Evaluating and Religious Beleifs

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## 1 Strong Rationalism/Evidentialism

* In order for a religious belief system to be properly and rationally accepted, it must be possible to prove that the belief system is true or false.
  + Here *prove* means: to show that a belief is true in a way that should be convincing to any reasonable person.
  + W. K. Clifford: “It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.”
* This view can be held by theists, atheists, and agnostics.
* Arguments and evidence are rationally necessary for belief in God (the presumption of non-theism)
* The view is often associated with *strong foundationalism* in epistemology
* Issues:
  + Is rational guarantee even desirable from the standpoint of religious faith?
  + Is it even possible to prove that a particular religious belief system is true?
  + Assumes that reason is neutral with respect to a person’s worldview.

## 2 Fideism

* Religious belief systems are not subject to rational evaluation.
* Proof defeats the whole point of faith.
  + “Without risk there is no faith. Faith is precisely the contradiction between the infinite passion of the individual’s inwardness and the objective uncertainty. If I am capable of grasping God objectively, I do not believe, but precisely because I cannot do this I must believe. If I wish to preserve myself in faith I must constantly be intent upon holding fast the objective uncertainty, so as to remain out upon the deep, over seventy thousand fathoms of water, still preserving my faith.” — Søren Kierkegaard
* Issues:
  + How do we decide which faith to leap for?
  + A religious belief system can be subject to rational evaluation without sacrificing faith.
    - Reason can help us better understand our faith (faith seeking understanding)
    - Reason can lead us to revise some of our religious beliefs without discarding the system as a whole.

## 3 Critical Rationalism

* In order for a religious belief system to be properly and rationally accepted, it must be possible to provide reasons and arguments in its favor and/or defend it against rational criticism.
* Religious belief systems can and must be rationally criticized and evaluated although conclusive proof of such a system is impossible.
* *Critical Evidentialism*:
  + We cannot prove our religious belief system, …
  + but we must be prepared to offer positive reasons and evidence for it …
  + and we must be prepared to defend it against critics.
* *Critical Anti-Evidentialism*:
  + We cannot prove our religious belief system, …
  + nor are we under any obligation to provide reasons or arguments for it; …
  + nevertheless, we must be prepared to defend it against rational criticism.
* Evaluating a Particular Religious Belief
  + Understand the belief as accurately as possible.
  + Consider the reasons and arguments for and against the belief.
* Evaluating Religious Belief Systems or Worldviews
  + Is the worldview internally consistent?
  + Is the worldview consistent with known facts?
  + Does the worldview have sufficient explanatory power? (I.e., Does it help make sense of the world around us?)
  + To what extent does the worldview enable us to make sense of the actual living of our lives?
* Issues:
  + Does critical rationalism lend itself to an open-ended process by which we never reach the point of having faith and being religious?
  + Does critical rationalism promote only a tentative or partial commitment to one’s belief system?

## References

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