

# RELIGIOUS COGNITION AS INTERPRETED EXPERIENCE: AN EXAMINATION OF IAN BARBOUR'S COMPARISON OF THE EPISTEMIC STRUCTURES OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION

*by William A. Rottschaefter*

*Abstract.* Using as a model contemporary analyses of scientific cognition, Ian Barbour has claimed that religious cognition is neither immediate nor inferential but has the structure of interpreted experience. Although I contend that Barbour has failed to establish his claim, I believe his views about the similarities between scientific and religious cognition are well founded. Thus on that basis I offer an alternative proposal that theistic religious cognition is essentially inferential and that religious experience is in fact the use of inferentially acquired religious beliefs to interpret ordinary nonreligious experiences.

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Frederick Suppe has observed in the new afterword to his highly influential and authoritative assessment of contemporary philosophy of science that "to an overwhelming degree the history of epistemology (and metaphysics) is the history of the philosophy of science . . ." (1977, 717). There is evidence, I believe, to support Suppe's claim. Indeed, a similar claim might be made about philosophy of religion. Modern and contemporary philosophy of religion has to a large extent reflected philosophical assessments of science. More specifically, modern Anglo-American philosophy of religion has been highly influenced by positivist and postpositivist interpretations of knowledge, interpretations based ultimately on analyses of the scientific enterprise. Thus when logical-empiricist, orthodox interpretations of science swayed under the blows of scientific revolutionaries like Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend, there were new efforts by religious thinkers to take advantage of the more open climate promised by the revolutionaries.

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One such religious thinker who is well acquainted with developments in science, philosophy of science, and religious thought is Ian Barbour. In a number of works, in particular *Issues in Science and Religion* and *Myths, Models, and Paradigms: A Comparative Study in Science and Religion*, he has explored some of the latest possibilities for religious reflection in the post-Kuhnian period. Barbour is applying the critical-realist views of the new philosophy of science and their more nuanced accounts of scientific knowledge to an analysis of religious cognition. On the basis of the parallels that he finds with scientific cognition Barbour attempts to steer a course between the position that religious cognition is self-authenticating religious experience and the thesis that religious cognition is inferential. Religious cognition, he claims, is interpreted experience.

In this paper I shall explore the notion of religious cognition as interpreted experience. My exploration shall take the form of a critical reflection on Barbour's attempt to establish on the basis of similarities between religious and scientific cognition that religious cognition has the structure of interpreted experience. Negatively, I shall contend that Barbour's analysis does not establish that religious cognition has the structure he attributes to it. Moreover, his analysis, I shall argue, does not exclude the possibility that there is a unique mode of religious cognition, direct religious experience, nor the possibility that the only approaches to the transcendent are inferential.<sup>1</sup> Thus, I believe that under Barbour's analysis the question remains open as to whether there is a unique mode of religious cognition, direct religious experience, or only religious interpretations of ordinary experience.

Positively, I shall argue that some recent developments in the understanding of the structure of scientific cognition, when applied to religious cognition, tend to support the view that there are only religious interpretations of ordinary experience.<sup>2</sup> Thus my contention is that religious cognition is essentially inferential, although it may be used in experiential reports to interpret ordinary experience in a religious way. Although I shall not be able to exclude the existence of a uniquely religious mode of experience, I shall present what I believe are some persuasive arguments against the claim that there is such a mode of experience.

#### BARBOUR ON FAITH AND REASON

Barbour is attempting to move back, but in a distinctive way, to an integrationist position on the relationships between faith and reason. Thus he faults the leading separatist positions. He argues that the neo-orthodox Protestant Christian separation of the realms of faith

and reason cannot be consistently maintained. He also believes that the existentialist understanding of faith suffers from the limitations of existentialism itself, that is, the latter's exclusive concern for the human realm and its subordination and neglect of the world of nature. Finally, he contends that the linguistic analysts' attempt to give autonomy to religious language by construing it as an independent language game is also inadequate because it does not do justice to the human cognitive drive for seeing things as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, Barbour is not comfortable with the classical medieval synthesis of Christian faith and reason on several counts. First of all, he believes that efforts to prove the existence of God have been shown to be faulty because their philosophical grounds are shaky. He also contends that attempts to build the foundations of faith on particular scientific theories or metaphysical systems are mistaken.

More positively Barbour contends that neo-orthodoxy, existentialism, and linguistic analysis give us some clues for understanding the cognitive roots of Christian religious faith. Neo-orthodoxy points us to the historical event of Christ as the central event of God's revelation. Existentialism stresses personal involvement as a prerequisite for religious understanding; and linguistic analysis shows that the distinctive functions of religious language are to express worship, self-commitment, and life orientation. In Barbour's estimate, all these clues point away from the classical medieval and later deistic syntheses through philosophical proof based on metaphysics or particular scientific theories and toward an approach based primarily on historical and personal experience. The source of such experience is in God's revelation continued into the present in the life of the believer and the religious community.

