



# Arguments Favouring Epistemic Justification of Religious Belief: A Critique

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## Abstract

In the epistemological trajectory of the philosophy of Religion, contemporary religious epistemologists seem to have undertaken the task of attestation of religious beliefs, their defence, ascertainment and justification, resorting to sanctioned methods of epistemic justification. The models of epistemic justification of religious beliefs they have adopted were intended to bring in a kind of objectivity into the religious realm and make meaningful assertions on shared experiences. The acclamation of such esteemed epistemic attempts should be viewed as feverish attempts made by religious epistemologists to subject religious beliefs to standard epistemic treatment. In this paper, three contemporary models of justification of religious beliefs by three outstanding religious epistemologists, namely, Alvin Plantinga, whose theory of proper basicity and the warrant, the epistemological holism with the application of Lakatosian principle in Philosophy of Science by Nancey Murphy and the cumulative case evidentialism by Richard Swinburne are critically analysed using the parameters of logical consistency, methodological acumen, norms of belief formation, the role of subjectivity, features of religious language and the hermeneutic dynamics.

**Keywords:** Religious Belief, Epistemic Justification, Foundationalism, Proper basicity, Epistemological Holism and Rationality.

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## **Introduction**

Most of the epistemic attempts endeavoured by philosophers of religion were to incorporate religious belief as one of the accepted basic things that would evolve into a case of knowledge, for it is the belief that evolves into a receptacle of knowledge. Normal beliefs or doxas naturally progress into a case of knowledge because they are objective, and if we notch them as objective instances, then universality and objectivity will be filtered into it. It is significant to assert objectivity and universality in religious belief, for knowledge is essentially knowledge across the other. Moreover, knowledge is not a private factor quite different from the doxa, therefore, a person must thrust objectivity into it to make it rationally palatable.

Epistemology's yardstick of knowledge seemed to have addressed only clinically objective types of beliefs. Significantly, it has been the hue and cry of the philosophers for centuries that this discipline should have to widen its vistas. If epistemologists were to have widened its vistas, religious beliefs would have become part of it, which would have added merit and novelty to the discipline. Undeniably, all these epistemic attempts are worthy of acclamation, even if the mainstream epistemologists devalued such attempts, for their intention was to bring to the limelight a useful institution, namely religion, which has been static, kept in cold storage for centuries, and was not certified to lead the humanity in various dimensions (Wainwright, 2005). Significantly, the story of religion is conterminous with the history of humanity, and the discipline has proved its mettle down the centuries and useful even in this era, and the above-mentioned task of religious epistemologists should be seen as an attempt to bring it to the mainstream.

Religious belief is basically a disposition to uphold a belief in a supernatural power or powers that control nature or human destiny, for it asserts faith in the reality of the existence of supernatural or spiritual aspects of a religion. Religious beliefs are characteristically private, textual, footed on a system of beliefs and largely institutionalised (Taliaferro, Draper, and Quinn, 2010). The author will review some of the major features of religious belief: first, religious belief evokes and expresses self-commitment, second, it recommends a way of life; third, it declares an intention to act in a particular way and endorses a set of moral principles; fourth, it

proposes a distinctive self-understanding and engenders characteristic attitudes towards human existence; fifth, it expresses religious experiences, faith belief, concern, commitment, revelation, sixth, explains religious attitude and activities such as prayer, worship etc., seventh, it adopts various methods, myths, models and paradigms to interpret and reinterpret religious facts and experiences (Wettstein, 2012).

Epistemic justification of religious belief has been critically viewed by philosophers of the postmodern age, their task being to ascertain whether religious beliefs and propositions could be justified or warranted like any other propositions (Taliaferro, Draper & Quinn, 2010). Before we get to the main body of the paper first let's have a cursory view on how religious belief has been treated by the philosophers down through the centuries.

### **1. Religious Belief: A Philosophical Assessment**

A systematic and applied history of the philosophy of religion might have commenced with Hellenic thinkers. Though insignificant, the naturalistic approach of Pre-Socratics traversed through a different phase with Plato's idealist, elitist and intellectual method with a rationalistic and mystical blend. Critiquing Plato's standpoint, Aristotle with his rationalistic realism came out with a purposive cosmology and theodicy with lofty discourses on virtues and human nature. Later, Plotinus synthesised Rationalism with contemplative methods. Apparently, in the Hellenic progression of thought, there was an epistemological progress from naturalistic monism to rationalistic idealism, then to rationalistic realism and finally to a synthesis of rationalistic-contemplative methods.

