
Is Christian Belief Rational? What the Philosophers Are Saying

by Michael L. Peterson

I. God's Comeback in Philosophy

A. Renewed Interest in Christianity

In April 1980 *Time* magazine reported that "God is making a comeback . . . in the crisp, intellectual circles of academic philosophers." The article surveys the quiet revolution in thinking which is currently taking place in philosophy. During the early part of this century, such philosophies as naturalism, positivism, empiricism, and existentialism gained widespread allegiance among professional philosophers. Unfortunately, these philosophies tend to view belief in God as either false or lacking in rational support. Roderick Chisholm from the Ivy League Brown University explains that this view has been so influential because "the brightest people" held it for years. However, Chisholm adds in recent years a number of "tough-minded" intellectuals have provided defense for religious belief, and have ushered the topic of God back into fruitful discourse. Most of them have a specific interest in the God of Christianity.

Whereas it used to be thought irrational to believe in God, now many philosophers are claiming it is entirely rational. Of course, no genuine issue in philosophy is ever finally settled. Philosophers are forever trying to shed new light on enduring problems, and the same is true for the problem of whether Christian belief is rational or not. I propose to take a look at what philosophers have been saying about this precise problem. The issue of religious belief is obviously very large and complex, so I will focus on just a few aspects of the overall problem.

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B. The Structure of this Essay

The issue of whether belief in God is rational has been approached in a number of different ways. One way is offering proofs or arguments for and against God's existence. Such arguments are taken to be the rational basis for either belief or disbelief in God. Those thinkers who believe the arguments for God's existence win out form the tradition of natural theology down through the centuries. Other thinkers who believe the arguments against God's existence tip the scales form the enterprise which we may call natural *atheology*. (At least this label is more charitable than calling it *unnatural theology*.) Our Christian heritage is greatly indebted to those who have tackled these kinds of problems, and I personally owe much of my own Christian position to their work.

However, there is another way of approaching the question of whether belief in God is rational — a way which provides a stimulus for what I have to say. This second approach does not deal directly with the various grounds on which belief in God can be called rational. Instead it deals with the very standard of rationality by which such grounds are judged. Philosophers have offered a number of proposals for conditions which must be met in order for a belief to be rational. I will discuss two of these proposals and try to determine whether Christian belief is rational according to these requirements. The two requirements, which are distinct but closely related are: (1) A person may hold a belief only on the basis of having responsibly reviewed the relevant evidence; and (2) A belief must have sufficient evidence. The first condition pertains to the relationship between the person doing the believing and the proposition he believes. The second regards the relationship between the proposition believed and the evidence for or against it.

C. Preliminary Distinctions

At the outset, it is necessary to clarify exactly what aspect of Christian belief is being analyzed. As the title states, Christian belief is the general concern, but this is a vast subject which entails a number of interrelated beliefs. Therefore, this article will be restricted specifically to the question of belief in God. To center on belief in God is not to study any particular Christian doctrines as such, even though the validity of Christian doctrines is a fascinating issue in itself. However, it is discussed indirectly here, since belief in God is the foundation of all other doctrines. And belief in God is

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logically necessary to orthodox Christianity. Unless belief in God is defensible, Christianity is not defensible.

For present purposes, to talk about belief *in* God is to talk about the belief *that* God exists, i.e., the belief that the proposition “God exists” is true. Obviously, believing in God involves *more* than accepting a certain proposition as true. Belief in God in the full sense includes trusting God, committing one’s life to Him, and living within His presence. But, if belief in God is more than acceptance of a proposition, then it is *at least* that. One cannot sensibly commit one’s life to God, or thank God, or praise God without believing that there *is* such a person as God. Hebrews 11:6 suggests this very idea. Hence, belief *that God exists* is fundamental to belief in God. And unless belief that God exists is defensible, trust in and commitment to God is not defensible.

Having made the above points, I shall use the terms “Christian belief” and “religious belief” synonymously with “belief in God.” Also I shall use “belief in God” interchangeably with “belief that God exists.” The exact question I wish to address, then, is whether belief in God — belief in the existence of God — is rational.

