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ARTICLE

The rationality of faith and the benefits of religion

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Abstract Religions don't simply make claims about the world; they also offer existential resources, resources for dealing with basic human problems, such as the need for meaning, love, identity, and personal growth. For instance, a Buddhist's resources for addressing these existential needs are different than a Christian's. Now, imagine someone who is agnostic but who is deciding whether to put faith in religion A or religion B. Suppose she thinks A and B are evidentially on par, but she regards A as offering much more by way of existential resources. Is it epistemically rational for her to put her faith in A rather than B on this basis? It is natural to answer No. After all, what do the existential resources of a religion have to do with its truth? However, I argue that this attitude is mistaken. My thesis is that the extent to which it is good for a certain religion to be true is relevant to the epistemic (rather than merely pragmatic) rationality of faith in that religion. This is plausible, I'll argue, on the correct account of the nature of faith, including the ways that emotion and desire can figure into faith and contribute to its epistemic rationality.

Keywords Faith · Rationality · Evidence · Emotion · Desire · Value

1 Introduction

"Is Buddhism Good for Your Health?" reads the title of an article in *The New York Times* (Hall 2003). The thought that religions can aid human flourishing is familiar enough. A proselytizing tract answers the question "Why Islam?" by appeal to "the beauty and benefits of Islam", which include a "practical and balanced way of

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life".[1] Indeed, religious believers are not the only ones to suppose their way offers benefits. One atheist writes:

> It is primarily in the face of suffering, whether the tragedy is individual or collective, that I am forcefully reminded of what atheism has to offer. … I do not have to ask, as all people of faith must, why an all–powerful, all–good God allows such things to happen (Jacoby 2013).

Likewise, Christopher Hitchens praises the benefits of atheism: "Take the risk of thinking for yourself: much more happiness, truth, beauty, and wisdom will come to you that way."[2] Religion, in contrast, is a "babyish attempt" to meet our "infantile needs" (Hitchens 2007, p. 64). (I don't know what he's got against babies.)

In many cases, the ways a religion can aid human flourishing seem to play a role in explaining conversions.[3] Plausibly, many people would report coming to faith at least partly because life felt meaningless without God, or because they found loving community within the church, or because their newfound religion somehow helped them get on in life.

When philosophers consider the rationality of faith, however, rarely do they focus on the ways a religion can or can't aid human flourishing. Instead, we are interested in arguments for and against the existence of God, and in articulating the correct standards of evidence. We philosophers are interested in *epistemic* rationality, after all. And just because a religion makes you feel nice doesn't make it epistemically rational to adopt it.

In this paper, I will argue that this attitude is mistaken. My central thesis is that the extent to which a religion can aid human flourishing is crucial to whether faith is epistemically (and not just pragmatically) rational. This suggests an exciting new project in the philosophy of religion, namely, that of articulating how it is the claims of different religions would or would not be conducive to human flourishing. If I'm right, then this project is central to assessing the epistemic rationality of faith.[4]

[1] http://islamicpamphlets.com/why-islam-the-beauty-and-benefits-of-islam.

[2] From a speech at Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, TX, November 18, 2010.

[3] It is hard to define 'religion', but Yandell (1990) does a pretty good job: "a conceptual system that provides an interpretation of the world and the place of human beings in it, that rests on that interpretation an account of how life should be lived … and that expresses this interpretation in a set of practices"; quoted in Audi (2008, p. 93). This is at least a useful heuristic (even though it would include some forms of atheism as a religion).

[4] What I'm defending here is reminiscent of Pascal's wager, as well as James (1897). However, the major difference is that Pascal's wager doesn't seem to have much to do with *epistemic* rationality, and it isn't clear whether James' view does either. In a similar vein, Rota (2016) and Williams (2011) argue that the value of a religion for human life can provide non-epistemic reasons that may combine with epistemic reasons to make faith all-things-considered rational. In contrast, my view is that the value of a religion *can itself* provide epistemic reason to have faith. What I'm defending here is also reminiscent of moral arguments for the existence of God according to which theistic faith provides moral benefits (Adams 1995; Zagzebski 1984). But don't confuse my view with these either. My view is strictly concerned with the extent to which such moral and pragmatic benefits can themselves make it *epistemically* rational to have faith. In this sense, my view more closely resembles Pace (2010), although Pace claims that moral-pragmatic considerations are relevant to the epistemic rationality of *belief*, while I am interested in faith, which may or may not require belief. Finally, Audi (2011, p. 67), notes briefly that the epistemic status of

