"What's (Not) Wrong with Evidentialism?"

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Abstract: Evidentialism can roughly be understood as the idea that in order for a belief to be justified, the subject must have some awareness of what makes the belief true. Recently, evidentialism has fallen on hard times, especially in discussions about the justification of religious beliefs. With the advance of externalist theories of epistemic justification, such as Plantinga's reformed epistemology, it is commonplace to denounce evidentialist standards for justified beliefs and to accept that one's religious beliefs are "properly basic" without requiring any awareness of the evidential basis for that belief. In other words, anti-evidentialists endorse that people can be justified in believing that God exists or that Jesus rose from dead, for example, without any awareness as to why those beliefs are true. In this paper, I will contend that evidentialism is still a viable option. To this end, I will point out misconceptions about evidentialism, especially concerning its requirement for awareness. By distinguishing conceptual from non-conceptual awareness, many of the objections against evidentialism can be dispelled. In conclusion, I intend to show that evidentialism remains a serious contender (if not the most plausible account) in religious epistemology.

Anti-evidentialism seems to be all the rage these days. Based on a perusal of recent works in religious epistemology, one gets the distinct impression that evidentialism is passé; it upholds enlightenment standards that are antithetical to Christian thought and practice; at best, it provides standards that are achievable only for scholars that can never be attained by unlettered believers in the pew of a typical Baptist church. My contention is that these kinds of complaints miss the mark, and evidentialism remains a viable option for Christians. To this end, I aim to show in this paper that evidentialism presents no obstacle for ordinary folks to justify their religious beliefs because of the possibility of justifying beliefs on the basis of non-conceptual awareness. I shall proceed, first, by characterizing what evidentialism is. Next, I shall develop the principal objection to evidentialism under consideration. In the third section, I answer the objection by distinguishing conceptual and non-conceptual awareness. The paper concludes by responding to potential objections.

I. Evidentialism

Here's a rough account of evidentialism: evidentialism is the position that in order for a belief to be justified, the subject must have some awareness[1] of the belief's truth.[2] This awareness can be either a direct (non-inferential) or an indirect (inferential) awareness of the belief's truth. Let's start with an example of the latter case, indirect awareness. Suppose that I am sitting in my office, and I hear footsteps in the hallway, and then I come to believe (on the basis of my belief that I am hearing footsteps in the hallway) that someone is walking down the hallway. The justification for this belief is afforded through my awareness of other beliefs and the inferential relations that hold between them. In other words, I am justified in believing that someone is walking down the hallway on the basis of being aware that I believe that someone is walking down the hallway and that this makes it very likely that it is true that someone is walking down the hallway. For an example of having direct awareness that some belief is true, consider the case of having an excruciating headache. In this circumstance the subject holds the belief that he is in pain. This belief is not inferred from any other belief, and to imagine that he does so is comical. (E.g., "I'm grimacing and moaning, and typically when I'm grimacing and moaning like this I'm in pain; therefore, I must be in pain.") Yet, to say that the subject does not infer his belief from other beliefs does not mean that his belief is held without any awareness from the subject's perspective that it is true.

So, what's supposed to be wrong with evidentialism? After all, the alternative initially sounds ridiculous to most people, namely, that some beliefs can be justified without the subject's

[1] Strictly speaking, the awareness should be of the belief's truth or verisimilitude (truth-likeliness). I have omitted the longer phrase because it is a cumbersome detail that adds too many additional words throughout the paper. If you are attentive to these sorts of details, then keep in mind that whenever I write of being aware of the truth of a belief, you should include this additional qualification as well.

[2] For a fuller statement of what I mean by "awareness" and "justification," see John M. DePoe, "Bergmann's Dilemma and Internalism's Escape," *Acta Analytica* 27, no. 4 (2012): 409–23.

having any awareness whatsoever that the belief is true. There are, of course, many different reasons why some scholars have resorted to such an extreme view of epistemic justification. For instance, there are some purely epistemological considerations, such as that the standards for evidentialism are self-defeating or that any awareness requirements for justification cannot ultimately be satisfied.[3] In this paper, I'm not going to address these purely epistemic objections, although I have addressed them elsewhere.[4] For my present purposes I shall focus on one type of objection to evidentialism that is based on the applicability and implications of using the standards of evidentialism in philosophy of religion for ordinary folks who do not have special training in philosophy or theology. What is this objection and who holds it?