Thus Barbour's stress on religious experience puts him on the side of the liberal Protestant integration of faith and reason. Yet Barbour wishes to distinguish his approach from both the classical inferential approaches to God and the purely experiential approaches of liberal Protestantism. He believes that a detailed analysis of the parallels between the epistemic structures of science and religion allow one to find in religious cognition a special structure which is neither purely inferential nor purely experiential, but rather has the form of interpreted experience. Thus Barbour's views on the epistemic structure of religious cognition represent on the one hand a traditional Protestant distrust of metaphysical proofs and a historical wisdom about the fragile character of inferences to the transcendent built on scientific theories or gaps in scientific theories. On the other hand, they recognize the obstacles to an experiential approach to the transcendent presented by an empiricist tradition in philosophy. Thus not wishing to

take either the separatist and isolationist position of traditional fideism or its sophisticated existentialist or analytic versions, Barbour seeks to rejuvenate the experiential approach in a form modeled on the epistemic structure of science.

#### RELIGIOUS COGNITION AS INTERPRETED RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Barbour makes use of three findings from the new view of science to develop his views of theistic religious cognition: first, the rejection of a substantive distinction between theory and observation, second, liberalized empiricism, and third, critical realism (see Suppe 1977). Thus he claims that just as all scientific observations are theory-laden, so too are all religious experiences interpretation-laden. And just as theory-laden observations can still be used to test theories, so too interpretation-laden religious experiences can be used to support religious beliefs. Finally, the acceptance of a critical scientific realism lends more plausibility to other modes of knowing that claim to move beyond perceptual experience in both meaning and reference. In this respect, both scientific and religious cognition make strategic use of models and metaphors in moving beyond the empirical (Barbour 1974, 34-38, 92-146; 1966, 137-74). It is the first of these claims about religious cognition, namely, that it has the structure of interpreted experience, which I shall now explore.

We can formulate Barbour's argument that religious cognition has the structure of interpreted experience in the form of an argument by elimination. The structure of religious cognition, so the argument goes, can take three possible forms. It could be inferential, directly experiential, or interpretatively experiential. Thus, for instance, consider the belief that God is a loving and forgiving person. If this belief were the result of a direct, noninterpretation-laden religious experience, then the religious content of the belief would be derived directly from the experience itself. On the other hand, if the belief were inferential, then its content would be implied by, but not given in, the experience itself.<sup>4</sup> Finally, if the belief were the result of interpreted experience, then its religious content would neither be given in the experience nor merely inferred from the experience.<sup>5</sup> For the sake of this discussion, I shall assume that these alternatives are exhaustive. Thus Barbour argues that the first two alternatives must be rejected. So religious cognition is interpretatively experiential.

Barbour believes that the inferential approaches to the transcendent have two major drawbacks. First, these approaches, for example, the classical proofs for the existence of God, have been shown to be faulty. Second, such approaches do not possess the self-involving and commitment-inducing characteristics of genuine religious cognition.

The possibility that religious cognition is directly experiential is ruled out in Barbour's view because such direct experience presupposes a givenness which has been shown in the epistemological analyses of both ordinary knowledge and scientific knowledge to be absent. Moreover, the fact that religious beliefs do seem to contain interpreted experiences lends support to the rejection of a directly experiential structure for religious cognition and points toward the third possibility—that of interpreted experience. Finally, Barbour claims that the use of metaphors and models in religious cognition, a use which parallels that in scientific cognition, also argues for the claim that the structure of religious cognition is that of interpreted experience.

Although one could raise many questions about inferential approaches to the transcendent, I shall focus on Barbour's reasons for rejecting direct religious experience and accepting the claim that religious cognition is interpretatively experiential.