II. Rationality and the Ethics of Belief (first criticism)

A. Intellectual Duties

We are familiar with the accusation that religious belief is rationally deficient or defective. Critics have made this accusation from two somewhat different perspectives. One perspective is religious believers have neglected the responsibility of scrutinizing and evaluating their beliefs in light of the evidence. The other perspective is the objective evidence itself, regardless of whether believers have been conscientious about it or not, just shows that God does not exist. According to either perspective, belief in God is plainly irrational. Let us examine the first way of criticizing religious belief in this section and reply to it in the next. Also, let us reserve consideration of the second criticism for subsequent sections.

The first formulation of the irrationality criticism exhibits an underlying conviction that there is an *ethical responsibility* which attaches to the human enterprise of believing. Ethically speaking, we have no right simply to believe anything whatever. We have the ethical duty to try to reach or approximate the truth. W.K. Clifford, a 19th century philosopher, tells a story to accent this fundamental

requirement:

A shipowner was about to send to sea an emigrant-ship. He knew that she was old, and not over-well built at the first; that she had seen many seas and climes, and often had needed repairs. Doubts had been suggested to him that possibly she was not seaworthy. These doubts preyed upon his mind, and made him unhappy; he thought that perhaps he ought to have her thoroughly overhauled and refitted, even though this should put him to great expense. Before the ship sailed, however, he succeeded in overcoming these melancholy reflections. He said to himself that she had gone safely through so many voyages and weathered many storms and that it was idle to suppose she would not come safely home from this trip also. He would put his trust in Providence, which could hardly fail to protect all these unhappy families that were leaving their fatherland to seek for better times elsewhere. He would dismiss from his mind all ungenerous suspicions about the honesty of builders and contractors. In such ways he acquired a sincere and comfortable conviction that his vessel was thoroughly safe and seaworthy; he watched her departure with a light heart, and benevolent wishes for the success of the exiles in their strange new home that was to be; and he got his insurance-money when she went down in mid-ocean and told no tales.

Clifford asks rhetorically, "What shall we say of the shipowner?"

Clearly, we shall say, "He is guilty of the death of those people."

B. The Importance of Sufficient Evidence

Granted, the shipowner sincerely believed in the soundness of the ship, or so we are told in the hypothetical story. But he believed in a manner which violates the ethics of the intellectual life. Actually, the shipowner had "no right to believe on such evidence as was before him." He had acquired his belief by stifling doubts and avoiding careful investigation. Clifford correctly indicates that even if we alter the story a bit and suppose the ship was not unsound after all, the shipowner is still as guilty as before. The question of right or wrong here does not have to do with the actual truth or falsity of the belief, but with the way in which the belief is attained and held. John Stuart

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Mill made this same point in his classic essay, *On Liberty*. Mill states the truth may reside in the mind as a prejudice, or a superstition, and this is beneath the dignity of a rational being. A belief, even a true belief, may be acquired in the *wrong way* — not because it is responsibly evaluated and seen as true.

According to the “ethics of belief” theorists, then, a belief ought to be held only on the basis of having found sufficient evidence. And the strength with which we hold any belief ought to be in proportion to the strength of the evidence. Presumably, if one is too busy or too untrained to investigate the grounds of a belief, then his proper attitude ought to be something like neutrality. As Clifford eloquently says, “Every time we let ourselves believe for unworthy reasons, we weaken our powers of self-control, of doubting, of judicially and fairly weighing evidence.” An ethic of belief, therefore, is a procedure for guarding the mind from error and credulity.

C. The Indictment of Religious Belief

It is now quite easy to explain the kind of criticism of religious belief which is based on the ethics of belief. The critic says the believer is in violation of the moral requirements placed on believing, or the believer has adopted certain theological propositions without carefully examining the evidence for and against them. In a sense, this criticism is directed against the *religious believer* in his role as a believer, and not against *what* he believes *per se*.

III. Is the Religious Believer in Violation of the Ethics of Belief? (first reply)

A. Giving the Critic His Due

What can be said in response to the critic who says the religious believer has violated or neglected the ethical conditions of believing? Has the believer failed to examine the evidence carefully and conform his belief conscientiously to it? Has he become so careless in his mental habits that he has fallen victim to wishful thinking, peer pressure, propaganda, or some other subrational force? The first part of our response to such questions should be to give the critic his proper due. The critic should be applauded for endorsing a general ethics of belief. Human beings are not totally free to believe just anything they choose. As responsible, rational, and moral agents, we must adjust our beliefs to the best reasons and evidence available.