II. The Objection

The typical way this objection is voiced is, first, with the assumption that ordinary Christians are obviously and uncontroversially epistemically justified in holding their religious beliefs. Next, objectors note that such people are typically not in any way appropriately aware of anything that puts them in a position to see that their beliefs are true. The conclusion drawn by these critics, then, is that the evidentialist standard must be misplaced.

I first encountered this sort of objection as an undergraduate when I read Kelly James Clark's book, *Return to Reason*. He closes the book with this reflection about his grandmother's justification for believing that God exists:

[3] Both of these problems have been advanced with great popularity due to Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 94–99; the second objection is best exemplified by Michael Bergmann, *Justification without Awareness: A Defense of Epistemic Externalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[4] John M. DePoe, "In Defense of Classical Foundationalism: A Critical Evaluation of Plantinga's Argument That Classical Foundationalism Is Self-Refuting," *South African Journal of Philosophy* 26, no. 3 (2007): 245–51; DePoe, "Bergmann's Dilemma and Internalism's Escape."

> My grandmother has never heard of the cosmological and ontological arguments or the argument from design; even if she had, it is not clear that she would immediately resonate to them or scintillate to their sophisticated criticisms. …
>
> If evidentialism is true, then my grandmother has a noetic defect—she believes without sufficient propositional evidence. I prefer to look at the matter in my grandmother's favor. My grandmother does not have a noetic defect—hence evidentialism is false. It is difficult for me to imagine that God has put her in a cognitive situation which makes her belief in God positively irrational.[5]

Alvin Plantinga in his influential essay, "Reason and Belief in God," gives the following example to illustrate what he takes to be an obvious defect of evidentialism's standards for justifying one's belief in God:

> What about the 14-year-old theist brought up to believe in God in a community where everyone believes? This 14-year-old theist, we may suppose, does not believe in God on the basis of evidence. He has never heard of the cosmological, teleological, or ontological arguments; in fact no one has *ever* presented him with any evidence at all. And although he has often been told about God, he does not take that testimony as evidence; he does not reason thus: everyone around here says God loves us and cares for us; most of what everyone around here says is true; so probably *that is* true. Instead, he simply believes what he is taught.[6]

W. Jay Wood makes a similar point in his book, *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous*.

> [S]eeking secure justification for religious belief through argument … severely restricts the number of people who can actively participate in the task of justifying even minimal theism. … Perhaps a few epistemologists are up to this task—and that is a claim on which reasonable minds differ—but the rest of us are left in the lurch. How much more then, when we enter the realm of supernatural belief, shall ordinary believers be deprived of rational belief, if before they can be said to believe justifiably in God's existence they must first successfully see and appreciate the grounds of their belief. Even if it is possible to prove God's existence—and this too is roundly disputed—it is not a task to which most persons are suited by aptitude, training or leisure time.[7]

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[5] Kelly James Clark, *Return to Reason: A Critique of Enlightenment Evidentialism and a Defense of Reason and Belief in God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 157–158.

[6] Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 33.

[7] W. Jay Wood, *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 157.

The anti-evidentialist movement is not restricted only to those who are skeptical about the likelihood of producing sufficient evidence for the existence of God. For instance, William Lane Craig is among those who oppose evidentialism. Craig, borrowing from Martin Luther, claims that evidentialism is guilty of the "magisterial use of reason."[8] He identifies four specific problems that this position faces. First, he claims that the evidentialist approach to religious epistemology denies "the right of the Christian faith to all who lack the ability, time, or opportunity to understand and assess the arguments and evidence."[9] Second, he claims that "those who have been presented with more cogent arguments against Christian theism than for it would have a just excuse before God for their unbelief."[10] His third criticism of evidentialism is that it creates an elite group of intellectuals, "a priesthood of philosophers and historians," who stand in a position to "dictate to the masses of humanity whether or not it is rational for them to believe in the gospel."[11] Finally, he declares that if evidentialism is true, then "[f]aith is subjected to the vagaries of reason and the shifting sands of evidence, making Christian faith rational in one generation and irrational in the next."[12] At the root of all of these criticisms is that evidentialism places requirements on ordinary people for the justification of their beliefs in the great truths of Christianity that is too severe for them to meet.

