

Michał Rogalski

Independent researcher

e-mail: michal.f.rogalski@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0001-8225-7026

Clifford's Principle and Its Opponents

Critical Notes on *The Right to Believe. Perspectives in Religious Epistemology*

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Abstract. This paper discusses several selected topics in the debate about the rationality of religious beliefs. Its point of departure is the book *The Right to Believe. Perspectives in Religious Epistemology* edited by Dariusz Łukasiewicz and Roger Pouivet (Ontos Verlag, 2013). In his critical notes on the book, the author emphasizes the importance of research practice in the strict definition of basic concepts used in arguments for the rationality of religious beliefs. At the same time, he analyzes selected examples of imprecise argumentative structures and shows their inconclusiveness. The key example of potential effects of lexical misinterpretation is a critique of Peter Inwagen's counterargument to Bertrand Russell's china pot hypothesis. The author argues that reformulation of Russell's argumentative structure in terms of probability changes the basic assumptions and clashes with Russell's own convictions about vagueness of the term. As a result, the entire Inwagen's argument can be acknowledged as inconclusive. Thus, the inclusion of historical context of the classical philosophical argument is just as important as being precise in semantic analysis. The author illustrates this claim by discussing arguments of Jacek Wojtysiak, Piotr Gutowski and Urszula Żegleń in favor of validity of religious beliefs. Moreover, he uses the self-proposed analytical tools to outline the social and cultural context of the thesis on agnosticism formulated by William Clifford, which is the starting point in the contemporary debate in the philosophy of religion.

Keywords: epistemology of religion; rationality of beliefs; agnosticism; theism; philosophy of religion; William K. Clifford

The book *The Right to Believe. Perspectives in Religious Epistemology* edited by Dariusz Łukasiewicz and Roger Pouivet addresses the issue of rationality of religious beliefs and the problems related to their justification (Łukasiewicz & Pouivet 2013). The work, a collection of 15 scientific articles, is a result of a conference under the same title that took place at Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz in 2010.

The editors made efforts to arrange the texts in such a way that their collection was consistent. Simultaneously, the varied scope of the problems presented by the authors stays visible. For this reason, it is difficult to treat the monograph as presenting a single research perspective on one issue. Rather, we are dealing with a range of philosophical methods used to analyze the many diverse issues that fall within the scope of the epistemology of religion.

Undoubtedly, the authors sympathize with the tradition of analytical philosophy, understood as a set of tools offered by logical and linguistic analysis of philosophical problems. Yet, their essays do not form a coherent story. This is a challenge for the reviewer of the book because on the one hand, each text should be treated separately, and on the other hand, such an approach would be cumbersome for the reader and would make it impossible to present a synthetic perspective.

Therefore, I have decided to analyze only these texts which inspired me the most as the closest to the fundamental problem outlined in the introduction: the matter of ethics and rationality of religious beliefs (Łukasiewicz, Pouivet 2013, p. 7–10; further I will use only page numbers whenever referring to this text). The analysis of all the chapters is beyond the scope of one article. The richness of the volume brings further opportunities for many other critical voices. I will analyze and criticize the arguments presented in the chosen texts as well as carry out a metaphilosophical analysis, where I present and evaluate the argumentation strategies adopted by the authors.

The Right to Be Agnostic and the Right to Believe

The introduction to *The Right to Believe* starts with the classic problem of ethics of religious beliefs, formulated by the English mathematician and philosopher William K. Clifford (Clifford 1879, p. 177–211). His argumentation is well-known thanks to William James' critical response to Clifford's text (James 1897, p. 1–31). The perspective adopted in the book under scrutiny is closer to James' solutions than to the ones proposed by Clifford since the authors make numerous attempts to justify the rationality of the faith. However, it was Clifford who challenged this matter in the first place. He has proposed a convincing rule to justify an agnostic position as withdrawing any judgment in a disputable situation.

Clifford's classic principle sounds as follows: "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence" (Clifford 1879, p. 186). Accordingly, it is not only unreasonable but also unethical, to adopt beliefs that are not sufficiently justified. Clifford merged here three properties of beliefs and considered them as equivalent. These are: (1) having sufficient justification, (2) being rational, and (3) being ethical, morally right.

