

Announcements and Such

- Three songs: “Loud Pipes”, “Nostrand”, and “Spanish Armada” by *Ratatat*
- Today: the epistemology of religion
- Next time: skepticism (finally!)
- Recommendation: to get your intuitions flowing, watch *The Matrix* or *Waking Life*

Kinds of Belief I

- We’ve spent a lot of time in this course talking about different sources of belief, and different ways in which a beliefs can be justified
- This suggests a way of dividing beliefs into kinds: perceptual vs. memorial vs. testimonial vs. inferential, deductive vs. inductive, etc.
- But we can also divide beliefs up by their *subject matter*

Kinds of Belief II

- Thus we can distinguish between scientific, moral, and religious beliefs
- We can also contrast these with our beliefs about more ordinary matters, such as those about nearby objects and events
- We’ve been thinking about the source and nature of justification and knowledge (mostly) in terms of *ordinary* beliefs—*there is a very good reason for this...*

Kinds of Belief III

- When it comes to scientific, moral, and religious beliefs, people tend to have VERY STRONG FEELINGS
- What’s interesting is that when one evaluates scientific, moral, and religious beliefs according to the standards for justification and knowledge established by thinking about ordinary cases, some very surprising conclusions seem to follow

Kinds of Belief IV

- As we've seen, it is hard to believe that we have *any* scientific knowledge at all in the sense that we take our selves to have knowledge about the objects we perceive around us
- Likewise, there are at least some very compelling arguments for the claim that we have *no moral knowledge* either

Religious Beliefs I

- So how about religious beliefs? Many non-religious people tend to assume that religious beliefs not only don't amount to knowledge, but they aren't justified either
- Likewise, at least some religious people assume that all of their religious beliefs amount to infallible knowledge
- Interestingly, Audi and the SEP article suggest that there are plausible alternatives to each of these views

Religious Beliefs II

- There are two main issues here: what grounds religious beliefs? And can these grounds (if there are any) ever lead to knowledge?
- Here we are concerned with beliefs such as the belief that God exists, or that s/he is benevolent

Evidentialism I

- Why doubt that religious beliefs are well grounded?
- *Evidentialism*: justified belief and knowledge are only possible on the basis of adequate (or perhaps *conclusive*) evidence
- A skeptic about religious beliefs will claim that we lack adequate evidence of any kind for religious beliefs

Evidentialism II

- What sort of evidence might there be for religious beliefs?
- Of course, religious beliefs themselves are ruled out
- Testimony, religious experiences, inductive evidence (IBE), a priori reasoning
- Are any of these candidates adequate?

Evidentialism III

- Religious beliefs don't seem to be self-evident, but some arguments for the existence of God, if they worked, would be a priori (e.g., the ontological argument)
- Others depend empirical premises (e.g., the argument from first cause)
- Still others are forms of IBE (e.g., the argument from complexity)

Evidentialism IV

- The problem with all of these arguments is that they are either subject to counterargument, or equally (or more) plausible alternatives
- That being so, they give us at best only partial evidence for religious beliefs
- If evidentialism is correct, these arguments cannot get us justification or knowledge

Experientialism I

- Another possibility is that we can get religious knowledge (or at least justified beliefs) *directly* from experience
- People claim to observe miracles, hear God speak to them, or have other mystical experiences
- But at best, these experiences will merely be evidence for an inductive argument, and as we've seen, that will be inconclusive

Fideism I

- So how else might one reply to the evidentialist challenge?
- One might reject the *hegemony* of evidentialism: the idea that there can be principles for determining what sorts of things we should believe independently of our belief forming practices
- One way to do this is known as *fideism*

Fideism II

- Fideism rejects the idea that lack of adequate evidence is grounds for giving up religious beliefs
- There are different ways of doing this: e.g., one can claim that evidentialism simply does not apply to faith, or that standards of evidence are different in different domains

Fideism III

- Disadvantages of fideism: it's either dogmatic, or self-defeating
- Dogmatic fideism just ends the conversation
- Relativistic fideism (the view that standards of evidence for religious belief are different than in other domains) cannot account for religious claims that go beyond the religious domain (e.g., claims about what exists)
- But many religious claims do just this!

Other Responses to Evidentialism I

- What about probabilistic or cumulative evidence for religious beliefs?
- Even if one admits that none of the arguments, e.g., for the existence of God are conclusive, one might think that taken together they make God's existence *probable*
- This depends on how strong the arguments really are when taken individually...

Other Responses to Evidentialism II

- One might try a *reductio* argument on evidentialism by way of an analogy with perception
- The idea is that the standards of evidence for religious justification/knowledge are so high that they would rule out perceptual justification/knowledge
- But surely we get justification/knowledge from perception. Right? (more on this next time)

Other Responses to Evidentialism III

- Given the importance of faith in religion, maybe it is mistaken to think religious belief requires justification
- Some people say they believe in God because it “feels right”. In that case, the belief is not based on any reasons
- Does that mean the belief is irrational?

Justification and Rationality I

- Irrationality usually suggests that a person’s beliefs are in conflict
- Although someone who merely has faith lacks positive reasons for her belief, she is only irrational if she has reasons *not* to hold that belief
- Does this mean that faith must be *absolute* and allow no room for doubt?
- That depends on the source of the doubt...

Knowledge without Justification I

- Suppose someone believes that God exists on the basis of faith, and suppose this belief is true
- We can agree that her belief isn’t justified, but might it amount to knowledge?
- This would seem to depend on the relationship between faith and truth...