The Hellenic views were the bedrock for the formation and formulation of the perspectives of the Medieval Christian thinkers. The main thrust was to make conciliation between the philosophical assent of reason under the impressive vestige of Greek philosophy of religion and the essential revelatory character of the Scripture and the Tradition. Subsequent attempts focused on reformulating a view of philosophy's relationship with religion. With Aquinas and his predecessors, the task of medieval thinkers was to set right the defensive or apologetical role of philosophy for justifying the preambles of faith and defending the articles of faith derived from

Christian Revelation by showing that they are not, *prima facie*, self-contradictory or incoherent. Although Greek philosophy had a tremendous influence on them, they had innovative routes to defend their philosophical theism (Charlesworth, 2002). Later, among other modern philosophers, this contention of medieval thinkers, religious belief as an intellectual assent, was on and again debated. It reaches its height in Emmanuel Kant's substantive attempts to examine the relationship between faith and reason. Thus, conceptually the approach to rationality of religious belief gets a definitive turn in the deliberations of post-medieval thinkers.

With the methodic rationalistic mode of rationality, Descartes proposed an indubitable rationalistic credential for theistic belief through his arguments for theistic religious belief of Divine existence. Later Leibniz too resorted to the rationalistic framework of defense of the rationality of religious belief, shielding the assessment that this created world as the best possible world. Further, he rationally justified this view affirming the perfection, rationality, and omnipotence of the Infinite Deity. He also secured a version of the cosmological argument and the principle of sufficient reason affirming the belief in innate ideas caused by God, refuting the philosophical position of Locke's empiricism. Detracting from the evaluations of his predecessors, David Hume expounded one of the most enduring critical examinations of religious belief. Hume's critical assessment of natural theology in his work *Dialogues on Natural Religion* (1779), was a groundbreaking one because it enabled an evaluative phase of the epistemic credentials of religious belief. With his noumenon and phenomenon distinction, the impossibility of metaphysics, Immanuel Kant took a transcendental idealist position assenting practical credibility of religious belief. On the other hand, Friedrich Schleiermacher with his hermeneutical bent considered religious belief as intuitive (Taliaferro, Draper and Quinn, 2010). Hegel's idealistic standpoint affirmed religious belief as imperative for a value-laden society stressing its axiomatic epistemic credentials. Later, the evaluation of the rationality of religious belief takes a decisive direction in the hands of existentialists, phenomenologists and pragmatists.

Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish existentialist, considered true religious belief as distinct from what one might assent to through the

means of philosophical reflection. The first premise of Soren Kierkegaard's argument begins with the skeptical standpoint of David Hume that religious faith cannot be convincingly justified by means of human reason. From a different perspective, William James defended pragmatism highlighting the effect of a belief upon one's actions for the meaning of that belief. Later, the meaninglessness of talk about religion had become a prime epistemic concern for Nietzsche. In his critique of Christian Monotheistic Beliefs, Nietzsche's genealogical method ascertained the impact of slave morality. Obviously, he critically evaluated the religious beliefs as historically laden, philosophically sustained by Hellenic thought and looked pessimistically at life. Such a nihilistic attitude must be replaced by affirming the vitality of life. In line with Nietzsche, Ludwig Feuerbach was a staunch materialist and a critic of religion. His famous theory of projection emphasized that any theistic religious belief is merely a projection of humanity's self-alienated essence. Later, the epistemological scenario took a decisive turn with A.J. Ayer's logical positivism which unequivocally emphasized the non-verifiably meaningless nature of religious belief (Taliaferro, and Marty, 2010). On the other hand, G.E. Moore, in the scenario of the linguistic turn of philosophy, highlighted religious beliefs and assumptions as the linguistically manipulated play of words. Later, there was a key development in the perspective on the epistemological validity of religious belief in the hands of Linguistics, Post-Structuralists and Psychoanalyticians. J.L. Austin reiterated the linguistic possibilities of different meanings of religious belief and expressions. Later, as an ardent representative of post-structuralism, Michel Foucault argued for the moulding and implications of religious belief as a result of historically manipulated power - relations. Post-structural feminist Julia Kristeva would look at the formation of religious belief and its application as a phantasmatic necessity for replacing individual symbolisation.