The authors of the texts collected in *The Right to Believe* address each of these three properties and the related questions:

- (1q) Do religious beliefs have sufficient justification?
- (2q) Are religious beliefs rational?
- (3q) Is holding religious beliefs morally right?

Interestingly, none of the essays collected in the book actually tries to show that religious beliefs meet the strict rule formulated by Clifford. On the contrary, the authors attempt to undermine this equivalence in various ways.

This strategy is justified, especially considering that the Clifford's principle itself has been repeatedly criticized as trivial or imprecise, e.g., because of its vague concept of evidence. An example of such a procedure is Peter van Inwagen's essay (1996), which questions the validity of Clifford's principle. The point of departure for it is a convincing observation of the social fact: rational people of sublime intellectual culture often disagree; they can conduct endless debates exchanging coherent, justified arguments and anyway, at the end of the day, each remains true to their own opinions. Inwagen shows that we must adopt a very broad definition of evidence to explain common ways of accepting and defending beliefs, what in consequence leads to the rejection of the Clifford's principle altogether. By the way, Inwagen also notes that, oddly enough, such a general epistemological principle as Cliffordian is invoked almost exclusively in debates on the epistemology of religion. Showing the inaccuracies contained in Inwagen's argument and a possible different interpretation of its individual steps goes beyond the scope of my essay. I mention Inwagen's critique to emphasize that the Clifford's principle itself is not indisputable. What indicates its important historical role and ongoing significance as an epistemological rule (even if it's regulatory role is limited) is the fact it constantly returns in debates on religious beliefs.

Thus, I would like to present this historical context in which Clifford's speech and text appeared because it helps us to understand the reasons why Clifford formulated his rule in this and no other way.

The beginnings of the essay *The Ethics of Belief* are rooted in a speech given by Clifford at London's Metaphysical Society. This organization was founded in 1869 to promote discussion on religious issues among the elite of British society, increasingly skeptical of religious matters (Madigan 2008, p. 18–21). Due to the inclusive profile of the association, among its members were such intellectuals as Thomas Huxley and W. K. Clifford, both key figures in the development of modern agnostic thinking.

Clifford's speech was motivated by several very vivid controversies of the period. One of them was the discussion about the impact of public admission to unreligious attitude on public morality. Many thinkers, including those who distanced themselves from religion, believed that the overwhelming majority of society may have a problem with critical thinking in religious matters and that a crisis of religious beliefs must lead to a moral crisis within the society. Clifford thought otherwise. He saw the declaration of the lack of faith as an opportunity for moral progress (Madigan 2008, p. 23–25).

Furthermore, the discussion about agnosticism, or about the right not to recognize any religion as one's own, had one important social aspect. In Victorian

society, it was a matter of maintaining a professional career. This was particularly important in academic circles. Until the 1850s, to pass the religious test was mandatory in Cambridge as well as in Oxford for all degrees. In the second half of the century, the fellowship in colleges and participation in the university senate still required public admission of the Anglican faith. This forced many intellectuals of that time to resign from certain positions in the name of honesty towards their views. This applies, for example, to another important philosophical figure of that period, Henry Sidgwick (see Tribe 2017). Although that matter did not concern Clifford personally, as he was a professor at a secular University College of London, it certainly heated the atmosphere of the discussion. It did not only concern problems of worldview but also their very pragmatic consequences.

The situation sketched by Łukasiewicz and Pouivet in the introduction to the book under scrutiny seems like the antipodes of Victorian England. The authors discuss the problem of the right to believe, not to distance oneself from believing, and the circumstances of the debate are much less dramatic. Religious views, as well as the lack thereof, are not a criterion for eligibility for any public office in democratic European countries. Moreover, there are only a few adherents of the thesis, if any, that unreligiousness is synonymous with immorality. Of course, this does not change the seriousness of the problem of rationality and ethics of beliefs.