First consider the rejection of givenness. Proponents of givenness have pointed to two types of knowing to support their claims: perceptual observations and scientific observations. But epistemological analyses of both perceptual observations and scientific observations have found no support for such givenness. Barbour believes that these epistemological analyses must also be applied to religious experience. Thus he argues that since religious experience is open to error, it always involves an element of interpretation. It cannot be direct (Barbour 1974, 125). However, in my view, Barbour's argument is inconclusive. The inconclusiveness of his argument results from an ambiguity in his analysis. The ambiguity is to be found in Barbour's failure to distinguish adequately between questions concerning mode of cognition, for example, experiential and inferential, and questions of justification, that is, questions of confirmation and falsification. He argues that religious cognition is interpreted because it is subject to error. From this claim he draws the conclusion that it is neither immediate nor self-authenticating. But the evidence of fallibility is not sufficient to distinguish inferential knowledge from immediate knowledge. For example, I can be mistaken about a perceptual claim, for instance, "There's Sidney." But I can also be mistaken about inferential claims, for instance, "Mass is velocity independent." So too I can err both about an alleged experiential religious claim, "God is a living and forgiving person" and an inferential claim, "God is the creator of all things." Thus the possibility of being in error about theoretical claims does not help distinguish them *qua* theoretical (inferential) from perceptual (noninferential) claims. Barbour has not distinguished adequately the use of the terms *theory* or *interpretation-laden* to describe claims which are nonperceptual or nonexperiential from their use about claims

which are subject to error. Since both uninterpreted and interpretation-laden claims are fallible, the evidence for the fallibility of religious experience does not enable one to determine whether a particular religious claim is inferential or noninferential, experiential or nonexperiential.

Second, Barbour argues that the interpretation-laden character of reported religious experiences leads to the conclusion that the structure of religious cognition is that of interpreted experience (1974, 122-26). Barbour claims that an examination of the content of these religious experiences reveals an interpretative element. Thus the basic modes of religious experience: awe and reverence, a sense of mystical union, the awareness of moral obligation, the experience of reorientation and reconciliation, the experience of interpersonal relationships, the experience of key historical events, and the experience of order and creativity in the world all come with an interpretative element (1974, 53-55). These interpretations are frequently drawn from the religious belief system to which the person is committed. As a result, Barbour argues that religious cognition has the structure of interpreted experience.

There is no doubt that beliefs, religious or otherwise, are used to interpret experiences. We hear a knock on the door and we say, without seeing them, "Oh, there's Eddie and Lenore; they're early." So too the scientist who sees a large blip on the seismograph and says there has been another earthquake near Mount Saint Helens. But if the knocking continues after we have shouted, "come in," several times, we may take a look out the window and see that it is really our neighborly raven rapping. Or if the seismograph continues to record large blips for hours on end, the scientist may call up colleagues down the road to see what their instruments are doing. This feature of human cognitive capability, the ability to perceive in both synthetic and analytic modes, has been called cognitive adaptiveness (Shimony 1978). It demonstrates our ability to bring large interpretative elements to bear on our experiences at one time and at other times to pare down the use of interpretative elements and let the experiential input be determinative of our claims.

Thus the use of religious beliefs to interpret religious experience is not an isolated phenomenon. But such use does not allow us to conclude that the basic structure of religious cognition is that of interpreted experience. The question remains open as to whether there are direct religious experiences to which there is added a further religious interpretation or whether the experiential element is itself nonreligious and a religious interpretative element, inferentially acquired, is used to interpret an essentially nonreligious experience in a religious

way (Barbour 1966, 229, 231-34; 1974, 133-37).<sup>6</sup> For example, I directly experience God as a loving and forgiving person but I interpret this experience in a Trinitarian fashion, that is, I use my belief that God the Father is the first person of the Holy Trinity and claim that I have experienced the first person of the Holy Trinity. On the other hand, I have an experience of loving forgiveness, and I infer that this is the action of God. But in both cases I *report* that I have *experienced* God's loving forgiveness. In the former case, religious cognition would have the structure of direct experience even though a further interpretative level has been added, and in the latter it would be inferential in nature. Thus the use of religious beliefs in experiential situations does not reveal the structure of religious cognition but rather the exercise of the capacity of cognitive adaptivity.

Finally, Barbour also believes that the use of models in religious cognition to interpret religious experiences reveals the structure of religious cognition to be that of interpreted experience (1974, 49-70). Barbour draws a comparison between scientific theoretical models and religious models. In his view, a scientific theoretical model is an imagined mechanism or process, postulated by analogy with familiar mechanisms or processes, used to construct a scientific theory which in turn correlates and explains a set of observations. Thus a theistic religious model which speaks in terms of persons and actions is used to construct religious beliefs. The religious beliefs in turn correlate religious experiences and, in some sense, explain them. The religious model is drawn, as is the scientific model, from the familiar realm of the perceptual world. Thus what gives empirical meaning to the scientific theory are the scientific models and observations, and what gives experiential meaning to the religious beliefs are the religious models and experiences.

