

## **Evidentialism - when a religion says it is supported by good evidence**

Main Lesson: "Truth must be served for it is simply right meaning it is right to serve it. Plus it is in our self interest to serve it for it does not care what we think so we may as well try to line up to it. Always look for disconfirming evidence. The bigger the claim or the more magical then the more you need to see such evidence".

Too much of what passes for faith and is praised and respected as faith is just assumption or habit masquerading as faith. It's a cheat. Blind faith is faith that does not give a toss about what the evidence says. It's an oxymoron - it is like deliberately inventing truth. Believing without evidence may take the form of believing before evidence. Because you have already made up your mind the evidence is not evidence to your mind. Evidence is that which is supposed to maybe change your mind. It speaks to an open mind.

The Old and New Testaments never do philosophy or concentrate on it. No. They give evidence. So you are meant to look at the evidence and then do the philosophy not the other way around. If there is evidence for God that comes before any argument for the existence of God. In theory, an argument could show that there is a God while science can show different. Science would have to come first and we would have to say that if the argument seems right it is still wrong and put that down to the limits of the human mind. A real defender of the Christian faith will not be a theologian or philosopher so much as a scientist.

So the Bible is about evidence. Thus those who try to indicate that the miracle stories are not literally true totally miss that. They are trying to make the Bible more accessible to a sceptical mind but all they are doing is watering it down. The Bible's evidence is deceitful and they know that which is why they lie.

What about the view that belief in gods or God is not a problem but it is that people are not letting the evidence show them what to believe? Those beliefs are a problem in themselves if there simply is no decent evidence. And it might be said we should not judge believers as ignoring evidence but as virtually telling us they have none. Blind faith should be read as an indication that the believers and unbelievers are united in one thing: God has no evidential support.

Apologists those who defend the Christian faith from those who say it is wrong or irrational use five approaches to defend the religion:

One, they may seek good evidence that the religion is objectively true or probably true.

Two, they may use special pleading. The method involves showing that God exists and then and only then will they try to show that Christianity is probably true. To do that they argue that miracles are possible. Then they assess the evidence for miracles and then proclaim them probable. It actually is not a method at all for nothing is allowed to refute what the apologist hopes to believe. An example is how they answer the problem of God letting babies suffer so terribly by saying we do not know but must trust in God.

Three, they assume what needs to be proved. They use circular arguments. Some say that it is okay to do that. They say that if you think there is no God then you can have no confidence in anything for there is no truthful God running the universe. Trusting that God is honest allows you to trust in the discoveries of religion and science and then education becomes possible. Believers take Christianity as a world view and as a whole to see if it is the best worldview and faith and that is enough for them. They do not care about the evidence for and against. Plantinga said, "I don't know of an argument for Christian belief that seems very likely to convince one who doesn't already accept its conclusion."

Four, they depend on their experience of God and Jesus. If they feel a priest has forgiven their sins they take that as evidence that he has.

Five, using a variety of approaches to make a cumulative argument. This involves assuming the faith is true and then trying to show that belief in it is reasonable. It only cares about what it thinks works. By works it means whatever seems to make its presuppositions look sensible. But each one of the four methods we have looked at is useless. The first one is good in principle but it fails to make Christianity believable. The cumulative argument is about cherry-picking and so it is intrinsically dishonest. It is only useful if it is used to show that a worldview is in fact improbable, dangerous or false. It can do that but it cannot show any faith to be true or probably true. A faith making sense could still be untrue. One that does not make sense cannot be true. See the point?

A cumulative case for religion cannot really show that it is believable. You can make a cumulative case for something that you know is untrue. But a cumulative case against religion can show that it is false. How is that fair? An example will help.

Bits of evidence cannot show that Jesus was infallible. What if you have bits of evidence that he made mistakes? If the bits cannot tell us what to think then they do show that it is wrong to say one way or another. A Jesus that claims to be all true is false if you cannot show if it is reasonable or unreasonable to believe. So it is with religion. A religion that fails to be plausible and asks for belief thereby proves it is false.