The Poisonous Allure of Pascal's Wager

Peter van Inwagen's text *Russell's China Teapot* is the first article in the collected volume and can be qualified as an example of a larger group of articles in which analysis of a historical argument is the starting point for presenting an important matter in the area of religious epistemology. A similar approach is used by Michael Bastit in relation to Aristotle (p. 59–72), Cyrille Michon in relation to Thomas Aquinas (p. 73–84), Renata Ziemińska in relation to Sextus Empiric (p. 149–160), and Łukasiewicz in relation to Marian Przełęcki (p. 161–178). In the case of Inwagen, the analysis and criticism of Bertrand Russell's argument, known as "the teapot argument," allows him to present his view on the rationality of religious beliefs.

Inwagen carefully examines Russell's reasoning presented in his 1952 essay *Is There a God?* (Russell 1997, p. 542–548). The most characteristic component of this classical reasoning is the analogy with the teapot orbiting in space between Earth and Mars. Russell uses it to illustrate the thesis that had been made a little earlier: "Many orthodox people speak as though it were the business of skeptics to disprove received dogmas rather than of dogmatists to prove them. This is, of course, a mistake" (Russell 1997, p. 547).

Russell argues that the burden of proof concerning the existence of God should lie with those who accept His existence. The same applies to any other religious dogma. Why? Because, according to Russell, religious dogmas are constructed in such a way as to make it difficult or impossible to rationally overthrow them. It is also worth mentioning that in the mid-20th century, in the culture in which Russell lived, the burden of philosophical argumentation is on the shoulders of the skeptics. It is their duty to overthrowing or questioning religious beliefs because the rationality of such beliefs is widely accepted.

Russell considers that this is an absurd situation and to support his position he proposes the hypothesis of a china teapot orbiting the solar system. He claims that the situation of the theist, who is unhesitatingly accepting the rationality of their faith and demanding that skeptic overturn it, is in fact identical to the hypothetical believer in such cosmical object who would demand to prove them that there is no such thing. The kernel of Russell's argument is that we have no way of verifying such a hypothesis according to the state of technology and science in 1952. Anyone who would accept it without any justification and who, moreover, would expect falsifying evidence that exceeds the possibilities of human knowledge, would be considered as unreasonable.

According to Russell, the same rule applies to all religious dogmatists. They should bear the burden of an argument. The cultural pattern so familiar to Russell, in which religion is something obvious and natural, is completely irrational.

Also, Inwagen comments on this part of the argument, but Russell's conclusion is much more important for his undertaking. Russell states that: "[...] there is no reason to believe any of the dogmas of traditional theology" (Russell 1997, p. 548). Inwagen raises the legitimate question of whether this is a valid conclusion, and in the spirit of Pascal's follower, he decides to reformulate Russell's argumentation using the probability category.

Inwagen only incidentally remarks that to accept his interpretation of Russell's argument it is sufficient to recognize Russell as a mathematician. Anyone aware of this fact would be able to resist the power of mathematical reformulation (p. 12). Without other justifications, Inwagen assumes that the expression "there is no reason" can be equated with "it's highly improbable" (p. 13). Following this path, he wonders what probability should be considered sufficient to properly claim that "it is the reason to believe in such a proposition." This question is not answered specifically, but Inwagen tries to convince the reader that neither the thesis about the existence of God nor the one about the non-existence of God has sufficient probability to be accepted as legitimate. Furthermore, it is not possible to make a convincing assessment of such a probability, so Russell's argumentation should be considered non-conclusive because it is based on some ulterior motive that justifies the thesis that there is no reason to believe in God. Inwagen's argument is funda-

mentally connected with a category of probability which, sufficiently high, would justify a given thesis.

According to Inwagen, Russell's analogy with the china teapot is incorrect because in this case, it is possible to estimate the probability of this teapot orbiting in space as extremely low which is not possible for the thesis of the existence of God. Therefore, the analogy is incorrect and based on some ulterior assumption and erroneous use of the probability scale.

The problem with Inwagen's argumentation, however, is that he uses the probability category for discussion with Russell's argumentation in the first place. This is inconsistent with how Russell himself treated this concept, and he expressed an explicit opinion in this matter. He considered probability to be an unclear and ambivalent category as well as he acknowledged the use of it in philosophical argumentation as ineffective in the 1930 essay *Probability and Fact*:

[...] the concept of probability is wrapped in obscurity and affords indeed a chief scandal in modern logic. Nobody knows what is meant by saying that an event is improbable; nobody knows in what circumstances we are justified in assuming that in improbable event will not happen. At every moment the most wildly improbable events occur. Why do we accept some of these quite calmly, while others cause amazement? Nobody really knows. I have no satisfactory theory to offer, and the extent of what I have to say in the present article is to make people wary of all theories that depend upon this rather hazy notion of probability (Russell 1996, p. 98).