This comparison does not allow us to conclude, it seems to me, that the structure of religious cognition is that of interpreted experience. To see this we must contrast the *postulated* analogies used in scientific theories with the *experiential* analogies common in everyday discourse. In the latter case, both terms of the analogy are experienced. For example, Mr. Ali says of his opponent, "He's a marshmallow." Presumably, Mr. Ali has experienced both terms of the comparison in the proper respects. But in the wave-particle model of the atom, only the perceptual materials from which the analogy is drawn have been or can ever be experienced, not the atom itself.

Thus in the schema of the postulated analogy the content of the experience is that of awe and reverence, for example, before someone or something. The content of the model is that of awe and reverence before a powerful and good person. The content of the belief is that

God is a powerful and good person who inspires awe and reverence. As a result, this belief can explain the experience of awe and reverence, and the experience confirms the belief. Under this interpretation the epistemic structure of religious cognition is inferential in the broad sense which includes not only deductive and inductive reasoning but also something analogous to the hypothetico-deductive schema of scientific explanation. Moreover, the experience itself has no specifically religious content. The experience is designated religious because of the religious model and belief used in its interpretation where the interpretation provides the religious meanings.

On the other hand, in the schema of the experienced analogy the experience itself has religious content. There is an experience of awe and reverence before the transcendent holy one. This experience is then compared with the experience of awe and reverence before a powerful and good person, and the belief claim is made that God is a powerful and good person who inspires awe and reverence. In this case, then, the model provides an interpretation of the experience by providing an illuminating metaphor for understanding the religious experience, but the experience itself possesses religious content. Thus both experience and model provide religious content for the belief, and the structure of religious cognition seems to be fundamentally noninferential.

Is the religious model an instance of an experienced analogy or of a postulated analogy in Barbour's view? There are some ambiguities in his account which make it difficult to determine his answer to this question. The ambiguities reflect the historical tension between experiential and inferential approaches to the transcendent. Although Barbour's intention is to overcome this dichotomy, his analytic tools seem to take him in one direction and his religious sensibilities in another. Thus he claims in opposition to the inferential approach of classical theism that the analogies of religious cognition are based on religious experience (1974, 18-19). In general he argues that one feature which distinguishes the religious enterprise from the scientific and metaphysical is its experiential, self-involving nature (Barbour 1974, 134-37; 1966, 218-28). If the religious enterprise is to have more than the theoretical, hypothetical, and tentative features of the scientific and more than the speculative, universalizing features of the metaphysical, it must, he thinks, involve a commitment of faith in the sense of trust and fidelity. This in turn seems to involve a consciously experienced personal relationship. If this is so, then Barbour seems to be claiming an experienced analogy between the referents of religious experience and the model employed to structure religious beliefs. If, however, as Barbour also claims, religious models function as do scientific models,



then an analogy is postulated between the model and the entities and processes referred to by the belief. In this latter case, religious cognition has an inferential structure modeled on the inferential structure of scientific cognition; but in the former case, religious cognition seems to have an experiential structure modeled on the ordinary use of analogies.

Barbour's commitments seem, then, to lead him on the one hand in the direction of both the postulated analogy and an inferential structure and on the other in the direction of both the experienced analogy and a noninferential structure.<sup>7</sup> Neither direction is satisfactory since Barbour maintains that the structure of religious cognition is neither inferential nor direct but displays the structure of interpreted experience.

Thus, Barbour's argument that the structure of religious cognition is that of interpreted experience is inconclusive for the reasons he brings to bear in support of his claim, namely, the rejection of givenness, the evidence that reported religious experiences have interpretative elements, and the use of models in religious cognition do not require the conclusion that the structure of religious cognition is that of interpreted experience. They leave open the possibility that its structure is either inferential or directly experiential.

I shall now argue that the recent developments in philosophy of science used by Barbour to understand the structure of religious cognition lead rather to the conclusion that the structure of religious cognition is essentially inferential.

#### THE RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATION OF ORDINARY EXPERIENCE: RELIGIOUS COGNITION AS INFERENTIAL

One of the central tenets of the new approaches in philosophy of science upon which Barbour rests his contention that the structure of religious cognition is that of interpreted experience is that all scientific observations are theory-laden. Another way to put this latter claim is that the distinction between theory and observation is contextual and pragmatic, not substantive. I have argued thus far that the notion of interpreted experience is not sufficient to establish that the structure of religious cognition is neither inferential nor immediate. I want now to argue that there is still room within the analysis of the structure of scientific cognition for a substantive distinction between theory and observation (Rottschaefer 1976). On the basis of this claim, I will argue that religious cognition is essentially inferential in structure. As a result I will claim that most probably there is no immediate religious experience but only ordinary nonreligious experience interpreted religiously.

