

A Doxastic Analysis of Religion

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ABSTRACT

Entertaining a proposition normally exposes our mind to a range of psychic states, ranging from involuntary to voluntary states, depending on the irresistibility of the proposition in question. There are some propositions which are too certain to entertain without believing them, and some too vague, too suspicious to hold without some degree of doubt. Normally, we relate to any matter we consider in one of these three different propositional attitudes: (dis)belief, acceptance (or rejection) or suspension of judgment. Though religion cannot be confined solely to acceptance of or a belief in the theistic God, as religions like Buddhism and Hinduism demonstrate, it is commonplace in ordinary language to think of religion in terms of having a belief in a transcendent being, a deity, at least in the Christian, Jewish or Muslim cultures. Most religions assert themselves as an account of the universe, human condition or their nature. Some people believe its explanations, some merely accept them. That is, religion can be a belief-system about the universe. But it may lack such belief-system, and could be a matter of mere acceptance. There are people who do not believe religious explanations about the origin of life or the universe, but they still accept them as a way of life. In this article, I aim to analyze the psychological bridge, in the way of belief and mere acceptance, between us and the idea there is a God in light of the existing evidence for and against the existence of God, assuming that we are dealing with rational agency.

Key words: religion, God, belief, acceptance, faith.

1- INTRODUCTION

Irrespective of the existential questions of God, and regardless of whether or not we believe or accept the religious way of life, I believe reconciling science and religion is useful in a way to have a peaceful coexistence directed towards the common good of humanity, i.e. in the way of ethical teaching. However, that being said, a person requires no religion to lead a moral life. I, unlike, Jean Paul Sartre and Bertrand Russell, do not take God to be a mere figment of human imagination. However, I think, for purposes of conceptual clarity, it is a philosophical imperative to get clear on the ambiguities surrounding belief in God. The question of God is different from the question of religion, even though they are sometimes discussed as inseparable in theistic religions.

The question of God is essentially a question of the existence or non-existence of a deity or a supreme being responsible for the creation and sustained existence of this universe, whether such a being is benevolent or evil, or whether it is logically possible for such a being, given his existence, to have transcendent powers, i.e., omnipotence, omniscience or omnipresence. Whereas the question of religion is essentially a question of prescribing controversial goods and proscribing evils. Theistic religions are committed to a belief in a transcendent being which they identify as God. Even if religion is not definable solely in terms of a supernatural belief, a supernatural attitude is one way to understand religion. It is one common way to characterize what it is for something to be called a religion: a commitment to a set of unsubstantiated ideas. In other words, religion is best understood as the explanation of things unexplainable by science or reason. Its views of the universe go beyond the remit of what reason can account for, which is why it is called religion.

There are some ideas which some people take with utmost conviction, the idea of God or existence being one of them, yet fail to logically substantiate or clearly flesh them out, once challenged to do so. Charles Peirce was one such philosopher who took even the most indubitable ideas to be vague. He thought that people

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who take such ideas to be indubitable often cannot, without error or contradiction, give clear substance to them. However, there are ideas which are self-evident enough to be able to clearly flesh them out, being able to put in definite terms the particular properties that individuate them, i.e. if Matt is taller than Keith, then Keith is shorter than Matt. Understanding such propositions per se is an epistemic reason for justifiably believing in them. But there is no such evident nature with the idea of God, even though a sizable number of people take the idea as a given, but still fail to both clearly state the true nature of the idea and adduce epistemically reputable grounds for belief in the idea. Instead, they either appeal to authority, contentious testimonial evidence, or vague experiences of God, i.e. their own feelings as evidence for the existence of God. It is this feeling of so-called experiencing God that partly accounts for this belief in God. But it is unclear as to what the nature of this experience is like, even though many people claim to have this kind of experience at least once in their lives, i.e. connecting to God on a personal level in the way of speech or writing. This, however, does not mean that believing itself is an emotional reaction towards an entity of some sort. However, pragmatic beliefs, due to their practical nature, owe their existence to non-epistemic considerations, i.e. practical reasons such as feelings, the kind of feelings that bring about happy emotions, the feeling of having a supreme being caring and watching over you being one of those feelings.