Here, Russell's position is the unambiguous position. He questions the use of the probability category in philosophical considerations. Of course, Russell sees its usefulness as a concept and mechanism in a theory of frequency. Probability is a legitimate statistical tool that helps one estimate the frequency of events that one knows from one's everyday life. However, Russell would certainly not agree with Inwagen's use of the phrase "it's highly improbable" as a way of interpreting his own "there is no reason to believe."

Inwagen ignores the broader context of Russell's conceptual frame. Therefore, he misses the proper meaning of the argumentation in the essay he is discussing with. Russell does not discuss how probable God is to exist. He does not apply this category to the question Inwagen proposes in his chapter. The concept of probability does not apply here at all. Russell argues that the existence of God does not have satisfying epistemic justification if any at all. There is no sufficient reason to believe in it, so it is unreasonable. One can accept such existence as fact but for some other reasons than rational. If someone wants to claim that it is rational behavior, one is obliged to justify their position and present a reason for that.

What can such a reason, and therefore epistemic justification, be? I believe that the scientific proof that meets the criteria of experimental confirmation, verifiabil-

ity, and intersubjectivity adopted for natural sciences, is not the only answer. Here, the reason should be understood much more broadly and not so restrictively. The reason is proof in a broader philosophical sense: coherent reasoning which would start from uncontroversial or at least frequently accepted premises, and lead to a validation of the thesis that God exists. If such proof could be given, it would be rational to accept the thesis.

Such an understanding of rationality seems acceptable in the light of Russell's other writings on religious philosophy. The 1952 text is neither his first nor the only statement about religion. Essay *Is There a God?* is only one from several other texts. Above all, the reasoning that overturns all the Christian dogmas are included in Russell's autobiography. The claim that there is no reason to believe in God is therefore not made for the first time but is preceded by Russell's long philosophical work on rejecting the arguments for the rationality of Christianity. The argument of evil, which is the only one to appear in the 1952 essay (Inwagen complains about it), is not the only one that occurs but is an exemplary and representative one. Its choice will seem much more justified given that just seven years earlier the Second World War ended, an event which showed that mankind can transcend the boldest imaginings of cruelty.

The fact that Russell referred only to Christian religious dogmas obviously calls into question the universality of this reasoning. Nevertheless, there are good reasons to recognize its legitimacy for Christian theology.

Inwagen's use of probability category goes completely against the logic of Russell's argument. Firstly, Inwagen proposes a category that is unacceptable to Russell. Moreover, Russell convincingly argues that the probability category is ambiguous and vague. Probability is the only mechanism that allows Inwagen to reject the correctness of the analogy between God and a china teapot orbiting in space.

It is also worth noting here that Russell's reasoning is of a completely different type than Pascal's wager and Russell has no intention of resolving the problem of the existence of God. The China teapot argument shows only that the burden of proof of the existence of God lies with the theists. According to Russell, there is nothing controversial when someone refrains from accepting the existence of an object which one does not deal with in everyday experience and can not give any arguments in favor of its existence. The agnostic attitude is rational because of its minimalism: it does not require any additional assumptions. If Russell's mathematical skills were to be invoked somewhere, it is here. Logical simplicity and elegance are some of his rhetorical advantages.

The failure of Inwagen as well as other authors who modernize historical problems of philosophy come from their negligence in analyzing the broader cultural context of one's thought. The other reason is the resignation from any attempts to reconstruct the philosophical argumentation in the light of the author's other texts. This is the major weakness of the perspective adopted in *The Right to Believe*.

However, it is not a problem of this particular book, but the broader issue of the limitations rooted in the analytical method as such. If you accept as possible the purely structural analysis of the philosophical argument, without taking into account the socio-cultural context in which the author functioned, you will neglect one of the essential features of language and thinking. The concepts used by people are not universal and unchangeable keys to the universe of thought. They can provide answers to questions and disputes of the historical period in which the author used to live. Moreover, a given author may have returned to certain problems several times which is not at all strange if these were relevant issues for them.