So far, the epistemic projects of the philosophers employed different methods to bring objectivity to religious belief by either affirming or negating their rational justification. However, their attempts were limited due to the lack of sustained epistemic space they canvassed to treat religious belief. In order to surmount the drawbacks of the fragmented analysis of making religious belief into a case of knowledge, an analysis of the rigorous attempts by religious

epistemologists who proposed three different models of rationality for the justification of religious belief would be timely and appealing. Three tall contemporary figures of religious epistemology, Alvin Plantinga, Nancey Murphy and Richard Swinburne, took up the task of bringing objectivity and universality into religious belief. For a contemporary religious epistemologist, acknowledging and critiquing the models of rationality employed by the stalwarts of religious epistemology will give an epistemic platform to look for a viable model of justification for religious belief.

## **2. Theories of Proper Basicity and the Warrant in Alvin Plantinga**

Alvin Plantinga's (American Analytic Religious Epistemologist) treatment of justification of religious belief is fundamentally based upon his criticism of classical foundationalism. To the foundationalists, a rational noetic structure would have a foundation – a set of beliefs not accepted based on others. The noetic structure refers to the structure of one's system of beliefs that includes the sum total of everything that a person believes. In a rational structure, some beliefs would be basic and non-basic beliefs would be accepted based on other beliefs, which may be accepted as the basis of still other beliefs and so on until the foundations are reached. Thus, according to foundationalists, a belief is only rational if it is either a basic belief or is justified by its relation to a basic belief (Davies, 2000). Those beliefs that are self-evident incorrigible, or evident to the senses are considered as properly basic beliefs by the modern classical foundationalists.

Plantinga endorses a new version of foundationalism in his Warrant and Proper Function rejecting the CF criteria for properly basic beliefs. He has examined the criteria and claimed that if it were true very few of our beliefs would have warrant. Plantinga strongly attacks the CF criteria for properly basic beliefs as self-referentially incoherent. In short, the main charge against CF is that it fails to meet its own criteria. According to his theory, basic beliefs are correct or properly basic when they are formed by a person whose cognitive faculties are functioning correctly (Plantinga, 2000). Determined to rectify the narrowed criteria of CF, Plantinga broadened the kinds of basic beliefs.

## 2.1 Broadening the Kinds of Basic Beliefs

Plantinga defines proper basic beliefs as grounded in experience, fallible, and person-relative. This draws in several kinds of beliefs to qualify as properly basic beliefs previously discounted by classical foundationalism. Those endorsed by CF (self-evident, evident to the senses or incorrigible) and many more, like perceptual beliefs, memory beliefs, beliefs about the mental states of other people, inductive beliefs, and testimonial beliefs. According to Plantinga, basic beliefs are proper when (among other things) they are laid on experience. Precisely, if persons operate devoid of any cognitive abnormalities when in certain unambiguous epistemic contexts, firm-specific beliefs suitable to these contexts would have a warrant for us. Now, one of the most pertinent questions would be to what category or kind does belief in God belong? Could it be a basic belief?

## 2.2 Belief in God as Properly Basic

Plantinga rightly contends that belief in God could be unavoidably one of these properly basic beliefs. Strikingly, he endorses a permissive criterion for properly basic beliefs that theistic religious belief could be treated as one of these rational, properly basic beliefs founded on experience. He specifies two grounds for belief in God as properly basic: first, Divine Perception and the second, Testimony. The first of the grounds that could validate belief in God as properly basic is direct experience of God, for many theists claim to have direct religious experience of God (Plantinga, 1967). These experiences include situations like ones where, after misleading her best friend, Catherine forms the belief that God disapproves of her, or Edward, while viewing some complex or exquisite piece on nature, shapes the belief that God furnished all of this. For theists, such types of experiences do possess epistemic value and justification.

## 2.3 Divine Perception and Sense Perception

The basic argument confirms that DP is a doxastic practice closely analogous to sense perception (SP). The argument follows that the beliefs (i) God disapproves of me and (ii) God made all of this are perceptual beliefs as much as (iii) I see a red fire-truck, and (iv) I see a tree. In each of these cases, I form the experiential belief on the basis of my consciousness having appeared to incorrigibly.

