

UNITED WISDOM

Respecting Experience without Having to Accept Its Explanation

Meaning and Direction

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Epigraph

A wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence.

— David Hume, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, X.I, paragraph 87. Exact original English sentence; belief here concerns confidence in an assertion.

What this article is about

A friend describes an experience that changed how he sees his life. He explains it through a particular spiritual power and expects agreement. Can his account be treated respectfully without accepting that explanation? The question also concerns personal experience: a meaningful event may not have one obvious interpretation. This essay distinguishes experience, an account of it, a proposed explanation, and a decision supposedly following from the explanation. These distinctions require neither rejection nor acceptance of a spiritual tradition. William James, David Hume, and John's Gospel offer different ways to consider personal testimony and general assertions; their foundations remain distinct. Our everyday scenes are invented, rather than medical cases or evidence of a practice's efficacy. Respect means care toward a person and precision about what is said. It promises neither to affirm every conclusion nor to let another person determine one's actions.

I. One Account Can Contain Different Subjects

Imagine two adult friends talking after a visit to a quiet place outside town. One says he felt clarity for the first time in a long while and recognized a conversation he had postponed. He adds that the place must have revealed his calling, so the other friend should visit too. Several subjects are now present: an experience, an explanation of its cause, an interpretation of meaning, and a proposed action for someone else. They can be considered separately without accusing the speaker of insincerity. The scene is hypothetical and establishes nothing about a real place or spiritual power. It shows transitions easily concealed within one confident account. The listener can hear the importance of the first statement while leaving other questions open and declining a trip despite the experience's significance.

An account is not an exact copy of experience either. A person chooses words, recalls a sequence, and emphasizes what matters for the listener. This does not prove the account false. It means description already has a form and a conversational subject. What changed in

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your perception? What did you feel then, and what did you decide later? Such questions can help when the speaker wants discussion. They need not become scrutiny of every word or a demand to establish entitlement to a feeling. Here, the listener can distinguish clarity that evening from a later idea about calling. Clarification does not take the event away from the friend. It prevents a later explanation from silently presenting itself as what was directly experienced.

An explanation may draw on a tradition, a personal conjecture, a book, or someone else's advice. These grounds have different standing. Saying that a tradition interprets an event in a certain way differs from saying its cause has been established. A person may adopt a tradition's language for understanding without requiring the listener to accept the whole system. In our scene, ask what the friend is offering: a meaning to share, an argument to consider, or a request to travel. Sometimes he simply wants to be heard, and debating causes is unnecessary for that conversation. If an explanation becomes the basis of a demand on another person, however, neither its subject nor its grounds is settled solely by the account's significance.

II. Respect Addresses a Person; Assent Addresses an Assertion

A listener can acknowledge that an account matters to a friend without knowing how to explain the event. That position need not conceal contempt. State it clearly: I understand this was important to you; I do not yet share the conclusion about its cause. One statement concerns a person, the other a particular assertion. Combining them makes disagreement look like denial of experience and attentive listening look like assent to everything said. Our friends may retain closeness without sharing a trip or an interpretation. This guarantees no easy conversation; one may expect more. An expectation nevertheless does not make different decisions identical or oblige a listener to profess a belief they do not hold. Care can remain visible while the substance of disagreement is named.

Respect does not require declaring every first-person report reliable. A factual account may be incomplete or conflict with other information. Consider this calmly and precisely without assigning an overall deficiency of worth. Was the event as described? What does the person remember? What meaning do they give it? Testimony matters, but its standing depends on its subject. A listener need not settle a factual question solely through the speaker's confidence. Conversely, doubt about one detail grants no right to ridicule a feeling or assign a diagnosis. The essay offers no rules for assessing unusual states. It concerns judgment in an ordinary conversation while preserving the possibility of appropriate assistance when circumstances require it. A limit to one's knowledge should be acknowledged in that situation too.

Assent can be partial. Agree that a conversation was overdue without agreeing that a place communicates a binding will to all visitors. Acknowledge a pause's usefulness without

accepting a promise of identical results for others. Partial agreement is not evasive when its subject is named. The second friend says: I am glad you decided to speak with someone close; I do not hold the same belief about the source of that clarity; I am not planning the trip. Those statements do not obstruct one another. They are more precise than a general agreement or disagreement because they identify different grounds and actions. They should not become a universal conversational script: actual words depend on the relationship and the moment.

III. James Limits the Authority of Another's Experience

In The Varieties of Religious Experience, lectures XVI–XVII, pp.422–427, James distinguishes authority for the experiencer from obligation for outsiders. He does not dismiss religious possibility as error. We use the distinction narrowly; neither historical medical terminology nor absolute authority over all personal actions becomes a contemporary rule.