One could argue in favor of an analytical approach in such a way that neglecting the context makes it possible to focus on the kernel of philosophical activity, namely: the content of the arguments and reasoning forms, ultimately analyzed aside from temporal causes and conditions. This would be the case if the language we use would be a strict, formal, and well-designed. Unfortunately, the context is what determines the proper understanding of the sentence and the argumentation. The context makes it possible to set the boundary conditions for different interpretations of one's thought.

Also, the pragmatic as well as semantic analysis of concepts used by a particular author is fundamental for the analytical method. Perhaps it is even crucial because analytical philosophers often use the tool of "reasoning translation" and interpret studied arguments by clearer and more understandable categories. Ludwig Wittgenstein suggests reasons for this procedure in § 90 of his *Philosophical Investigations*: "Our investigation is therefore a grammatical one. Such an investigation sheds light on our problem by clearing misunderstandings away" (Wittgenstein 2009, p. 47e). If the analysis leads to a misunderstanding, it misses its goal.

Let us get back to Inwagen's reasoning. Even if we ignore Russell's critique of the probability category and consider that it is not enough to give it up, we still need to consider whether it is possible to apply it in the dispute over the existence of God. Here, Inwagen chooses a peculiar argumentation scheme. On the one hand, the probability is used here many times and is an important part of the reasoning, but on the other hand, the author does not try to calculate its value (exact or approximate) for the existence of God. Nevertheless, many times he steps in a way of the tradition of Pascal's approach and suggests that the starting point when it comes to consideration of God's existence is a fifty-fifty situation: The existence of God is as likely as His non-existence. But is this legitimate?

Inwagen analogies to drawing a card from a deck or to throwing several numbers of dices undoubtedly have their appeal. But is it possible to juxtapose a potential draw of a red or black card from the deck with the existence or non-existence of God? In the case of cards or dices, we know the properties of these objects, the number of cards in a deck, and the number of walls on the dice. The frequency of occurrence of particular layouts is a mathematical problem, a problem of the fre-

quency of occurrence of certain phenomena in a system where rules and components are known. The universe in which God exists or does not exist, does not resemble the situations mentioned above. Here, we do not know the essential conditions for estimating probability. Limiting ourselves to classical Aristotelian logic, in which the principle of the excluded middle makes both sentences "God exists" and "God does not exist" equally probable, actually tells us only that we know nothing about the potential existence of God. The same goes for dwarves, unicorns, and dragons.

Risky conceptual games

Piotr Gutowski's text *To Be in Truth or not to Be Mistaken?* starts with a detailed discussion of James' reasoning from the essay *The Will to Believe* (James 1897, p. 1–31). Gutowski reconstructs James' reasoning in an attempt to show how it wrongly weakens the difference between agnosticism and atheism. According to Gutowski, James thus loses the opportunity to draw interesting consequences from the epistemological characteristics of three different positions: theism, atheism, and agnosticism.

Gutowski reconstructs the subsequent points of James' argumentation. He aptly demonstrates its crucial point: the recognition that the question concerning the existence of God has a distinctive epistemic status. James attributes three properties to the theistic hypothesis: it is forced, living, and momentous. This means that to decide if God exists or not is important, unavoidable, and has far-reaching consequences for all aspects of human life. This kind of dilemma cannot be left undecided. In consequence, James claims, firstly, that it is possible to answer such a question without sufficient evidence and, secondly, he considers the agnostic position to be tantamount to an atheistic solution of the dilemma. This argumentation allows James to recognize the impossibility of a noble agnostic stance towards existentially significant problems (in his language it is described as a "genuine option"). Equally impossible is to refrain from resolving such questions.

For unclear reasons, Gutowski recognizes that there is another possible interpretation of agnosticism which would be in accordance with Jamesian conceptual frame. In this second interpretation, agnosticism is a meta-position in metaphysical dispute, a kind of "non-belief," which allows perceiving both the theist and atheist as believers (p. 91–92). I do not see how this interpretation would be consistent with Jamesian categories. If we want to assume that the dilemma related to the existence of God is a genuine option, no meta-position can be held. Because this would mean that the question about the existence of God is not forced but avoidable (James 1897, p. 3), which in a result means it is not important enough to force an answer.

