

Epistemic Evaluation of Specific Religious Experiences or Spiritual States

Hamidreza Ayatollahy

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Religious experience in the philosophy of religion is mainly discussed in the topics of belief in God, and it is considered a sign of the existence of the divine. While if we consider a more general meaning of it, it can also include many religious teachings other than the existence of God. This has also happened in the Western tradition of the philosophy of religion. In the 90s of the 20th century, Plantinga put all his efforts through the reformed epistemology to conclude the truth of the belief in the existence of God by using religious experience, but the continuation of his activities in this regard reached the point where in 2000, from "warranted Christian belief" speaks. Christian belief includes belief in the existence of God and includes incarnation, descent, original sin, redemption, and salvation through Christ. Therefore, in this article, the religious experience in its broader meaning is examined and the spiritual states that refer to some religious teachings other than the existence of God are analyzed. There are many questions about these situations and experiences, the answers to which and their evaluation are the focus of this article.

We often hear reports from people who have spoken of an immaterial affair or the interference of an immaterial affair some of them occurred in a religious context.

A person claims to see and become aware of an event hundreds of kilometers away. This claim seems to be related to immaterial things that cannot be explained in the realm of the material condition of nature, which has its own rules. But if someone claims that he asked God for something and in his praying then he experienced that his prayer was answered in an unusual natural process, he has reached a religious kind of immaterial affairs.

Non-material experiences, whether religious or non-religious, are in various forms. Some simply report a fact that is either related to the material realm or related to a realm other than this material world. Some of them, are more than reporting. They are

a kind of interfering with an action in the world and performing an extraordinary action that cannot be explained by material conditions. So all of these immaterial experiences can be divided into several categories:

- 1- non-religious non-material reports that are related to the material world, such as a report by a person who has undergone austerity about an event in another part of the world.
- 2- non-religious non-material reports that are related to the non-material world, like some of those who report about the world of the jinn.
- 3- non-material religious reports that are related to the material world, such as the interpretations of various dreams by Yusuf, peace be upon him, or various reports about the future by mystics. These are considered religious because they have been achieved along with religious claims, in religious contexts, or due to adherence to religious orders.
- 4- non-material religious reports that are related to the non-material world, such as religious experiences that result from the existence of God, or reports that people give from another world after temporary death. The most obvious type of such experiences is the revelation given to the prophets.
- 5- manipulation of the world in a non-religious way, like the spiritual powers that few people have in making changes in the world.
- 6- manipulation in the world in the religious form which is the clearest example is in the miracles done by the prophets.

All of the above cases point to the fact that other than the material world, there can be another non-material world that is beyond the laws and mechanisms of the material world or has non-material causes.

Items 1, 2, 3, and 4 can indicate the existence of the unseen world, which is beyond the sensory world, and that there can be the possibility of acquiring some knowledge about it.

Cases 5 and 6 can indicate that there can be non-material causes and changes in the world.

Since this article discusses religious experiences and spiritual states, items 3 and 4 will be addressed.

The truth of experiences

As Descartes rightly stated, any mental and inner idea that a person finds, in itself, cannot be rejected and denied; Yes, when we ascribe this idea to something beyond imagination, it will begin to be evaluated for truth and falsity.

However, when these inner states are expressed, they go through the passage of exegesis, interpretation, and explanation, and each of them causes the stated experience and not the pure experience to be subjected to criticism and evaluation and even rejection and denial. Let's examine these three and the cause of happening errors in them:

exegesis

Exegesis, which is putting a mental finding into a language form based on language criteria that have been obtained in a person over many years in the person's thinking structure and through interaction with others, is the expression of a person's inner perception in common language forms with others. For example, when it is revealed to a Christian the presence of Jesus (peace be upon him) and a Muslim sees Imam Reza (peace be upon him) in a dream, both of them try to express the exegesis of their encounters. That is, the former intellectual structure of the first is so that he finds the person who is seen in the form of Christ and the intellectual structure of the second is so that he finds the person who is perceived in the form of Imam Reza. Because for the Christian audience Jesus (PBUH) and the Muslim audience Imam Reza (PBUH) is a common concept with the speaker, so different exegesis of those encounters is seen. But these different backgrounds do not make us deny the encounter of the first person with Christ (AS) as unreal, and the second person with Imam Reza (AS) as well. If two people talk about encountering a person and express two different exegeses of their encounters, and we assume that each person's intellectual background is effective in their proposed exegesis, it cannot be concluded that both of them have seen something alike, and according to their intellectual structure, they think that they are two. It is possible that they saw two people and their two exegeses were due to the real difference between the two people. Therefore, the mere possibility of the experiencer being influenced by his intellectual background and belief structures cannot cause us to attribute different expressions to different exegeses of the same thing, and we cannot reduce the inner finding of a person as an imaginary thing that the set of thoughts and intellectual structures of the person made it. let's go down: For this reason, some psychological analysis of it cannot be a basis for reducing it to other matters. It can only be one of the possibilities and cannot rule out other possibilities. There can be discrepancies in the proposed exegeses of one experience. Although the multiplicity of language interactions brings minds closer to each other linguistically, and although some similar contexts bring meanings closer to each other, different linguistic contexts can make linguistic understanding distant and dim. Be a semantic

share. So, the proposed exegeses and the listener's understanding of it can have contradictions. That is, exegeses create a linguistic understanding in other minds that cannot be easily understood to be the same as the linguistic understanding of the speaker.