It is the overwhelming non-epistemic nature of supernatural beliefs that make them appear to us as emotional, rather than intellectual attitudes, and it is due to the predominant role of emotions in their constitution that Peirce takes the idea of God as more emotional than intellectual. It is this prevalent emotional element of the belief in God that leads to the idea of passions as the primary origin of supernatural beliefs, i.e. originating from within us rather than the result of a logical inference arrived at through the intellect in relation to an external object. This, however, shall not imply that supernatural beliefs are inherent in us. In virtue of our cognitive constitutional aim of truth, we are primed to pursue the truth and quest for happy emotions, but we are not primed to develop supernatural beliefs owing their existence merely to happy emotions, although many people do develop such beliefs, many do not.

Perhaps as profound as the question of whether God created us, is the question of why God created us after all, that is if He was responsible for our creation. I find sense in the answer which the French philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas, provides to this question, making it convincing to ascribe to God anthropomorphic attributes. He argues that God created us because he needed some company to talk to. However, pleasing the

idea of there being a talking, loving, benevolent and just God is, the absence of empirical or verifiable evidence makes it epistemically awkward to settle opinion on these matters, whether it be in the way of belief or acceptance.

There are some propositions which are self-evident in a way that we just cannot help believing them, such as *all philosophers are humans, some humans are philosophers, all lions are animals, some animals are lions or honey is sweet*. I consider whether or not I am conscious, I find it irresistible not to think that I am, I therefore come to believe with certainty that I am. I set an appointment for 12 pm with a friend of mine, and I expect him to arrive at 12. I, on the basis of his assurances, come to believe that he will be here at 12, although I am not certain that he will be. I have some degree of doubt, arising from the contingencies that any travelling might involve, i.e. traffic jams, mechanical failures, road accidents, potential loss of memory of the appointment, his wellbeing and other relevant considerations. Believing does not entail certainty. Thus, my believing that he will be here at 12 does not entail that I am certain that he will be. Believing does not exclude some degree of doubt, a doubt that is not strong enough to shake or substantially undermine the foundation of the belief.

I consider whether or not ghosts are real, I have not seen any myself, I therefore find it irresistible not to disbelieve or reject the thesis that argues in favor of their existence. I consider whether or not there are extraterrestrial beings in this universe, I find the available evidence for and against their existence inadequate to believe or disbelieve that there are, I therefore come to suspend judgment on this issue. I find this more rational than engaging in wishful thinking. However, some people might, due to the excitement such idea might provide, come to accept or believe that they exist. People describe mermaids as beautiful marine creatures, as if they have seen them, as if they exist for real. It is a very interesting idea to believe in. But alas, there is not much to gain from the idea itself. It is belief in the idea that counts, not the idea itself. The same with angels! These, God, angels, mermaids, extraterrestrials, are the kind of things that people describe as perceptual objects with no actual perceptual evidence at their disposal. There is nothing more epistemically sinful than believing a perceptual object in the absence of any perceptual evidence for it.

The psychological bridge, in the way of belief or mere acceptance, between us and the idea that there is a God is a matter of both personal and cultural sensitivity to evidence, whether it be testimonial or otherwise. I take it that the available evidence for the existence of God merits, not a belief, but an appropriate attribution of acceptance in the idea that there is a God, assuming that we are dealing with rational agency. I think that

religious belief is, in light of the existing evidence, better characterized as mere propositional acceptance, than proper belief. This is especially the case in cultures that are sensitive to testimonial evidence. But no matter what our stance on religion is, whether it is in the way of belief, mere propositional acceptance or outright disbelief, I believe it is a civic duty of all, especially religious authorities, to make religion a harmless and a more meaningful part of human life.

Unlike voluntary propositional attitudes such as faith or mere propositional acceptance, belief, by virtue of being an involuntary psychological state, requires epistemically adequate conditions to be formed and warranted to hold. I consider whether or not ghosts are real, I have not seen any myself, I therefore find it irresistible not to disbelieve or reject the thesis that argues in favour of their existence. I consider whether or not there are extraterrestrial beings in this universe, I find the available evidence for and against their existence inadequate to believe or disbelieve that there are any, I therefore come to suspend judgment on this issue. I find this more rational than engaging in wishful thinking. However, some people might, due to the excitement such idea might provide, come to accept or believe that they exist.