The logical empiricists and positivists attempted to make a substantive distinction between theory and observation in several ways. Thus they argued, first, that the meaning of observation terms is essentially independent of the meaning of theoretical terms because the former is drawn from a theory-independent source, empirical observation; second, the truth-value of observational statements is independent of the truth-value of theoretical claims because the former is ascertained from a theory-independent source, empirical observation; third, empirical statements put one in direct contact with what is the case (theories do so only indirectly, if they do so at all); fourth, those empirical statements which provide direct contact with what is the case provide an incorrigible foundation for the corrigible statements of theory; and fifth, observational statements and terms are those used in perceptual reports while theoretical statements are not so used.

The critics of logical empiricism and positivism, both the scientific revolutionaries like Kuhn, Feyerabend and Norwood Russell Hansen and their critics, the new orthodoxy, have rejected the last three mentioned ways of distinguishing observation from theory, the criteria of givenness, incorrigibility, and use in perceptual reports. They have rejected givenness arguing that there are no statements which put one in direct contact with what is the case. They have also rejected incorrigibility because they claim that no observational statement is incorrigible. All such statements, they claim, are theory-laden and are as liable to be rejected as the theories which sustain them. Finally, both the radical critics and the new orthodoxy have denied that only observational statements and terms are used in perceptual reports and have pointed out that scientific perceptual reports abound with theoretical statements and terms.

However, the new orthodoxy rejects the revolutionaries' views on the radical meaning and truth-value dependence of observational terms and statements on theoretical terms and statements (the first and second criteria above). The new orthodoxy argues rather for a relevant meaning and truth-value independence of observation from theory. Thus it claims that although the meaning of observational statements and terms is dependent upon theories and is not the direct result of sensory input, nevertheless, the meaning of the terms in the test statements need not and, indeed, must not be dependent upon the meanings of the terms of the theory under scrutiny. Similarly, although the truth of observational statements is theory-dependent and is not founded on direct contact with what is the case, nevertheless, the truth of the test statements need not and, indeed, must not depend on the truth of the theory under scrutiny.

I believe these contributions of the radical critics of the logical empiricist and positivist views of the distinction between theory and obser-

vation, as modified by the new orthodoxy, are essentially correct. However, I do not believe they exclude the existence of some theory-free concepts and some claims formulated in terms of these concepts.<sup>8</sup> These latter constitute the principles of what I shall call the ordinary knowledge framework (OKF). They are a set of statements formulated in theory-free terms concerning perceptible objects, including persons, their perceptible qualities, interactions, and relations. These theory-free concepts constitute the basic categories of OKF and refer to its basic entities, persons and things, both living and nonliving, and to their perceptually attainable properties, activities, and interrelationships. However, the details of the content of OKF are themselves a matter of empirical investigation, specifically of cognitive psychology, and are not completely determinable by ordinary perceptual investigation. Although this is a very general characterization of the content of OKF, I do not believe that it is necessary here to specify these principles in more detail.

It is important, however, to delineate some of the epistemic characteristics of OKF, in particular, the notion of theory-free concepts. I maintain, in opposition to both the radical critics and the new orthodoxy, that there is a set of theory-free concepts which constitute an *epistemic* given. That is to say, they are a starting point in the order of knowledge. They are, to use an Aristotelean distinction, first in the order of knowledge though not in the order of being. As such, they represent the first cognitive results of the interaction of the human perceiving organism with its environment. They reflect, but in no immediately ascertainable way, the contribution of the human perceiving organism and the ontological structure of the perceptual object and its environment. Thus the epistemic given differs from the ontological given because the epistemic tie does not provide an incorrigible foundation of noninferential knowledge upon which the knowing enterprise can be built with surety and because it does not require that the referents of these concepts, however they be characterized, exist.

There are persuasive reasons for believing that such a framework exists. For granting the biological stability of the human species, we can assume in mature, healthy humans a similarity of physiological and psychological structures and functions, including perceptual and cognitive systems. In addition, it is plausible to assume a general similarity in basic human needs and tasks and some degree of general environmental similarity. As a result, if the initial conceptual structure with which the human knower gets around in the world is the result of an interaction of knower and known, we can infer some degree of universality in the conceptual content and structure of the ordinary knowledge framework.

Moreover, this framework can be considered to be an evolutionary product. Thus it would be *a priori* from the point of view of the individual, though *a posteriori* from the point of view of the species. As a result this conceptual structure, though neither invulnerable to criticism nor irreplaceable because it is an absolutely accurate account of what is the case, would possess a stability which belongs to the biological makeup of the human species. It will, then, relative to the stability of the species, always play a role in the human cognitive enterprise. It has a methodological irreplaceability based on species-specific human cognitive capacities.

