

Peer Review

Review of: "On the autonomy of mystical perception"

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Nice paper. In fact, this is also one of the main themes I will sustain in my writings.

Here are some suggestions on how to enhance the quality of this article.

My main concern isn't so much the content, on which I largely agree, but rather the terminology, wordings, the word choice.

Let me begin right from the start: The title. I feel that the expression "mystical perception" isn't adequate for the mystical ... well... mystical experience. Because the word "perception" evokes the perception of the five senses, or eventually also some not better-defined non-physical forces/energies of something residing on another level of existence but where there is still a distinction between a subject that perceives and an object that is perceived. That is, the word "perception" suggests misleadingly the opposite of what some of the most profound mystical experiences are about, and where the subject-object distinction vanishes. I suggest "mystical experience". Or also "mystical insight," "mystical knowledge," or if the author doesn't agree, then at least "mystical inner perception."

Another misleading terminology I feel to be "non-rational." It is too vague. The non-rational comprises the infra-rational—that is, the irrational emotional delusions, as well. Again, something suggesting the opposite of the mystical experience. What about "trans-rational"? At least it suggests something beyond the irrational and even the mind itself.

And here we come to the "mental states of the mystics." I think these are not states of the mind, but "states of consciousness." The conflation between mind and consciousness is quite frequent, but they are two distinct categories. I would avoid even using the word "mind" too much (of course, it might be impossible to avoid it entirely because we are trying to convey a message with words and through the mind), because, again, it suggests the rational mind. "Mystical mind" also seems to mean that the

mystic is just ruminating with his mind on mystical questions, just as someone could have an “artistic mind” without transcending the ordinary mind and states of consciousness. The author quotes many mystics talking about an experience that can’t be captured by the mind, the intellect, “reality cannot be accessed by the rational mind,” something “hardly communicable by verbal description,” “it is not reflected in the mind” – “the mind is not in use” – “the true self is beyond the mind” – “This reality cannot be accessed by the rational mind,” etc., and often insets in their quotes the parenthesis [rational] before mind. I think that there are good reasons why the mystics quoted preferred to avoid the word “mind,” rational or not, altogether. So, “mystical mind,” again, more or less subconsciously, suggests the opposite of the central point of the paper: The mystical experience isn’t about framing a philosophy, nor a delusion of whatever mind, but a direct experience that should be taken seriously. Why not “mystical cognition,” or “mystical insight,” or “mystical gnosis”?

The inadequate terminology might also explain why so few results came up on PubMed with the keywords “mystical mind.” Searching for “mystical experience,” I get 170 results. Admittedly, not very interesting, almost all focused on the effects of psychedelic-induced mystical experiences, but not surprisingly because PubMed is a biomedical engine. However, this is an aspect that the author should at least mention with some references, since this is nowadays a field of intense research. If one makes a query in good old Google Scholar, one gets about 76,000! And he will find that his topic of research isn’t new. Unfortunately, it is ignored. That’s why I endorse it nevertheless. I would also add some of the recent studies with brain scan technologies on people in a meditative state. There have been many more in the last decade.

The physics part is the technical aspect that needs closer inspection. I would avoid making too direct references to quantum physics in an academic work, unless one is a physicist and knows how far one can venture in this territory. For example, whether quantum entanglement has anything to do with NDEs is a far-fetched extrapolation that isn’t based on any sound theoretical consideration, let alone experimental results. That Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle is about the act of observation is a very common misconception but essentially wrong. The uncertainty is ontological, not epistemic (in a sense, this makes it even more interesting for the mystical arguments, but I don’t want to write a too long review here). There is no common agreement that the Big Bang came out of nothing (even though physicists sometimes like to put it that way when they talk to the media and a non-academic audience of non-physicists). The Big Bang theory describes physics starting from the first fractions of a second. What was before that time it tells us nothing, not that there was nothing. Nowhere do I read

Zeilinger's statement as saying that decaying atoms must "sample its peers." This isn't how atomic decays work. There are also other statements that are a bit misleading, IMO. I suggest the physics part be subjected to a physicist or left out entirely.

Despite these shortcomings, overall, the article is interesting. I would certainly recommend it for publication. Because even though we might not agree on the technical details, the rationale standing behind it is what our contemporary civilization is urgently in need of.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.