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RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AS WORLD-VIEW BELIEFS

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Abstract. In this paper, I defend a moderately cognitive account of religious beliefs. Religious beliefs are interpreted as "worldview beliefs", which I explicate as being indispensable to our everyday and scientific practice; my reading is nonetheless distinct from non-cognitivist readings of "worldview belief" which occasionally appear in the literature. I start with a brief analysis of a recent German contribution to the debate which on the one hand (rightly) insists on the priority of epistemic reasons for or against religious beliefs, but on the other hand contends that religious beliefs are worldview beliefs (section 1). This leads me to explicate a special sense of worldview beliefs, as well as their cognitive role (2). After that, I shed some light on a special epistemological characteristic of worldview beliefs, namely the strong involvement of "free certitude" in their acceptance. I explore the implications for the possible role of arguments for worldview beliefs, especially for worldview beliefs concerning theism (3).

I. BECKERMANN ON RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

Ansgar Beckermann's 2013 monograph on religious belief[1] has gained widespread attention in German-speaking philosophy-of-religion circles, since it is located in a prominent series of introductory books and provides the reader with a decidedly anti-religious standpoint; this standpoint may correspond with the sentiments of a majority of its intended audience. Unlike many contemporary anti-religious treatises, however, Beckermann's book is widely free of unnecessary polemics and develops its agenda with serious and informed philosophical arguments. And there are various points in Beckermann's treatise which will (or should) be endorsed by religious thinkers as well. Chief among these is Beckermann's plea for the priority of *epistemic reasons* in undergirding the (ir-)rationality of religious beliefs. Beckermann can thus, for example, spare himself and his readers discussion of the arguments from the utility or disutility of religious beliefs which often characterize more polemical pro- and anti-religious treatises and which may have high prima facie plausibility for many readers, but which are philosophically defective.[2] Secondly, Beckermann takes religions at their best as his target, rather than taking cheap shots at the irrationality of perverted "straw-man" forms of religion.[3] Thirdly, Beckermann's book contains many well-taken criticisms of problematic arguments and positions which would indeed be unnecessary or unrecommend-

1 Ansgar Beckermann, *Glaube* (De Gruyter, 2013).

2 Such utility/disutility arguments (for the anti-religious side, see, e.g., the familiar treatises of the "New Atheists" Dawkins, Dennett, Hitchens and Harris, for the pro-religious side think of the familiar arguments from the cultural inspirations by the religions and their beneficial effect on individual psychological stability) are philosophically defective for obvious reasons: Firstly, the (non-epistemological) issue of the utility/disutility of beliefs is categorially different from the (epistemological) issue of their rationality, justification, warrant or truth. Secondly, there are no obvious criteria for weighing the benefits and damages that beliefs may sometimes have (e.g., how is the beauty of Palestrina's church music and St. Peter's Cathedral to be weighed against the cruelty of the Holy Inquisition? How is the rescuing of Aristotle's writings by antique and medieval Muslim scholars to be weighed against Islamist terror of our day? Is, hence, Christian or Muslim belief overall useful or not?) Thirdly, the utility/disutility effects of religious beliefs often only come entangled with other beliefs: e.g., "religion wars" like the Northern Ireland conflicts have at closer inspection usually also their robust ethnic, economic and historical causes, and the benefits of religion often flourish only under suitable cultural conditions.

3 "Gläubige sind keine Deppen", approx. "The faithful are not dullards": Beckermann, *Glaube*, 152.

able even for those who endorse the rationality of religion: e.g. Anselm's argument, the Intelligent Design argument, and negative theology.

Beckermann does not adopt the familiar Carnapian argument that religious beliefs are cognitively meaningless. He attributes to them a more or less clear meaning, but sees two key objections to their rationality. One is the problem(s) of evil (where Beckermann argues that not even the logical problem has been solved, let alone the evidential problem). The other is religious beliefs' supposed lack of empirical support. He regards religious beliefs as empirically testable in a broad sense, and holds that they score poorly: petitionary prayer is ineffective, as is the sticking of St. Christopher badges to your car cockpit, the using of Lourdes water, and similar practices (one may of course ask whether such practices are really central to religion, however). A subsidiary line of thought in Beckermann's book is that the other traditional link between our more empirical beliefs and religious beliefs, namely certain theistic arguments with empirical premises (like cosmological and teleological arguments) are inconclusive.[4]

To summarize, Beckermann locates religious beliefs very much in the vicinity of empirical beliefs or even assimilates them to empirical beliefs. According to him, they are not "worldview beliefs" in a Moorean sense.[5] (It is clear that this notion of "worldview beliefs in the Moorean sense" is Beckermann's possible alternative characterization of religious beliefs; for discussion see section 2.2 below.) I do not want to discuss whether Beckermann's reading of Moore is historically adequate, but will simply take it as presented. And contrary to Beckermann, I will defend the thesis that, in a different sense of "worldview belief", religious beliefs are in fact best regarded as worldview beliefs. As such, they are not "provable" in any strong sense, but nor are they irrational.