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Presumably many religious people do not believe in their religion or their religion's account of the origin of the universe or human race, but they might still accept it as a way of life or as a social convention. They might accept it as a way of life probably because they feel compelled to have a sense of belonging in a world partly marked by all these different religious trends. Further, people might accept religion out of the fear of the unknown or out of the uncertainties of life. However epistemically heretical these considerations are to justify belief in a proposition of such magnitude, they still provide a practical reason for the person who accepts religion or one of its principles as a way of life.

Though I am not, in the given article, applying the Lockean conception of belief as a propositional attitude responsive only to good reason, nor do I wish to make a systematic distinction between the commonsensical and the philosophical conception of belief, I think there is something fundamentally unique about the

constitutional nature of belief no matter which conception is at play, that is if there are any constitutional differences between the two, which I do not wish to espouse: belief normally obtains when the person concerned finds adequate or satisfactory the evidence that gives rise to belief in a given proposition, even if unbeknown to him the evidence is not objectively adequate or good. One can perceive some evidence to be satisfactory, even if unbeknown to one the evidence is not objectively adequate or good. There are isolated tribes in the Amazon rainforests who presumably believe in certain things on the basis of satisfactory, but objectively bad evidence. I take it that religious beliefs are violations of our entrenched epistemic tendencies, in much the same way as miracles, if there are any, are violations of the laws of nature.

While knowledge of God requires accurate perceptual evidence, that is if knowledge of the external world is ever possible, belief in God does not. Belief is a fallible and perspectival concept, which is why the evidence required for belief shall not necessarily be accurate. Some of our beliefs arise from inaccurate or misleading evidence, like the perceptual beliefs that originate from optical illusions such as the person who believes the object that appears to him as green to be green while it in fact is red or the perceptual beliefs that originate from hallucinatory experiences, like the person who believes there to be a trophy on the table while there really is none. In both of these cases, the experiences, however false their representations of the physical world, are inaccurate but genuine perceptual experiences. Further, some of our beliefs emanate from practical reasons, such as the kids' belief in Santa Claus, some from wishful thinking, like the delusional lover who nourishes a belief in the affection of someone out of a hunger for such a belief. Although it can be caused by false evidence, belief cannot be retained in the presence of a realization on the part of the believing subject that the evidence that initially gave rise to the belief is false or sufficiently undermined by new evidence.

Though we normally aim at getting the truth in our reflective¹ doxastic cultivations, the fact that we are sometimes awakened to a false pragmatic belief does not guarantee that we will not engage in nourishing other pragmatic beliefs in the future. We are fallible thinking beings, capable of forgetting and repeating the errors we make. We may well forget about that instance and reengage, whether consciously or unconsciously, in satisfying our practical desires, buying into what appeals to such desires rather than engage in the pursuit

¹ For the purposes at hand, I merely accept that we can appropriately attribute a constitutional aim to reflective beliefs. Though it would be inappropriate to assign such aim to the unreflective beliefs we unconsciously and automatically acquire through perception. But I am not here concerned with settling whether or not we can appropriately attribute an aim to the concept of belief on the whole.

of our ideal cognitive aim, seeking the truth, no matter how brutal or unsettling the truth might be. The pursuit of truth is the ideal object of our cognition, and we normally pursue such end in our doxastic cultivations, except when we are concerned with satisfying our practical rather than epistemic desires. Being concerned with the pursuit of truth does not, however, necessitate our propositional attitudes according with how the world really is. There are no intellectual guarantees for hitting the truth, no matter how rigorous we are in our cognitive activities, which is why some of our beliefs end up being false. This is just the way we are. It is human nature. We are prone to error.

But, of course, there is a difference between consciously and unconsciously being in error. It is epistemically irrational to believe or retain belief in a proposition in the presence of good evidence to the contrary. It is, however, epistemically rational to believe or retain belief in a proposition, even if unbeknown to you the proposition in question is false, but adequately supported by the evidence at your disposal. Normally, we abandon our doxastic position upon encountering sufficient contrary evidence or upon discovering that we are in error. It is, given the existing evidence, both pro and con, impossible to prove whether atheists or theists are in error, as is the case with proving or disproving the existence of God. There is, in a philosophical sense, knowledge neither of the existence nor the non-existence of God. It is one of the things that we just do not know yet. The absence of probative evidence cannot be *ipso facto* taken to prove or disprove the existence of God. The biggest intellectual sin is retaining belief upon encountering or discovering sufficient evidence to the contrary, buying into a proposition or getting yourself to believe a proposition you have or find no good evidence for, even upon careful reflection. It will, however, be inappropriate to argue that there is no evidence of any sort for the existence of a transcendent being. Immanuel Kant argues that there are three key philosophical arguments for the existence of God, but none constitutes proof of his existence.

2- THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT:

The cosmological argument is one such evidence taken by some to support the idea of there being a transcendent being in this universe. The argument is driven by considerations of the origin of the universe and the existence of all that is contained in this universe. The argument is based on the notion of contingent as opposed to necessary beings. A contingent being is one whose existence is due to the existence of another being and is therefore possible for it not to exist, whereas a necessary being is one whose existence is due to itself and is impossible for it not to exist, i.e. by virtue of it

being a necessity, it just cannot not exist. Theists believe this necessary being to be God, but so far a necessary being has neither been proven to exist nor has it been proven that this necessary being, if it exists, is actually the God theists have in mind.

The argument, as developed by Thomas Aquinas, stems from the notions of possibility and necessity. He argues that in nature, we observe entities that can both exist and cease to exist, given their generation and corruption. Consequently, the potential for their existence or non-existence exists. However, perpetual existence is implausible, as what can cease to exist at some point ultimately does. If everything could potentially not exist, there must have been a time with nothing in existence. If true, even now, nothing would exist because the emergence of existence requires something already existing. Thus, if nothing existed at one point, nothing could have initiated existence, leading to the absurdity that nothing exists now. Hence, not all beings are merely possible; there must be something with necessary existence. Every necessary thing either derives its necessity from another or possesses it inherently. Infinite regress in necessary things with derived necessity is impossible, as shown with efficient causes. Consequently, we must acknowledge the existence of a being with inherent necessity, not derived from another but causing necessity in others. This entity is commonly referred to as God.

That there are, in this universe, physical objects in existence, is one of the most indubitable propositions we know to be true. The question now becomes whether these objects are contingent or necessary things. Aquinas takes a contingent object to be not only one whose existence is caused by another, but an object which did not exist at some point and would not exist at some point, for these contingent objects are not impervious to influences of nature, which is why they come into existence, get destroyed and subsequently cease to exist. He argues that if all beings are merely contingent, then at some point there was nothing in existence, for that which comes into existence, comes into being through something already existing, and if there was no such thing already in existence, then there would still be nothing in existence, and because there are things in existence, therefore there should have been a necessary being to cause the existence of all that we see in this universe.

3- THE TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT:

This argument is premised on the idea of the *design* and *function* of the universe and its components. These two attributes are taken to support the argument that there should be a designer in order for certain things to exist and function the way they do. Eighteenth-century

philosopher William Paley gives a classic version of this argument, drawing an analogy between a watch he imagines he stumbles upon in a field and the universe. He draws our attention to the way the parts of the watch are formed and adjusted to serve its purpose and the design it has, arguing that all this intricate structure couldn't be a coincidence and that there should have been a designer who formed and designed the watch. He likens the universe to a watch, arguing that the universe too couldn't have happened to be here as a mere coincidence, given the complex design and function of its elements. From this, he concludes that the universe too has a designer and creator though of much greater intelligence and ability, which theists characterize as God.

Theists argue the sophisticated design and function of the universe show that this universe is the work of an omniscient, omnipotent and morally perfect God. That is, theistic belief entails that there is only one God who created the universe. But the teleological argument fails to support this part of the belief for it is logically possible to think that the universe was created by several deities and the result of several botched attempts, as argued by David Hume.

4-THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

This argument was first formulated by Italian philosopher and theologian Anselm of Canterbury in the 11th century. It centers on two premises: existence in reality and existence in thinking alone, taking existence to be a property of things. That is, Anselm argues things exist either in reality or in thinking, or in both. He turns to God and says when we profess belief in you, we mean "we believe that you are a being than which nothing greater can be conceived." In other words, theists take God to be the greatest being and since existence in reality is greater than existence in thinking alone, God couldn't exist in thinking alone otherwise he wouldn't be the greatest and since we believe God is the greatest being, he should exist in both thinking and reality. Therefore, God exists. The following is the core of his argument:

assuredly that than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For, suppose it exists in the understanding alone; then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which is greater. Therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one, than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a

being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality. (Anselm, 2001: 54)