For our scene, ask what grounds connect the account to another person's action. The friend experienced clarity and found spiritual language for it. The listener was not in the same circumstances and does not adopt that language as a personal conviction. Acknowledging this does not make the experience meaningless. Personal significance does not transfer to someone else as a ready-made obligation. Even visiting the place would not require an experience matching the account. Travel might be interesting for independent reasons or might not fit. Declining an offer requires no proof that the experience is impossible. Another person's confidence simply should not be treated as already established consent. This is a contemporary editorial conclusion for the conversation, rather than a law shared by every spiritual tradition.

The distinction should not be reversed into a new demand. If experience imposes no obligation on the listener, the experiencer is not thereby required to abandon their language or adopt the listener's explanation. Each retains a subject of judgment. They may discuss an argument, compare descriptions with other information, or leave this part of the conversation unfinished. Identical beliefs are unnecessary for deciding the practical question of travel. Our listener can offer an ordinary meeting while declining the spiritual interpretation. The first friend may decide whether to meet on those terms. Neither acquires entitlement to participation through the experience's importance. This does not imply every assertion is equally justified; the grounds for a particular conclusion remain available for consideration.

IV. Hume Asks about the Grounds for Confidence

In An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, X.I, paragraphs 87–89, Hume considers confidence and testimony within a critique of miracle reports. His position is not declared a shared doctrine with the Gospel, nor used to infer that every spiritual report is false. The contemporary conversation below is a separate comparison.

The listener can distinguish confidence that the friend reported clarity from confidence in the proposed cause. The first is testimony about personal experience; the second needs grounds of its own. Those might be a traditional interpretation, an argument, or repeated confidence alone. They do not all answer the same question. Talk about meaning should not silently become an established mechanism by which a place acts. A promised travel outcome requires more than an account of one visit. Here, the friend's association between the evening and an important decision can be acknowledged without extending that association to everyone. This limit requires no denial of other possible events. It keeps the assertion within available content and its identified subject.

Confidence is not a measure of respect for a friend. Spend time, listen carefully, and help with an ordinary task without affirming an explanation of causes. Conversely, polite assent can create a mistaken impression of a shared decision. A later demand built on that assent requires clarifying what was unclear from the beginning. Where appropriate, say: I hear your account, but do not currently accept that conclusion. The essay requires no immediate debate about evidence in every conversation. Sometimes someone primarily needs company, rather than an argument. Attention to the moment should not become a declaration of reliability the listener considers unjustified. Discussion can be postponed while the distinction remains visible, and postponement need not be presented as a promise of eventual agreement.

V. John Preserves a Witness's Voice within Faith

In John 9:13–34, especially 9:25, the witness distinguishes what is unknown from an experienced change. Yet 9:35–41 leads to faith. This Christian healing narrative is not a neutral test of all experience. Its polemic is not generalized to religious groups today, and its bodily event is not equated with our imagined clarity.

The limited comparison concerns naming personal testimony precisely. Our friend can say the evening mattered while acknowledging that he considered its cause afterwards. The listener can recognize that precision without accepting the interpretation. An isolated convenient phrase should not make the whole Gospel defend permanent refusal of a religious conclusion. Its own movement differs. Comparison therefore retains both a similar question and different foundations. Contemporary friends do not repeat the ancient narrative's participants; their conversation proves no miracle and refutes no faith. They consider which words concern

experience, which concern the unknown, and which express belief. Respectful reading includes refusing to attribute a conclusion the source does not make, even when an isolated part appears to fit a contemporary concern.

The distinction matters for someone else's account too. A listener may select one convenient detail and build a final explanation around it, although the speaker described more. Disagreement then becomes a claim to rewrite another person's experience. Decline a spiritual interpretation without replacing it with one compulsory personal explanation. Our second friend does not know every circumstance of the evening. That ignorance proves neither the first interpretation nor any conjecture the listener offers instead. I cannot determine this from our conversation is a possible response. It preserves knowledge's limit without ridicule or obligatory agreement. Uncertainty may be an accurate result of the conversation, rather than evidence that the listener failed to attend carefully to the person. It need not be filled merely to avoid leaving an open question.

VI. Metaphor, Meaning, and Cause Are Different Assertions

Someone may say a place opened a path, using an image for a personal decision. Such language need not claim a verified external mechanism. Ask what the image means without forcing it to become a scientific assertion. If the same words support a guaranteed outcome for another visitor, however, the subject changes. An image becomes the basis of a promise or demand. Our friends can clarify: are you describing personal meaning or claiming the trip must do this for me? The question does not prohibit metaphor. It retains the distinction between narrating a life and asserting what should happen to others. An attractive expression does not automatically establish both, and its force in one use supplies no missing grounds in the other.