In law, you consider the evidence as a whole. Bible believers cherry-pick the Bible evidence. They want to show you Jesus' body went missing from the tomb. You will tell them the Bible is unreliable. They will say even if it is, it is reliable in that thing for there are commonsense reasons for thinking Jesus did go missing. They will say that Jesus as a matter of fact vanished from the tomb.

You cannot use a few facts or alleged facts that are in the Bible and treat them on their own. You need to slot it all into the notion that the Bible is generally trustworthy and inspired by God. There are books worse than the Bible that say things that ring true but are not. And nobody agrees on what rings true. Bible believers can say the Bible is true but disagree on whether it can be proven that Jesus really went missing or whatever.

The true religion will have the best support from science. This warns us to be careful for it means all religions barring one or perhaps none of the religions is a real friend of science and the more it says it is the more it proves it is not.

Evidence for a religion that is against science is worthless.

Evidentialism is the idea that you need enough evidence that a religion is true in order for it to make sense to believe in it.

"Evidentialism is the only method [of Christian apologetics] that accepts the need for sufficient evidence, and it only has 20 per cent support among apologists, then 80 per cent of all Christian apologists do not think there is sufficient objective evidence to believe." John W Loftus. *How to Defend the Christian Faith: Advice from an Atheist*. 2015. The person that does not care about insufficient evidence and encourages the nasty doctrines of Christianity and encourages Christian "healers" is an unsavoury individual.

The Bible purports to give evidence for its religious claims. It speaks of how God did not ask the people to believe in what his prophets said on his behalf without evidence. He provided the evidence by signs and wonders. The gospels read as if they are making a case for Jesus being God's Son. Not everything presented as evidence really can be taken as evidence. The gospels make loads of errors in that respect. The defenders of the faith routinely ignore them in the name of their dogma that the Bible comes from God and is inerrant.

People are prone to bias and errors and believing lies when it is a testable matter. Even more so when the subject is non-testable. Those who believe in non-testable religious doctrines are harder to bring to their senses than those who make errors about testable stuff. A responsible religion will care deeply for evidence.

It is clear that anything that is non-testable is no good because:

It leads to bad thinking habits

It leads to people being at risk of error

It leads to people ending up in terrible error or being taken advantage of

It leads to truth being downgraded in importance

If you say something without evidence then somebody else can say the opposite without evidence too. It is self-destructive in principle and in its results.

Objections to Evidentialism: Not having evidence for something means you should not believe or disbelieve but suspend judgement.

Alvin Plantinga alleged that evidentialism is self-refuting. It demands evidence when there is no evidence for itself! (Plantinga 1983).

It is not self-refuting because we know from experience that the simplest understanding of the evidence is the best. We have learned so much from it.

Problems with evidence does not mean that all evidence is bad or worthless.

Plantinga forgot that we all know that using evidence and learning from it works. Evidence works!

Only a minority of defenders of the Christian faith now embrace evidentialism. They have no choice for the evidence for the religion being true is horrendous and often ambiguous.

Everybody makes mistakes. Sometimes Christians find a mistake that somebody made and use it in their favour. But a mistake is not evidence - it is just a mistake. For example, if Jesus gave a vicious sermon and some bits of it are unclear the Christians will reason that the sermon is incomplete and if we had the whole thing we would see it is not vicious at all. The lack of clarity is a mistake but they turn it into something else. You can't use mistakes as evidence for they are just mistakes and some mistakes do help you create a picture that suits your ideas. But doing that is manipulative. Jehovah's Witnesses use the faulty grammar of John's gospel chapter one as an excuse for translating it as saying that Jesus was a god.

If God creates a religion then the evidence will invite us to listen to this God and his moral code revelation. The link between scriptures and their alleged morality leads to pressure to bend the evidence to back the religion up and make it look plausible. Another pressure is if you think that the only way to make morality convincing is to have a God command it and maybe on pain of going to Hell forever for being immoral.

Christians start off with a conclusion and then clutch at straws to make it look reasonable. It is not really a conclusion. They are deceptive for making it appear to be one.