Thus I believe that the results of the new analyses of scientific knowledge point to the existence of a basic cognitive framework, OKF. The concepts of OKF are theory-free, not merely theory-neutral and thus constitute an epistemic given. Moreover, OKF is a conceptual structure common to the members of the human species and is possibly genetically based. Although not providing the species with irreplaceable cognitive achievements, it nevertheless plays an indispensable methodological role in any human cognitive achievement.

These results have, I believe, general epistemological consequences and are applicable to the epistemic structure of religious cognition. Their application leads to the conclusion that the structure of religious cognition is inferential and that there is no unique religious experience, but merely the religious interpretation of an OKF experience. For example, an experience of awe and reverence in the presence of a remarkable person or an inspiring natural setting can provide the concepts and the data which may be used in an inference that leads to a theistic belief about an awe-inspiring, transcendent being. This inferentially acquired belief can then be used in perceptual settings to interpret in a religious fashion one's experiences of awe and reverence. As a result, one comes to report having experienced an awe-inspiring, transcendent being. But on the account I am urging the experience itself is nonreligious. The religious content used to interpret the experience is acquired inferentially.

The key point of application of the above analysis concerns the methodological role played by OKF in the human cognitive enterprise. My claim is that the constitutive concepts and principles of OKF play a necessary role in all human cognitive achievements, including religious. The necessity of this role is based ultimately on the biological identity and stability of the human species. Thus the intelligibility and truthfulness of all human belief systems, including the scientific and the religious, originate in and find confirmation in OKF.

It is important to notice that this claim about the methodological role of OKF does not represent an attempt to resurrect the ill-fated logical

positivist verifiability principle. I am in complete agreement with both the critical realist interpretation of scientific theories by Barbour and others and their criticisms of instrumentalism. Microphysical theories demonstrate, I believe, the possibility of moving in a justifiable fashion beyond the perceptual. I am claiming, then, that OKF plays a methodological role in transcending the perceptual in the scientific and religious cognitive enterprises.

Thus, in my view, the cognitive status of microphysical theories and religious beliefs about the transcendent is quite similar. On this basis, then, I claim that religious cognition, insofar as it concerns theistic religious beliefs about the transcendent, is inferential in structure. The data used to support religious beliefs have their bases as do scientific data in OKF. This is, of course, not to claim that either scientific data or data relevant to religious belief are equivalent in every way to ordinary everyday observations.<sup>9</sup> I am claiming, however, that OKF terms and statements play a necessary methodological role in the constitution of both scientific data and theories and religious experiences and beliefs. As a result, the intelligibility and truthfulness of these cognitive structures originate in and find confirmation in OKF. But just as the intelligibility of derivative cognitive frameworks is not confined to OKF, neither is their truthfulness. Therefore, the statements of OKF, though methodologically necessary, may be corrected or even rejected outright because of highly confirmed results in the derivative cognitive frameworks.

Moreover, the notion of cognitive adaptiveness allows us to understand how it is that, even though we make the claim that there is no immediate religious experience and that religious beliefs are inferential, nevertheless religious claims are frequently made in experiential terms. For there is increasing evidence that human persons have both the capability of perceiving wholes formulated in more or less theoretical or interpretive terms and the ability to perceive in more analytic ways and in more fundamental terms (Shimony 1978). Thus evidence of the use of interpretation in experience is not sufficient to allow one to conclude that the interpretive terms used to understand the experience are not themselves gained originally via an inferential process. At this point, I am in agreement with the revolutionaries' and the new orthodoxy's findings about the use of theoretical terms in observational reports. I differ with them only in the conclusions they draw from these facts (Rossschaefer 1976). These facts are not incompatible with the notion of the existence of some theory-free concepts; and, indeed, they can be explained, as I have indicated, by means of the notion of cognitive adaptiveness. I believe that the situation is completely comparable for religious cognition. Thus the overwhelming evidence for

the presence of interpreted religious experience rather than uninterpreted religious experience, and the seeming preponderance of experiential rather than inferential and argumentative approaches to the transcendent are not sufficient evidence to establish a unique epistemic structure for religious cognition.

Thus the methodological role of OKF leads us to the conclusion that religious cognition is essentially inferential in structure, and the capacity for cognitive adaptivity enables us to see how this conclusion is compatible with the widespread evidence for interpreted religious experience.

#### UNINTERPRETED RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

But what then are we to make of the claims for an access to the transcendent not through religiously interpreted experience but through what Barbour might call immediate experience of the transcendent and what we shall call a uniquely religious experience (URE)? Why does the existence of OKF seem to rule out such a special mode of experience? I would like to suggest an answer, though not a definitive one, to that question before I conclude (Rottschaefer 1978a).