This remark formulated by Gutowski has no direct consequences for his analyses of James' thought but it shows that he uses categories in an imprecise way. A very similar conceptual inaccuracy can be found in the conclusion of the text. There, Gutowski abandons his scholastic reconstruction of James' position in the epistemology of religion and tries to interpret it using two simple behavioral principles. Thus, the controversy about the existence of God presented by James comes down to two competing directives: "Look for the truth!" and "Avoid mistakes!". When one deals with the genuine option, the search for the truth is supposed to be a much better option and more valuable than avoiding mistakes. However, the problem here is that the rules formulated as above are not separable. They are two formulations of the same epistemic principle. Avoiding mistakes, which means avoiding falsehood or false beliefs, is nothing other than searching for the truth and valuing it.

The difference between agnosticism and atheism (treated by James as one position toward faith) and theism lies elsewhere. These two attitudes have different behavioral consequences. James has linked the answer to the question about God to its consequences in one's life and moral conduct. He even made them an argument for the need to answer religious questions and proved the impossibility of taking an agnostic position. However, he underestimated other possible consequences of a pragmatic approach. The way of resolving an important problem may be connected with the psychological predispositions of an individual and their particular life experience. To comment on Gutowski's argument with an example would mean that one may be more inclined toward being agnostic if one repeatedly burned one's hand as a child instead of avoiding accidents that result from child curiosity about the world's functioning. When a person was taught from their experience to be cautious in small matters, it is possible that the modest principle "Avoid mistakes!" will speak to them more than the bodacious "Look for the truth!".

If James' approach actually links the resolution of a theistic dilemma with a type of personality or individual experience, it may also mean that a specific resolution in matters of religious faith may have little to do with the criteria of rationality and what we consider knowledge. Religious dilemmas may be existentially significant but this does not yet mean that their various solutions are rational.

Similarly bold use of concepts is made in the text by Jacek Wojtysiak (p. 103–113). There, he analyzes two types of apologetic arguments for the credibility of Christianity: (1) rationalistic which he defines as *a priori*, and (2) empirical which he calls *a posteriori*. Here, he makes full use of the analytical work done by Richard Swinburne (2008) and confines himself to one *a posteriori* and one *a priori* argument, just as Swinburne explained them. In quoting the arguments expressed by the English researcher, Wojtysiak briefly refers to their fundamental weak-

nesses. This is an efficient but reproducible part of the essay. The arguments are only briefly summarized and do not address much of the possible doubts.

In the last part of his text, Wojtysiak, still following Swinburne, puts forward the thesis that a possible way to overcome the classic accusations of apologetic empirical and rationalistic arguments is to create some kind of mixed argumentation. The premise in favor of such a solution is the criticism of the distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori*, which has started from Willard Van Orman Quine's famous essay on the two dogmas of empiricism (1951) and continues until today (see Casullo 2015). The followers of this distinction are accused of a lack of coherence, arguing in various ways that knowledge, or sentences we take for granted, cannot be purely empirical or purely analytical. Wojtysiak concludes that the same could be applied to the arguments for the credibility of Christianity and that since *a priori* and *a posteriori* arguments are not possible in their pure form, mixed arguments should be created.

This is the wrong conclusion. From the epistemological critique of the distinction between analytical and synthetic results only that in both kinds of apologetic arguments, one can find elements of theory (*a priori*) and empirical evidence (*a posteriori*). This does not mean that these arguments can be freely mixed together. They represent two completely different thinking strategies. On the one hand, in the case of empirical arguments, it is a matter of adopting as little controversial experimental data as possible, which is generally accepted, so that the arguments built on their basis are independent of the worldviews of the thinkers. This is completely different for analytical arguments that are based on the assumption that there are some non-controversial metaphysical theses that every thinking person accepts 'naturally.' On the basis of these non-controversial notions, arguments are being built on the rationality of Christianity (or just on the existence of God), independent of historical data.

