OCR H573 | INDEPENDENT REVISION

A* Model Essay

Religious Experience

Philosophy of Religion

When, if ever, is religious experience a rational basis for belief in God?

1,476 response words | Complete annotated PDF | Individual topic edition

What is included

A complete original response, an argument plan, paragraph-level AO1/AO2 annotations and source works for further reading.

A* describes the intended style of this teaching model. This is independently written, not an OCR-marked script or a guaranteed grade.

Use this model to study argument and evaluation, then write your own answer. Do not submit it as your own assessed work.

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Argument plan

When, if ever, is religious experience a rational basis for belief in God?

Thesis: Religious experience can provide defeasible personal grounds for belief when it is coherent, not undermined by specific defeating evidence and considered alongside wider reasons. Its private character, cultural diversity and plausible alternative explanations prevent it from functioning as a universally compelling proof. The rational response should distinguish acknowledging an experience's evidential relevance from accepting every theological interpretation of it.

1. James and Otto identify distinctive experiential features that deserve explanation.

Counter-argument: Intensity, apparent insight and transformation do not establish a divine cause.

> Interim judgement: Experience should be taken seriously without confusing its description with its verification.

2. Swinburne gives experience and testimony an initial presumption of credibility.

Counter-argument: The presumption is defeasible and lacks some checks available in ordinary perception.

> Interim judgement: It can justify cautious personal belief more readily than compel a public conclusion.

3. Natural explanations and contradictory reports challenge exclusive theological interpretations.

Counter-argument: Neural mediation and cultural interpretation do not automatically make an experience false.

> Interim judgement: A limited cumulative evidential role survives, while claims of a decisive proof do not.