

Did the women and the apostles have visions that originated in their own minds, subjective hallucinations?

Jesus died by crucifixion and was supposedly absent from the tomb a few days later and appeared alive to his followers. The first witnesses were women who went to attend the tomb. The women also reported men in white at the tomb which the Church wants you to think means angels for we can't have people thinking some cult group had stolen the body!

Matthew says that people rose from the dead at the time Jesus died and after his resurrection they appeared to people. What if one of these entities was mistaken for Jesus? What one pretended to be Jesus? If these entities had been going about, it would be easy for believers to get worked up and think they had a vision of the risen Jesus even if he had not risen at all!

The women took their story to the apostles who said they thought it was insane. That is what they said but did they really think that? They had to fear the trouble that could come. It was safer to ignore the thought that Jesus rose and for the reward was being on the right side of the Jewish leaders and the Romans.

The apostles might have disbelieved the women at the start but then they could have developed the hope and expectation necessary to make them hallucinate as well. Studies have shown that up to 14% of people who have no mental illness have had hallucinations with some involving more than one of the senses and some having a chat with the hallucination. The figure has to be higher for there has to be people who have hallucinations and never noticed that they hallucinated and many people on a lifeboat at sea have been seen to have a hallucination of a ship coming to save them that is so similar to what the rest see for they want to believe what they see is real and so the delusion fits what most of them describe to fulfil that need once they start talking about what they see so they seem to be having the same hallucination (Craig's Empty Tomb and Habermas on the Post-Resurrection Appearances of Jesus).

Stress could have triggered the visions and could have altered their memories so much that they came to believe that they had seen Jesus though they had not. The Resurrection Factor would reject this for the visions brought joy and comfort (page 43). But how long did this joy last – two seconds? The gospels do not tell us. It is doubtful it brought them any more joy than the average Christian gets.

The Christian arguments against the women hallucinating are interesting and if they work for the visions of the angels they do not work for the visions of Jesus simply because if you have visions of angels then the possibility of hallucinating something after that is very real. The angel visions undermine the Jesus vision. What if the Jesus vision was just another angel vision and they decided afterwards it was Jesus? That gives you no reason to think it was Jesus!

Christians contradict themselves all the time and their dishonesty shines clearly from the fact that they claim that angels were reported at the tomb. If the women did think they seen angels that would have made them expect to see Jesus and fulfil the expectation necessary for causing a hallucination. The Matthew gospel has the women being told Jesus was alive by an allegedly angelic third party and they rush away and run into Jesus - they were predisposed to see him which could have caused them to have the kind of hallucination they had.

John has Magdalene not knowing Jesus rose after her first visit to the tomb. She thinks he is the gardener. Matthew has her and her companions being told and persuaded by an angel that Jesus rose on the first visit. Magdalene's sanity has been questioned for the gospels say she had demons in her that Jesus cast out. It looks like she saw the gardener and an illusion set in.

Whatever you think we have an unparalleled situation here. It is so unique that you cannot really compare it to the hallucination case studies that Christians want you to take as shining light. Hallucination cannot be ruled out for that reason.

APPENDIX: FROM CHAPTER 6, IS IT RATIONAL FOR CHRISTIANS TO BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION? - CONTEMPORARY DEBATES IN PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Edited by Michael L. Peterson and Raymond J. VanArragon

The belief that Jesus rose from the dead is central to the Christian faith. If it were irrational to believe in the Resurrection, this would seriously call into question the rationality of Christian belief. Stephen T. Davis argues that it is indeed rational for Christians to believe that the Resurrection occurred. Michael Martin opposes this position, contending that it is not rational for anyone to believe that it took place.

Evidence that the resurrection appearances were not hallucinations

Davis claims that many factors indicate that the Resurrection appearances of Jesus were not hallucinations: the disciples were not expecting the Resurrection; the idea of the resurrection of one individual before the end of the world is not found in the Jewish tradition; the resurrected Jesus was not immediately recognized; some who saw him doubted; many different people saw the risen Jesus at different times and in different circumstances; and there were none of the usual causes such as drugs, lack of food, water, or sleep, and so on. He also seems to reject the idea that one person's hallucination could start a chain reaction among other members of the group (p. 183, n. 30).

However, the historical reality of the Resurrection is not the only alternative to the hallucination theory. Stories about Jesus' appearances in the Gospels may be legends that cannot be completely traced to hallucinations. Recall that the detailed stories of Jesus' appearances do not appear in Paul and other earlier letter-writers. This is surprising on the theory that the appearances are historically accurate, but not on the legend theory, according to which details are developed over time.

[NOTE: In fact, resurrection stories were common in Jesus' era and before.

Ancient heroes such as Romulus and Hercules were rewarded by being taken up into heaven and made divine beings. Romulus's ascent was seen by "eyewitnesses." In other cases the hero's ascent was shown by the lack of bodily remains. Sometimes the hero might return to earth and appear to his friends. Similar legends have been associated with more recent or contemporary personages, such as Apollonius of Tyana, the prophet Peregrinus, and the Emperor Augustus.]

According to Davis, doubters and skeptics of the Resurrection in the gospel stories themselves testify to the truth of the stories. But this is questionable. In some of the legends, the skepticism of characters is used as a literary device to stress the reality of miracles performed by the hero. Given this background, it is not surprising that the Resurrection story would develop complete with skeptical characters. It hardly seems to matter, as Davis thinks, that the Christian story might have some elements not found in the Jewish tradition. There are other traditions not mentioned by Davis, including Egyptian, Zoroastrian, and Greek, which might have influenced Christian legends. However, suppose that it is shown that Christianity has elements not found in any other tradition. Legend making is to some extent creative. Nothing follows from this fact that a story contains elements that cannot be traced to older myths and legends as to whether these elements reflect historical reality.

Moreover, it is not clear that the hallucination theory can be so easily dismissed. Hallucinations plus legends can explain more than either phenomenon taken in isolation. Despite what Davis suggests, collective hallucinations are well-known phenomena, and there is every reason to suppose that they can occur without Davis's "usual causes" being present. Furthermore, we know that one hallucination can trigger other hallucinations. The history of witchcraft indicates that people who were thought to be bewitched had hallucinations that caused those around them to also have hallucinations.

[NOTE: In the case of Sevi, the visions of his followers were infectious, one person's vision triggering hundreds of others]

In a series of visions of the Virgin Mary in Dordogne, France, in 1889, one child's vision triggered similar visions in other children and then in a large number of peasants.

There are also the Old Testament stories of Enoch and Elijah, who were taken up to be with God and left no traces. (See Price, *Beyond Born Again*, ch. 6.)]

Davis argues that hallucinations are ruled out by the fact that neither Jesus nor his disciples were expecting the Resurrection, Jesus was not immediately recognized, and different people in different times and circumstances saw him. With respect to the first point we know from the gospels that people did believe in the resurrections of individuals before the general resurrection at the end of time. The public appearance of Jesus was interpreted as the resurrection of John (Mark 6:14) and some suspected that John was the Messiah (Luke 3:15).

Furthermore, Davis's argument assumes that the historical account is accurate. What if part of the story is legendary? Legends of the time and earlier suggest that heroes are resurrected, ascend to heaven, and sometimes return to earth. So was it really true that the disciples could not expect some sort of resurrection? These legends also indicate that skepticism is used as a literary device to authenticate miracles. The stories of the initial failure to recognize Jesus surely could function in a similar way.

Moreover, the evidence cited above show that collective hallucinations do not always appear in a particular place or in one group of people.