Religious language should not automatically be declared metaphorical either. For the speaker it may express a genuine belief about the world. Precision requires hearing the standing given to words, rather than making them comfortable by substitution. Understand that a friend literally accepts a spiritual cause without sharing the belief. Do not insist they merely described a mood poetically when they assert otherwise. That would let the listener maintain convenient agreement while misunderstanding the speaker. Preserve the actual difference: for you this is a causal assertion; for me it is not yet justified. Treatment of a person remains separate from a need to reconcile worldviews during one evening. Recognizing the assertion's intended meaning is not accepting its truth.

Some statements have a mixed meaning not yet settled even for the speaker. They may be trying language rather than presenting a finished system. Clarification can help more than immediate assent or refutation. Keep several formulations and consider which describes the subject more accurately, if both want that discussion. The listener need not become an editor of another person's spiritual biography. One may prefer not to discuss the experience in detail;

the other may decline unlimited listening. Conversational boundaries belong to both. Our scene can end with acknowledgment of the evening’s importance, disagreement about obligatory travel, and an ordinary meeting. An unfinished explanation does not make the conversation a failure or require ending the relationship for complete logical closure.

VII. Disagreement Can Remain Specific

Conversations sometimes offer two overly broad responses: I believe everything, or nothing like this can happen. More specific positions lie between them. I hear that it mattered. I cannot establish the cause. I do not accept the conclusion that I must act likewise. I want to understand the argument. Each has a particular subject. Our listener need not simultaneously decide about all spiritual traditions. This account and this travel offer can be considered specifically. Limiting scope need not evade difficulty. It preserves the scale of a conversation and prevents a personal story from silently requiring a general decision about the nature of the world. A broader question can be discussed separately when there is interest and adequate grounds.

Independence requires no dispute with every word. Sometimes it is enough not to claim agreement and to name the practical boundary. The listener may decline discussion of causes for now while hearing why the evening matters. That is consent to a particular conversation, rather than all future demands. If attention continues to be made conditional on complete belief, the conditions of communication become another subject. They can be named without proving every conviction false. The trip remains voluntary whether the philosophical dispute is finished or not. The essay offers no sentence guaranteed to persuade. It shows that a separate decision does not depend on winning a debate about every possible cause of experience, or on demonstrating a superior personal account.

Specific disagreement also matters for honesty. Pretending to be fully convinced may reasonably be heard as a shared outlook, making a later refusal surprising. Courtesy need not require that pretence. Choose tactful words and an appropriate moment without asserting what seems unjustified. Respect remains in a question, attention to the answer, and absence of ridicule. Assent to an explanation is a separate decision. This promises neither preservation of the relationship nor freedom from offence. People understand closeness and shared faith differently. The essay determines no outcome; it helps keep an existing distinction from disappearing beneath a formula of general agreement and keeps personal uncertainty from being presented as another person’s mistake.

VIII. When an Explanation Concerns Shared Action

A personal interpretation becomes a different subject when used to organize shared action. Travel needs time and resources; shared practice needs participation conditions; publication needs consent to dissemination. Even accepting part of a spiritual explanation leaves each action to be considered separately. Someone can believe a place matters without being able to travel. Someone else can reject the explanation while wanting a walk there. One answer does not automatically establish the other. Practical conditions matter independently and remain relevant during discussion of spiritual depth. They prove neither a tradition’s truth nor its falsity. They preserve the subject of a decision concerning particular people and circumstances, rather than only the persuasiveness of an overall account.

A private story should not become public evidence without consent. A friend’s disclosure during a personal meeting does not authorize publishing it as an argument for or against travel. Precision about explanation does not cancel the conditions of disclosure. Discuss a personal response without revealing someone else’s details. If the story is to enter a broader conversation, establish separately whether its teller agrees and what may be shared. This does not replace legal rules or professional consideration of private information. Attention to experience includes attention to how the account was provided. Respect extends beyond words of assent or disagreement about a proposed spiritual cause; handling the account is itself a particular action.

Shared action may require checking facts unrelated to spiritual interpretation. Travel conditions, access, or meeting arrangements need appropriate verification. A personal account of clarity establishes none of these. Our listener can clarify timing and feasibility without making that a sign of accepted faith. Conversely, a practical refusal need not be presented as philosophical refutation. Meaning, factual conditions, and consent retain different grounds. This is neither a detailed travel plan nor a recommendation of a particular place. The scene illustrates how a shared undertaking needs its own consideration even when it began with one person’s meaningful experience. That importance should not silently replace unavailable information, or require others to act as though it had already been obtained.