The morality of our believing something is determined largely by our honest and energetic efforts to analyze the evidence, even if we are sometimes mistaken.

The critic also seems to be correct in indicating that some religious believers are credulous people, defending themselves by saying their religious beliefs are private matters without any rational or ethical constraints. It's no wonder thoughtful nonbelievers sometimes characterize believers as persons who believe on fancy, push away doubts, and direct their minds toward the comfortable and familiar.

Now, after giving the critic his due, what can be said in stronger defense of the rationality of religious belief? Two important defenses are in order: (1) We must point out a host of technical difficulties involved in formulating an exact ethics of belief, and we must emphasize that not all believers are out of the spirit of such a code anyway; and (2) We must insist that the critic is operating on the single principle of avoiding error while religious belief may be governed more by the additional principle of finding truth. Let us develop these defenses in more detail.

B. Difficulties in Formulating the Ethics of Belief

While it is quite legitimate to call for responsibility in believing, it is very difficult to formulate a clear criterion for fulfilling that responsibility. One problem arises with respect to the notion of *sufficient evidence*. Many philosophers say the ethics of belief require us to believe a proposition only on sufficient evidence. Supposedly, every meaningful proposition is capable of being justified or refuted by appropriate evidence. Yet spelling out the exact *kind* and *amount* of evidence which would be sufficient in any given case is a formidable task. For example, what *kinds* of evidence are relevant to theological propositions, and particularly to the proposition that God exists? Does pure intellectual argumentation count? Does personal experience or insight count? Do historical events count? Precisely what sort of evidence is valid so that one who considers the proposition "God exists" is ethically obliged to take account of it?

To continue this line of questioning, *how much* evidence is sufficient or enough to justify any given proposition? How does one tell when the evidence he possesses is indeed sufficient? Obviously, there are times when one has an overwhelming amount of evidence *for* a belief or an overwhelming amount *against* it. But how do we

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specify the exact point at which the evidence becomes sufficient? What about one who conscientiously thinks that he has sufficient evidence and yet is mistaken? Who has the prerogative of setting up this criterion of sufficiency anyway?

The questions above reveal difficulties in articulating a precise code of ethics for believing. We can endorse the *basic value* of being concerned for evidence, but we cannot specify a formula for when this value has been properly displayed. Therefore, the moral evaluation of whether someone has done his intellectual duty, in conforming his belief to the evidence, is in the realm of fallible judgment and not in the realm of exact calculation. This means there is room for difference of opinion regarding the ethics of belief. In fact, we might add part of the general ethics of belief which we are discussing includes, not only *evidential scrupulosity* but, *intellectual humility* and *tolerance* as well. Without these other equally important intellectual virtues, the search after truth (which the critic wants to protect) is simply jeopardized in other ways.

The moral here is that no one can dictate the precise point at which another person has weighed the evidence responsibly and is therefore entitled to believe. As long as a person makes a serious attempt to be reasonable and honest in his belief, we should be cautious about pronouncing him to be in violation of intellectual ethics. Thus the critic does not really possess a strict and absolute standard of ethics according to which the religious believer is clearly out of order.

Furthermore, in spite of the difficulties surrounding a precise code of ethics of belief, many religious believers take great care to accord with the basic spirit of such an ethic. Not only do many lay believers want to be as reasonable as their ability permits, there is a whole tradition of Christian scholarship which has produced impressive reasons for belief in God. Therefore, the critic cannot justly make a blanket indictment that the religious believer is irrational because he has violated the ethics of belief.

C. The Neglected Duty to Truth

We have examined the critic's objection that Christians violate the ethics of belief. We have begun to see that a number of believers actually exhibit the intellectual virtue of reasonableness. But the discussion so far has been dominated by only *one* aspect of intellectual ethics — *the duty to avoid error*. There is another duty of the intellectual life — *the duty to find truth*. I think believers may find an

important method of rebuff for the critic by exploring this second duty.

Initially, we must emphasize that these two duties are genuinely distinct. They are not just two ways of expressing the same duty. To fulfill one may not be to fulfill the other. All responsible thinkers must face the question of which of these twin duties has priority in case of conflict, for it will make a great deal of difference in how they operate in the realm of belief. W.K. Clifford, for example, emphasizes the avoidance of error and warns against believing anything without sufficient evidence. Clifford feels pathos when he says that an error or falsehood, once believed, is like a pestilence which can “master one’s body and then spread to the rest of the town.” Then he asks, “What would be thought of one who, for the sake of a sweet fruit, should deliberately run the risk of bringing a plague upon his family and his neighbors?” Clifford’s point is permeated by the fear of error, which offsets the desire for truth.