Belief in God may be properly basic if grounded in Divine Perception. This DP is a doxastic practice that bears analogues to Sense Perception. DP does not strictly ground belief in God as properly basic, but rather beliefs which necessarily entail God's existence, in the same way, that perceptual beliefs do not strictly speak ground belief in the existence of the objects they entail. It appears that all things considered, DP and SP are in the epistemological situation. There is a second ground for belief in God as properly basic and that is when it is grounded in testimony. The religious belief should be grounded in testimony where at least one other person in the epistemic community has obtained and sustained that belief apart from the testimonial warrant, and there is no cognitive malfunction. Belief in God can be grounded in perception (as Divine Perception) or testimony as a properly basic belief. The epistemically preferable way to ground belief in God as properly basic is in perception (Plantinga, and Tooley, 2008).

It could be counter-argued that this position is untenable owing to a deficit in one's own experience of DP. What should be held if there is a multiplicity of mutually incompatible religious claims? How are we to adjudicate between them on Plantinga's proper functionalism? Is it not the case that on the above construal of DP, and belief in God as properly basic that any and every claim may be seen as a rational, properly basic belief-including Linus's belief in the Great Pumpkin that returns every Halloween? This has become known as the "Great Pumpkin Objection" (GPO). To repudiate such objection, Plantinga redefines an epistemic term, warrant that could pledge his epistemic theory.

#### 2.4 Epistemic Warrant

The key to Plantinga's Reformed Epistemology is warrant, the property which converts mere true belief into knowledge when possessed in sufficient degree. Justification, in Plantinga's view, is moderately easy to come by—it's warrant that is imperative for knowledge. It is within this context that he offers his four criteria for warrant:

- 1) The cognitive faculties of the person are functioning properly.
- 2) The cognitive environment is appropriate.



- 3) The purpose of the epistemic faculty is aimed at producing true beliefs.
- 4) The objective probability of a belief being true is high.

Plantinga's warrant precept affirms that persons have warranted beliefs if they are produced by cognitive faculties that are properly functioning in an appropriate environment for them, according to a design plan aimed at truth, with a high statistical probability that the beliefs produced are true, furthermore, the stronger our inclination to believe beliefs of the preceding sort, the more warrant they have (Plantinga, 2000).

There are three essential components in this definition: (1) the concept of cognitive proper function, (2) the cognitive environment, and (3) the concept of a good design plan aimed at truth. The first element of Plantinga's warrant formula ratifies that our beliefs evoke warrant only if our cognitive faculties function properly, working the way they ought to produce and sustain our beliefs. Closely tied to Plantinga's notion of properly functioning cognitive faculties is the idea that the cognitive environment in which the belief is produced must be the one or like the one for which it is designed. Plantinga defines our cognitive design plan as the way our cognitive faculties work when they function as they ought to, without any detrimental malfunctions to mention: non-damaged, broken or non-functional. The novelty of Alvin Plantinga's model of rationality is founded upon his theory of proper basicity and the concept of warrant. Nevertheless, critics would find some important points to disagree.

a. Foundationalist Incoherence: Plantinga negated foundationalist criteria and labelled it as self-referentially incoherent. Nevertheless, as far as he endorses the foundationalist framework, in coherence is not yet erased, for ultimately, Plantinga reiterated that our noetic structure does have foundationalist character and his theory of proper basicity is an offshoot of moderate foundationalism.

b. Determination of the Criterion: To Plantinga, belief in God is properly basic, and not every belief is proper. On account of this description, each group would be responsible for drawing its own set of criteria for properly basic beliefs. If so, subsequently, there would be as many criteria as the groups exist and exert.

c. Thrust of the Model of Rationality: For a passable model of rationality, one should be implicated not on when one is rational in holding belief in God, but whether one is right in holding that belief because it is true. Plantinga's criteria for being rational do not ensure that one is right, and yet it seems that being right is important and should be a factor in an overall model of rationality. A more complete system of rationality ought to include attempts, if possible, to examine one's beliefs on evidence.

d. Application of this Model of Rationality to Other Beliefs: Even if it is flawlessly argued that belief in God could become part of one's set of properly basic beliefs, it is hard to see how this approach could be developed into a model of rationality that would apply to all beliefs. Precisely, Plantinga's argument for the proper basicity of belief in God does not seem applicable to other religious beliefs where he would agree on the need for deductive and inductive arguments, empirical evidence, and so forth in order to make a rational case.

e. Over Simplified Parallel: It might be argued that Plantinga seemed to draw too simple a parallel between our everyday properly basic beliefs and belief in God. Although his argument seemed palatable that we apply the same cognitive apparatus to both categories of belief, candidly, people do not tend to challenge their everyday beliefs in the way that people could come to impugn their own belief in God. A more complete system of rationality ought to include attempts, if possible, to examine one's beliefs on evidence.