IX. Personal Experience Also Allows Revision

The difference between experience and explanation concerns personal accounts too. Someone may remember a meaningful evening while later understanding its causes differently. A new explanation need not destroy the experience. In another hypothetical scene, someone initially connects clarity to a special place and later notices rest and a long-prepared conversation. This establishes no actual cause for similar events. It shows the possibility of reconsidering a causal idea while retaining an account of what felt important. A single explanation need not be chosen before naming significance. Yet significance does not make every explanation equally grounded. Consider new information without turning each revision into denial of personal worth or the whole past. A change in understanding is another subject to describe precisely.

A causal question can also remain open. I know the evening stayed with me; I do not know which explanation is adequate; I understand that it establishes no obligatory decision for someone else. This need not impoverish life or remove meaning. Meaning may concern later questions and actions while causes remain a subject of inquiry. The essay does not demand that causal questions be dismissed as unnecessary. Considering them with appropriate grounds is separate work. Uncertainty is neither a universal spiritual virtue nor rejection of knowledge altogether. It accurately names what remains unestablished without filling the gap with a compulsory traditional explanation or a compulsory explanation offered by its critic. Either proposal still needs to be identified as a proposal.

Personal experience grants no unconditional authority over future actions. Someone can remember strong confidence and separately consider a new promise, participation, or a decision involving others. In our scene, initial clarity does not replace the conversation with a close person that made it meaningful. That person’s response and actual circumstances still matter. Experience cannot be presented as ready proof that another must agree. This preserves the subject of a shared decision without devaluing experience. Someone may act on their understanding where the decision is their own and acknowledge another’s participation where two people are involved. Spiritual significance grants no right to bypass that distinction. A personally compelling direction can therefore coexist with an unfinished conversation and with limits to what can be decided alone.

X. Attention and Examination Can Coexist

Attention to experience and examination of explanation need not exclude one another. Our listener acknowledges that the evening matters, declines an obligatory spiritual cause, and retains a separate travel decision. If both wish, discussion of meaning or argument can continue. If neither wishes, that does not prove closeness impossible. The essay guarantees no convenient arrangement for every pair of people. It offers a narrower possibility: one disagreement need not negate a person, and one act of attention need not affirm a whole system. Name differences at the scale at which they arose. An account then remains an account, and its proposed explanation acquires no authority solely through intensity or confidence. Its grounds and any ensuing action remain available for separate consideration.

Attention includes precision in personal language. Instead of a general I believe you, identify what was heard and which conclusion remains open. Instead of calling everything invented, name a particular disagreement, unknown, or missing ground. These formulations are not prescribed verbatim and promise no relief from tension. They prevent saying more than one considers justified. Our listener can support a decision to speak with someone close without accepting an explanation of the place. Further discussion can also be declined when its conditions or time are unavailable. Respect concerns both participants. It assigns neither endless listening to one nor a duty to translate experience into the listener’s worldview to the other as a condition of being heard.

Experience, description, explanation, and action remain connected, but connection does not make them one subject. Treat a person carefully, read a source accurately, acknowledge the unknown, and examine an assertion’s grounds. Accepting someone else’s interpretation is unnecessary for hearing experience’s significance. Rejecting every spiritual possibility is likewise unnecessary for retaining separate consent. Our three sources answer different questions without merging into one teaching. The contemporary conclusion is modest: a meaningful account merits attention, while a proposed transition to another person’s belief or action needs its own consideration. Our friends have not agreed about the evening’s explanation. They can nevertheless distinguish one person’s experience, a question for both, and separate decisions. That clarity promises no particular outcome and imposes no obligation to finish every question during the conversation.

What this means in practice

If reflection is appropriate now, choose a small account of your own or an invented one. Do not use someone else’s private details without consent or examine a difficult experience merely to complete the exercise. This is an editorial way of posing questions, rather than an established method of changing someone’s state. Stop or seek appropriate assistance when needed.

Write four separate lines: the experience described; its proposed explanation; the explanation’s grounds, if known; and the action supposedly following. If distinctions are difficult, mark the question as open. Do not invent a cause to fill a form. In our scene, clarity belongs to the first line, a spiritual cause to the second, and another person’s travel to the fourth.