In Sect. 2, I argue that there is an evaluative condition on faith, that is, faith that-p requires some positive evaluation of p. In Sects. 3, 4, and 5, I argue that faith is epistemically rational, only if its component evaluation is. This is so, even if the evaluative condition on faith is satisfied by emotion or desire, since, as I will argue, emotion and desire can be assessed for epistemic rationality. In light of this, we should ask what sorts of considerations make it epistemically rational to positively evaluate a worldview or a religion. In Sect. 6, I address this. I articulate the notion of a worldview's existential resources, resources for meeting one's basic existential needs. I argue that a worldview's existential resources are crucially relevant to whether it is epistemically rational to positively evaluate that worldview. Accordingly, in order to assess the rationality of faith, we must characterize in what ways and to what degrees a worldview or a religion provides resources for managing one's existential needs.[5]

2 Rationality and the evaluative component of faith

Faith can be misplaced. Suppose I have faith that Santa will deliver presents to children everywhere. My faith is misplaced simply because its propositional object is false. Consider, however, a second respect in which faith can be misplaced. Suppose I have faith that the polar ice caps will continue to melt. Such faith is misplaced, not because its propositional object is false, but because it is *bad*. The same holds for faith objects that are neither good nor bad. Suppose I have faith that the number of fish in the sea is even. Such faith is misplaced, not because its propositional object is false, nor because it is bad, but because it is evaluatively neutral.

These instances of misplaced faith show that there are two independent standards that apply to faith. We can understand these standards in terms of *fittingness*, since they have to do with the objective fit between faith and its object:

Factual Fittingness: Faith that-p is fitting, only if p is true.
Evaluative Fittingness: Faith that-p is fitting, only if p is good.

I want to draw two implications from this. First, Evaluative Fittingness shows that faith in some way requires a positive evaluative attitude towards the faith object. Either faith is partly constituted by an evaluative attitude, or faith itself *is* an evaluative attitude.[6] Second, there are two corollary conditions, not on the fittingness of faith, but the *epistemic rationality* of faith:

Footnote 4 continued
faith's evaluative component partly determines the epistemic status of faith itself. I take myself to be offering a full-fledged account of this claim.

[5] Of course, some have already made important progress here, such as Adams (1999), Flanagan (2011), Roberts (2007), Stump (2010), and Williams (2011).

[6] Many endorse the claim that faith requires positive evaluation of the faith object. See Howard-Snyder (2013, p. 360), who offers illustrative passages from Adams (1995), Alston (1996), and Audi (2008), all

Factual rationality: Faith that-p is epistemically rational, only if it is epistemically rational to in some way affirm that-p.
Evaluative rationality: Faith that-p is epistemically rational, only if it is epistemically rational to in some way regard p as good.

By *epistemic rationality* I don't mean some explicitly coherence-related notion, as some philosophers do. Instead, I mean a generic notion of justification or reasonableness. Moreover, in both the above theses, I've left the relevant attitudes towards p unspecified, since it is controversial just what sorts of attitudes will do. For instance, faith that-p requires you in some way affirm that-p, but must you *believe* p? Indeed, it has recently been argued that non-doxastic states such as assuming, accepting, or acquiescing can serve as the cognitive component of faith (Alston 1996; Audi 2008; Buchak 2012; Howard-Snyder 2013). While I will remain neutral on that issue, note that the same question can be asked of Evaluative Rationality. If I'm right so far, then there is *an evaluative condition* on faith, that is, faith requires some positive evaluation of the faith object. What kinds of evaluative attitudes can satisfy the evaluative condition? Must it be evaluative belief?

If evaluative belief were the only attitude that could satisfy the evaluative condition on faith, then Evaluative Rationality would be secure. After all, presumably evaluative belief is epistemically assessable just as non-evaluative belief is.[7] However, there are other evaluative attitudes besides evaluative belief. For instance, to regard one's upcoming family vacation with longing or revulsion, gratitude or resentment, hope or dread, or with some other desire or emotion, is to evaluate it positively or negatively. Desires and emotions are evaluative attitudes, yet it is far from obvious they require evaluative belief.[8] And one might reasonably doubt that desires and emotions are assessable for epistemic rationality.

