

PROBING THE MIND OF GOD: DIVINE BELIEFS AND CREDENCES

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1. Introduction

God has beliefs. But does God have credences?

- Belief: taking a proposition to be the case or regarding it as true.
 - Three attitudes: believe p , withhold on p , disbelieve p .
- Credence: a measure of one's confidence in a proposition on a scale from $[0,1]$.
 - 1 represents absolute certainty that some proposition is true.
 - 0 represents absolute certainty that it is false.

Lots of work on divine knowledge; some work on divine belief. But we are not aware of any discussions of whether God has credences.

Goal: lay out, compare, and evaluate various views on whether God has beliefs, credences, both, or neither.

- Section 2: God has only beliefs.
- Section 3: God has both beliefs and credences (divides into four views).
- Section 4: God has only credences.
- Section 5: God has neither beliefs nor credences, only knowledge.
- Will also consider the question of whether all God's credences are extreme (1 or 0) or whether God might have non-extreme credences.

Ultimately, we'll conclude that if God has mental representations, then divine belief-is-credence-1 or divine belief-first are most plausible; however, the knowledge-only view is also a live contender.

Concept of God:

- Perfect being: has all great-making properties to their most valuable degree, in the greatest overall combination (Murphy 2017).
- Cognitively perfect: includes, but may go beyond, omniscience (Zagzebski 2008: 232).

2. The Belief Only View

Argument that God has beliefs:

- Omniscience: for every proposition, God either knows it is true or knows it is false.
- Knowledge entails belief.
- Therefore, God has beliefs.

How would we establish God has no credences?

- Possible reason: if God has beliefs, positing divine credences seems superfluous.
 - God already has perfectly accurate beliefs about every single proposition.
 - God has everything God needs for divine decision making.
 - Not clear that credences contribute to cognitive perfection.
 - Definition of omniscience in terms of belief (and knowledge) seems accurate and complete.

3. The Belief and Credence View

Two reasons to think God has credences in addition to beliefs:

- Humans have credences. But on many religious traditions, God is a personal being with a mind, and humans are made in God's image. Unless we have a good reason to think credences are a feature of human limitation or lack, the possibility that God has credences shouldn't be ignored.
- The belief-only view doesn't specify God's degree of confidence in the propositions God believes. What accounts for God's maximal confidence?

3.1 Reduction vs. Non-Reduction

Four versions of the belief and credence view:

Divine belief-first: God has both beliefs and credences, and God's credences reduce to God's beliefs.

Divine threshold view: God has both beliefs and credences, and God's beliefs reduce to God's credences above some threshold less than 1.

Divine belief-is-credence-1 view: God has both beliefs and credences, and God's beliefs reduce to God's credences of 1.

Divine dualism: God has both beliefs and credences, and God's beliefs and God's credences are irreducible.

On divine belief-first:

- Many objections to the belief-first view in the human case are based on some limitation or lack, thus they don't get off the ground in the divine case. E.g.:
 - Children and animals have credences but lack the concept of probability (Frankish 2009).
 - One can form credences in, but not probability-beliefs about, barely-graspable propositions (Jackson forthcoming).
- The other big objection to the belief-first view involves the interpretation of probability in those beliefs (Christensen 2004). However, in the divine case, it's natural to think God's beliefs would be about *objective* probabilities.

On divine credence-first (two middle views):

- Can affirm God has beliefs (unlike credence-only view), but still preserve simplicity at a fundamental level.
- Big objection to the credence-first view: where to set the threshold for belief?
 - Threshold of <1 : looks ad hoc.
 - Threshold of 1: doesn't look ad hoc, but runs into trouble in the human case:
 - We're more confident in some of our beliefs than in others.
 - We believe things that we aren't maximally certain of.
 - We wouldn't bet anything on our beliefs, but according to decision theory we should bet anything on propositions to which we assign credence 1.
 - But the above don't seem like problems in the divine case.

On divine dualism:

- Kaplan's (1996) Bayesian challenge: why would we have both a credence in p and a belief that p ? Positing both seems superfluous.
- Dualist answers to the challenge fall into two camps:

- Beliefs are a heuristic, useful for simplifying reasoning (Staffel 2019).
- Beliefs are not a heuristic, but play other roles that high credences cannot.
 - Beliefs allow us to take a stand and have a view of the world (Ross & Schroeder 2014).
 - Beliefs are essential to our moral judgments (Buchak 2014).
 - Beliefs play a role in knowledge that credence cannot.
- If beliefs are merely a heuristic to simplify reasoning, a cognitively perfect agent wouldn't have beliefs.
- If beliefs play a non-heuristic role, is divine dualism more plausible?
 - However, the dualist needs to argue not only that divine beliefs play these roles, but also that divine credences cannot. And in the divine case, these roles can be played by extreme credences.
 - Thus, if God has extreme credences in all the propositions God believes, we don't have a good reason to accept dualism.