### **3. Nancey Murphy's Model of Rationality of Religious Belief**

In order to make an admissible application of criteria, Nancy Murphy (American Religious Epistemologist) another ardent religious epistemologist drenched in philosophy of science proposed an innovative possibility for the rational justification of theistic belief. She developed her theory against the backdrop of the following assumptions. a. Rejection of mere dogmatism rooted in knowledge based on authority, b. Dissidence towards all formulations of certainty characterized by undue epistemic commitment, c. The assertion that with the rational and evidential limitations, one cannot reach the truth of beliefs with certainty, d. Replacement of

foundationalist theory with a holistic approach. e. Application of scientific formulation for theistic religious formulations.

One of the underlying features of the method proposed was the replacement of foundationalism with a system of epistemological holism based on the notion of distinction between the basic and non-basic beliefs as non-apparent. She subscribed no privileged epistemic status to any particular beliefs that she chose to disregard the self-justifying prerogative of the so-called basic beliefs (Murphy, 1990). Murphy reiterated that the philosophical cry for rationalist foundations would not offer certitude for our beliefs, asserting that what appears to be indubitable in one particular intellectual context would be questionable in another. It is impossible to apply the deductive consequences of logical and mathematical certitude haphazardly to anything in the world and expect a result. She cited an instance of using a system of mathematical application for navigation in space for which corrigible and unreliable results would be the outcome. To her, for leading into the way to have rational beliefs, one should replace the foundationalist structure with a new structure for which she resorted to theory-laden scientific theorizing without overdependence on indubitable foundations (Provenzola, 2000).

Murphy applies Lakatosian scientific research program method to the justification of religious belief. Working on the structure of Lakatos's methodology, she highlights its contents as a set of theories and a body of data, asserts one fundamentally core theory as crucial to the program and affirms a set of supplementary or auxiliary hypotheses together add sufficient information to make the data related to the theory. Further, she stresses the functioning of two types of supplementary hypotheses: first, theories of observation or instrumentation; second, lower-level theories that are applied to the core theory in different levels of cases. Significantly, the auxiliary hypotheses function as a shielding coverage around the fundamentally core theory since they are designed to be modified when potentially defeating data come up.

The concept of communal discernment marks the crux of this model of rationality wherein the possible suitable data for theistic religion is contrived out of a consensus on the activity of Deity in observable events in the community's life. Among others, some decisive data for

religious beliefs could comprise scriptural texts, historical facts, sociological and anthropological data and possibly facts from the natural sciences. Significantly, the communal consensuses among the available data mark one of the most crucial aspects of the determination of data for the justification of religious belief (Murphy, 1997). Tracing into the trajectory of the growth of the Church, Murphy, among others, pointed out some of the data that indicated communal consensus like the agreement with the apostolic witness and succession or the community of the gathering for the common cause.

To summarise, Murphy intends to highlight that whatever is true will never be shown to be inadequate in its central contentions. Second, she inculcates the standards of rationality in contemporary Philosophy of Science into the Post-Modern model of rationality applicable to religious epistemology. Third, she responds to evidentialism through the rediscovery of religious experience to posit as data for a model of rationality in religious epistemology. Fourth, she undertakes the challenge of proving religious experience as a valid methodological starting point for rational justification of religious belief. Nevertheless, there are a few critical points to be considered.

#### a. Lack of Theoretical Development

In her attempt to furnish data for a non-foundational model of rationality, Murphy failed to develop a rationally appealing theory of experience, although she proposed the concept of communal experiential evidence that would provide a ground for justification of religious belief, but was unsuccessful in showing its precise development as such. Subjectively, one might be convinced of theistic works in the people's lives, but to justify this claim lacks real objective foundations.