The claim for a URE is often posed in such a way as to rule out common criteria that are used in the evaluation of cognitive claims, for example, empirical support, consistency, coherence, pragmatic support, richness, and simplicity. It is held that these criteria are neither needed nor applicable. The claim that the criteria are not applicable rests on the contention that the content of UREs is unique, and the claim that they are not needed rests on the contention that UREs provide their own authentication. They are self-evident.

Consider the last claim first which might be formulated as follows: If one finds oneself in the presence of the transcendent, then one will know it with certainty.<sup>10</sup> Such a claim is often dialogue-halting for it appears that one must either take the necessary steps to put oneself in a position to have a URE, accept the testimony of the initiated, or keep one's skeptical silence. However, there is another alternative. The proponent of URE can be requested to query himself about the basis for the certainty of his experience. This is surely what the skeptic would have to do if upon learning the necessary preliminary steps, one has—to one's surprise—a URE. A possible response to this question is that there is something special about the mode of the experience which gives it its self-authenticating character, for instance, the special feelings accompanying the experience. However, this sort of response is not satisfactory since the use of feelings on other occasions as a cognitive check is not infallible, as indeed is also the case with the other

criteria of justification that we mentioned above. Thus the self-authenticating mode must be special in a strong sense.

But consider now the content on the basis of which the common criteria of justification are claimed to be inapplicable. The content of the experience must be, as the mode of experience, special in the strong sense, if none of the criteria of justification, otherwise applicable, are so in this case.

But if my claim about the methodological necessity of OKF is correct, then neither the mode nor the content of the alleged URE can be special in the strong sense, for on my account OKF mediates the cognitive significance and justification of all claims. If, however, it is still maintained that URE in this strong sense has occurred, then the experience must be literally ineffable, for discourse takes place, on my hypothesis, only in OKF and OKF-dependent frameworks. Thus if there is discourse about the alleged URE, the claims concerning the experience must be mediated by OKF concepts and beliefs. If the URE is genuine, there will be no discourse to oneself or to anyone else. To reformulate Ludwig Wittgenstein, that of which one cannot speak, he will not—to himself or others! But clearly there is discourse about religious experience and the transcendent. Thus it seems that neither the mode of the experience nor its content are special in the strong sense we have been discussing. Thus the meaning of and the truth criteria for this discourse derive in the first instance from OKF.

But could there not be a non-OKF base functioning in URE? Call it the URE base. What would such a situation be like? It seems to be very much like the case of the experienced analogy which we found in our analysis of Barbour needed to be distinguished from the postulated analogy used in scientific theories. In this situation, then, the experiences of URE provide one term of the analogy. Those of OKF are used as the other term to bridge the gap, as it were, between URE and other human cognitive structures. It is assumed, then, that URE provides an independent meaning base.<sup>11</sup> And it can be assumed, though it does not seem necessary to do so, that the experiences are genuinely self-authenticating. Further there must indeed be some "commonality of content" in order to provide the basis for the analogies drawn between OKF and URE.

How might we establish the existence of such UREs? I do not know the answer to this question, but I will make some suggestions which will need further investigations. The classical test of replicability can help us to determine whether there are common OKF descriptions of the alleged UREs.<sup>12</sup> But even if such were attained, we would not have sufficient evidence to distinguish between situations in which OKF functions as the meaning base and those in which an independent URE

base was functioning. Some of the questions that need to be asked center around the relation of the URE and the OKF terms of the analogy. If the OKF analogue is adequate to the URE experience, then it would seem that we do not have a genuine URE. For, *ex supposito*, there is no content in the URE that exceeds that of the OKF analogue. If, on the other hand, the analogue is not adequate to the URE, then we need to inquire as to the sources of the inadequacy. Is the OKF analogue inadequate to the URE experience because of the latter's indeterminateness or its richness? If the former, we might argue that URE experience does not provide an independent meaning base. If the latter, we might argue that it does. But the notions of richness and excess will need explication, if we are to pursue this line of thought. Another question of importance, I believe, is whether the person claiming a URE can distinguish the experience with its content from the OKF interpretation. If she claims that she can do so, even though she cannot tell us the URE content except through OKF terms, then we might tend to believe that she has indeed had a genuine URE. At this point we might ask our psychologist colleagues how we might further test such a claim. Indeed, attempts to determine whether there are UREs, and to understand their structure might make use of some of the tools used in trying to understand animal intelligence and in trying to ascertain the existence of extraterrestrial intelligence and extrasensory perception. The latter case is probably closest to that of UREs; but it is also significantly different since ESP claims usually are special only in mode and not in content.