Indeed, I take it this represents the main reason one might reject Evaluative Rationality, namely, if one takes the view that there are non-doxastic evaluations suitable for faith, but which are *not* themselves assessable for epistemic rationality. If this view is correct, then obviously the rationality of faith cannot depend on the rationality of those non-doxastic evaluative attitudes. If, however, that view is mistaken, if *any* attitude that can satisfy the evaluative condition is epistemically assessable, then it is plausible that faith is epistemically rational only if its evaluative component is. Accordingly, I will defend Evaluative Rationality by defending the following claim:

Footnote 6 continued
of whom endorse some evaluative condition on faith. For an account that rejects the evaluative condition on faith, see Dougherty (2014).

[7] Of course, some metaethical non-cognitivists deny that we have evaluative beliefs to begin with. Nevertheless, other non-cognitivists allow that we have evaluative beliefs, and such non-cognitivists tend to adopt a minimalism or quasi-realism that would equally allow that evaluative beliefs are epistemically assessable.

[8] Some philosophers, such as Solomon (1976), hold that emotions *are* evaluative beliefs. But we should reject this view because we can have emotions that conflict with our evaluative beliefs, as when you fear the rodent you believe to be harmless. Now, you might respond that in all such cases what we have are two conflicting evaluative beliefs. But that seems to attribute *way too much* irrationality to such cases.

The Universal Generalization: Any evaluative attitude that can satisfy the evaluative condition on faith is assessable for epistemic rationality.

This is important because establishing Evaluative Rationality is a crucial step in my overall case for the claim that the benefits of a religion are relevant to the epistemic rationality of faith.

What non-doxastic evaluations are there? As already suggested, desires and emotions are the primary options here. Two other states worth mentioning are preferences and valuings. But these are in some sense analyzable in terms of either desires, or emotions, or both. To prefer something is to *want* it. To value something is to register its value in a way that shows in your emotional and motivational dispositions (Scheffler 2010, Ch. 1).

While we're at it, what is the difference between desire and emotion? Why not just reduce emotion to desire, or perhaps to belief-desire couplings, as philosophers are fond of doing?[9] Indeed, it would actually help my case if we could reduce emotion to desire. After all, the fewer non-doxastic evaluations there are, the easier my job is. However, the reduction of emotion to desire or even to belief-desire couplings is controversial (and, I think, implausible), so I am going to grant that desire and emotion are distinct. At any rate, this gives my opponents the best chances at success.

I take it, then, that if emotions and desires are assessable for epistemic rationality, this is sufficient to establish the Universal Generalization. And if the Universal Generalization is true, then so is Evaluative Rationality.

Let's start with emotions.

3 The epistemic rationality of emotion and desire

The first thing to note is that emotions can be assessed as fitting or unfitting. Imagine someone who is angry at a crying infant, or moved with longing by a bad piece of kitsch, or proud of the ocean. This person's emotions are mistaken in an important sense. That's because emotions have conditions of fittingness. Anger is fitting *iff* directed at blameworthy offenses, and infants aren't blameworthy. Aesthetic longing is fitting *iff* directed at the sublime, and bad kitsch is not sublime. Pride is fitting *iff* directed at one's achievements, and the ocean isn't any human's achievement. As you can see, fittingness stands to emotions as truth stands to belief or veridicality to perception in at least the following sense: fittingness, truth, and veridicality each depend on matching up with the world in the right way.

The fittingness of an emotion should not be confused with its moral status, even though they may overlap. For instance, it is implausible that one's longing in response to bad kitsch is *morally* wrong, even though it is unfitting. The mistake this emotion makes is not a moral mistake (D'Arms and Jacobson 2000).

That being said, consider the following case:

[9] See Green (1992) and Marks (1982) for the view that emotions are reducible to belief-desire couplings. For criticism see Griffiths (1997, Ch. 2), and Deonna and Teroni (2012, Ch. 3).

Lottery Hoax: Don has won a lottery for millions of dollars. Since his evidence strongly favors the verdict that the lottery is legitimate, and that he has indeed won millions, naturally Don feels overjoyed at this turn of events. Unfortunately, however, Don's evidence is misleading. The lottery is a complete hoax.