II. WORLDVIEW BELIEFS AND THEIR COGNITIVE FUNCTIONS

II.1 Preliminaries: Where is the logical place of theism?

It is interesting that theistic beliefs have been assigned very different logical characteristics and hence very different places in our belief system. In order to illustrate this, let us begin with a (loosely Quinean) analysis of the various components of our belief system. In the following diagram, the first column lists some[6] of these components. The second column lists some well-known attempts to locate theistic beliefs among these respective components (and to briefly justify these placements). The third column sketches Beckermann's commentaries on these attempts (they are partly evident from his book, and partly I have extrapolated them).

4 Here, Beckermann has a tendency to put the notoriously precarious arguments in focus and to present their rejection as important achievements, whereas stronger arguments like the *kalam* argument do not get their deserved attention. Moreover, Beckermann's renderings of Aquinas' *First Way* and Pascal's Wager are defective. For a more detailed critical analysis of Beckermann's book, see my article "Weltbildsätze: Nicht beweisbar, aber auch nicht irrational", in *(Ir-)Rationaler Glaube*, ed. R. Jaster and P. Schulte (Mentis, forthcoming).

5 Beckermann, *Glaube*, 14.

6 The present analysis does not claim completeness. In somewhat more detail, I talk about the structure of belief-systems in: Winfried Löffler, "An Underrated Merit of Plantinga's Philosophy", in *Plantinga's 'Warranted Christian Belief': Critical Essays with a Reply by Alvin Plantinga*, ed. Dieter Schönecker (De Gruyter, 2015).

Components of our belief-system	**Prominent attempts to locate theistic beliefs there**	**Beckermann's (presumable) commentary on the logical placement of theistic beliefs**
A priori truths	Anselm's argument (provided it is really a priori)*, Gödel's ontological argument, Plantinga's ontological argument	Unsound arguments
Empirical beliefs (from everyday life and science)	Arguments from miracles and extraordinary religious experiences	If theism is located here, it is empirically ill-founded
Worldview beliefs of a first type (not reasonably dubitable) (Beckermann labels them as "Moorean")	(Probably:) "Wittgensteinianism" in the philosophy of religion	Theism cannot be located here, as it is reasonably dubitable
Worldview belief of a second type (reasonably dubitable & justifiable)	Cosmological, teleological and possibly other arguments	(Presumably:) If theism is located here, the arguments in favor of it are very weak
Beliefs the only function of which is practical	Pascal's Wager, Kant (belief in God as a condition of the comprehensibility of morality and duty), arguments from the individual or social benefits of religious belief	These are arguments from non-epistemic reasons; hence, they are irrelevant
"Beliefs" without cognitive meaning	(Probably:) Negative Theology	This reconstruction of religious belief is inadequate from a religious standpoint, since believers would (rightly) reject the idea that their beliefs are contentless
* It is often overlooked that Anselm's Proslogion 2 Argument contains one empirical premise: that everybody, even the fool, understands by the word "God" "(aliqu)id quo maius cogitari nequit", i.e. "that/something greater than which nothing can be conceived". As already Thomas Aquinas in *STh* I, 2,1 ad 1 pointed out, this is plainly false.		