#### CONCLUSION

Ian Barbour has attempted to give an account of religious cognition using as a guide contemporary analyses of scientific cognition. He claims that such an analysis reveals that religious cognition has the structure of interpreted experience. I have examined Barbour's claim as developed in discussions of the rejection of givenness, the interpretation-laden character of reported religious experience, and the scientific and religious use of models. Although I have argued that Barbour's analysis fails to establish that religious cognition is neither inferential nor immediate in structure but rather has the structure of interpreted experience, I believe that his integrationist position and strategy are solidly founded and offer some substantial hope of clarifying the nature of religious cognition. Thus, on this basis, I have argued that a closer adherence to the similarities between religious and scientific cognition and to the basic epistemological principles to which the latter leads brings us to the conclusion that religious cognition is infer-



ential and that religious experience is in fact the use of religious beliefs inferentially acquired to interpret ordinary nonreligious experiences rather than a unique kind of experience. I have not, however, been able to exclude definitively the existence of uniquely religious experiences.

#### NOTES

1. Barbour's focus is on theistic conceptions of the transcendent within the Judaeo-Christian religious tradition. My focus will be the same. I suspect that my discussion would require substantial refinement and, perhaps, modification if extended to conceptions of the transcendent, especially nontheistic ones, within other world religious traditions.

2. Implicit in this contention is the claim that ordinary experience is nonreligious. I am here limiting the sense of religious to theistic conceptions of the transcendent within the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Compare note 1 above. I shall also present some reasons for believing that there are no extraordinary experiences of the religious sort, what in the text I call uniquely religious experiences.

3. Compare also the penetrating criticism of several current separatist positions by William Alston (1976).

4. The type of inference Barbour seems to have in mind is not deductive proof in which the content of the conclusion is "contained" in the premises. Rather, it is inductive inference. Thus the classical proofs for God's existence that are in question are the *a posteriori* ones.

5. Admittedly this purely negative characterization of religious cognition as interpreted experience is not completely satisfactory. Barbour's notion of interpreted experience reminds one of the Kantian account of experience according to which experience is constituted by both the matter of sensation and the forms of the understanding. But the comparison with Immanuel Kant does not fit well with the similarities Barbour claims to find between religious and scientific cognition. For present purposes it suffices to realize that Barbour is claiming that both science and religion have a cognitive structure that is neither directly experiential nor merely inferential. Thus for Barbour all religious experience comes interpreted but its religious character derives neither from the experience itself nor from a religious interpretation, inferentially based.

6. I have found in one place the claim that religious experience does not originate in sense experience (Barbour 1974, 209). If taken in a strong sense, Barbour seems to be claiming that there is a unique, though fallible, mode of religious experience. Understood in a less strong sense, Barbour may be claiming that religious experience has its origin in introspection or reflection, not perceptual experience. But the latter interpretation does not seem to fit all the types of religious experience enumerated by Barbour, for instance, interpersonal relationships, key historical events, and order and creativity in the world. These seem to involve a perceptual element.

7. Barbour suggests another manner in which his claim that all religious experience is interpreted can be understood (1974, 163-71). If God is conceived of as an agent, the knowledge of God is comparable to that of another self. This kind of knowledge, Barbour claims, is neither an immediate datum nor an inference since the self of another is neither directly perceived nor merely inferred. There have been a number of recent attempts to develop this analogy and the sometimes connected contention that the world is like God's body. Although this is not the place to enter into this discussion, it does seem to me that the use of this kind of analogy departs significantly from the comparison of the epistemic structure of scientific and religious cognition Barbour is attempting to develop. For the usual portrayal of the knowledge of a personal other from the agent point of view makes the connection between intentional and personal predicates a conceptual and not an empirical one. If then the data itself could uncover evidence of intention, it would logically imply personal agency, and the personal model would be rendered superfluous.

8. I have in mind something similar to what Wilfrid Sellars has referred to as the principles of the commonsense framework, although I believe that his implicit, old-

empiricist presuppositions finally subvert his attempts to give an account of this framework (Rottschaefer 1978b).

9. The details of this important distinction between OKF "data" and scientific data have not yet to my knowledge been worked out in detail. See Hooker (1975). I believe that a similar distinction can be made between OKF "data" and religious data.

10. Often claims of this kind are not uttered with such certainty as is evidenced by the traditional "rules for discernment" present within many Christian mystical traditions.

11. Classical examples, although not presented in the context of URE, appear in the first premise of many versions of the ontological argument for the existence of God. These premises involve claims about perfection, the unlimited, the infinite, etc.

12. The claim is often made that such a common core can be found. For a recent critical examination of that claim, see Steven T. Katz (1978, 22-74).

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