

Faith and Reason

I. The burden of proof

a. Why is this issue important?

- i. Many people carry an *unreflective* burden-of-proof *assumption* into the debate over God's existence. This probably includes you.
- ii. And **this assumption largely determines where you'll end up** at the end of the debate. It's easy to poke holes in arguments, to resist them, to cross examine witnesses. It's difficult to build up positive arguments, to *prove* a position.
- iii. So if you assume the burden of proof is on, for example, **theism**, and you're pretty good at poking holes in arguments, you'll probably end up an **atheist**.
- iv. Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556), Anglican theologian: "What the **heart** loves, the will chooses, and the mind justifies."

b. The burden of proof in the legal system



i. *Semper necessitas probandi incumbit ei qui agit.*

1. The necessity of proof always lies with the person who **lays charges**.

ii. *Affirmanti, non neganti incumbit probatio.*

1. The burden of proof is on the party who **affirms**, not one who denies.

iii. *Per rerum naturam factum negantis nulla probatio est.*

1. By the nature of things one who **denies** a fact need not give proof.

iv. PROBLEM: Both atheism and theism can be seen as "affirmations," and each is the denial of the other. Antique Latin phrases won't settle this issue for us.

v. **Presumption of Innocence**

1. Prosecution must prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

- a. If the prosecution fails, the defendant is declared "not guilty" and released.

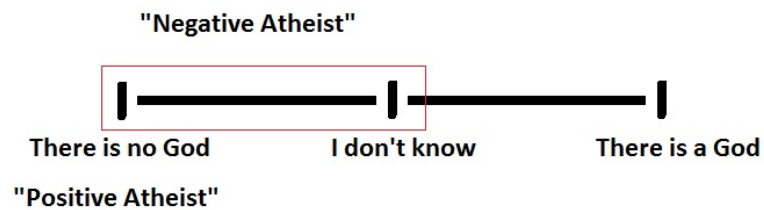
- i. Note: not declared "innocent"

c. Our question: **Should we presume atheism, or should we presume theism?**

II. "The presumption of atheism" (Antony Flew)

a. "Atheism"

- i. "The word 'atheism', however, has in this contention to be construed unusually. Whereas nowadays the usual meaning of 'atheist' in English is 'someone who asserts that there is no such being as God', **I want the word to be understood not positively but negatively.** I want the originally Greek prefix 'a' to be read in the same way in 'atheist' as it customarily is read in such other Greco-English words as 'amoral', 'atypical', and 'asymmetrical'."
- ii. In this interpretation an atheist becomes: not someone who positively asserts the non-existence of God; but someone who is simply **not a theist**. Let us, for future ready reference, introduce the labels 'positive atheist' for the former and 'negative atheist' for the latter.



b. Presumptions and Preferences

- i. "To accept such a presumption is to adopt a policy. And policies have to be assessed by reference to the **aims** of those for whom they are suggested."
- ii. "If for you it is more important that **no guilty person should ever be acquitted** than that **no innocent person should ever be convicted**, then for you a presumption of guilt must be the rational policy."
- iii. "What then are the **aims** by reference to which an atheist presumption might be justified? One key word in the answer, if not the key word, must be **'knowledge'**. But knowledge is crucially different from mere true belief. All knowledge involves true belief; **not all true belief constitutes knowledge.**"
- iv. "If, for instance, there is a question whether a colleague performed some discreditable action, then all of us, though we have perhaps to admit that we cannot help believing that he did, are rightly scrupulous not to assert that this is known unless **we have grounds sufficient to warrant** the bolder claim."
- v. "It is, therefore, not only incongruous but also scandalous in matters of life and death, and even of eternal life and death, **to maintain that you know either on no grounds at all, or on grounds** of a kind which on other and comparatively minor issues you yourself would insist to be **inadequate.**"

c. Flew's Central Argument

- i. "It is by reference to this inescapable demand for **grounds** that the presumption of atheism is justified. If it is to be established that there is a God, then we have to have good grounds for believing that this is indeed so. Until and unless some such grounds are produced we have literally no reason at all for believing; and in that situation the only reasonable posture must be that of either the **negative atheist or the agnostic**. So the onus of proof has to rest on the proposition."

d. What is Flew's Argument?

1. You can know that something is true ONLY IF you have good grounds or evidence for it.
2. So, you can know that **theism** is true only if you have good grounds or evidence for it. (from 1, an instance of 1)
3. If knowledge of theism requires evidence, then the burden of proof is on theism.
4. Therefore, the burden of proof is on theism (2&3 MP)

e. Objections?