II.2 Beckermann on Moore-type world-view beliefs; and why religious beliefs are not like that

According to Beckermann, a familiar manoeuver to safeguard religious beliefs from empirical criticism, namely by declaring them as Moorean worldview beliefs, has little to recommend it. Beckermann characterizes Moorean worldview beliefs as follows:[7]

(1) They do not admit of normal errors, i.e. they are "alternative-less";

7 Beckermann, *Glaube*, 9–16. At closer look, the overall dialectic is somewhat complicated here: Beckermann develops his account of Moorean beliefs out of his discussion of Christoph Jäger's essay "Wittgenstein über Gewissheit und religiösen Glauben", in *Die Sprachen der Religion*, ed. Florian Uhl and Artur R. Boelderl (Parerga, 2003). The latter is primarily focused on Wittgenstein, takes a partly sympathetic stance to Wittgenstein and only indirectly deals with Moore. Hence, there are various strata of possible hermeneutical and historical questions lurking here which would be worth pursuing (whether Beckermann represents Jäger / Wittgenstein / Moore correctly; whether Wittgenstein indeed defended a Moorean view of religion, whether Beckermann rightly ascribes Jäger himself a Moorean standpoint, etc.). For the present task, I bracket all these questions and take Beckermann's account of "Moore-type beliefs" as it is, without caring about the adequacy of its historical backgrounds.

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(2) they are not hypotheses, hence they are not empirically justifiable;

(3) they are the "cornerstones" of the believer's epistemic practice and hence not subject to doubt: if someone were to doubt them in earnest, then his/her epistemic practice would collapse;

(4) they are not an object of "knowledge" in the proper sense of the word;

(5) they enjoy general acceptance.

Beckermann[8] holds that religious beliefs do not share some of these features, and hence that they are not Moorean worldview beliefs. He justifies this claim roughly by the following reasons: 1. Obviously, religious beliefs are not alternative-less (not even for the individual person). The plurality of religions provides many alternatives, and adherents of one set of religious beliefs often claim that others are in error; 2. Beckermann sees religious beliefs as empirically testable in a wider sense (see above on the effects of petitionary prayer, St. Christopher badges etc. and the poor empirical record of religious beliefs); 3a. Believers sometimes have religious doubts (and likewise non-believers sometimes doubt whether there might perhaps be something to religion after all), and such situations resemble common epistemic doubts in other fields; 3b. The normal, non-religious epistemic practice would not collapse at all if a religious believer considered his religious beliefs wrong or doubtful; 5. There is notoriously no general consent about religious beliefs.

As a brief aside comment on Beckermann's claims, one might say that he is broadly right.[9] Religious beliefs are indeed not cases of Moorean worldview beliefs, if these exist at all. However, there is a second type of worldview belief in our belief systems, and I would claim that religious beliefs should best be located there. In what follows, I will discuss these beliefs in some detail.

II.3 Proposal: There are world-view beliefs of a second type

Not only our day-to-day practices, but also the sciences operate under various extra- or pre-scientific assumptions and operative structures that are usually either tacit or unproblematically taken to be rational — and which, either way, are hardly ever questioned.

- There are certain extra- or pre-scientific beliefs about what "really" exists and has to be taken seriously;
- there are certain recurrent conceptual structures that arise across various domains;
- scientific practices are embedded in various extra- or pre-scientific practices;
- and there are stable and successful forms of communication about these assumptions and structures.

In somewhat more detail, we rely, for example:

- on a tacit distinction between objects and their attributes at various levels (e.g., we distinguish between electrons and their spin, organisms and their temperature, biological populations and their growth rates, galaxies and their speed etc.);
- on certain assumptions which every scholarly discipline makes about its domains of objects (e.g., biologists believe that cells, genomes, organs, organisms, populations, and so forth exist; mathematicians believe that numbers, theorems etc. exist; economists believe it of money supplies, interest rates, revaluation pressures, etc.);

8 Beckermann, *Glaube*, 9–16.

9 Except probably for point 2, where Beckermann's unfortunate assimiliation of religious beliefs to simple empirical beliefs comes in. If this assimilation were on target, it would shift religion closer to magical practices than most believers would accept. At least for respectable forms of religion, things like Lourdes water and St. Christopher badges are peripheral (or even embarrassing) phenomena, and petitionary prayer is usually not interpreted in a crude empirical sense like rain dances.