The basic objection, then, is that evidentialism places epistemic standards on ordinary Christians that make it nearly impossible for them to justify their religious beliefs. Indeed, one

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[8] William Lane Craig, "Classical Apologetics," in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 37.

[9] Ibid.; this point is reiterated in William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 50.

[10] Craig, "Classical Apologetics," 37; Craig makes the same point in Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 50–51.

[11] Craig, "Classical Apologetics," 37.

[12] Ibid.

popular philosophy of religion textbook actually defines evidentialism as the position that states most people hold their religious beliefs in an irrational way, while only an elite few philosophers are capable of having justified beliefs about religion.[13] Consequently, these critics maintain that there must be some other, less stringent, way for ordinary believers to be justified in holding their beliefs about the Christian faith.[14]

III. Conceptual and Non-Conceptual Awareness

So, many critics have objected to evidentialism on the grounds that its standards make the common man's beliefs about the Christian faith virtually unattainable, and since the common man is obviously justified in holding these beliefs, then evidentialism has the wrong standards for justifying these beliefs. There are three possible ways to respond to this objection. The first way is to deny the supposedly obvious truth that all ordinary believers (ranging from fourteen-year-olds to grandmas) are justified in holding their Christian beliefs. Second, evidentialists can maintain that their standards for epistemic justification are just fine and that ordinary folks are fully capable of meeting them. The third way is to combine the other two approaches: we can reject both the claim that obviously all believers are justified in holding their Christian beliefs and that the evidentialist's epistemic standards are not as unattainable as their critics suppose. My strategy is the third, although I believe that the overwhelming weight of my response depends on showing how ordinary believers are capable of meeting the epistemic standards of

[13] Michael Peterson et al., *Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 147–148.

[14] Here are a few other places where this line of objection is raised: Ronald Nash, *Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 94–95; Kenneth Boa and Robert M. Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001), 152; Michael J. Murray and Michael C. Rea, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 110–111.

evidentialism. To do this, however, I must first make a distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual awareness.

Conceptual and non-conceptual awareness denote different ways in which a subject is aware of something. In conceptual awareness, a subject employs concepts. The paradigm case of conceptual awareness is belief. Thus, when *S* believes that *p*, then *S* has an awareness about *p* by virtue of holding the belief that *p* is the case. We typically express conceptual awareness in terms of the subject's being aware *that* something is the case. Non-conceptual awareness, on the other hand, refers to a type of awareness that is not mediated through concepts. Cases of non-conceptual awareness occur when a subject is directly aware of some object with no mediating awareness of any sort, including concepts.[15] Non-conceptual awareness is typically expressed in terms like the subject is aware *of* something's being the case. A fish,[16] for example, is aware *of* its being in pain, but most likely a fish is not aware *that* it is in pain (because fish are not able to form concepts). Thus, a fish can have non-conceptual awareness of its pain states, while not having conceptual awareness that its pain states are a certain way. We can also distinguish cases where a subject is conceptually aware that something is the case and non-conceptually aware of something's being the case when the subject lacks the ability to form certain concepts. For instance, a person can be aware *of* a mauve hendecagon without being aware *that* the object of his awareness is mauve or a hendecagon (suppose that the person lacks these fine-grained concepts).

While there are paradigmatic examples of conceptual awareness (like believing), direct acquaintance seems like the closest thing to a paradigm case of non-conceptual awareness. The

[15] Proving that such states of awareness must exist is the subject of my manuscript, "An Indirect Proof for Direct Acquaintance," which is currently under review.

[16] The fish example works for me. If you find it plausible to think fish have conceptual awareness, move further down the animal kingdom until you find an animal that you find to be a plausible case, such as a worm.

propagation of direct acquaintance in contemporary philosophy is undoubtedly due to the influential work of Bertrand Russell. Russell writes that a person is acquainted with an object when he stands in a "direct cognitive relation to the object, *i.e*. when [the subject is] directly aware of the object itself."[17] Elsewhere, he writes "we have *acquaintance* with anything of which we are directly aware, without the intermediary of any process of inference or any knowledge of truths."[18] Richard Fumerton characterizes direct acquaintance as an unanalyzable, basic, *sui generis* relation that can obtain between a self and a thing, property, or fact.[19] For a person to be directly acquainted with some object, then, is for that person to have an immediate, non-inferential, non-conceptual awareness of the object.