- i. First Objection: The argument also shows the burden of proof is on positive atheism. Just swap "atheism" in for "theism" in the above argument.
 1. But Flew wants the burden of proof to be ONLY on theism, and NOT on atheism, positive or negative.
 2. Also looks like the burden of proof is on agnosticism, if we swap in "*the view that the right attitude is agnosticism*" in for "theism" above.
- ii. Second Objection: premise 1 is **evidentialism**. More on this later.

III. Problem for Flew: Pascal's Wager

- a. Flew: "If for you it is more important that **no guilty person should ever be acquitted** than that **no innocent person should ever be convicted**, then for you a presumption of guilt must be the rational policy."
- b. Pascal: "Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is... If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation that He is."
- c. How can Pascal's Wager be used as an argument for a presumption of theism?

1. If a strategy will maximize your expected utility (and no alternative strategy dominates), it is rational to adopt that strategy.
2. Presuming theism (like presuming innocence) will maximize your expected utility (and no other strategy dominates).
3. Therefore, it is rational to presume theism. (1, 2 MP)

IV. “Is there a God?” (Bertrand Russell)

a. Russell’s Project

- i. Refute arguments for God’s existence
- ii. Offer an argument against God’s existence
- iii. **Show that, in the event of a tie, we should be atheists**

1. So, the burden of proof is on theists

b. Burden of proof Argument: Russell’s China Teapot

- i. “Many orthodox people speak as though it were the business of sceptics to disprove received dogmas rather than of dogmatists to prove them. This is, of course, a mistake.”
- ii. “If I were to suggest that **between the Earth and Mars there is a china teapot revolving about the sun in an elliptical orbit**, nobody would be able to disprove my assertion provided I were careful to add that the teapot is too small to be revealed even by our most powerful telescopes.”
- ii. “But if I were to go on to say that, since my assertion cannot be disproved, it is intolerable presumption on the part of human reason to doubt it, I should rightly be thought to be talking nonsense.”



c. Why is the burden of proof on the people who believe in this teapot?

- i. They claim to **know** it’s there.
- ii. They’re making an **extraordinary** claim.
- iii. They’re making a **positive** claim.

d. Knowledge Argument

1. If two people disagree, the burden of proof is on whomever makes a claim to **knowledge**.

2. Theists claim to know that God exists.
 3. Therefore, the burden of proof is on theists.
- ii. Objections: **Atheists (at least the 'positive' variety) also make a knowledge claim.** But Russell wanted the burden of proof to be ONLY on the theist and not on the atheist (positive or negative).
- e. Extraordinary Claim Argument
1. If two people disagree, the burden of proof is on whomever makes the more **extraordinary** claim.
 2. Theism is more extraordinary than atheism.
 3. Therefore, the burden of proof is on theism.
- ii. Objections:
1. Why think theism is the more extraordinary claim?
 2. Romans 1:20 "since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."
 3. The overwhelming majority of people ever have **not** been atheists. Humans seem hardwired for supernatural beliefs.
- f. Positive Claim Argument
1. If two people disagree, the burden of proof is on him who makes a **positive** claim.
 2. Theists make a positive claim: that God exists.
 3. Therefore, the burden of proof is on theism.
- ii. Objections:
1. Theism claims only one fundamental, "brute," unexplained-explainer. Atheism claims very many. All the fundamental physical particles and all the laws of nature.
 2. When it comes to *those*, atheism is also a "positive" claim. Even *more* so. And you might think *those* are what matter, since they're *simpler*. Maybe that's what this "positive" talk was trying to get at: simplicity vs. complexity.

V. "The Ethics of belief," W.K. Clifford

- a. The Story: "A SHIPOWNER was about to send to sea an emigrant-ship..."
- b. The Argument:
 - i. "It has been judged wrong to believe on insufficient evidence, or to nourish belief by suppressing doubts and avoiding investigation. The reason of this judgment is not far to seek: it is that in these cases the belief held by one man was of great importance to other men. But forasmuch as **no belief** held by one man, however seemingly trivial the belief, and however obscure the believer, **is ever actually insignificant** or without its effect on the fate of mankind, we have no choice but to extend our judgment to all cases of belief whatever... To sum up: **it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.**"
- c. Clifford's Argument
 1. If a belief is of great importance, it is wrong to believe on insufficient evidence.
 2. No belief, however seemingly trivial, and however obscure the believer, is ever actually insignificant or without its effect on the fate of mankind.
 3. Therefore, it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence. (1&2 MP)