In this case, Don's joy about his situation is unfitting. Joy is fitting *iff* one's situation is good, and Don's situation is not good. However, the important thing about this case is that Don's emotion is nevertheless *rational* (reasonable, justified, appropriate, etc.). I don't claim yet that his emotion is rational in an *epistemic* sense, only that it is rational in *some* sense. This much is just an obvious feature of the case. But I am going to argue that we should think Don's emotion is rational in an epistemic sense.

If Don's emotion is not epistemically rational, then in what other sense is it rational? The two most natural options are that his emotion is *pragmatically*[10] or *morally* rational. But we can rule both of these out.

It is implausible that Don's emotion is pragmatically rational. After all, it is easy to change the case so that Don's emotion is clearly pragmatically *ir*rational even though it retains the same *other* kind of rationality it has in the original case. Imagine Don knows that some super-criminal, bent on spreading misery, will obliterate him if he experiences any positive emotions. (The super-criminal has psychic powers that detect emotions.) Given this, it is rational from a pragmatic point of view for Don to avoid feeling joyful about his apparent lottery win. Yet, clearly it's still rational *in some other sense* for Don to feel joyful about his apparent lottery win.

It is also implausible that Don's emotion is *morally* rational. After all, we do not think he is doing something morally praiseworthy when he is overjoyed at his apparent lottery win. Neither do we think he would be doing something morally wrong by *not* being overjoyed (perhaps he has complicated feelings about money).

So, Don's emotion is rational, but not in a moral or pragmatic sense. A further possibility is that it is rational in some sui generis sense. However, this should be seen as a last resort. It would be an explanatory cost to admit a new, sui generis normative status. Thus, by elimination, it is plausible that Don's emotion is rational in an epistemic sense.

4 The epistemic goal: truth versus representational success

Any argument from elimination, however, must consider objections against the favored option. In the present case, the most natural objection runs as follows. Epistemic rationality is traditionally thought of as dependent on the goal of finding truth and avoiding falsehood (with respect to a suitably diverse and broad set of subject matters). This goal we may call *maximizing truth* (Foley 1991; James 1897; Vahid 2010).[11] That's partly why beliefs can be epistemically rational: beliefs can

[10] By 'pragmatic rationality' I mean rationality in light of the goal of maximizing pragmatic benefits. Something like 'prudential' or 'economic' rationality might have done just as well.

[11] This conception of the epistemic goal is sometimes invoked in the faith literature, as in McKaughan (2016, Sect. V). Of course, not everyone holds this view of the epistemic goal. There is a recent movement claiming that the epistemic goal is towards *understanding* rather than true belief (e.g., Kvanvig

be true or false. However, emotions cannot be true or false. Emotions might be misplaced or inappropriate, but we do not say they are false. Thus, emotions can't be assessed in terms of the final epistemic goal, and so cannot be assessed as epistemically rational.

Against this, we ought to reject the claim that the epistemic goal should be understood in terms of truth and falsehood *only*. Suppose both Harry and Selma know that it's snowing outside. Selma knows this because she sees it. Harry, in contrast, is visually hallucinating sunshine. Still, he knows it's snowing. For, he knows that he always hallucinates sunshine, so he doesn't rely on his vision for checking the weather. Instead, he relies on Selma's testimony, whom he knows to be highly reliable.

So, both Harry and Selma have true beliefs with respect to whether it is snowing. So, they have both succeeded in the epistemic goal of maximizing truth with respect to whether it is snowing. However, it is plausible that in some sense Harry is epistemically worse off than Selma. After all, Harry would be better off if he were not hallucinating, and plausibly the sense in which he would be better off is epistemic rather than moral or pragmatic or explainable in terms of some other evaluative notion.[12]

One might object here that the sense in which Harry is worse off than Selma is simply that his visual system is *malfunctioning*. So, Harry isn't *epistemically* worse off; he's worse off according to some biological norm of *proper functioning*. Against this, however, note that there are certain well-known illusions that occur within properly functioning visual systems, and the case can be recast in terms of such illusions. Suppose Marcy and Paulo are driving through the desert. Like normal perceivers, Marcy visually experiences mirages in the distance. Paulo, however, takes a pill that removes this illusion from his visual system. Marcy knows this, and so she relies on Paulo's testimony as to whether there is a body of water in the distance. So, both of them *know* there is no water in the distance. But Marcy has a non-veridical visual experience as of water, while Paulo sees only what is actually there. Paulo is better off in some sense, but this can't be explained in terms of proper functioning, since Marcy enjoys a properly functioning visual system.