- on some — usually less clear or complete — assumptions about the relations between domains themselves. For example, biologists believe that genomes influence organisms' shape and behavior, and that there can also be certain conjectures from the shape and behavior to the genome; physicists believe in atoms as well as in spheres, mirrors and batteries; and they believe that spheres, mirrors and batteries are made of atoms that influence those properties; but they also believe that there is no complete upward or downward explanation linking these realms;
- on our ability to distinguish and identify normal and abnormal, standard and non-standard specimens of objects and situations; e.g. we tacitly distinguish between normally developed and underdeveloped plants, well-developed and molded bacteria cultures, coordinated and uncoordinated body movements, functioning and squeaking machines, thermometers within and beyond an accepted accuracy range, etc.;
- on our ability to assess (and often predict) the possibilities / impossibilities / contingencies which are connected with certain objects and situations;
- on the assumption of a principle of causality (according to which contingent facts and changes must have certain causes or arrangements of causes);
- on an assumption of regularity for wide ranges of phenomena, e.g., the assumption that similar causes have (ceteris paribus) similar effects and vice versa;
- on our tacit assessments of what is (and what is not) in need of explanation in certain situations and changes of situations;
- on the normative presupposition that our descriptions/explanations of the world should in general avoid contradiction (or, that they recognize contradictions as problematic and in need of further clarification);
- on tacitly assumed "collision rules" for possible but competing explanations. E.g., in the normal course of things, and as long as there is no indication of problems, we explain the movements of people's limbs as intentional behavior, e.g. as cases of agent causation, rather than as cases of causation exerted by natural-law-driven causes. However, when indications for coordination problems and dysfunctionality mount, we switch to physical/chemical/biological explanations and consider the influence of alcohol, hypoglycemia, or similar states.

The presuppositions in the foregoing list work tacitly and hardly ever come explicitly to our mind (at least, not in the normal course of our cognitive business); as a result, we tend not to formulate them as "beliefs". However, they could easily be recast as beliefs, at least in the dispositional sense of "belief": They are the contents that we would assent to if asked the relevant questions. These beliefs provide the cognitive background that is operative in our actual practice, and they are the objects of our discussions — especially in cases where the normal course of things is disturbed, our expectations are frustrated, etc. Notice further that some of these beliefs have chiefly descriptive content, whereas others have a strong normative or ought-component; examples of the latter are the avoidance of contradictions and the assumption of collision rules between possible explanations.

The beliefs in the above list enjoy a peculiar status in our epistemic organization. On the one hand, they do not fulfill the five conditions for Moorean beliefs as discussed in the foregoing section. For example, they admit of alternatives (e.g., there are process and trope ontologies, there are philosophers who believe in true contradictions, and there are scholars who question some of the fundamental logical-ontological claims of their respective disciplines); at times they are objects of doubt and dispute; and a certain amount of change in them would not cause a collapse of our epistemic practices. On the other hand, the beliefs in question are not parts of science as such[10]; for example, they are neither hypotheses

10 At least in a non-expansive, non-inflationary sense of the words "science" and "scientific"; we come back to that point in a moment in 2.4.

nor empirically testable, they typically receive no mention in science textbooks (and if they do, then they are merely assumed without question). But their peculiar status notwithstanding, it seems intellectually impeccable and entirely rational to hold these beliefs, and by and large we all hold them.[11]

II.4 World-view beliefs, science, and naturalism

As a merely pragmatic terminological proposal (and chiefly to distinguish them from Moore-type beliefs), let us call these beliefs "worldview beliefs of a 2nd type". Related and familiar terminological proposals from the literature of recent decades include "conceptual frameworks", "world-picture", "(descriptive) metaphysics" and others. The exact terminological choice is not important,[12] it is just crucial to keep in mind that "worldview" is not restricted to the frequent, but narrow politico-religious-axiological sense which the word sometimes seems to have. (One's stance on political parties and programs, the rights to abortion and euthanasia, the existence of God and other transcendent entities, etc. are sometimes labelled "worldview" questions; the sense of the word used in the present paper is much broader and comprises contents which would appear surprisingly trivial and platitudinous in the eyes of many people).