While direct acquaintance itself is not a kind of knowledge or justified belief, it can serve as the basis for non-inferential or immediate knowledge. Following Fumerton's lead,[20] I take non-inferential knowledge to consist of a person's having three direct acquaintances: direct acquaintance with the fact that *p*, direct acquaintance with the thought that *p*, and direct acquaintance with the correspondence that holds between the fact that *p* and the thought that *p*. When the subject has these three direct acquaintances, he is aware of everything one needs for his belief to be true on the correspondence theory of truth. The subject is aware of the truth-bearer (the thought that *p*), the truth-maker (the fact of *p*), and the correspondence relation (the correspondence between the thought that *p* and the fact of *p*). Thus, on the account I am endorsing, for a person to have knowledge by acquaintance that he is having a headache, for

[17] Bertrand Russell, "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 11 (1910): 108.

[18] Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, ed. John Perry, Reprint (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 46.

[19] Richard A. Fumerton, *Metaepistemology and Skepticism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995), 74.

[20] Ibid., 73–79.

example, the person must be directly acquainted with (i) the thought that *I am having a headache*, (ii) the headache itself, and (iii) the correspondence that holds between the thought and the headache.

IV. Why Ordinary Folks May Be Aware of More than Philosophers Realize

So, how does this distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual awareness help the evidentialist? In brief, it helps because it recognizes that often people have some awareness of their reasons for believing something to be true even if they are not conceptually aware of their reasons. A significant flaw in the anti-evidentialist objection under consideration is that it assumes that if people are not conceptually aware of their reasons for believing something, then they must believe without any reasons whatsoever. Once we see why this is mistaken, it will be easier to see how an evidentialist can say that ordinary people may be justified in holding their religious beliefs on the basis of reasons of which the person is non-conceptually aware.

There are a number of experiences that we have all had that confirm the way in which people can have non-conceptual awareness of their reasons for believing something else. The kinds of experiences I have in mind are similar to those captured by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's description of Sherlock Holmes in *The Study of Scarlet*.[21] In the second chapter, "The Science of Deduction," Holmes reveals how he was able to deduce that Watson had been an Army Doctor who had served in Afghanistan:

> From long habit the train of thoughts ran so swiftly through my mind, that I arrived at the conclusion *without being conscious of intermediate steps*. There were such steps, however. The train of reasoning ran, 'Here is a gentleman of a medical type, but with the air of a military man. Clearly an army doctor, then. He has just come from the tropics, for his face is dark, and that is not the natural tint of his skin, for his wrists are fair. He has undergone hardship and sickness, as his haggard face says clearly. His left arm has been injured. He holds it in a stiff and unnatural manner. Where in the tropics could an English

[21] For those who are eager to dismiss this example about Holmes on the grounds that he is a fictional character, it is worth noting that Holmes was loosely based on an actual person, Dr. Joseph Bell.

> army doctor have seen much hardship and got his arm wounded? Clearly in Afghanistan.' The whole train of thought did not occupy a second. I then remarked that you came from Afghanistan, and you were astonished.[22]

In the following examples, I'd like to show that we, like Holmes, often quickly run through inferential steps of reasoning without being fully conscious of them. My first example comes from the familiar example of "automatic driving," as it has been dubbed by D. M. Armstrong.[23] In the case of automatic driving, a person can drive for a long stretch of time and suddenly realize that he has been driving without being conceptually aware of the fact that he has been driving. Of course, the person wasn't unconscious, nor is it plausible to believe that the person has been completely unaware of his driving. Otherwise, it would be impossible to explain how he was able to navigate his vehicle without causing a wreck. On my analysis, cases like automatic driving demonstrate the distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual awareness. The driver is non-conceptually aware of his mental activities while driving, but he is not conceptually aware of them until he has that jolting realization.

I have an example from my own experience that is like this. When I was a graduate student, I worked part-time as a bus driver for the university. During my training, I had to learn how to make right-hand turns. Mastering this maneuver required paying attention to a number of things simultaneously in order to ensure that the bus didn't hop the curb or careen into oncoming traffic. After driving for months, I discovered that I was able to make right-hand turns without consciously rehearsing all the steps propositionally before my mind. On my account, this can be explained by recognizing that I remained non-conceptually aware of my thoughts and actions

[22] Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* (London: Ward, Lock, & Co., 1888), chap. 2 emphasis added.