VI. Evidentialism

- a. Examples:
 - i. **Flew**: We can know something only if we have good grounds/evidence for it.
 - ii. **Russell**: If two people disagree, the burden of proof is on him who makes a positive claim.
 - iii. **Clifford**: If a belief is of great importance, it is wrong to believe on insufficient evidence.
 - iv. Colin McGinn: "It is often forgotten that **atheism has an ethical motive**. We believe, as an ethical principle, that beliefs about what reality contains should always be formed on the basis of evidence or rational argument—so that "faith" is inherently an unethical way to form your beliefs. **To believe "on faith" is to believe that the world is a certain way (contains a god etc.) without the support of either empirical or logical justification.** This violates the ethics of

belief—how you ought to arrive at your convictions. That, for us, is the original sin of theism.”

b. Definition of Evidentialism

- i. A person is justified in believing p **if and only if** that person’s evidence supports p , i.e. the evidence makes p **more likely to be true than not**.

c. Objections to evidentialism

i. Counterexample: **Jury Deliberation**

1. Jury member has evidence that strongly supports *the defendant is guilty*. But he’s not justified in believing the defendant is guilty, since he cannot understand or appreciate this evidence.
2. Quick fix for Evidentialism? “...and she sees/justifiably believes that it does.”
 - a. Worry: Infinite regress. To have a justified belief that p , I must first have another justified belief.

ii. Counterexample: **Skeptical Scenarios**

1. You’re justified in believing that there’s an external world, that the universe wasn’t created five minutes ago with the appearance of age, that we’re not in an expanding/contracting universe, etc. But your evidence doesn’t make these hypotheses more likely than their skeptical alternatives.

iii. Self-Defeat

1. There’s no stunning argument for evidentialism. Even in their seminal paper, Feldman&Conee just present the thesis (as common sense) and defend it from objections. But if our evidence doesn’t make evidentialism more likely than not, the view tells us not to believe itself.

iv. Pragmatic Encroachment

1. Commitment of Evidentialism: If $S1$ and $S2$ have the same evidence for/against p , then $S1$ is justified in believing that p iff $S2$ is too.
2. But suppose $S1$ and $S2$ are in different *practical* situations...
 - a. *Low Stakes*. Hannah and her wife Sarah are driving home on a Friday afternoon. They plan to stop at the bank on the way home to deposit their paychecks. **It is not important that they**

do so, as they have no impending bills. But as they drive past the bank, they notice that the lines inside are very long, as they often are on Friday afternoons. Hannah remembers the bank being open on Saturday morning a few weeks ago, so she says, 'Fortunately, it will be open tomorrow, so we can just come back.' In fact, Hannah is right– the bank will be open on Saturday.

- i. Does Hannah know the bank will be open on Saturday?
Is she justified in believing that it will be open?

b. *High Stakes*. ... Since their mortgage payment is due on Sunday, they have very little in their account, and they are on the brink of foreclosure, **it is very important** that they deposit their paychecks by Saturday....

- i. Does Hannah know?

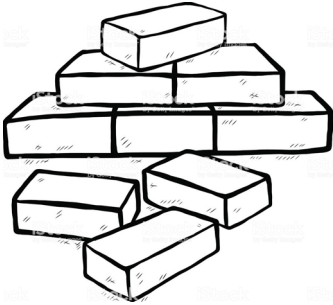
3. Many people judge that the two Hannahs *have the same evidence* for p, yet *one is justified and the other not*. That's a problem for Evidentialism.

VII. Alvin Plantinga's Religious Epistemology

a. The Evidentialist Objection to Religious Belief

- i. "Many philosophers have urged the **evidentialist** objection to theistic belief. They have argued that belief in God is irrational or unreasonable because, as they say, **there is insufficient evidence for it.**"
- ii. The evidentialist objection is rooted in **classical foundationalism**. We may think of the classical foundationalist as beginning with the observation that some of one's beliefs may be **based** upon others.
 1. I believe that the word 'umbrageous' is spelled u-m-b-r-a-g-e-o-u-s: this belief is based on another belief of mine: the belief that that's how the dictionary says it's spelled."
- iii. "Some of my beliefs, however, I accept but don't accept on the basis of any other beliefs. Call these beliefs **basic**.
 1. I believe that $2 + 1 = 3$, for example, and don't believe it on the basis of other propositions."

b. Foundationalism: Proper Basicity



i. According to the classical foundationalist, some propositions are **properly basic** for a person and some are not.

1. a proposition p is properly basic for a person if and only if p is either **self-evident or incorrigible** for her (modern foundationalism)
2. or either **self-evident or 'evident to the senses'** for her (ancient and medieval foundationalism).

ii. "Those beliefs that are not properly basic are rationally accepted only on the basis of evidence, where the evidence must trace back, ultimately, to what is properly basic."

iii. "The existence of God, furthermore, is **not** among the propositions that are properly basic; hence **a person is rational in accepting theistic belief only if he has evidence for it.**"

c. How does the Evidentialist's argument against religious belief go?

