Martin on Credulity
A religious experience is an experience in which one senses the immediate presence of some supernatural entity.

“S senses X” means that S believes that X exists, but not that X does in fact exist.

[Michael Martin, *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification* (1990)]
Types of Religious Experience

Public Sensory Object
(1) **Common**: a common object experienced as supernatural (e.g., experiencing a dove as an angel)
(2) **Uncommon**: experiencing a supernatural object (e.g., Moses sees the burning bush, Joseph Smith sees Moroni)

Private Sensations
(3) **Describable**: e.g., Peter’s sack lunch, Jacob’s ladder
(4) **Indescribable**: mystical experiences

Without Sensations
(5) **A mental seeing/experiencing** (e.g., St. Theresa)

About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.” [Acts 10: 9-13]
Joseph Smith’s Night-Time Visitor
**Traditional Argument**
A religious experience warrants a corresponding belief (in whatever was experienced).

“I sensed the presence of God; therefore, God exists.”

**Martin’s Argument**
The above fails to distinguish how a belief is arrived at, and how it is justified. [non-rational vs rational causes of belief]
A proper justification would look like this:

(1) Under certain conditions, C, religious beliefs of type K are likely to be true.
(2) These conditions obtain.
(3) My belief that God exists is of type K.
(4) Therefore, my belief that God exists is likely to be true.
Deriving Beliefs from REs

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Why believe (1)? For it to be true, we must assume:
   (H1): the external cause hypothesis.
But there are competing hypotheses, such as:
   (H2): the psychological hypothesis.
Which is more likely to be true?
H1 suggests the various RE would form a consistent set (but they do not), while H2 suggests a diverse set of RE (which there is).
How might we distinguish true from false REs?

**St. Teresa:** True REs are: (1) consistent with Scripture, (2) have a “good effect” on the subject.

(But…)
Argument to the Best Explanation (inductive)
(1) All mystical experiences are basically the same.
(2) This similarity is better explained by H1 than H2.
(3) The most adequate version of H1 is that God causes the mystical experience.
(4) Therefore, mystical experiences support H1.
Swinburne’s Principle of Credulity (PC)
If it seems (epistemically) to a subject S that X is present, then probably X is present

Martin’s Negative Principle of Credulity (NPC)
If it seems (epistemically) to a subject S that X is absent, then probably X is absent.

“seems epistemically” = S in inclined to believe what appears to S on the basis of the present sensory experience.