

THE AXIOLOGY OF THEISM MEETS (THE RATIONALITY OF) FAITH  
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1. INTRODUCTION

Goal: bring the axiology of theism and the faith literatures into contact with each other.

- The axiology of theism bears on the rationality of faith in an interesting way.
  - Counterevidence might not be the only “challenge” to faith.
  - The person of faith may need to take a stand on the axiology of theism.

Five upshots:

1. There’s a debate, parallel to the question of whether faith entails belief—does faith entail desire?
2. Faith involves *conative* resilience.
3. The person with faith that God exists cannot be a strong anti-theist.
4. The *truth* of anti-theism may not render faith that God exists irrational.
5. Connection of the above to Islamic views of faith.

2. THE AXIOLOGY OF THEISM

Three philosophy of religion questions:

- The **ontology** of theism: does God exist?
- The **epistemology** of theism: should we believe that God exists?
- The **axiology** of theism: should we want God to exist?

**Pro-theism:** God’s existence would be a good thing. If God exists:

- there is ultimate cosmic justice
- human lives are meaningful
- no evil is gratuitous (etc.)

**Anti-theism:** God’s existence would be a bad thing. If God exists:

- this invades our privacy
- this renders morality incoherent
- some lives are meaningless and absurd (etc.)

Personal pro(anti)-theism: God’s existence would be a good (bad) thing for *us*.

Impersonal pro(anti)-theism: God’s existence would be a good (bad) thing for *the world*.

3. FAITH: DESCRIPTIVE AND NORMATIVE

2.1 *The Nature of Faith*

Two kinds of mental states:

- **Cognitive states:** mind to world direction of fit; represent the world (e.g. beliefs, credences, probability-beliefs)
- **Conative states:** world to mind direction of fit; inherently motivational (e.g. desires, pro-attitudes, beliefs about the good)

S has faith that p iff:

- (i) S has a positive cognitive attitude toward p (e.g. thinking p is likely, having a high credence in p, believing that p),
- (ii) S has a positive conative attitude toward p (e.g. thinking that p would be a good thing, desiring p)
- (iii) S has a commitment to p, and
- (iv) S is resilient to counterevidence against the truth of p.

**Objection:** Is (ii) too strong? E.g. what if someone doesn't want God to exist, but feels rationally compelled to commit to Christianity? What about crises of faith (Malcolm and Scott 2021)?

- **Response:** desiring *p* is consistent with a lot of other sometimes complicated things going on in your head regarding *p*, such as conflicting desires, lack of strong emotions regarding *p*, etc.

## 2.2 The Rationality of Faith

Natural thought: faith's rationality depends on the rationality of faith's components.

Rationality and Faith's **Cognitive** Component:

- Cognitive states aim at **the truth**. Thus, evidence that *p* is *true* makes a cognitive state about *p* rational.
- If someone's evidence decisively supports the proposition God does not exist, it seems irrational for them to have faith.
- Involves the ontology and epistemology of theism.

Rationality and Faith's **Conative** Component:

- Conative states aim at **the good**. Thus, evidence that *p* is *good* makes a conative state about *p* rational.
- If someone's evidence decisively supports that God's existence would be a bad thing, it seems irrational for them to have faith.
- Involves the axiology of theism.

This doesn't mean the rationality of belief and rationality of desire are parallel in every sense. (For example, conflicting beliefs seem less rational than conflicting desires.)

## 4. UPSHOTS AND CONCLUSIONS

**Upshot 1:** There's a debate, parallel to the question of whether faith entails belief—does faith entail desire?

- In the same way that people argue that states weaker than flat-out belief can play the cognitive role, maybe states weaker than flat-out desire can play the conative role.
- To what extent should we expect a belief-desire symmetry?

**Upshot 2:** Rational faith involves conative resilience.

- Rational faith that *p* may be resilient to evidence that *p* is bad (e.g. marriage, religious commitment).

**Upshot 3:** Faith that God exists may be inconsistent with certain views in the axiology of theism.

- Hard to see how someone with religious faith could be a strong anti-theist.
  - But there are various strategies to we can weaken the relationship between faith and desire and be more inclusive.

**Upshot 4:** The *truth* of anti-theism may not render faith irrational. In fact, the axiological question is ambiguous between the:

- **Ontological-axiological question:** Is God's existence a good thing?
- **Rationality-axiological question:** Is desiring God's existence rational?
- Someone could consistently say no to the first, but yes to the second—in the same way we can have rational, false beliefs (it may be rational to believe in God, even if God doesn't exist).

**Upshot 5:** Connection to Islamic views of faith. Some questions I have:

- One, does *imān* entail, at least on some level, a desire for God to exist?
- Two, is *imān* resilient in the way described above, and if so, is it both epistemic and conative?
- Three, what does Islam have to say about the axiology of theism?