1. A belief is rational **only if** it is properly basic (self-evident, incorrigible, or 'evident to the senses') or it is sufficiently supported by evidence.
2. The existence of God is not self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses.
3. The existence of God is not sufficiently supported by evidence.
4. Therefore, belief in God is not rational. (1, 2, 3 MT)

ii. Objections?

a. Plantinga's first objection: "both forms of foundationalism are self-referentially incoherent and must therefore be rejected."

VIII. Plantinga's Second Objection: **Redefining Proper Basicity**

- a. I see a tree.
- b. That person is angry.
- c. I had breakfast this morning.

ii. "Although beliefs of this sort are typically and properly taken as basic, it would be a mistake to describe them as groundless. Upon having experience of a certain sort, I believe that I am perceiving a tree. In the typical case I do not hold this belief on the basis of other beliefs; it is nonetheless not groundless."

- iii. "If I see someone displaying typical pain behavior, I take it that he or she is in pain. Again, I don't take the displayed behavior as *evidence* for that belief; I don't **infer** that belief from others I hold; I don't accept it **on the basis of other beliefs**. Still, my perceiving the pain forms the **ground** of my justification for the belief in question." The same holds for memory beliefs.

b. Sensus Divinitatis

- i. "Now similar things may be said about belief in God. Calvin holds that God "reveals and daily discloses himself to the whole workmanship of the universe," and the divine art "reveals itself in the innumerable and yet distinct and well ordered variety of the heavenly host."
- ii. "**God has so created us that we have a tendency or disposition to see his hand in the world about us.** More precisely, there is in us a disposition to believe propositions of the sort *this flower was created by God* or *this vast and intricate universe was created by God* when we contemplate the flower or behold the starry heavens or think about the vast reaches of the universe.
- iii. "Calvin recognizes, at least implicitly, that other sorts of conditions may trigger this disposition. Upon reading the Bible, one may be impressed with a deep sense that God is speaking to him. Upon having done what I know is cheap, or wrong, or wicked I may feel guilty in God's sight and form the belief *God disapproves of what I've done*. Upon confession and repentance, I may feel forgiven, forming the belief *God forgives me for what I've done*."
- iv. "When life is sweet and satisfying, a spontaneous sense of gratitude may well up within the soul; someone in this condition may thank and praise the Lord for his goodness, and will of course form the accompanying belief that indeed **the Lord is to be thanked and praised**."

c. Recall the Evidentialist Objection to Religious Belief

1. A belief is rational **only if** it is properly basic (self-evident, incorrigible, or 'evident to the senses') or it is sufficiently supported by evidence.
 2. The existence of God is not self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses.
 3. The existence of God is not sufficiently supported by evidence.
 4. Therefore, belief in God is not rational. (1, 2, 3 MT)
- ii. What is Plantinga's objection?

1. Maybe he's objecting to the definition of "properly basic" in premise 1. This is the most common reading.
2. Alternatively, if his understanding of proper basicity is covered by "evident to the senses," he's objecting to 2. Had he taken this option, he could have avoided the most serious objection to his argument (Great Pumpkin/Permissiveness Objection)

d. Plantinga's Conclusions:

i. "There is no *De Jure* Objection" to Christian Belief (and Jewish, Muslim, etc.)

1. *De facto* objection: Christianity is *false*
2. *De jure* objection: **Whether or not Christianity is true**, nobody can rationally believe it.

a. *BECAUSE: If Christianity is true*, it's likely properly basic, and therefore *rational*

i. Sensus divinitatis. Internal instigation of the Holy Spirit

IX. Conclusion

a. Why think burden of proof is on **theists**?

i. They're making a **knowledge** claim

1. But so are atheists. Argument would prove burden is on atheism too.

ii. They're making an **extraordinary** claim

1. Extraordinary *according to whom?* This is question-begging.

iii. They're making a **positive** claim in need of **evidence**. Like Russell's Teapot. Clifford's view.

1. Van Inwagen's response to Teapot and Clifford's view. Counterexamples to evidentialism. Plantinga's criticism of classical foundationalism.

b. Why think burden of proof is on **atheists**?

i. **Pascal's Wager**. If you're right, you gain all. If you're wrong, you lose little or nothing. The stakes are relevant when adopting a *policy*.

ii. Plantinga on *sensus divinitatis*, proper basicity. Theism is **commonsensical, status quo**. Common sense is the default view (but *may* be overturned)