

WHEN SUPERSTITIOUS OR RELIGIOUS FAITH BECOMES A CONTROL BELIEF - COLOURS ALL YOUR OUTLOOKS

A control belief controls and co-ordinates how you look at the evidence and how you interpret it.

It is inevitable that we will have control beliefs. The secret is to stick to strictly necessary as in default beliefs. This unfortunately is usually not what happens.

Believers in religious or political systems make up their minds and then they interpret the evidence to fit their belief.

A control belief can be conscious or unconscious. You may not be aware of how you treat something as probably true.

To avoid and minimise the damage and risks of control beliefs you need to know what the default beliefs are. That helps work out why people are not settling for these beliefs or sometimes are unaware of the need for the right defaults.

Belief is a head exercise where you tend to agree with something. A faith position is when you honour somebody else by believing what they say. Its a heart job for it is about connecting to another person as a person. Religion is about faith.

We will look at religion as an example of a control faith.

FAITH

The default position is to assume that much of what is referred to as faith is really not faith at all but self-deception. The fact that our control beliefs always lead to self-deception proves that. Suppose my default position is atheism. That affects the way I see the evidence - I see it as backing it up. Even if it does back it up, I am still

We see people sacrificing a lot for their self-deception. Young people take risks speeding because they feel they will live forever. Wives risk their health and children to stay with abusive husbands for they have deceived themselves into thinking its not the men's fault and that the men love them and are eager to change. We see more sacrifices for self-deception than for sensible faith. Religionists tend to be more devoted to dodgy religious teachers than the boring Vicar. So we should assume that self-deception is more common than faith. We should assume the religionists are deceiving themselves.

We are weak vulnerable creatures. We tend to fool ourselves to cope with harsh realities. So it should be assumed that a person is fooling themselves until proven otherwise.

Religion is the biggest instance of self-deception. It is because it makes people feel its needed to keep them on the right path, it is because it offers them a God who allegedly loves them, it is because it tells blatant lies like, "We judge the sin not the sinner", it is because it promises damnation to those who do not obey it, it is because it promises happiness in Heaven forever as a carrot. It stands to reason that the thing that tries to satisfy our worst fears will depend on people deceiving themselves more than anything else would. Clergy and popes prey on vulnerability. Religion is keeping people away from truth. It proves this when it condemns the default positions we have taken as sinful. It seeks an unfair advantage and is manipulative.

In regard to religious faith, suppose a highly educated person such as Thomas Aquinas or William Lane Craig believe in Christianity. Are they irrational for believing such a nonsensical religion? Some say no. But if a religion is nonsensical then it is up to the educated followers to prove that they are not irrational. If they won't do it then we can make it our business to challenge and expose them. You can be rationally wrong. But you can also be irrationally wrong. If you are wrong it is likely that you are irrational as well. The default position is that they are irrational.

If you claim that nonsense is true and are highly intelligent, you have an obligation to prove to your listeners that you are not deliberately lying or deceiving yourself.

If you embrace an extraordinary belief, that means you have to provide others with extraordinary evidence for the truth of the belief before you can ask them to accept it. This is to justify asking them to believe. You don't ask the world to believe Saint Francis of Assisi was a woman without evidence. It's only fair. The extraordinary nature of the belief demand extraordinary evidence. Also, your extraordinary belief isn't the only one out there. We can't have everybody going about with different extraordinary beliefs or we would have chaos. It would encourage charlatans. Also to say your extraordinary

belief is true while somebody else's is wrong would be unjust and it would be arrogant and sectarian.

Also, if you claim to have an extraordinary belief you have to provide evidence that you believe it. We are not speaking of providing evidence for the belief being true but evidence that you accept the belief. For example, if you believe that you really have two heads: one visible and the other undetectable then that is mad. It would be extraordinary if you believed that.

HOLINESS

Holiness is a vice. It argues that one must be good for the sake of pleasing God. But nobody can explain how it can be God's business what we do?

Is good good because God commands it? Then it would be good if he asked us to sacrifice children.

Is good good whether God commands it or not? Then what do you need God for? What business has he commanding good? Commanding is always an attempt to compel a person to do something. We should do good spontaneously.

Some say that neither the above are correct for

The default position is that we help others for human reasons and keep religion and God out of it. Help the dying beggar man yes. But don't waste any of your motivation on the thought that you must do it for God or any of it for God. That is giving something to a being who cannot be proven when it could be given to the person you are helping. Waste no love on God.