[23] David M. Armstrong, *A Materialist Theory of the Mind*, Reprint (New York: Routledge, 2002), 93 ff.

while not being conceptually aware of them. Like Holmes, I can say that the train of thoughts was present but that it went by so quickly I ceased to have conceptual awareness about it.

Non-conceptual awareness in perception is one thing, but what about its role in rational inference, like the case of Holmes? Here's a second example from my own experience. I was sitting in my office one day when I felt slight tremors. In a moment, I became convinced I was experiencing an earthquake (a phenomenon I had not experienced until this point). After reaching this conclusion, I took a moment to reflect and introspect on how I had reached this conclusion. Although it took a few minutes to reconstruct the reasoning fully, I was able to recover a fairly complex line of reasoning that my mind had assembled in a short moment during the minor earthquake. Once again, I believe this illustrates that we may be non-conceptually aware of elaborate patterns of reasoning that occur rapidly, which may require careful reflection and introspection in order for us to articulate them at the level of conceptual awareness.

Examples like the ones I have given above could be enumerated many times over, and I suspect that just about everyone has had similar experiences to these. Upon introspection, it is clear that we often reach a conclusion through a complex chain of reasoning that zips through our minds quickly, and we are not conceptually aware of this reasoning while it occurs. However, with time and reflection we often can express the process of reasoning that occurred using concepts.

The application of this distinction to cases of ordinary folks and their religious beliefs should be apparent. Contrary to the claims of Clark and Plantinga who insist that ordinary folks are completely unaware of any reasons that justify their religious beliefs, I think it is plausible to assume that many, perhaps even most, people have at least a non-conceptual awareness of some reasons that support what they believe. These reasons, however, typically are not brought to the

level of conceptual awareness without the right promptings. Furthermore, it typically takes significant time and introspective reflection to find the right way to describe accurately what those reasons are precisely. In my own experience talking with ordinary folks in churches, this is typically the case. These people, while having no formal training in philosophy or theology, often are able to describe reasons they have for their religious beliefs. Sometimes—perhaps more often than not in my experience—these reasons aren't entirely bad. These people sometimes state reasons that sound like a cosmological or teleological argument for the existence of God (although they would never use the technical vocabulary that is found in academic discussions of these arguments). Many of these people point to the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, noting that naturalistic explanations cannot provide a plausible account for the facts surrounding this event.

Assuming that there are, in fact, adequate lines of justification for the great truths of Gospel,[24] I don't see any good reason to suppose that the only way ordinary folks could hold them is through advanced training in philosophy, history, or theology. Of course, I don't deny that through study ordinary folks can learn important concepts and distinctions that will help express their reasons more accurately and persuasively. My point is that ordinary folks may have good reasons for their religious beliefs even though they do not have an advanced education.

V. Objections and Replies

In an effort to clarify and defend my thesis, I shall anticipate some objections to it and offer a brief response to each.

[24] Indeed, this is an important matter that cannot be settled here. It should surprise nobody that I believe there are arguments that justify the great truths of the Gospel. For some examples of this in the recent literature, see Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Craig, *Reasonable Faith*; William Lane Craig and James Porter Moreland, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009).

1. On the assumptions that one has a moral duty to believe what is best supported by the available evidence and a Christian comes to believe that Christianity is no longer supported by the available evidence, does it follow that the evidentialist must endorse this Christian's apostasy?

Many may be inclined to reject the assumption that one has a moral duty to believe what is best supported by the evidence. However, I am sympathetic to this notion, and I think that an adequate response can be given even if the assumption remains unchallenged. Of course, I happen to believe that the balance of available evidence strongly supports Christianity. Unfortunately, we all know of individuals who have left the faith claiming that they could not continue to believe in good conscience what the available evidence does not support.

The answer to this lies in the significance of the question whether Christianity is true. Given the eternal consequences that accompany the truth or falsity of Christianity, an investigation of its truth is one of the most important inquiries one ever can and should undertake. C. S. Lewis makes this point in his essay, "Man or Rabbit?"