A second objection here runs along the following lines. Knowledge is the best epistemic status. Therefore it cannot be improved upon. Both Harry and Selma know it is snowing outside. So, it cannot be that Harry is worse off than Selma. Against this, however, we should reject the claim that knowledge cannot be improved upon. I know that war is hell. So do veterans of wars. But their epistemic relation to this claim is better than mine, because they *understand* it better. Even

Footnote 11 continued
2003). Would this imply that the epistemic rationality of faith hangs on whether faith deepens or in some way improves understanding, casting a new light on the old adage of "faith seeking understanding"? This is extremely interesting but I cannot discuss it further here.

[12] I do not assume here that direct, perceptual evidence is always better than testimony. The point is rather that it is better to veridically perceive p than to hallucinate not-p, even if in both cases one has a true belief that-p or even knows that-p. Thanks to Duncan Pritchard and an anonymous referee for discussion on this issue.

when two people both know p, one of them can still be in a better overall epistemic relation to p (Kvanvig 2003).

It is plausible, then, that Harry is epistemically worse off than Selma. But how? Maybe it's just that Selma is capable of ascertaining *many more* true beliefs about the weather via her visual experience. After all, she sees many more details besides the mere fact *that* it is snowing. She sees how heavily it is snowing, whether it's sticking, etc. However, this can't be the whole story. For, Harry is epistemically worse off *with respect to the specific question of whether it is snowing.* I suggest, instead, that what makes him epistemically worse off is simply that he is non-veridically hallucinating. His visual experience presents the world as though things were sunny, but the world is not that way. Even though his beliefs about the weather are true, his visual experience is out of touch with reality.

I conclude, therefore, that Harry is epistemically worse off than Selma simply because he is non-veridically hallucinating. This is a significant result. After all, we don't speak of visual experiences as true or false. Rather, we speak of them as accurate or inaccurate, veridical or non-veridical. Thus, if the *non-veridicality* of Harry's experience explains his epistemic deficiency, then this overturns the traditional view that the epistemic goal is maximizing *truth*.

Like true belief, veridical perception succeeds in conveying the world as it is. Thus, truth is just a determinate of a more generic notion of being in touch with reality; or, more technically, a more generic notion of *representational success*. Something achieves representational success *iff* it represents, conveys or depicts the world as being a certain way, and the world is that way. I use the maximally generic "something" because many diverse kinds of things can have representational success: not only mental states like beliefs and memories, but also artifacts like maps and portraits. What I'm suggesting here is that maximizing *truth* is an unduly specific way of characterizing what is the real epistemic goal, that of maximizing *representational success*.[13]

Here is another case to motivate this. Imagine a creature who lacks the capacity to form beliefs, but who has perceptual experiences. Call such a creature a *Simpleton*. Plausibly, many animals are Simpletons. According to the old-school, truth-maximizing conception of the epistemic goal, no Simpleton can be epistemically better or worse off than any other, since none of them can form beliefs, let alone true or false beliefs. However, that is implausible. Imagine Simpleton A always hallucinates non-veridically, while Simpleton B always genuinely perceives his environment. It is plausible that Simpleton B is much better off from an epistemic point of view.[14] But it can't be that he's better off from the truth-maximizing point of view. He doesn't even have any truth-assessable attitudes! This suggests the epistemic goal should be understood in terms of a notion one click more generic than truth, and the notion of representational success is just that.

[13] This view of the epistemic goal also helps with the old problem of how some false scientific theories better approximate the truth than other false theories do. Representational success is, after all, a degreed notion, like *accuracy*, while truth is, most think, strictly binary.

[14] This case might tempt certain counterexamples. Note, however, that for my purposes I am not, and need not be, offering a sufficient condition for a state's being assessable for epistemic rationality.

The take away is this: Given that the epistemic aim is representational success rather than truth, the mere fact that emotions and desires cannot be assessed as true or false doesn't show they cannot be assessed for epistemically rationality. If emotions and desires have representational content, then the objection that they fail to meet up with the ultimate epistemic aim is mistaken.