#### b. Application of Lakatosian criteria

Murphy located the typical characteristics of communal agreement and discernment in the justification of religious belief in order to supply equal criteria for standard requirements of scientific data. However, she also reaffirmed that the qualities of reliability and replicability required for standard data could not be applied to

religious experience. The criticism raised holds that the data corresponding to religious belief cannot function in the same way as that of the scientific research programs.

c. Traces of Foundationalism:

Although Murphy's project could be labeled as holistic epistemology with the justification elements of communal discernment and consensus, it has apparent traits of foundationalist rudiments. In the fundamental argument of this project, she designates the presupposed existence of God as part of the set of hardcore beliefs, whereas other beliefs in this holistic project are considered auxiliary hypotheses, indicating that some beliefs have an assumed advantaged status, suggesting a certain degree of a prior commitment. Her Lakatosian model depicting the hardcore beliefs as the basis for her attempts towards rational non-foundationalism would not hold good.

Murphy's choices could not be argued as conforming to Lakatosian criteria for rational choice for the subscribed prior commitments is the same as that of the foundationalist evidentialism. Thus, the failure of this project was to provide valid and solid reasons for the selection of the right criteria for the application of Lakatosian methodology. Murphy's tentative approach claimed that knowledge and rationality in both science and religious epistemology are, at best, tentative (or fallible) and in need of continual revision. Theistic belief is considered rational when the evidence for that theory or belief fits the best explanation at the time. This project intended to frame a model of rationality with a non-foundational foundation but failed to relate the postmodern methodology for applying the scientific model into an epistemological framework with determining criteria of communal consensus of religious experience that would not give a rational platform to build up a non-foundational structure. Would another model of rationality explain comprehensively the conditions for rational justification of religious belief? Here, the notion of Richard Swinburne could be a case of relevance.

4. Cumulative Case Evidentialism: Richard Swinburne

Richard Swinburne's (British Religious Epistemologist) book *Faith and Reason* itself is an argument for the rationality of religious belief,

because for him, 'a man's belief is a rational belief if he is justified in holding it – for epistemological reasons. 'By 'epistemological reasons' he meant reasons which concerned the likelihood of it being true. In this way, he ruled out all other reasons like satisfactory feelings or pragmatic results, such as changed moral behaviour, etc. Reiterating Hume's claim of the passivity of belief, Swinburne affirmed that a man, in general, cannot choose to believe there and then. Specifically, 'believing is what happens to a man, not something that he does.' He illustrates this by saying, 'I believe that today is Monday....I cannot suddenly decide to believe that today is Tuesday....' Consequently, belief is seen as a function of one's basic propositions (and the degree of confidence which one has in them) and one's inductive standards (Swinburne, 1981). By 'basic propositions', Swinburne means 'those propositions which seem to a man to be true and which he is inclined to believe, but not solely on the ground that they are made probable by other propositions which he believes....' Propositions like those which report one's perceptions ('I see a clock') or what one perceives ('the clock reads 5.10'), one's memories ('I remember going to Kochi yesterday') or what one remembers ('it rained in London yesterday') are among one's basic propositions. Probable beliefs are made probable by this set of basic propositions.

To highlight his theory, Swinburne argues for five kinds of rationality that beliefs might possess. First, the Rationality of Internal Coherence: to Swinburne, a belief is rational if it is coherent with a subject's system of beliefs. Thus, if one's belief is incoherent with one's other beliefs, there has obviously been a failure in induction. The belief is rational if the response satisfies the believer's own standards. However, this fails to take into account objective validity; therefore, Swinburne moves to the second criterion: the Rationality of Objective Conformity, wherein he asserts that a man's belief is rational if it is grounded in those propositions which his present experiences (and memories of his past experiences) in fact justify him in holding them and is supported by them in virtue of correct inductive standards. For instance, if the sensations that a subject has had justify him only in claiming that he has seen a light, his claim to having seen a UFO is not justified. The belief is rational if the response satisfies correct standards. However, the problem of the inadequacy of such standards may be present (Swinburne, 1981). Therefore, the third form of rationality is presented: the Rationality