Let us say that the set of our worldview beliefs (in this 2nd sense) constitutes the extra- or pre-scientific worldview. Although there is no full correspondence between the worldviews of different people, there is in fact great overlap between them, as our (by and large successful) common social practices show. Against a frequent tendency to regard worldviews as dubious and problematic (in comparison to the purportedly perspicuous and unproblematic realms of the sciences), I am inclined to endorse the thesis that our pre-scientific worldviews are a means of accessing reality[13]. But more than this: they are not an unimportant addendum playing second fiddle to the more dignified epistemic channels (e.g., the sciences) — the worldviews even provide the *epistemically more fundamental* part of our understanding of reality. The special scholarly disciplines may be regarded as sets of specified theories and methods for specified, well-defined problems originating in our pre-scientific worldview. This can be seen, for example, from the following considerations:[14] (1) Our pre-scientific worldviews provide the forum where we (*in globo*) assess the success or failure of our whole body of scientific practices and theories. Whether biology, physics etc. are good for anything is ultimately judged on the basis of their consequences at the level of the worldview: e.g., whether the medical treatments based on our biological theories prove successful, whether the technical constructions (like bridges, coffee-machines, airplanes and TV sets) developed on the basis our physical theories work, etc. (2) Our pre-scientific worldviews provide the forum in which we assess the (in-)appropriate application-cases of our scientific theories , i.e. in which we choose which theories are suitably applied in given cases. To return to the example of the most suitable interpretation of body movements: Whether a person's actual behavior is best explained as a (perhaps somewhat excited) form of action and hence a case for the psychology of acting subjects, or whether it is a case for physico-chemico-biological explanations of the hypoglycemia pattern style, is not decided by scientific considerations, but rather by our expectations for what is normal or abnormal at the level of our worldview.

It follows from the foregoing remarks that methodological naturalism (the thesis that only those methods which would be acceptable in the sciences are truth-conducive, in philosophy as well as in our other cognitive fields) must be wrong: The sciences (and other scholarly disciplines) reveal reality only in the context of the whole "epistemic package", which includes our pre-scientific understanding of the

11 I argued for the importance of such beliefs in Löffler, "An Underrated Merit of Plantinga's Philosophy", and Löffler, *Einführung in die Religionsphilosophie* (WBG, 2013), section 5.

12 I slightly prefer the term "world-view beliefs" as it brings out the unifying and orientating function somewhat better than the other terminological proposals: It seems natural to say that a person shares more than one world-picture (e.g. scientific ones and others beyond them), but it seems strange to say that somebody shares different world-views. But as I shall show in a moment, the world-view (in my sense) is the epistemically prior and unifying orientation system.

13 There is also no sharp borderline between the scientific and the world-view segments of our cognitive organization, and there can be mutual influences between these segments: for examples see Stephan Körner, *Metaphysics: Its Structure and Function* (CUP, 1984).

14 I read John Greco's contribution "Transmitting Faith (and Garbage)", *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 10, no. 3 (2018), to defend a very similar point.

world, where this pre-scientific understanding helps us identify scientifically tractable problems and assign scientific methods their proper fields of application.[15]

II.5 On the epistemology of type II worldview beliefs

A few remarks on the epistemological status of type II worldview beliefs might be appropriate. Firstly, due to their fundamental role, they are not provable in a narrow sense (empirically or otherwise), since any proof would have to refer to something more fundamental. But nevertheless some of them are *defensible*, namely by reference to their ubiquitous and (by and large) successful role in our cognitive practices, both scientific and everyday. For some such worldview beliefs, their apparent unavoidability might even be argued for by so-called "retorsion arguments".[16] These arguments show that the very speech-act of denying the belief in question tacitly presupposes the denied belief, and that such a denial therefore leads to performative contradictions. Famous historical examples are Aristotle's defense of the principle of non-contradiction (PNC) (Metaphysics IV, 4) and the refutation of the claim "there is no truth" by numerous Greek, medieval and modern philosophers.[17] Anybody who would deny the PNC would presuppose that his statement is true and the opponent's claim is false, and would hence tacitly apply the PNC. Likewise, the speech-act of claiming "there is no truth" presupposes the truth of this very statement and hence contradicts it at the operative level. These are not "proofs" of the PNC or the existence of truths, but nonetheless very strong defenses of them. From the list of worldview beliefs in 2.3, some might invite a defense by retorsion arguments. For instance, someone who would argue against our presupposition of objects and attributes would by his very argument distinguish between his addressee (as a relatively stable object) and her opinions (which are in need of change and are hence changeable attributes); likewise, any attempt to argue against our principal ability to assess objects' possibilities, impossibilities, or contingencies would make use of this very ability (since the desired opinion change in the addressee is taken to be among his range of contingencies).

Secondly, there are plausible proposals for criteria of rationality for worldview beliefs, and they do not even fundamentally differ from those for scientific beliefs. Inspired by Alfred N. Whitehead, Frederick Ferré[18] developed four rationality criteria for metaphysical proposals: (1) logical consistency, (2) internal coherence (i.e., the absence of scattered, unconnected theory-fragments which would require an arbitrary skipping between patterns of explanation), (3) relatedness to experience, and (4) openness to any new experience. On closer inspection, these criteria might constitute a very general rationality benchmark for any cognitive enterprise, but they are open to specifications: the "relatedness to experience" of a claim might, for instance, in scientific contexts mean testability by forecastable, observational consequences; for worldview beliefs, however, it might mean successfully functioning to order and structure our experience. "Openness to any new experience" may, in scientific contexts, mean (for example) the validity of a theory with respect to an unrestricted range of variables; similarly, rational worldview beliefs should enable us to integrate and make sense of any, even surprising, new experiences without arbitrarily excluding some of them from the scope of what we take to be relevant.