5 The content of emotion and desire

What I want to suggest now is that the fittingness of emotion is plausibly regarded as a kind of representational success. When I am angry at something, my anger *represents* it as offensive. That explains why anger has the fittingness conditions it does. When I am moved with longing in response to something, my longing represents it as sublime. That explains why longing has the fittingness conditions it does. When I am proud of something, my pride *represents* it as an achievement. That explains why pride has the fittingness conditions it does. When an emotion is unfitting, it makes a mistake that may occasionally be moral or pragmatic but which is most fundamentally epistemic.

The idea here is that emotions attribute evaluative properties to their objects. In slogan form, *emotions have evaluative content*. This is currently the dominant view in philosophical work on emotion, and has been since the '60s. There is dispute about whether emotions are judgments, perceptions, or sui generis states, but what these views share is the claim that emotions, whatever they are, have evaluative representational content.[15] To avoid going far afield, I won't argue for this view at length. I'll just offer three brief considerations to soften you up.

First, as I've just noted, the claim that emotions have evaluative content explains why emotions have fittingness conditions at all, and why each emotion has the specific fittingness conditions it does.

Second, if emotions have evaluative content, this explains in what sense emotions are evaluations: They are evaluations in the sense that they represent evaluative properties.[16]

Third, emotions often conflict with our evaluative beliefs. Those who are terrified of flying often know better. They believe that flying is safe. They thus experience a conflict between what they feel and what they believe. If emotions have evaluative content, this would explain the conflict: their beliefs and their emotions have conflicting representational contents. Their fear represents flying as harmful, while their belief represents it as safe. Such recalcitrant emotions can thus be explained on

[15] For the view that emotions are evaluative beliefs, judgments, or some cognitive state in the vicinity, see Foot (1978a, 1978b), Greenspan (1988), Helm (2001), Kenny (1963), Lazarus (1991), Lyons (1980), Neu (1977), Nussbaum (2001), and Solomon (1976). For the view that emotions are evaluative perceptions or perception-like states with evaluative content, see Dancy (2014), Döring (2003), McDowell (1979, 1985), Prinz (2004), Roberts (2003), and Tappolet (2012). For the view that emotions are sui generis experiences with evaluative content, see Johnston (2002), Mendelovici (2014), and Tye (2008). For recent criticism of the thesis that emotions have evaluative representational content, see Deonna and Teroni (2012).

[16] But for an alternative explanation, see Deonna and Teroni (2014).

analogy with known visual illusions. You know the stick is straight but it continues to look bent. You experience a conflict between your visual and doxastic representations.

To recap, it is plausible that emotions have evaluative content. Given this, emotions can be assessed in light of the epistemic goal of maximizing representational success. Since emotions can be assessed in light of this goal, emotions can be assessed as epistemically rational.[17] Recall our example of Don's joy at his apparent but phony lottery win. His joy is ultimately a representational failure because it represents his situations as good when it is bad. However, from the point of view of Don's evidence, his situation looks very good, and so Don has excellent reason to think his joy a representational success. His joy is thus "justified" in the way that false beliefs are sometimes justified in spite of being false.[18]

That's what I have to say about emotions. Can the same be said for desires? I say Yes. Just as many hold that emotions have evaluative content, many also hold that desires have evaluative content (Oddie 2005; Schafer 2013; Stampe 1987). Desires represent their objects as good in some way. While I can't defend this view at length, the three brief considerations from earlier can be repeated here. First, desires have fittingness conditions. If you desire to be tortured to death, your desire is in some sense mistaken, since this would not be a good thing for you. If desires have evaluative content, then this would explain why they have fittingness conditions. Second, if desires have evaluative content, this would explain in what sense they are evaluations. Third, desires, like emotions, can conflict with evaluative beliefs. I desire a fourth bowl of ice cream, but this conflicts with my belief that this would be bad for me. We can explain this as a conflict between evaluative contents. My desire represents something as good, while my belief represents it as bad. Accordingly, given that desires have evaluative content, they, too, can be assessed in light of the epistemic goal of representational success. They, too, can be epistemically rational.