That is, the common sense understanding of the creator of the universe is that he is a being none greater than him can be conceived, given his unsurpassable abilities and arguably moral perfection. Some believe such a being is merely a figment of human imagination (*p*). But Anselm aims to establish the existence of such a being in reality too through deducing a logical impossibility or contradiction from *p*. He argues that the proposition that God exists in thinking alone is self-contradictory, given our understanding of him as a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. If he were to exist in thinking alone (*p*), then a being greater than him could be conceived to exist, namely a being with similar abilities that exists in reality for existence in reality is greater than existence in thinking alone, and this is self-contradictory for God is supposed to be a being than which none greater can be conceived. Anselm therefore concludes: if God exists in thinking, he should exist in reality too. This is how he shows the existence of God in reality.

This argument has drawn a wide range of criticism from across the philosophical schools, most notably from French Monk Gaunilo. He argues we can prove the existence of anything if this argument holds, namely the greatest island, an unsurpassably great island that contains immeasurable beauty and pleasure. The person trying to prove the existence of such an island on the basis of the ontological argument will argue that this island exists somewhere in the world for if it doesn't, it wouldn't be the greatest and thus any land that exists in reality would be greater, which is contradictory to the idea of there being a greatest possible island, for existence in reality is greater than existence in thinking alone.

But Alvin Plantinga argues that the "idea of a greatest possible island is an inconsistent or incoherent idea; it's not possible that there be such a thing" for no matter how great such island might be, it is logically possible that there might be an island with more beautiful lakes, scenes and gardens for properties like beauty have no upper limit or intrinsic maximum. He, however, argues that the idea of a greatest possible being is coherent and consistent for the properties in virtue of which a being is greater than another has an intrinsic maximum. Theists identify these great-making properties generally as omniscience, omnipotence, and moral perfection. If for every proposition *p* a being *b* knows whether or not that *p*, then *b* has an unsurpassable degree of knowledge and is therefore omniscient, if he can do anything he is omnipotent, and behave morally in every conceivable situation, he is morally perfect.

Plantinga therefore argues that the ontological argument establishes the “rational acceptability” of theism but not its truth. Moreover, the moral teachings of religious scripture is no evidence of the existence of God.

5- CONCLUSION

Belief is a perspectival notion, which is relative to the person in question, and its acquisition is subject to a person’s sensitivity to evidence. In cultures where there is unfettered rational autonomy, people are more sensitive to evidence, which is why people find it harder to buy into propositions that are inadequately supported by evidence. But in cultures where there is less or no rational autonomy, people often tend to take things at face value, tending to be more credulous than usual. The more sensitive a person is to evidence, the less credulous he will be in settling opinion on matters, and vice versa. Belief, by virtue of its constitutional aim at truth, normally responds to truth-conducive evidence. But sometimes our epistemic tendencies get derailed through hypnosis, credulity, or practical desires. Supernatural beliefs, in virtue of being driven by unverifiable evidence of unprobative nature, abound, if carefully considered, with skeptical considerations; which is why they need to be frequently activated, through commitment to the belief in question, in order to stay alive, i.e. commitment through the belief-relevant divine worship practices.

Doubts, awakening from these beliefs’ lack of a firm foundation, can be temporarily put to rest through such commitment or through ignoring the doubts themselves, but cannot escape a careful and critical reflection on the nature and evidential status of such beliefs. However, it is difficult to imagine a person committing to a belief one vividly and repeatedly doubts. Given the living and recurrent nature of these doubts, this kind of commitment is better characterized as commitment to an idea accepted, not an idea that is believed. That is, we normally tend to discard beliefs about which we have living and recurrent doubts. It is psychologically impossible to hold or maintain a belief in the presence of living and recurrent doubts. Rational, critical, careful thinking is most erosive to religious beliefs, for it is this which awakens doubts, helping us pursue our natural epistemic tendencies.

Though there is no philosophical consensus on this, there is more intuitive and commonsensical appeal in differentiating between belief and acceptance as two different propositional attitudes, than there is in lumping them together as one mental state. The

constitutional character of these two are different. Belief² is a theoretical, mental attitude aiming at truth, whereas acceptance is a practical attitude aiming at action. That is, belief formation involves truth considerations, whereas acceptance involves actional considerations. However, we do sometimes accept the hypotheses or propositions we are unsure of or have no good reason to believe, in order to discover the truth about them. Under these circumstances, we accept a proposition in order to discover the truth or to find out whether belief in that proposition is epistemically warranted. That is, truth considerations are not extraneous to acceptance under these conditions. Belief can, but should not, involve acceptance. Similarly, acceptance can, but should not, involve belief.