These two completely different economies of thought. The critique of the distinction between analytical and synthetic does not reduce the difference between them. They are intended to prove the credibility of Christianity from different points of view, each time starting from the narrowest possible group of premises. They cannot be easily combined by mixing empirical and theoretical premises. On the contrary, Quine's critique and its continuation should rather be a cautionary tale on the possibility of each of these strategies applied individually. In fact, it is doubtful, if one accepts the unreasonableness of distinguishing between *a priori* and *a posteriori*, that the empirical premises do not contain theoretical elements: ways of interpreting historical data, a methodology of researching sources, understanding of the relationship between the text and the writing subject, especially difficult if a text has more than one author. Therefore, the apologetic arguments *a posteriori* demand additional critical verification, and the possibility of a *a priori* argumentation remains in question.

The Struggle with Clifford's Approach

Clifford's Principle of "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything on insufficient evidence" can be interpreted twofold. Firstly, in the weak interpretation, it is only an implication: if you have an unreasonable belief, you act immorally. Secondly, in the strong interpretation, it is a material equivalence: all legitimate beliefs are ethical, and all ethical beliefs are also legitimate.

Such a strong interpretation is controversial and in contrast with Clifford's original goals but it preserves the important link between ethics and rationality of the beliefs. Such interpretation makes it possible to convincingly justify the rationality of the beliefs if their moral righteousness was already proved.

Urszula Żegleń presents one possible type of such reasoning in her text *Religious Beliefs in the Face of Rationalism*. Her argumentation consists of two parts. In the first part, she presents her own model of the rational subject and shows the relationship between rational thinking and religious matters, while in the second part, she constructs a model of the believer's experience, limited to Christian tradition. The second model is intended to indicate the basic features of religious experience and constitutes a starting point for arguing for the moral value of religious faith.

The problem which appears in this reasoning is that the categories of rationality, justification, and ethics have permeated it from the very beginning. None of these categories is original and primary in relation to the others, and they all appear in the premise, as well as in conclusions.

It is worth looking first at the model of rationality proposed by Żegleń. It is made up of four components. The rational subject has four distinctive features: (1) "the capacity for discursive thinking (especially to make inferences and use them in different reasonings)," (2) "the ability to justify his beliefs in the light of standards which are epistemically valid," (3) "the ability to communicate in language;" and (4) "the capacity for reflection" (p. 115–116). The most controversial is the point (4). Reflection is further defined as "awareness and control of all the acts and capacities that make up reasoning and communication and is the prerequisite to any kind of belief assessment" (p. 116). According to this definition, it is therefore the awareness of the entity that knows that it is undertaking the conclusions and checking that they are correct. The possibility of checking the correctness of reasoning is already properly covered by point (1) of the rational subject model. Since the subject has the "capacity for discursive thinking," it follows that they are able to distinguish between correct and incorrect reasoning and to recognize well-structured reasoning. Therefore, the reflection is only the self-awareness of the subject who is aware that they are acting rationally. In this model, it is an important but technical characteristic and it is not clear why Żegleń attributes some "metaphysical aspect" to reflection (p. 116) and on what basis the modest model of rationality would result in the subject's propensity to take metaphysical questions.

I think it is an unconscious imposition of empirical knowledge (that people pose metaphysical questions) on a model that presents only methods of behavior and in no way determines what subject matter the reasoning is about. A rational subject, in Žegleń's viewpoint, may as well make conclusions about the weather, protein structure, other people's behavior, the existence of God, and the structure of the universe. The rationality of their behavior depends on whether the rational subject follows the rules in their reasoning, and not on the matter of that reasoning. In spite of this, Žegleń puts forward the thesis that religious reasoning is rational, which, in the light of the model she proposes, is difficult to understand otherwise than trivially: reasoning about anything can be rational if it is carried out in accordance with the principles of rational thinking. This does not yet say anything about whether it is justified to accept the truthfulness of religious beliefs.

This issue is dealt with in the second part of the text, in which Žegleń presents an epistemic model of the experience of faith. Its main features are that a believer has (1) an "intimate and personal relation to God as a person;" and (2) he "trusts God completely." In addition, this relationship to God has consequences for the believer's conduct and changes their "perspective of life." The relationship to God proposed by this model is a separate kind of experience of the believer and at the same time can be treated as the evidence for their beliefs (p. 120).