Thirdly, although the worldview beliefs of different people overlap on many points (otherwise the general success of our communication and cooperation would appear miraculous), they need not necessarily overlap in all of them. Just like in the sciences, the wide overlap of worldview beliefs, and the existence of rationality criteria, do not preclude a certain amount of dissent about worldview beliefs. There

15 This holds of course only if "scientifically acceptable methods" and "naturalism" are defined in an ambitious, non-expansive and interesting sense: if "science" is understood in an inflationary sense, i.e. as the whole package consisting of science proper plus the extra-scientific, world-view-style knowledge, then almost everybody would be a "naturalist" in a loose, uninteresting sense.

16 On such arguments (sometimes also called "elenctic refutations", whereas the term "transcendental arguments" has a more generic meaning), see Gaston Isaye, "La justification critique par rétorsion", *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 52, no. 34 (1954).

17 See, e.g. John P. Doyle and William C. Charron, "On the Self-Refuting Statement "There is no Truth": A Medieval Treatment", *Vivarium* 31, no. 2 (1993).

18 Frederick Ferré, *Language, Logic, and God* (Eyre&Spottiswoode, 1961). My use of Ferré's criteria is strongly influenced by Otto Muck, *Rationalität und Weltanschauung. Philosophische Untersuchungen*, ed. Winfried Löffler (Innsbruck, Wien: Tyrolia, 1999), 41f., 242.

are for instance various rival proposals of revisionary metaphysics, there are defenders and opponents of paraconsistent logics, and there are notably different stances concerning the options of theism, atheism, pan(en)theism, and weak and strong agnosticism. Dissenting opinions in these and other fields do not resemble mere questions of taste, nor are they intellectual options of a mere voluntary character; rather, there are arguments available for and against these positions.

Fourthly, people also sometimes change their minds on these matters, though such changes are neither frequent nor easy. Such changes tend to come slowly, prepared only by long consideration; indeed, sometimes such processes are even experienced as painful — the apparent similarity to religious or political conversions does not seem too far-fetched. This comparative resistance to change has to do with an oft-overlooked factor in the complex epistemology of worldview beliefs; a factor, however, which can also be detected in other contexts: the factor of "free certitude". It will be in the focus of the next section.

III. WORLD-VIEW BELIEFS, FREE CERTITUDE, AND THEISTIC ARGUMENTS

III.1 The notion of "free certitude" / certitudo libera

Any successful argument, i.e., any argument that convinces the addressee to embrace the conclusion, requires two factors. On the objective side, it requires *reasons* which can be uttered, described, explained, etc.[19] But there is also a requirement on the subjective side, which we may describe as the non-enforcable assent to the argument and its conclusion, the adopting or embracing of an argument. Let us call this factor *free certitude*. At first glance, this free certitude might perhaps appear spooky, even a worrisome intrusion of epistemic voluntarism: should not rather the reasons be what prompts our assent, or even worse, is everybody simply entitled to follow any argument they want, provided that they can manage to produce sufficient free certitude? Is free certitude thus something like a workaround remedy for otherwise bad arguments? Not at all. The factor of free certitude is indeed operative in all cases of argumentative success; however, in "standard epistemic situations" it is just hardly visible. In unproblematic arguments (about unproblematic issues, under unproblematic circumstances, with unproblematic interlocutors) the confrontation with good reasons regularly suffices to motivate us to agree in free certitude; withholding one's free certitude in such situations would even be seen as problematic. Unproblematic arguments usually concern "local" questions, or questions of detail within deeply entrenched realms of discourse, be they scientific or extra-scientific. But the more an argument touches on the fundamental questions of a realm, the more the component of free certitude becomes apparent. In such fundamental questions, there are usually arguments available, but there are no strict "proofs" in sight which would easily convince everyone.