My question for Clifford and the Cliffordians is, “Are there not situations in which the chance of gaining truth outweighs the risk of error?” When one is sifting through the evidence for and against a contemplated belief, there may be no magical signal that he has acquired enough of the right kind of evidence and is therefore entitled to believe. One simply has to weigh the evidence to the best of his ability and then make a judgment to give or to withhold assent. If the desire or need for truth is strongly present, even when the evidence is not compelling, it is plausible to think that a person might go ahead and believe.

Going ahead and believing is even more plausible if one assesses the risk factor differently from Clifford. Clifford seems to assume that if one refrains from believing on insufficient evidence he has *eliminated* the risk of *error*. This assumption, however, is not correct. The risk of gaining or losing truth, or of embracing or avoiding error, is present regardless of what attitude one adopts toward a proposition — whether he positively believes, positively disbelieves, or remains neutral. The Cliffordian insistence on sufficient evidence, well-motivated though it is, is hardly effective in eliminating risk.

We can even envision special situations in which the proposition being considered for belief is so important that the Cliffordian code cannot give adequate guidance at all. We might imagine a situation in which the importance of finding truth is quite great, even though the evidence is not absolutely definitive. The famous American

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philosopher William James considered the type of situation in which the Cliffordian fear of error is neither practical nor possible. James speaks of decisions about what to believe which are (in his words) “living,” “momentous,” and “forced.” For James, as well as for a great many people, decisions about religious beliefs are precisely of this sort. They present us with situations in which we *cannot avoid* some kind of decision, and hence cannot protect ourselves from risk. It does not matter which way we believe — we risk falling into error and also risk losing the truth.

Having drawn up a scenario in which a decision about belief is living, momentous, and forced — and yet in which the evidence is not conclusive either way — we can now understand why the *duty to seek truth* might take priority over the duty to avoid error. This may well be the kind of situation in which many religious believers find themselves, and hence their choice to believe in God is not only understandable, but justifiable. About the only qualification on such a choice is that the person involved responsibly consider the evidence and the alternatives, and that the evidence be in some way adequate for the decision. But the rigid Cliffordian standard is quite useless in these situations. So, according to a more complete ethics for believing — an ethics which includes a duty to find truth — a person’s decision to believe in God may be entirely compatible with his epistemic duties.

IV. Rationality and the Available Evidence (second criticism)

A. The Need for Evidence

We have just been considering a criticism of religious belief which focuses on the relationship between a believer and the belief that he holds. There is a second, but related, criticism which focuses on the relationship between the belief held and the evidence for or against it. Most philosophers say that any proposition which is believed must be based on appropriate evidence. The actual evidence, then, is the ultimate court of appeal, regardless of how conscientiously one reviews it. Just as a *person* can be criticized for not going through the proper process of forming a belief, the belief itself can be criticized for not measuring up to the evidence.

This second type of criticism is the one we now want to examine with respect to religious belief. The critic may say either that belief in God is *not supported* by available evidence or that it is *straight-*

forwardly falsified by the evidence. This kind of criticism is fairly common in the history of philosophy. The brilliant British philosopher, Bertrand Russell, was once asked what he would say if, after dying, he were brought into the presence of God and asked why he had not been a believer. According to Russell, “I’d say, ‘Not enough evidence God! Not enough evidence!’” I suppose that each of us could have some fun speculating how such a reply would be received! But Russell held, as many people have, that belief in God is irrational because there is *insufficient evidence* for it. Let us explore this criticism a little further.

B. What Is It for a Belief to Have Evidence?

Just what is it for a belief to have evidence or grounds? For our purposes, it is for one proposition, namely, the belief, to be justified by one or more other propositions. These other propositions already have some favored status in one’s thinking and hence can be used to gauge or measure the acceptability of other propositions. To cite proposition *B* as evidence for proposition *A*, then, is to indicate that one believes *A* on the basis of *B*, which he already believed. As an example, consider two propositions which provide evidence for a third.

(1) John is a Hoosier, and (2) Nine out of ten Hoosiers can play basketball. Thus, supply evidence for the proposition. (3) Probably, John can play basketball.