So, religious experiences may have been expressed with correct exegeses. On the other hand, there is a possibility that they were influenced by psychological or sociological factors or other factors in the form of such an exegesis. For example, the interpretation attributed to Ibn Arabi (whose citation is also questionable) that I saw Rawafez as a pig in the revealed view can be rejected from the point of view of whether the exegeses of his revealed view (if it really happened) is a true exegesis of what he has seen. Is it true that he has said about several people as Rafizi at that time the same as the interpretation of the Shiites at this time? So, linguistically, the proposed exegeses of religious experiences cannot be considered wrong, nor can they be considered correct.

Interpretation

Our interpretations of our experiences are subjected to interpretations according to the set of propositions we have already believed and lead to a propositional belief about our experimental findings. Consider the example of a tree. The interpretation of it as a tree is exposed to the set of our previous beliefs about the tree, and as a result, we can have an interpretation of it that its wood can be used for carpentry.

As mentioned, interpretation can also be subject to conflict between the speaker and the listener. Because despite the many similarities between the intellectual structures of the speaker and the listener due to being in a common context, there is a possibility of many discrepancies in the set of propositional beliefs of the two, which makes many interpretations more acceptable and reasonable, and some places be hesitant again, we need criteria to distinguish acceptable interpretations from rejected interpretations. Therefore, religious experiences by themselves cannot show which of the interpretations it gives are correct and which are incorrect. We need criteria beyond internal religious perceptions. But religious experiences can lead to propositional beliefs that we believe are correct interpretations of religious experience.

Explanation

After the formation of sensory, internal, or religious experiences, we are faced with the question of what happened when we gained this experience. The why of experience confronts us with the problem of explaining experiences. If someone experiences a wolf in front of him, one can ask why he had this experience. Maybe he had such an

experience due to the use of psychedelic pills, or maybe it is a wolf in front of him that caused such an experience. It is important to explain them in religious experiences and spiritual states. There are two types of religious explanations for these experiences: the first one is that these experiences are caused by the induction of divine affairs or that these experiences indicate there exists a referent for its reality, that is, God.

Also, there can be some other explanations such as these experiences can be caused by a person's fantasies and illusions or by superstition. Some psychologists and sociologists try to attribute the cause of these experiences to a person's psychological or social background. By showing some psychological and social causes in some of these experiences, these psychologists and sociologists create the belief that all religious experiences are of this type. It is clear that even by explaining some religious experiences and referring them to psychological and social contexts, it cannot be concluded that all religious experiences are of this type. Unfortunately, this misplaced generalization can be seen in the words of some secularists.

Also, the abuse of some fraudsters for financial exploitation of these pure feelings distorts some of these reports by some people.

A person's network of prior beliefs plays an important role in explaining an experience. His basic beliefs about experiences of the type of religious experiences can be a good explanation for believing in the content of the experience. One of the most important basic beliefs in this field is believing in the unseen world. A world that cannot be achieved by analyzing material conditions, but this basic belief must be achieved in another way, such as the testimony of numerous honest witnesses related to God. Without this belief, a wide range of our beliefs will remain unjustified. Perhaps it is for this reason that at the beginning of the Qur'an, faith in the "unseen" is considered one of the most basic beliefs to achieve many religious beliefs. In the shadow of belief in the unseen, we will not only have broader interpretations of spiritual states, but we will also have a more comprehensive explanation for such experiences that cannot be explained in other justified ways.

As it can be seen, here we need to have criteria to distinguish between religious experiences that refer to the divine and those that refer to something else, such as a person's inner austerities, psychological and social factors, or superstition.

So, we need three criteria to distinguish between true and false exegeses, true and false interpretations, and true and false explanations. It is clear that due to the complexities of religious experience, their personal nature, and their hiddenness for others, these criteria cannot be definitive, and we can tentatively distinguish right from wrong.

According to what has been said about specific religious experiences, we conclude that:

- 1- It is not possible to reject the exegeses raised in a specific religious experience. For example, a person who sees Imam Reza (PBUH) in a dream or in a waking revelation, his exegesis of this experience that he saw Imam Reza (PBUH) and not Imam Sadiq cannot be undermined. Because maybe he somehow understands his exegesis of this experience, but he cannot explain the reason for it. Also, any exegesis of a person's experience cannot be accepted. For this reason, it is possible to reject the proposed exegesis of an experience only with strong reasons. It is also necessary to provide valid reasons for accepting an exegesis.
- 2- The interpretations raised from a specific religious experience will also be rejected if there are strong reasons to reject them. Also, the acceptance of interpretations must have the necessary reasons.
- 3- In the same way, denying or accepting the explanations provided for a specific religious experience also needs clear reasons. Therefore, the content that Hume has put forward to reject the divine nature of these experiences in the discussion of miracles is not acceptable due to inappropriate generalization.

The reasons for accepting or rejecting aspects of a religious experience do not need to be obtained from the analysis of the experience itself but can be obtained from reasoned materials that come from a path other than experience, such as rational investigations, historical research, empirical evidence, or knowledge by testimony. I hope that the evaluation methods of such experiences can be presented in later articles.