

Arguments against Mystical religious experience

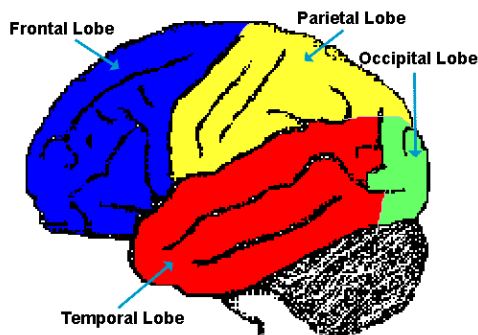
Psychological and neurological argument

Psychologists have been trying to reason and interpret mystical experiences, using people suffering from epilepsy. This is because there are parallels between the epileptic and religious personalities. This is not the same as saying epilepsy causes mystical experiences, as there are some epileptics that have terrifying and agonising experiences in attacks while in contrast others have ecstatic and heavenly experiences during their attacks.

Some psychologists analysed this theory of attaching epilepsy to mystical experiences: W Hellpach commented on religious believers and epileptic patients. Defining the differences that true spirituality has beneficial effects on behaviours and way of thinking. V fleck analysed that true religious devotion was more common in epileptic patients than in the population as a whole.

However electro encephalography techniques have helped with some conclusions of this argument. Electro-encephalography is the technique that involves measuring electrical activity in the brain. It works by attaching electrodes to the scalp in specific places to pick up the electrical voltages that the brain generates, these electrodes are then amplified which in turn controls the magnetic pen on moving graph paper. These results are averages and analysed to give common patterns of electrical activity for various stimuli or excitement of the nervous system. When an epileptic has an attack the graph has shows large spikes.

To understand this analysis you have to understand how the brain works and where about's the signals are taken from to pick up these electrical voltages.



The temporal lobe handles hearing language and higher thought processes. Research has shown links between the temporal lobes and interest in things religious.

Many respected neurologists have observed:

- Dewhurst Beard-temporal lobe epilepsy patients show an interest in religion after the onset of their condition.
- N Geschwind- observed a tendency towards matters religious and philosophical after the start of temporal lobe epilepsy.

- M Persinger-mystical or religious experiences occur at the same time as micro-seizures in the temporal lobes of the brain. This reaction of brain cells could subject thoughts towards religious experiences.

What is the value of this argument?

For me I think that this argument does have value, I think that religious experiences can just be reactions within the brain. It is the best way to rationalise a mystical or religious experience. The EEG readings show that the brain gets more excited during the twilight stages of an epileptic shock, which shows that it could be a reaction within the brain causing these experiences. Not only is that, but people with epilepsy proven to be more interested in religion after the onset of their condition. On the other hand psychology can only interpret information nothing can be proven.

Induced mystical experiences

These are experiences that are self inflicted. It is a theory that if you can create the right mood and atmosphere then you will have a religious experience. An example of an induced mystical experience is below:

- One programme is the audio-visual environment; it involves over 100 slides of abstract paintings accompanied by a sound track of music and chanting lasting for about 40 minutes. The participant's reactions were ones of euphoria, anxiety, a trance like state, and distortions of time and body perceptions; there experiences were reported as pleasurable and sometimes religious in content, especially in terms of the feeling of unity.

Most observers suggest that mystical experiences vary only superficially. The aspects of each one are selected from a set of aspects which can be common to any mystical experience. However, mystics believe that the source of their experiences is from god themselves. Monotheistic religions see the norm as being godly in both cases. There are activities that people have claimed to open a doorway to mystical experiences, these activities included: prayer and fasting, faith, grace, fasting, sex, fear of death and drugs. Although, it is accepted that a mystical experience can appear completely out of the blue, for no apparent reason.

What is the value of this argument?

I Think his argument does have value but I wouldn't say it is directly against mystical and religious experiences. It says that if the mind and body is in the right state then a religious experience may happen. This could be because the participant