Evidence, as we now see, is simply some propositions offered to support other propositions. It is irrational to believe any proposition for which there are no pre-propositions which can be offered as a proper support.

C. Evidence and Foundationalism

As we continue to think about some propositions supporting others, we may ask whether the supporting propositions in turn have support, i.e., whether the evidence itself has evidence. Of course, this is a legitimate question. Many philosophers say this is exactly how knowledge and belief is structured — that there is a series of propositions in which each one is supported by others. In terms of our previous example, the proposition (1) John is a Hoosier, which served as evidence, may, in turn, rest on the propositions, (4) John filed an Indiana tax return last year, (5) John cheers for Indiana University sports, and (6) John frequently hums “Back Home Again

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in Indiana.” These last three propositions now serve as evidence for the preceding one; and each of these three could rest on further propositions, and so on.

However, a number of philosophers think we cannot just keep citing evidence for evidence for evidence indefinitely. As these philosophers see it, the process of citing some propositions to support others must come to an end. We must come to certain propositions for which there is no further evidence. Presumably, these propositions will be the most general, most basic, and most important propositions that all mankind believes. Although philosophers have differed somewhat over which and how many propositions form the foundations of human knowledge, there is much common agreement. The proposed list of such propositions frequently includes: the beliefs that self exists, other persons exist, material objects exist, there has been a past, etc. Such special propositions have been called the *foundations of knowledge*; and the philosophers who view knowledge in this way are called *foundationalists*. Philosophers who seem to hold some form of foundationalism include Aristotle, Aquinas, Thomas Reid, and G.E. Moore; I am also inclined to interpret Clifford as some sort of foundationalist.

When we adopt a *foundationalist view of knowledge* and envision the rest of our beliefs somehow resting upon a secure basis, we can see that no talk of evidence is complete unless it includes one’s *total* set of beliefs reaching all the way down into the foundational beliefs he holds. When we ask about the evidence for or against a proposition, we ultimately want to know how that proposition fares with respect to all of the relevant propositions in one’s storehouse of beliefs and not just with regard to a select few. Belief in a proposition would truly be irrational, we should think, if it did not square with the total evidence available in our set of beliefs.

D. Another Indictment of Religious Belief

It is now easy to see how a critic might use foundationalist thinking to say that religious belief is irrational. He might not want to bother with the weaker criticism that belief in God is disconfirmed by some beliefs in our noetic structure. Instead he might advance the stronger criticism that belief in God is disconfirmed by our total set of beliefs, or at least by the balance of our beliefs. But more pointedly, belief in God is unacceptable in light of the foundational beliefs we hold.

V. Is Religious Belief Contrary to Available Evidence? (second reply)

A. Giving the Critic His Due — Again

The criticism that religious belief is irrational because it does not have support by our overall structure of knowledge cannot be easily dismissed. In fact, there are a number of considerations which force us to take the criticism seriously. For one, the whole idea of belief having foundations is an attractive and often helpful theory. For another thing, it seems true that some religious believers cite weak or irrelevant evidence for their belief in God, making it appear perhaps that there is no better justification. However, the persistent critic will probably not be satisfied with only this mere concession.

B. Foundationalism and Atheism

The zealous critic will want to state his charge in the strongest possible way: that the foundational propositions on which all other human beliefs rest entail that God does *not* exist. The contemporary philosopher, Antony Flew, makes this point in his treatise, *The Presumption of Atheism*. Flew thinks that the common and normal belief structure of mankind is such that it discredits belief in God. Hence, belief in God is irrational. Since the presumption, according to Flew, is in favor of atheism, the heavy burden of proving God's existence rests squarely upon the shoulders of the believer.

C. Difficulties with Foundationalism

The question of whether the atheistic proposition "God does not exist" is included in or implied by the foundations of human belief meets with several difficulties. These difficulties are best understood as specific instances of larger and more general difficulties with foundationalism itself. To begin, there is a problem in specifying exactly which propositions are properly incorporated into the foundations. There is certainly no unanimous agreement about these propositions, and there is clearly no accepted criterion whereby we can detect the right propositions. There are some rough guidelines, to be sure: We suppose these basic beliefs to be relatively few in number, to be entailed by all or some of our other subsidiary beliefs, and so forth. But beyond this, nothing seems very definite.