An illustrative example can be found in the century-long foundational debates in mathematics between realism and constructivism/intuitionism concerning the existence and nature of numbers. The typical shape of debates in this field is as follows: there are arguments on both sides which in many cases have become familiar to anybody competent on the issue; the opponents' arguments are perceived as comprehensible; the positions of the respective interlocutors are not regarded as irrational — it is even granted that they might have a considerable point. Nonetheless, the arguments do not convince the respective opponents. Even in the face of strong arguments for realism, constructivists usually remain constructivists, and vice versa. From an outside perspective, no parties can be called irrational for holding their respective positions. Similar debates can be noticed on the foundations of ethics (usually described as debates between consequentialism, deontologism and universalism) and between descriptive and various revisionary ontologies.

However, fundamental questions with a strong component of free certitude are not even alien to the natural and social sciences. A familiar example is provided by the various interpretations of quantum mechanics. Another arises in the context of conflicting policy suggestions based on rival economic

19 For the sake of simplicity, let us count the logical intactness of the argument among its reasons (in a wider sense), because logical intactness is something that can objectively be claimed, explained etc., and in any case not a matter of subjective assessment.

theories. For instance, in the economic recession of recent decades, proponents and opponents of the low-interest policy of the US Federal Reserve (and other national banks) defended their positions with elaborate arguments (which do not appear to be merely driven by simple political group interests, but to be genuinely economic in character). As happens frequently in economics, the issue cannot be settled in a simple empirical way, since the contingencies of economic history never provide clean, comparable and repeatable conditions; hence the question seems to be one of deeply fundamental economic assumptions. The dialectic in both cases — that is, the quantum-physics and the economics case — is similar: the arguments are mutually comprehensible, not all of them are condemned as misguided, yet they rarely ever suffice by themselves to make a person change her opinions.

To summarize, it appears that free certainty becomes more important the more closely an issue touches on the fundamental convictions and assumptions of an area of discourse, whereas, in questions involving local details (which are often open to empirical control and which are embedded in a bunch of other consensual beliefs) it tends to be irrelevant and hardly visible. In this way, the fundamental questions of scholarly disciplines resemble questions pertaining to type II worldview beliefs.

III.2 How free certitude relates to theistic arguments

In the previous section I argued that the relevance of free certainty is not restricted to religious and other worldview matters, or even to philosophical matters in general, but that it is an indispensable component of arguments in other fields too. But of course arguments for and against theistic beliefs are paramount fields of application for free certainty, and theistic beliefs (and their alternatives) are paramount examples of worldview beliefs of the second type. When it comes to such beliefs, doubt and dissent are obviously possible, and religious doubt resembles epistemic doubts in many ways; theistic beliefs are not alternative-less and not generally accepted; they are not directly empirically testable (naïve, magic-like forms of theology aside) but they have a certain connection to experience and moreover play an integrating or ordering role with respect to it (examples include beliefs like "God is the creator of the experiential world" or "God is the ultimate reason for regularities in the world").

Arguments for theistic beliefs make use of premises which express type II worldview beliefs, usually (for example) forms of a principle of causality. Although such arguments may start out from facts and beliefs which are (in a broad sense) empirically given, sooner or later they switch from the realm of empirical or science-like beliefs to a discourse on world-view beliefs (if they did not, the "God" whose existence they seek to establish would be no more than a very particular object in the world, rather than the world's ultimate ground). As arguments about worldview beliefs, such arguments are markedly subject to free certitude. Hence, the terms "*proofs* for God's existence" or "theistic *proofs*" are better avoided: the term "proof" should better be reserved for arguments whose premises and whose logical intactness are beyond significant doubt, so that free certitude plays at most a marginal role. The potential function of these arguments can thus be characterized as follows. Even if they are not "proofs of God's existence" (and even less an instrument for easy conversions), they can show that theistic belief is not irrational — provided these arguments involve good objective reasons.

III.3 Example: the kalam argument from the standard cosmological model

As an illustration of the foregoing claims, a short look at one of the most-discussed theistic arguments of our day, the *kalam* argument, might be instructive. It belongs to the family of cosmological or contingency arguments (like Aquinas' *Five Ways*, Leibniz's arguments e.g. in *De rerum originatione radicali* (1697), and many others). It starts with the current standard cosmological model of an expanding universe, whose expansion can be traced back to an initial singularity approximately 14 billion years ago (e.g., an exceptional physical state where certain quantities go to zero or infinity and the natural laws are not yet applicable). It is powerfully proposed and defended against objections by William Lane Craig in numerous well known

books and articles.[20] The informal reconstruction presented here is strongly inspired by Craig; I have added a brief justificatory comment after every premise and inference.