Without additional justifications, Žegleń introduces here a self-evident type of knowledge, which not only does not require but even does not provide an opportunity to create a justification for its own truthfulness. Such religious experience is also completely unverifiable and is not available intersubjectively because it concerns the personal relationship of a single believer with God.

The question should be asked about the compatibility of this type of knowledge with the model of rational cognition which Žegleń herself formulated earlier. Is such self-evident knowledge compatible with epistemically valid standards of justification of beliefs? Žegleń answers affirmatively: "From the epistemological point of view this very widely understood experience of faith can also be treated as a very specific kind of testifying or justification of religious beliefs" (p. 124). However, it does not prove that faith is a form of knowledge. Her model only shows that it is an essential existential experience for believers. However, the existential significance is not an obvious criterion for knowledge.

In fact, Žegleń herself states that: "The rational operations of our mind in cognition are not sufficient to grasp the content of faith (without grace) and to understand it" (p. 123). Nevertheless, she considers faith to be a form of understanding: not rational but existentially relevant and reasonable. What does it mean to be reasonable and not rational at the same time? Probably, that being reasonable is a more primary and essential category than being rational. However, Žegleń does not precise what this relevant and primordial category of reasonability may be. All we know is that existential relevance is sufficient justification for beliefs, and this

could be regarded as ethical property, because if something is an important part of human life and experience, to which human devotes time and attention, then it should be regarded as morally good. Here, Clifford's Principle is reversed, and the rationality fell victim to it: the rationality does not have to be a distinctive feature of all the beliefs that people accept.

A different approach to Clifford's principle is presented by John Greco who is trying to extend the concept of evidence in such a way as to recognize religious testimony as a rational form of justification for a belief. Religious testimony as justification for beliefs is exposed to a whole series of skeptical accusations. The most serious is that because religious experiences and testimonies can be contradictory, they cannot be considered valid. The multiplicity of religious traditions is empirical proof that such testimonies cannot be treated as a form of knowledge.

Greco tries to discuss with skepticism, arguing that in different everyday situations we accept testimonial evidence, and our beliefs do not always meet strict epistemological criteria of correctness (32). So, not to undermine the sense of the whole range of human actions, Greco proposes to accept that such situations simply happen, and the more important philosophical challenge is to formulate the boundary conditions for the credibility and correctness of testimonial evidence rather than engage in their critique based from the skeptical position. Therefore, he assumes a position that he calls "anti-skeptic methodology" (33). It potentially provides an opportunity to describe many human behaviors that we commonly consider to be rational and to show the sources of that rationality. Greco is creating this model in the second part of his text.

A serious problem arises in the third part when he tries to use this cognitive model to disprove the skeptical arguments against religious testimony. This is a classic error of *petitio principii*. Since the motivation for building his model was systemic anti-skepticism and the recognition that focusing on skeptical arguments does not allow us to interpret common human experience well, the conceptual framework that he has created acknowledges as axiomatic something that skepticism tries to deny, namely the credibility of testimonial evidence. Therefore, it cannot be applied to discussions with skepticism.

In place of conclusion

In § 19 of the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein notes: "And to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life" (Wittgenstein 2009, p. 11e). Language is a reflection of a certain form of life, and the way of life is imprinted on the language used. This can be seen in most of the essays collected in *The Right to Believe*,

both written by academic believers and academic non-believers. More interesting changes in the way language is used are related to the situation of believers.

Religious commitment leads to the operation on language. It is processed in such a way to contain and express the experiences that are important for the subject speaking, especially religious experiences. This cannot always be done in a completely clear way. For concepts can lead astray, as Wittgenstein also noted in a previous paragraph: "Our language can be regarded as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, of houses with extensions from various periods, and all this surrounded by a multitude of new suburbs with straight and regular streets and uniform houses" (Wittgenstein 2009, p. 11e). You can be lost in a city, especially in an ancient one. Wittgenstein's metaphor can imagine both: the lack of awareness that historical context is important and the risky games on concepts used. Despite the weaknesses of the texts in the volume under scrutiny, they are relevant voices in the discussion about the rationality and ethics of religious beliefs. The perspective presented in the book shows that Russell's argument that the burden of justification of religious beliefs stays with the believer. After half a century it became an obvious point of departure in a philosophical debate.

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