ALTRUISTS OR EGOISTS?

Here is an argument I give without comment that the main reason we do anything we do is that it serves us in some way. It says that we do everything we do mainly for ourselves. You may call it predominant egoism. We at least expect some return for everything we do even if it is a little bit of a good feeling.

"When I act and take a sweet, I take the sweet because I want to use my will and I want to have the sweet. There are two motivations not one. The I wants show it is me who I have at the centre. The wanting is the same if I want to use my will for YOU to have the sweet. I want to will and I want you to have it. The sweet for myself is not selfish because I have it but because I want it. Therefore if I want you to be happy that is selfish too! But in a good way!

FREE WILL

The default position is that we do not have it. We are programmed by our past which makes us feel we do things freely. Our past is part of us and we think we own it and that gives us the feeling that we are free. But whatever we feel, we do not have free will.

Why can't agnosticism about free will be the default? Why can't we say we have no way of knowing if we have it or not? But we have no reason for thinking we have it.

The main attraction about believing in free will is that it seems to justify rewards and punishments. It is true that one should be punished for having done wrong but it is not as simple as that. One can't go back and undo it. Once its done one can't help it any more. Punishment is unjust because you don't have the power to make what has happened not to have happened.

THE AFTERLIFE

The default position is to assume that there is no life after death. It looks as if death is the end and that is enough for us.

BELIEF IN MIRACLES

A miracle is an event that cannot be explained by anything natural. It is supernatural. We have to assume something in relation to miracles happening.

1 We may assume that they can happen.

2 We may assume that they cannot happen.

3 We can say we can assume neither.

4 We might assume that they can happen but don't.

Four options. One option says they are believable. The other three says they are not. So being outnumbered, the default position is that miracles are not believable. Taking any other position is biased and unfair.

INTERPRETING MIRACLES

Even if we think miracles can happen, the problem then is how do we know if an event really is a miracle? We can assume that it is a miracle. We can assume that it is possible that it is a miracle. We can assume that there may be unknown natural laws that can explain it meaning it is not a miracle. We can assume that the witnesses are mistaken or misled.

The default position here is that the miracle presumption is outnumbered so the default position is that we should not accept an event as a miracle. So we will assume that we can never know if a reported miracle really was a miracle. Maybe it was but that is not the point.

A miracle has to be unlikely or improbable - by definition. If it is routine for statues to come to life, then it is not a miracle or wonder anymore. If we had nothing but sunshine since the world began a shower of rain would be a miracle. So we should be sceptical.

The burden of proof is on the believers. They have a duty to show us that the miracle happened. And they have a duty to show that it must have been a miracle. There are more important things in life than worrying about verifying miracles. Go and help out in the soup kitchen and don't degrade yourself and others by wasting time on signs and wonders. If you disagree then you show your own arrogance and your crave for religious excitement.

Believers usually present evidence for miracles that no sane person would take seriously.

Christians believe that God miraculously wrote the gospels through men. If he did, then why didn't he get them written down a few months after the alleged events? The further away from the events an account is written the less credence we can lend it. The gospels contain loads of miracle stories - you need very good evidence that miracles happened. The gospels appeared decades after Jesus died and therefore cannot count as good evidence.

Some liberal Christians instead of saying, "Jesus rose from the dead", may say, "It is possible that Jesus rose from the dead." So they speak of miracles as possible but not of miracles as having happened. But if you can base a religion and hopes on possible miracles then you end up having no reality check and gullible is the only word to describe you. There is no way the Mormon who says it is possible that God revealed the Book of Mormon to the Prophet Joseph Smith can be refuted. There is no way to show the man who writes a Bible that he thinks aliens inspired him to write and which says Smith was a nut and a fake is wrong. The end result is a faith that looks like it cares about reason and truth but which is really just a manifestation of fundamentalism. It is fundamentalism masquerading as good sense.

Liberals and Roman Catholics incidentally make little effort to keep the most vulnerable and silly members of their flocks away from miracle mongers and charlatans.

No matter how strong the evidence is for a miracle, it still only shows at best that the miracle was possible not that it actually happened.

RELIGION

The default position is that we should be secular not religious. All that matters is acting like a caring God to others instead of caring if God exists or not. If God does not exist we must be him.

Finally, we need our defaults. We only want other beliefs. That is why control belief and faith mechanisms are inherently oppressive.



