

The Argument from Religious Experience (ARE)

ARE: An argument that takes the facts of religious experience as premises and concludes that God (as the percept of religious experience) exists.

Common Version of the Argument

- (1) Religious experience is a universal experience.
- (2) Universal experiences constitute some significant evidence for the existence of the percept of the experience.

So it is probable to degree N that:

- (3) God exists

Conflicting Claims Challenge (CCC): There is no experience that is both sufficiently universal and religious. Diversity of religious experience defeats ARE by rebutting premise (1) since the diversity involves inconsistent experiences.

Responses to CCC:

- (I) Religious experience is universal, but descriptions of the experiences are different (and even inconsistent).
- (II) There is a common core religious experience that provides evidence for the corresponding percept(s) of the common core experience.

(II) allows for some apparently diverse religious experiences to be different only at the level of description or interpretation, thus preserving a uniform experience.

Unlike (I), though, (II) allows for there to be genuine differences between religious experiences at the level of experience itself, not merely its description or interpretation.

So two issues need to be addressed:

- Is the alleged diversity of religious experience purely a matter of diversity of description and interpretation of experience?
- If not, is there nonetheless a common core experience that would constitute evidence for a corresponding percept of the experience?

Caroline Franks Davis's Argument:

Caroline Franks Davis argues that in many cases the apparent diversity of religious experience does not involve inconsistent experiences. The inconsistencies derive from incompatible beliefs about or interpretations of the experience. However, she also maintains that some paradigmatic religious experiences do actually conflict, for example theistic and monistic experiences. In the light of this she argues that the premises of ARE must focus on a "common core" experience and the conclusion of ARE cannot specify "God" but rather a less ramified transcendental percept.