1. All that has a temporal beginning has causes of its existence. (Methodological principle, ubiquitous except marginal cases)
2. The universe has a temporal beginning. ("Empirical" premise, from the standard cosmological model)
3. Hence, the universe has causes of its existence. (From 1, 2)
4. There are two basic patterns of causal explanation: explanation in terms of causes governed by laws of nature, and explanation in terms of personal agency. (Premise from the philosophy of science)
5. The causes of the universe are not governed by laws of nature. (From the standard cosmological model: there are no law-like explanations in the initial singularity)
6. Hence, there are person-like causes of the universe. (From 3, 4, 5)
7. It is ontologically more plausible to assume that the universe has exactly one and not a multiplicity of causes. (A premise suggested by the standard cosmological model [the universe begins in a point!] and considerations of ontological parsimony: for a beginning in a point, a multiplicity of causes would be implausible.)
8. If the universe has a cause of its existence, it must — beyond personality — have some further attributes: beginningless, power, bodylessness, … (Craig brings detailed arguments for this claim. The core idea is this: a truly *ultimate* explanation of the universe must not share the traits of the explanandum.)
9. Hence, there is exactly one personal cause of the universe with these attributes. (From 6, 7, 8)
10. The unique personal cause with these attributes has substantial similarities with the "God" of the theistic religions. (Identification proposal)
11. Hence, there is exactly one God in the sense of the theistic religions. (From 9, 10; QED)

The foregoing reconstruction was not intended as an entrance into a detailed discussion of the argument.[21] It is aimed merely to prepare and invite the following observations.

(1) The argument has seven premises (1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10) of which many are very plausible and none is obviously implausible.

(2) None of these premises represents a clear specimen of a properly "scientific" or purely quotidian belief; rather, each premise represents beliefs which are best subsumed under type II worldview beliefs.

(3) Most premises even enjoy wide, but not complete, consent; for some, the consent is explicit (as for premise 2), for others it is rather a tacit consent which is apparent from their practical application (for premises 1 and 4, e.g., the application is almost ubiquitous).

(4) All of these premises can be or have factually been backed by (in part very strong) arguments, but none of them is completely beyond dispute.

20 See William L. Craig, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1979) (various new editions); William L. Craig and James D. Sinclair, "The Kalam Cosmological Argument", in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. William L. Craig and James P. Moreland (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); William L. Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Crossway Books, 2008).

21 I also take it for granted that the logic of the argument can be reconstructed by rather simple means of elementary predicate logic.

(5) Hence, each premise is to some extent subject to free certitude.

Due to the important role of free certitude, the *kalam* argument is not a "proof" in the strong sense, but an argument proceeding within a context of world-view beliefs which may show the theistic belief to be rational. Another point that counts in favor of the rationality of theistic belief is the following: The argument does not presuppose an *ex-ante* definition of the notion "God" (which might be a point of dispute in itself), but connects this notion to various worldview beliefs which are wide-spread also among non-theistic thinkers. Starting out from these beliefs, the argument reconstructs the attributes of the causal explanans of the universe by a reductive explanatory strategy. Only in the end (step 10) does the proposal identify this explanans with the God of theism.[22] Of course, this step of identification is also a matter of free certitude.

IV. CONCLUSION

Our investigation has shown that there is an important layer of rational beliefs between the reputable logical and "scientific" beliefs (as well as the beliefs of other scholarly disciplines) and the rather ill-reputed provinces ranging from pure matters of taste to unclear quasi-beliefs and plain nonsense. I labeled them "type II worldview beliefs" and argued that it seems most plausible and most fitting to the self-understanding of believers (and non-believers) to locate theistic (and non-theistic) beliefs there. On the one hand, this removes theistic belief from those parts of our belief system that resist objection, but also from those that are a-rational; on the other hand, on such a view strong "proofs" for theism do not seem within reach. Nevertheless, my proposal gives us a strong option for reconstructing the rationality and defensibility of theistic beliefs. This is a significant result, given the widespread verdicts that theistic belief are plainly and evidently irrational.[23]

22 This strategy, by the way, has a historical ancestor in the often-overlooked final step in Aquinas' Five Ways: "et hoc omnes dicunt Deum" / "and this everybody calls God".

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