Now the critic needs for the foundations to be very clear for his accusation to stick. He needs to be able to say that the proposition that God does not exist is *in* the foundations, or at least that it *can be*

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deduced from foundational propositions. But as long as different people might have important disagreements regarding the propositions which they count as basic, the critic cannot move so unilaterally against religious belief. According to the foundations of some people's beliefs, *belief in God* may be perfectly legitimate. Admittedly, according to the foundational beliefs of other people (e.g., Flew) belief in God may be *ruled out*. But this fact about the differences in what we count as basic is merely biographical information and not grounds for saying that belief in God is *irrational* with respect to *the* foundations of human knowledge.

D. God and Foundationalism

We have shown that there is no necessary reason to think belief that God *does not* exist is in the foundations of human knowledge. Now what can we say about whether the belief that God *does* exist is in the foundations? It appears that we must say that belief in God is not included in the foundations any more than it is excluded from them. As far as a typical list of our most basic beliefs goes, neither belief nor disbelief is necessitated. While this may at first sound a bit unsettling to the devout believer, I think that it is really more faithful to the Christian picture of how people come to belief in God. Granted, the Bible says that all men somehow have a consciousness of God or a belief in God. But it does not give us a philosophical analysis of whether this belief is foundational in the technical sense with which we are concerned.

For a proposition to be foundational, we must remember, it can serve as evidence for other propositions, but it is accepted without evidence. There are clear biblical passages which intimate that there are various evidences *for* God's existence, and which men may recognize if they will. These passages can readily be interpreted by the categories we have been using. To say that there is evidence for God's existence is to say that certain propositions about ourselves, the world, and so forth — together with our foundational beliefs — provided support for believing that God exists. This puts the Christian in the position of having to consider those evidences and recommend them to others. *Belief in God*, then, just like *disbelief in God*, cannot simply be a presumption or assumption for which we need have no evidence. But this means that belief in God is *not* in the foundations.

E. The Tradition of Natural Theology

So far, we have shown that belief in God is *not irrational* and that this belief is subject to evaluation by both favorable and unfavorable evidence. But we could press on to argue that belief in God is *positively rational*, that it is in fact confirmed by the evidence. A great many religious believers cite various evidences to support their position: that the world must have had a cause; that someone had to design the complex and orderly universe we have; that they have had a personal experience with the transcendent source of all creation; and so forth. Moreover, there is an inveterate tradition which has sharpened and sophisticated these kinds of arguments so that even the best of minds have had to take notice. This is the tradition of natural theology. The *Time* magazine story cited earlier follows the continuing attempts made by Christian philosophers to give rational support to religious belief.

Now I am not insinuating that such arguments and evidence compel just anyone and everyone who considers them to accept belief in God. No argument in any area of life (religion or otherwise) can do this. Neither am I pretending that there are no arguments and evidences brought against belief in God by thinking persons. There is the problem of evil in the world, the problem of the meaning and verification of theological language, and other arguments which seem to support disbelief.

What I am claiming is the arguments and evidences which thinking believers have developed certainly prevent the critic from stating that religious belief is outright irrational according to the evidence. The state of the debate over God's existence is just not that simple. All thinking people must sift and weigh the evidence for themselves. What thinking believers have done is to point out the legitimacy of sorting out the evidence to support belief in God. Hence, their efforts give us a clear right to say that belief in God's existence is rational.

VI. Vindication of Christian Belief (conclusion)

In closing, what shall we say in response to the primary question which constitutes the title of this paper? Is Christian belief rational? Of course, what we have done here is to look at only one aspect of this complex question, but a very fundamental aspect at that: Is belief in *God's existence* rational? We have seen what philosophers are saying about the rationality of any belief in general and about religious belief in particular.

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We have discovered the accusation that belief in God is irrational has force only when arbitrary or impossible standards of rationality are employed. Under close analysis, we find the most familiar standards of rationality are not capable of being captured in precise formulas. We have found religious belief fares reasonably well on the incomplete but important criteria of rationality that we do have. We have reaffirmed — with some new appreciation — a number of believers abide by a general ethic of rationality and provide impressive evidence for their religious position.

Therefore, I offer an answer to our initial question. There is no necessary reason to think that Christian belief — in so far as it rests on belief in God — is irrational. Instead, there are good grounds for claiming that it is indeed rational.