Two open questions:

- To what extent is there pressure to accept a divine-human symmetry? (e.g. if we are dualists about human beliefs and credences, is that reason to be dualists about the divine mind?)
- Does the Bayesian challenge even apply to God? If God is infinite with an unlimited cognitive capacity, simpler may not always be better. On the other hand, cognitively perfect beings probably don't have purposeless mental states floating around.

3.2 Non-Extreme Credences

Open theism: God does not know contingent propositions about the future which are not at present causally determined.

The idea that God has credences fits naturally with open theism.

- God may have non-extreme credences in these future contingents.
- What credences? According to David Lewis's (1980) Principal Principle, rational credences match known objective chances. So a cognitively perfect being's credence in a future contingent, p , would match the objective chance that p is true.

Can non-extreme credences save divine dualism? No.

- Suppose there is a future contingent proposition, p , with an objective chance of 0.999. And suppose that God not only has a credence of 0.999 but also believes that p .
- God's belief that p is fallible, since there is a chance, however small, that the future contingent in question is false.
- Thus, God risks having a false belief, which compromises omniscience (and is incompatible with essential omniscience).

Similar problem for the divine threshold view:

- Since the threshold is less than 1, some future contingents will have objective chances which are above the threshold but less than 1.
- God's belief in those future contingents will be fallible since there is some chance, however small, that they are false.

Thus, of the reductionist views, divine belief-first and divine belief-is-credence-1 are most plausible.

4. The Credence Only View

4.1 Divine Credences without Beliefs

Setting aside non-extreme credences, on this view, God has perfectly accurate credences—God has a credence of 1 in all true propositions, and God has a credence of 0 in all false propositions—but no beliefs. What might motivate this view?

- Appeal to reasons God has credences, given above.
- If God has perfectly accurate credences, this raises the question—what would divine beliefs add?
 - This question is especially pressing if extreme credences can play the roles that belief is meant to play.
- One can give a reasonable account of omniscience in terms of perfectly accurate credences AND it specifies God's degrees of confidence.
- Can this view capture the idea that God knows things? Moss to the rescue!
 - Sarah Moss (2013; 2016) argues that credences can amount to knowledge—credences can have properties such as factivity, safety, sensitivity, and even be unGettiered.
 - God's credences satisfy the conditions for knowledge (e.g. they are factive, unGettiered, etc.). Then, even if God has only credences, God can nonetheless know things. (This story seems even easier to tell if all of God's credences are extreme.)

Main downside of the view: God doesn't have beliefs.

- May be odd to think that God has mental representations, but no beliefs.
- We don't think this is a decisive reason to reject the view, though.

4.2 Non-Extreme Credences

The credence-only view may give the open theist a response to a long-standing objection to her position. The objection claims that, on open theism, we seem to be able to know things that God cannot know.

- The problem: Suppose Sam eats Cheerios everyday, and tomorrow is an ordinary day. Does God believe that Sam will eat Cheerios tomorrow?
 - If yes: then God's belief is fallible.
 - If no: then I know something God doesn't
- But if the credence-only theorist appeals to Moss' view that credences can be sufficient for knowledge, then the open theist can safely reject the second horn of the dilemma.

5. The Knowledge Only View

Alston (1986): God is directly aware of/acquainted with all facts. This makes representational mental states superfluous, so God has none.

- Advantages of the knowledge-only view:
 - Intuitively a more perfect form of cognition (Alston).
 - May solve problems about foreknowledge and indexical knowledge (Alston).
 - Solves problems about how God knows certain things, e.g., about abstract objects.
- Objections to the knowledge-only view:
 - Objection 1: past and future facts don't exist, so God can't be in direct contact with them (Hasker 1988).

- Reply: eternalism.
 - Reply: direct awareness of facts about the truth-values of propositions about the past and future.
- Objection 2: God’s knowledge depends on the world, but God should not depend on the world in any way (Mavrodes 1988).
 - Reply: Maybe what matters for perfection is independent existence and an independent disposition to be directly aware of all facts.
 - Reply: The world depends on God, so God’s knowledge doesn’t depend on anything fundamental other than God.
- Objection 3: infant perception and peripheral vision show that direct acquaintance is not sufficient for knowledge (Dickinson 2019).
 - Reply: direct acquaintance of a perfect sort, not mediated by human cognitive and sensory faculties, is sufficient for knowledge (Saeedimehr forthcoming).

6. Conclusion

Seven views (*Implausible):

1. ***Belief-only**: downside: doesn’t specify God’s degrees of confidence.
2. **Divine belief-first view**
3. ***Divine threshold view**: downside: setting the threshold somewhere that isn’t ad hoc; if God has non-extreme credences in things God believes, God risks having a false belief; if God has all extreme credences, why set the threshold below 1?
4. **Divine belief-is-credence-1**
5. ***Divine dualism**: downside: if God has non-extreme credences in things God believes, God risks having a false belief; if God has all extreme credences, beliefs seem superfluous.
6. **Credence-only**: downside: God has no beliefs, but still has mental representations
7. **Knowledge-only**

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