State what you accept, what you decline, and what remains unestablished. Has attention been presented as assent to explanation, or disagreement as a verdict on someone’s entire experience? Name only the subject actually considered. Personal meaning can be respected while a cause remains open.

Finally, name one next practical choice and its conditions: further discussion, a pause, or declining an action. Do not make that choice proof of maturity, faith, or one tradition’s correctness. Afterwards, ask whether transitions are clearer: where description ends, assertion begins, and separate consent is needed. The answer concerns this examination’s clarity. It promises neither identical outcomes for others nor a final explanation of experience.

Key quotation

> *No authority emanates from them which should make it a duty for those who stand outside of them to accept their revelations uncritically.*

— William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, XVI–XVII, p.422, point 2. Exact original English; them refers to mystical states.

Connections between traditions

1. **Personal conviction and a shared conclusion: James, XVI–XVII, p.422, points 1–2; Hume, X.I, paragraph 87.** The former distinguishes experiencer and outsider; the latter connects confidence to grounds. What transition justifies another’s assent? Comparison separates an account’s force for one person from an assertion’s grounds for another. Our listener can hear the friend’s clarity without accepting a ready explanation. James nevertheless leaves religious possibility open, while Hume places the question within criticism of miracle testimony. They supply neither a shared verdict on spiritual experience nor modern diagnosis, and promise no discovery of the actual cause.

2. **Testimony and its examination: John 9:18–25; Hume, X.I, paragraphs 88–89.** The Gospel distinguishes what participants know from what is being questioned; Hume considers conditions of confidence in reports. Their comparative mechanism identifies who testifies to what before extending a conclusion. Personal clarity can then be separated from a universal promise of results. The boundary is fundamental: John presents healing within Christian faith,

while Hume criticizes miracles' testimonial grounds. The sources do not confirm one another. Comparison makes neither a religious narrative into a neutral experiment nor doubt about explanation into permission to humiliate a speaker.

3. **An account and subsequent explanation: John 9:25,30–33,35–38; James, XVI–XVII, pp.425–427, point 2.** Testimony leads toward religious recognition in the narrative; James limits general authority through interpretative diversity. The shared comparative subject is transition from a report to wider interpretation. Making this visible prevents automatic acceptance. The Gospel's movement is not refusal of a conclusion, however, and James does not make faith meaningless. A contemporary listener can consider explanation separately; that editorial conclusion is not attributed to every participant in the ancient story. Both sources retain the direction of their own argument rather than being reduced to one conversational rule.

4. **Origin and value: James, I, pp.4–5; Hume, X.I, paragraph 87.** James distinguishes origin from value; Hume distinguishes confidence from grounds for factual conclusions. Comparison prevents one answer from replacing another question. A meaningful evening may remain in a biography while its causal explanation is unsettled; significance guarantees no external outcome. James's value judgment nevertheless differs from Hume's assessment of evidence and cannot replace it. This is comparison between philosophical questions, rather than an empirical conclusion about the friend or a method established to preserve experience's value when causes are reconsidered.

5. **Limits of shared belief: James, XVI–XVII, pp.427–428, point3; John 9:35–41.** James leaves possible wider meanings open; the Gospel's conclusion affirms faith on its own foundation. Who adopts a further belief, and on what grounds? Comparison preserves genuinely different answers rather than creating a universal formula. Someone else's faith can be understood without becoming the listener's compulsory explanation. Christian recognition is not turned into agnosticism; James's openness is not proof of every cause. Neither source decides travel for our contemporary friends. Their practical choice remains distinct from understanding either source's position.

Primary sources

1. William James. The Varieties of Religious Experience, lectures 1901–1902; displayed Longmans 1917 printing. Lecture I, pp.4–5; XVI–XVII, pp.422–428. Original English.

2. David Hume. An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, X.I, paragraphs 87–89; context 86–91. L.A.Selby-Bigge's second edition 1902, from the posthumous 1777 text; original English.

3. John 9:13–34 and 9:35–41. King James Version; both displayed BibleGateway passages read. Christian conclusion 9:35–41 retained.

John 9:35–41 conclusion

Hume and James were read in original English; Russian quotations are United Wisdom's own translations. The Gospel was read in the named English translation, without claiming Greek-original collation. Contemporary hypothetical scenes and consent questions are editorial argument. Full raw sources are not imported or vectorized; worldwide licensing is not asserted.

Tags

experience, explanation, respect, testimony, spirituality, consent, independence, trust, uncertainty, meaning, cause, metaphor, conversation, friendship, personal biography, belief, grounds, William James, David Hume, John, pragmatism, empiricism, Christianity, traditions, reading, interpretation, privacy, participation, questions, discernment

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