Let's connect all this back to the Universal Generalization. That thesis, you'll recall, wagers that any attitude that can satisfy the evaluative condition on faith is assessable for epistemic rationality. This thesis is most objectionable in the case of non-doxastic evaluative attitudes, the most natural candidates being emotions and desires. However, we have seen that it is plausible to regard emotions and desires as having evaluative representational content. Thus, emotions and desires are assessable in terms of the epistemic goal of maximizing representational success, and are thus assessable for epistemic rationality. I conclude, therefore, that Evaluative Rationality is plausible. For, it's plausible that, if faith is partly constituted by an epistemically irrational attitude, then faith itself is epistemically irrational. Thus, in order for faith to be epistemically rational, it must be epistemically rational to hold a positive evaluation of the faith object, whether that

[17] I'm not claiming that any state that is representational is thereby assessable for epistemic rationality. For instance, it is typically held that visual states are representational but not assessable for epistemic rationality (for an exception, see Siegel 2017). The representational content of emotion is just *part* of the explanation as to why it can be assessed for epistemic rationality.

[18] I'm just assuming justification is not factive (contra Littlejohn 2014).

evaluation is a belief, an emotion, a desire, or some pattern or dispositional network of these.[19]

6 The value of a worldview

So far, I've argued that faith that-p requires some positive evaluation of p. I've also argued that faith that-p is epistemically rational, only if its component evaluation of p is epistemically rational. But I'm specifically interested in the faith people have in their respective religions (or worldviews, to include naturalism). When is it epistemically rational to hold a positive evaluation of a religion? By way of a partial answer, I will develop the notion of an *existential resource*, and show how this can help explain the sense in which a religion may or may not merit positive evaluation.

For our purposes, to hold a positive evaluation of a religion is to regard it as a good thing if that religion were true. A religion is true *iff* its core claims are true. But whether the claims of a religion are true is one thing; whether we should want them to be is another. For instance, how good would it be if God exists as Christians conceive Him? How good would it be *for us*? We may also ask the comparative question: Is it better for us if God exists than if He doesn't? Here, for it to be *better for us* would mean, at least, that we are more capable of thriving in the world. So, if God exists, does that make the world more conducive to our thriving?

Such value questions are independent of what we believe the world is actually like. You might believe there is no God but that it would be better for us if there were.

Such value questions can also be asked about any of the claims of the major religions, as well as the totality of their respective claims. The offerings are finite in number—Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, paganism, scientifically-oriented naturalism. Add or subtract from that list as you like. My point is just that we can ask the value question with the complete menu in mind (whatever you think it offers): On which of the major worldviews is the world most conducive to our thriving?

I take it that for us to thrive means that our deepest, existential needs are met, needs for meaning, love, identity, community, and personal growth (to offer a laundry list).[20] While I wish to avoid complications in this area, I take it that for these needs to be *met* there is both an objective and subjective component. It isn't enough to lead a life that is in fact meaningful, if you find it empty. And it isn't enough to lead a life you *experience* as meaningful, if it is in fact trivial. If one's need for meaning is to be met, one must *experience* the meaningfulness one's life *actually* has.

[19] It's worth contrasting this with Wainwright (1995), who articulates a different account of how emotions or desires are relevant to the rationality of (Christian) faith. He argues that certain affective or conative dispositions are required in order to properly assess the epistemic reasons one has for theistic belief. In contrast, I am arguing that affective or conative states can themselves be epistemically rational, and so directly contribute to the epistemic status of the faith they constitute.

[20] See Williams (2011, Ch. 1), for more sustained discussion of what our existential needs are (albeit from a Christian point of view).

I take it something similar can be said of the other existential needs. One doesn't simply want to be loved as a matter of fact; one wants to feel the love one has, or at least, be in a position to feel it. One doesn't simply want to have great friendships as a matter of fact; one wants to feel the joy and security of the great friendships one has, or at least, be in a position to feel them. But neither does one want to feel these things if such feelings would be out of touch with reality.

The idea here is that humans, as a species or life form or perhaps as rational beings, have existential needs, and it is good *for us*, as well as good simpliciter—assuming there are such goods—if the world is such that we are capable of meeting our existential needs; and so the fact the world is that way, given that a certain religion is true, would be a reason to positively evaluative—to attribute value to—the claims of that religion.

The major worldviews offer different ways of meeting our existential needs. If Christ died for our sins, then the way we manage our moral failures is different than if we are spinning around the wheel of *saṃsāra*. If we are most fundamentally image-bearers of God, then the way we deal with the need for identity is different than if the self is an illusion all the way down. If life will continue either in Heaven or Hell, then the way we face death is different than if it is the total extinction of the person.