Belief can motivate acceptance, but acceptance alone cannot lead to belief, although it could lead to self-deception or pragmatic belief. To believe that God exists, is, owing to good epistemic reasons, to think that it is true that God exists, but not necessarily act appropriately to such belief. To accept this belief, is to both believe that God exists and act accordingly, committing yourself, whether partially or completely, to the actions this belief requires you to do. But to merely accept the idea that there is a God, is to act and think appropriately to this idea, but not believe accordingly. In other words, to merely accept the idea of God, is to have a non-doxastic commitment to this idea.

We acquire beliefs either consciously or unconsciously, i.e. reflectively or unreflectively, respectively. God is not like a perceptual object on a boulevard, unconsciously coming to your field of view every time you walk down the street, to unreflectively form a belief about him. Believing in God is a profoundly reflective belief. Reflectively having come to believe in somebody or something requires both understanding the object of the belief along with understanding the reasons that give rise to the belief. To believe in God, is to have considered the idea of God and the reasons for this idea, understood the idea and found the reasons for the idea epistemically adequate for belief in the idea.

Given the elusive nature of the concept of God, the unprobative and unverifiable character of the evidence for his existence, any reasonable person of no bias would, after careful reflection on the existing evidence, conclude that the idea of God merits an appropriate attribution of propositional acceptance rather than belief, and would therefore opt for acceptance rather than belief, that is if he were to take a stance on the matter. The presence of living doubts along with the contradictions and logical inconsistencies in the attributes ascribed to him, as the question of evil,

² Here I am concerned with epistemic reflective beliefs, not pragmatic beliefs which are driven by desire satisfaction, a desire to satisfy practical needs.

omniscience and omnipotence exhibits, makes it epistemically inappropriate to count belief in God warranted.

However, this is not to say that, given the nature of the current evidence for his existence, belief in God is impossible. It is possible through ignoring living doubts, the contradictions and logical inconsistencies in the aforementioned attributes associated with God, and through focusing on supporting evidence alone. But beliefs acquired in this way are epistemically rogue, deviating from our epistemically entrenched tendencies for truth. These are pragmatic beliefs, which are acquired through some kind of self-deception, turning a blind eye on existing doubts, deluding yourself into thinking that the evidence at your possession is adequate for belief, while in fact inadequate or undermined by relevant doubts and logical inconsistencies in the properties that make up the idea in question.

If there is a God, and if he creates us in order to keep his company, to talk to us, to direct us to good, if he wants us not to go astray in our pursuit for knowledge, then he surely wants us to believe in him in an epistemically reputable way, not through fables or unprobative evidence. Normally, believing something on good grounds can, if the belief is true and if its reasons are intelligibly accessible to the believing subject, constitute knowledge, but not on bad grounds, even if the belief is true and its reasons are accessible to the believer. The reasons that cause a belief could go well beyond a believing subject's perspective on a given idea, some of which he might have no inkling about, such as neurological reasons. However, normally we do have and could adduce reasons for our beliefs.

But I doubt that ordinary people are aware of the aforementioned sophisticated evidence or even have the mental sophistication to understand them, let alone adduce them in favor of their belief in God. If you stop them and ask them for reasons behind their belief in God, the most probable answer that you would get is: scripture or the wonders and complexity of the structure and constitution of the universe and its inhabitants. However, compelling the latter is, it is not adequate for a belief of such magnitude. The universe or its inhabitants could have always been there, uncreated. In light of this and the living doubts³ that recurrently undermine the idea of God in people's mind, this belief in God is epistemically better characterized as mere propositional acceptance or as an idea which people *want* to believe, but fall short of believing it due to conflicting evidence, existing doubts and inadequate supporting evidence. There is a difference between believing something and wanting to believe it. Believing a proposition entail

holding the actual belief itself, whereas the latter entails holding only the desire to have the belief, not the belief itself. We, due to the lack of adequate corroborating evidence and owing to a desire to satisfy certain practical needs, could want to believe something, and might remain in the state of desiring the belief, but might never actually hold the belief.

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³ The doubts which apparent believing people report about the existence of the theistic God.