To speak of being religiously lucky certainly sounds odd. But then, so does “My faith holds value in God’s plan, while yours does not.” This book argues that these two concerns — with the concept of religious luck and with asymmetric or sharply differential ascriptions of religious value — are inextricably connected. It argues that religious luck attributions can profitably be studied from a number of directions, not just theological, but also social scientific and philosophical.

There is a strong tendency among adherents of different faith traditions to invoke asymmetric explanations of the religious value or salvific status of the home religion vis-à-vis all others. Attributions of good/bad religious luck and exclusivist dismissal of the significance of religious disagreement are the central phenomena that the book studies.

Part I lays out a taxonomy of kinds of religious luck, a taxonomy that draws upon but extends work on moral and epistemic luck. It asks: What is going on when persons, theologies, or purported revelations ascribe various kinds of religiously-relevant traits to insiders and outsiders of a faith tradition in sharply asymmetric fashion? “I am saved but you are lost”; “My faith tradition is true, and valued by God, but yours is false and valueless.”
Part II further develops the theory introduced in Part I, pushing forward both the descriptive/explanatory and normative sides of what the author terms his inductive risk account. Firstly, the concept of inductive risk is shown to contribute to the needed field of comparative fundamentalism by suggesting new psychological markers of fundamentalist orientation. The second side of an inductive risk account is concerned with the epistemology of religious belief, but more especially with an account of the limits of reasonable religious disagreement. Problems of inductively risky modes of belief-formation problematize claims to religion-specific knowledge, and to doxastic responsibility. But the inductive risk account does not aim to set religion apart, or to challenge the reasonableness of religious belief tout court. Rather, the burden of the argument is to challenge the reasonableness of attitudes of religious exclusivism, and to demotivate the “polemical apologetics” that exclusivists practice and hope to normalize.
Part II  Applications and Implications of Inductive Risk

3  
**Enemy in the Mirror**: The Need for Comparative Fundamentalism

From Philosophy of Luck to a Toolkit of Inductive Norms
Fundamentalist Orientation and the Risks of Teleological Suspension
Conclusion

4  
**We Are All of the Common Herd**: Montaigne and the Psychology of our ‘Imporunate Presumptions’

Psychologists and Philosophers on our Bias Blind Spot
How Etiological Symmetry Begets Religious Contrariety in Testimonial Traditions

  Step One: Narrative Content Confounds our Source Monitoring
  Step Two: An Adopted Revelation Becomes the Ground for a Self-Awarded ‘Prize’
  Step Three: ‘Have Their Ditch and Cross it, Too,’ or, Testimonial Authority Assumption Comes to be Identified with a Propositional View of Revelation
  Step Four: Biased-Closure Inferences Rationalize Peer-Denial and Pave the Way for Generate ‘Easy’ Knowledge

Conclusion

5  
**Scaling the ‘Brick Wall’**: Measuring and Censuring Strongly Fideistic Religious Orientation

The Many Sources of Religious Diversity
Descriptive and Prescriptive Fideism: A Crucial Distinction
Bridge Building, or Burning? A Critique of the Belief Model
The Conceptual Incoherence Argument
Dicey Advising? Dilemmas for the Two Form of Exclusivism

  A Religious-value Focused Constructive Dilemma
  An Advice-focused Dilemma for Mutualist Exclusivists

An Objection and Reply

6  
**The Pattern Stops Here?**

Counter-Inductive Thinking, Counter-Intuitive Ideas, and Cognitive Science of Religion

What is meant by “Science of Religion”?
Vainio’s Christian Philosopher Appropriation and Critique of CSR
*De Jure* and *De Facto* Challenges: How Related?

  Hume on Miracles
  The Religious Credence Thesis: Another Sort of ‘De-bunking’ Argument?

Counter-Inductive Thinking and Minimally Counter-Intuitive Teachings: How Related?

Chapter 6, Part II, & Book Conclusions

Notes, References, Index
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Problems of Religious Luck
Assessing the Limits of Reasonable Disagreement

Guy Axtell

A thought-provoking, historically-informed, and highly distinctive take on the important questions raised by religious luck, this is a welcome addition to the literature.

— Duncan Pritchard, University of Edinburgh

Guy Axtell is professor of philosophy at Radford University.


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