The *existential resources* of a worldview are the ways our existential needs can purportedly be met in virtue of the core claims of that worldview. It is a *claim* of Christianity that Christ died for our sins. It is also a *resource* because we can put that claim to use in managing personal moral failures. Many people have done things so monstrous they can only live with themselves by actively avoiding the reality of what they have done. Even those more innocent can admit to evil desires, thoughts, wishes, and fantasies that haunt the dark corners of the heart. It is essential to personal, spiritual growth that one has the courage to confront these evils no matter how monstrous. The natural course is either to face one's darkness and be crushed by the shame of it, or to avoid the shame by avoiding the reality. Choose your poison—to die from shame or live in self-deception? This dilemma is, it seems, a part of the basic package of human life. And it is here that we see the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ is not simply a thesis; it is a resource for dealing with and ultimately transcending this dilemma. The conviction that in full recognition of what we are, God not only loves and forgives us but desires our fellowship, can be called upon to for the courage to confront one's own evil.

Whether you agree with what I've just said, my point here is simply to illustrate the way in which the claims of a religion are not mere claims but also purport to provide existential resources.

Since the major worldviews differ in their existential resources, it is not at all obvious that they will offer the same *quality*. It may well turn out that one of the major worldviews offers far greater existential resources than all the others.

From this much, it is clear that the quality of a religion's existential resources is *relevant* to whether and to what extent that religion merits positive evaluation. What exactly is the nature of the relevance relation here? For reasons of space, I won't develop this into a properly constructed principle with necessary or sufficient conditions. For our purposes, it suffices to say that the fact that a religion offers

excellent existential resources is an epistemic reason to positively evaluate that religion. And this brings us back to the central claim of this paper, the claim that whether and to what extent a religion provides existential resources is relevant to the epistemic rationality of *faith* that the religion is correct. We are now in position to see that this is true. Suppose that Alyce the agnostic is trying to decide where to place her faith. She has somehow rationally narrowed her options down to religions A and B. Alyce knows that A and B are evidentially on par, let us suppose. Alyce knows that the only difference between A and B is that A offers much better existential resources than B. If the argument of this paper is correct, then religion A merits a greater degree of positive evaluation than B. And since faith is partly constituted by positive evaluation, this means it is *more* epistemically rational for Alyce have faith that religion A is true than it is for her to have faith that religion B is true. This does not yet say that it *is* epistemically rational for her to have faith that A is true. That depends on the nature of the *cognitive* requirement on faith. If belief is required, then it would not be fully epistemically rational for Alyce to have faith that A is true, although it would be *less irrational* than faith that B is true, given the greater existential resources of A. If, however, belief is not required for faith, if non-doxastic states such as assuming or accepting satisfy the cognitive condition on faith, then it may be that Alyce is fully epistemically rational in having faith that A is true, simply on the basis of its greater existential resources. Either way, the existential resources of a religion are relevant to the epistemic rationality of faith.

7 Conclusion

I have argued that the benefits of a religion are relevant to the epistemic (rather than merely pragmatic) rationality of faith that the claims of that religion are true. The benefits I have emphasized are the existential resources a religion has to offer. I've argued that faith is partly composed of a positive evaluation of the faith object. This evaluative component may take the form of emotion or desire, rather than evaluative belief, but even if that is so, emotions and desires are themselves assessable for epistemic rationality. This is partly explained by the fact that emotions and desires have evaluative representational content, and are thus capable of being assessed in light of the epistemic goal. That goal, I have argued, is not to maximize truth, as traditional accounts would have it, but to maximize representational success. Accordingly, even if faith's evaluative component takes the form of emotion or desire, it's still the case that faith's evaluative component is assessable for epistemic rationality. Thus, whether faith is epistemically rational depends on whether its evaluative component is. This makes it important to ask what factors are relevant to assessing whether it is rational to positively evaluate a religion's claims. If I am right, then a crucial factor is the existential resources a religion offers. Whether a religion provides the resources to find meaning, identity, belonging, loving relationships, personal growth, etc., is relevant to whether faith is rational in an *epistemic* sense.

This suggests a radical re-focusing of philosophical work on the rationality of faith. To address whether it is epistemically rational to have faith that a certain

religion is correct, we must characterize the existential resources of that religion and compare them to the existential resources of alternative worldviews. This requires us to draw on work in ethics and empirical psychology as well as the history and anthropology of the various world religions, and indeed any form of human expression arising from lived experience within the various religious systems. If what I've said is correct, then this project is of central importance to work on the epistemic rationality of faith.

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