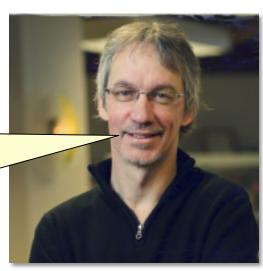
# Martin on Credulity

# Martin on Religious Experience

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 (born 1932) (Boston University)

[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)

[Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (1978)]

## Peter's Sack Lunch



<sup>9</sup>About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. <sup>10</sup>He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. <sup>11</sup>He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. <sup>12</sup>It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. <sup>13</sup>Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." [*Acts* 10: 9-13]

# Joseph Smith's Night-Time Visitor



# Deriving Beliefs from REs

### **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.

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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).

# Identifying True REs

How might we distinguish true from false REs?

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

(But...)
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# Argument from Mysticism

### 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.

# Principles ...

### 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.