of Subjectively Adequate Investigation, to Swinburne, a man's belief is rational only if his evidence results from the past investigation, which was, in his view adequate, his inductive standards have been subjected to criticism by him and found to be adequate and he has checked, in his view, adequately, that his belief is made probable by his evidence. Thus, rationality 'is a matter of the subject's beliefs being backed by the investigation which he believed to have been adequate.' However, subjective adequacy may not be real adequacy (Savio, 2012). Therefore, the fourth feature of rationality is formulated as the Rationality of Advanced Subjectively Adequate Investigation, where, in Swinburne's view, the third kind of investigation must be properly carried out to achieve the fourth kind of rationality. Thus, a 'subject S who believes that p has a rational belief if and only if S's evidence results from past investigation which was by S's own standards adequate, and his inductive standards have been subjected to criticism by S, which is by S's own standards adequate, and S has checked adequately by his own standards that p is made probable by his evidence.' Still, it may be seen that the adequacy standard is only subjective. Therefore, Swinburne proposes yet another feature for his model: the Rationality of Objectively Adequate Investigation, where in continuation to the fourth feature, he asserts that S's belief that p is a rational belief if and only if S's evidence results from the past investigation which was adequate and inductive standards which have been submitted to adequate criticism, and S has investigated adequately whether his evidence makes his belief probable. Thus, objective validation is crucial to achieve rationality of faith (Swinburne, 1981).

To sum it all up, true religious beliefs are imperative since beliefs and actions are logically connected. Adequate and objective investigation of beliefs is a prerequisite for the rationality of belief, for the standards of induction themselves need to be well investigated before adequately scrutinizing the beliefs. The longing for long-term well-being is one reason why religious beliefs regarding God, immortality, and salvation must be investigated amid the various conflicting claims to truth. The strength of the need determines the intensity and exactness of the search. Since, the challenge of counter-religious claims is great, a careful and deep investigation is crucial. Ultimately, a voluntary thrust of faith is

necessary in order to choose the way, the following of which in course of time will demonstrate the success or failure of the assumptions.

It might be critically asserted that Swinburne's criterion does not remove the possibility of doubt. Can there be any adequate objective investigation on which faith in God (monistic, polytheistic, pantheistic, or monotheistic) is based? To Kierkegaard, such a stand is not possible as he would assert that if he would begin, he would never finish, and would have to live constantly in suspense, and lest something so awful should suddenly happen that his bit of proof would also be demolished. The possibility of falsification is inherent in every empirical, inductive investigation. Further, since the knowledge of God is not similar to knowledge of the empirical world, one cannot expect certainty of the knowledge of God by recourse to empirical investigation.

## **Conclusion**

Our analysis so far focused on the epistemic routes taken by three contemporary religious epistemologists to justify religious belief with a brief examination of philosophical assessment of religious belief down through the history of philosophy. These esteemed attempts intended to incorporate religious belief into the mainstream epistemology because these thinkers who fall into the analytic stream have thought that religious beliefs as a category of belief that preoccupy a major chunk of human experience should not be wiped out of the mainstream knowledge endeavors. They also intended to widen the vistas of epistemology and sought to make possible inroads from other streams of thought into the religious realms. Thus, Plantinga opted to resort to Reidien foundationalism, in which religious beliefs become part of basic beliefs of the noetic structure and warranted if they are produced by cognitive faculties that properly function in an appropriate environment for them, according to a design plan. Nancey Murphy another postmodern religious epistemologist, endeavoured to develop a system of rationality applying principles from Philosophy of Science to offer appropriate kind of religious evidence based on epistemological holism stressing the tentative nature of religious belief. Yet, in another attempt, Richard Swinburne, with his theory of cumulative case evidentialism, tried to propose the justification of religious



belief that a person holds a belief for reasons which concern the likelihood of it being true. All these attempts, as we have seen, were limited and not full-fledged, further, it would not seemingly bring forth the expected result of justification of religious belief. Further, they have made attempts to employ the same tools to ratify religious beliefs, the very same tools they might have used to examine and ratify the mundane - physical and empirical beliefs. However, they go wrong because religious beliefs seem to fall into a different category altogether. Epistemic justification per se, as a matter of fact, is confined or meant for empirical justification. And if we look for empirical justification of religious beliefs, then we would go wrong because we are searching for justification of religious beliefs in the wrong place. We might point out five major drawbacks of such attempts. First, aforesaid attempts were seemingly limited due to their lack of self-refuting methodological application. Second, the significant facet of belief formation was unacknowledged. Third, the role of subjectivity is outmoded. Fourth, the specificity of the features of religious language was not taken into consideration; and finally, the hermeneutic dynamics were not accounted for. Therefore, it must be convinced that if religious beliefs were to be ratified, the way to ratify should not be through relying on epistemic yardsticks used for common, mundane empirical types of beliefs. Therefore, we must resort to a model of rationality that would incorporate the aspects of the formation of religious belief and the dynamics of hermeneutic interpretation for the required justification of religious belief.

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