

Dialogues in
PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION
Annual Lecture

HELEN DE CRUZ

VU University, Amsterdam



with commentary by
Charity Anderson, Baylor University

FRIDAY, FEB 27TH
3:45PM IN GCHR 311

**THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF
RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE
THROUGH PRACTICED SKILLS**

Under what circumstances does religious experience provide support for religious belief? Philosophers of religion have commonly taken ordinary perception as a relevant model for the epistemology of religious experiences, in particular mystical perception. For instance, Alston uses the term “doxastic practices” for forms of mystical perception analogous to ordinary sense perception. However, recent cognitive psychological and anthropological research shows that many instances of religious experience are more akin to skilled perception (as displayed by scientists and art connoisseurs) than they are to ordinary perception. In order to gauge the epistemology of religious experience, a closer examination of such skilled practices is in order. I discuss two cases—the practices of Evangelical Christians and of Latina Catholics—and examine how their religious practices are conducive to religious experiences. I argue that these practices exhibit some features characteristic of epistemically virtuous skills; however, the fact that religious skilled perception can support a very wide variety of religious experiences presents a challenge.

Helen De Cruz's areas of expertise include philosophy of cognitive science, philosophy of religion, and naturalistic approaches to epistemology. She investigates how we as human beings – embodied, socially and materially embedded, cognitively limited – acquire beliefs about subjects that seem far removed from our everyday experience, such as in mathematics, science and theology. How do we come up with concepts like ‘2’ or natural selection? Why do people so widely believe in supernatural beings like gods and ghosts? She looks at the cognitive factors involved in our acquisition of such beliefs and offer philosophical reflections, among others, on embodied/extended cognition, and the implications of the etiology of our beliefs on their rationality.

Charity Anderson is a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Oxford. Her work is primarily in epistemology, with a focus on issues concerning fallibilism, epistemic modals, invariantism, and knowledge norms. The project of her dissertation was to offer a systematic defense of stable invariantism.



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