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Philosophy of Religion

Why all this talk about arguing from religious experience? someone may be asking. 'If you really experience God you don't have to argue, you know he's real, and that's all there is to it.' So if we are trying to do justice to the varieties of religious experience, we must take very seriously this particular type, the sense of knowledge arising out of inner conviction.

It is a risky business, of course, to claim to know something and to act as though one knows for sure, if one can't give much by way of reasons for one's claim. People have claimed to 'just know' (as they put it) all sorts of things. Even the most irrational and misguided things have been said and done at times with apparent certainty and complete conviction by tyrants and dictators, and by ordinary people confused by ignorance or blinded by prejudice. To have no doubts at all about one's beliefs may sometimes be more a symptom of insanity or arrogant irresponsibility than of sound thinking. Yet believers, aware of all these risks, may still feel they have a right to say they know because they experience God's reality for themselves.

From Donovan P Can we know God by experience? in Davies B (ed) –
Philosophy of Religion: a guide and anthology (OUP, 2000) p370

1. (a) Clarify the argument and/or interpretation in the passage. (24)

(b) Do you agree with the idea(s) expressed? Justify your point of view and discuss its implications for understanding religion and human experience. (16)

(Total 40 marks)

TOTAL FOR PAPER 1A: 40 MARKS

Start your answer on page 3.