> Here is a door, behind which, according to some people, the secret of the universe is waiting for you. Either that's true, or it isn't. And if it isn't, then what the door really conceals is simply the greatest fraud, the most colossal "sell" on record. Isn't it obviously the job of every man to try to find out which, and then to devote his full energies either to serving this tremendous secret or to exposing and destroying this gigantic humbug?[25]

In other words, the extent to which one is willing to pursue the evidence may be an important test of one's character and commitment to the faith. One of Jesus' promises is "seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you" (Matthew 7:7). The prophet Jeremiah records the Lord's promise that "you will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart" (29:13). Finding the evidence for Christianity insufficient should not be a stopping point for anyone. We should *want* Christianity to be true and seek out evidence for it because of what

[25] C. S. Lewis, "Man or Rabbit?" in *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 111–112.

is at stake. Consequently, those who leave Christianity by claiming that there is insufficient evidence are likely exhibiting more than just epistemic shortcomings.

This position, incidentally, is not a new one. Evidentialists have long held to the notion that the pursuit of the knowledge of God involves a test of one's character. Joseph Butler (1692-1752), for instance, wrote, "The evidence of religion not appearing obvious, may constitute one particular part of some men's trial in the religious sense: as it gives scope, for a virtuous exercise, or vicious neglect of their understanding, in examining or not examining into that evidence."[26] William Paley (1743-1805), another exemplar evidentialist maintained

> that irresistible proof [of the truth of Christianity] would restrain the voluntary powers too much; would not answer the purpose of trial and probation; would call for no exercise of candour, seriousness, humility, inquiry, no submission of passion, interests, and prejudices, to moral evidence and to probable truth; no habits of reflection; none of that previous desire to learn and to obey the will of God, which forms perhaps the test of the virtuous principle, and which induces men to attend, with care and reverence, to every credible intimation of that will, and to resign present advantages and present pleasures to every reasonable expectation of propitiating his favour.[27]

2. How can we tell the difference between rationalizing what one already believes and discovering one's reasons on the basis of non-conceptual awareness?

The objection raises the concern that my account cannot distinguish when a person is genuinely justified in holding a belief on the basis of non-conceptual awareness and when a person rationalizes a belief that he did not have any justification for believing. For instance, in my defense of ordinary believers being justified in holding their beliefs I appealed to the fact that many of these folks appear to have reasons for these beliefs, although it seems like they may not have ever conceptualized them until I raised this issue. How do I know that they aren't making it up on the spot?

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[26] Joseph Butler, *The Analogy of Religion* (London: Printed for Longman & Co., 1834), 226.

[27] William Paley, *Evidences of Christianity* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879), 470.

My answer involves two points. First, there is a difference between discovering what one's reasons are based on introspective reflection and rationalizing what one already believes. This difference is evident from experience. In other words, there is a phenomenologically different experience in the two cases, which indicates that there is a real difference going on in the two cases. So, the case against my proposal cannot succeed by claiming that all attempts to discover one's non-conceptual awareness of one's reasons through introspective reflection are nothing more than *ad hoc* rationalizations.

Second, whether a person is being truthful in how they report their justification is another matter. Thus, if objectors resort to claiming that we cannot know if other people are truly discovering their pre-existing non-conceptually aware justification for what they believe or making it up as *post hoc* rationalizations, that's a different concern. It may be that many Christians are unjustified in holding their religious beliefs. The point I am trying to make in my paper is that there is nothing about evidentialism that implies ordinary folks cannot have justification for these beliefs. Of course, it remains possible that many Christians are not justified in holding their religious beliefs, but it was never my intent to rule that out in principle.

VI. Conclusion

Evidentialism, contrary to the claims of many critics, does not uphold an epistemic standard that is a threat for ordinary folks to hold their religious beliefs justifiably. By recognizing the difference between conceptual and non-conceptual awareness, it remains possible that ordinary folks may be non-conceptually aware of their reasons that justify their

religious beliefs. Consequently, we can endorse evidentialism without worrying that it necessarily sets standards beyond the reach of the common man.[28]

[28] I would like to thank Lydia McGrew, Shandon Guthrie, James McGlothlin, and an audience at the 2015 annual meeting of the Evangelical Philosophical Society who have reviewed an earlier draft of this paper and provided helpful feedback.

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