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EPISTEMOLOGIA & FILOSOFIA DA LINGUAGEM

Epistemology of Religion: On the Rationality and Defeasibility of Religious Belief

Epistemologia da religião: sobre a racionalidade e a derrotabilidade da crença religiosa

Epistemología de la Religión: Sobre la Racionalidad y la Derrotabilidad de la Creencia Religiosa

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Abstract: This article examines the conditions under which religious belief may be regarded as rational in light of contemporary debates in epistemology. Beginning with the distinction between belief and knowledge, it examines the role of epistemic justification as the element that confers stability and epistemic value upon beliefs, preventing their truth from being merely a matter of luck or chance. It then explores the notion of epistemic rationality, focusing on the debate between internalism and externalism and their implications for the assessment of religious belief, as illustrated by the evidentialist and externalist approaches advanced by Richard Swinburne and Alvin Plantinga, respectively. The article then introduces the notion of epistemic defeasibility, emphasizing that the rationality of a belief depends not only on the presence of justifiers but also on its ability to withstand potential defeaters. It examines several prominent challenges to religious belief—including the problem of evil, divine hiddenness, and naturalistic critiques of religion—and considers possible responses to them. It argues that the existence of such defeaters does not automatically render religious belief irrational, since they may themselves be neutralized by appropriate counterarguments (that is, defeater defeaters). The article concludes that the rationality of religious belief should be understood more broadly, as depending both on the conditions under which the belief is formed and sustained and on its capacity to withstand defeaters.

Keywords: epistemology of religion; rationality; epistemic defeasibility; religious belief; defeaters.

Resumo: Este artigo investiga sob quais condições a crença religiosa pode ser considerada racional, à luz de debates contemporâneos em epistemologia. Partindo da distinção entre crença e conhecimento, o trabalho examina o papel da justificação epistêmica como elemento que confere estabilidade e valor cognitivo às crenças, evitando que sua verdade seja meramente fruto de sorte ou acaso. Em seguida, analisa-se a noção de racionalidade epistêmica, com destaque para o debate entre internismo e externismo, bem como suas implicações para a avaliação da crença religiosa, ilustradas pelas propostas evidencialistas e externistas de Richard Swinburne e Alvin Plantinga, respectivamente. Introduz-se, então, a noção de derrotabilidade epistêmica, enfatizando que a racionalidade de uma crença não depende apenas de seus justificadores, mas também de sua resistência a possíveis derrotadores. São analisados alguns dos principais desafios à crença religiosa — como o problema do mal, o ocultamento divino e as críticas naturalistas — e discutidas possíveis respostas a eles. Argumenta-se que a presença de tais derrotadores não implica automaticamente a irracionalidade da crença religiosa, uma vez que estes podem ser neutralizados por contra-argumentos adequados (isto é, derrotadores dos derrotadores). Conclui-se que a racionalidade da crença religiosa deve ser compreendida de modo mais abrangente, como dependente tanto das condições de sua formação quanto de

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sua capacidade de resistir a derrotadores.
Palavras-chave: epistemologia da religião; racionalidade; derrotabilidade; crença religiosa; derrotadores.

Resumen: Este artículo examina las condiciones bajo las cuales la creencia religiosa puede considerarse racional a la luz de los debates contemporáneos en epistemología. Partiendo de la distinción entre creencia y conocimiento, analiza el papel de la justificación epistémica como el elemento que confiere estabilidad y valor epistémico a las creencias, evitando que su verdad sea simplemente una cuestión de suerte o azar. A continuación, explora la noción de racionalidad epistémica, centrándose en el debate entre internalismo y externalismo y en sus implicaciones para la evaluación de la creencia religiosa, tal como se ilustran en los enfoques evidencialista y externalista propuestos por Richard Swinburne y Alvin Plantinga, respectivamente. Posteriormente, el artículo introduce la noción de derrotabilidad epistémica, subrayando que la racionalidad de una creencia depende no solo de la presencia de justificadores, sino también de su capacidad para resistir posibles derrotadores. Examina varios desafíos destacados a la creencia religiosa —entre ellos, el problema del mal, el ocultamiento divino y las críticas naturalistas a la religión— y considera posibles respuestas a ellos. Se sostiene que la existencia de tales derrotadores no convierte automáticamente a la creencia religiosa en irracional, ya que estos pueden ser neutralizados mediante contraargumentos adecuados (es decir, derrotadores de derrotadores). El artículo concluye que la racionalidad de la creencia religiosa debe entenderse de manera más amplia, como dependiente tanto de las condiciones bajo las cuales la creencia se forma y se mantiene como de su capacidad para resistir derrotadores.
Palabras clave: epistemología de la religión; racionalidad; derrotabilidad epistémica; creencia religiosa; derrotadores.

1 Introduction: Can Religious Belief Be Rational?

Can it be rational to believe that God exists? Or that Jesus Christ is the redeemer of humankind? Or that the Trinity consists of three persons in one God? Or that the biblical texts constitute divine revelation? More generally, can religious beliefs be rational?

An initial reaction might be to answer these questions with another question: why shouldn't they be? Since the earliest forms of social life, religious beliefs have played a central role in shaping both communities and the lives of their members. Throughout history, countless testimonies have reported what is taken to be divine action in the world, and religions continue to attract millions of adherents. Against this background, the suspicion that religious belief is irrational appears to require justification.

Nevertheless, doubts concerning the rationality of religious belief are as old as religion itself. Whenever a favorable event is attributed to divine action, room is opened for challenges based on counterexamples or on the absence of regularity. This line of thought lies at the very roots of philosophical skepticism.

Skepticism may be understood as a response to an epistemic deficiency—that is, to the absence or insufficiency of reasons, evidence, or justification. From ancient skepticism, represented by Sextus Empiricus, to the methodological skepticism of René Descartes, the possibility of widespread error has been taken seriously (Feldman, 2003, p. 108-156). Within this framework, religious belief emerges as a particularly salient target of doubt: might we be mistaken about the existence of God or about the nature of religious matters?

Beginning with the Enlightenment, criticisms of the rationality of religious belief became increasingly prominent. The rise of the scientific method and the rejection of appeals to authority contributed to growing suspicion toward metaphysical beliefs (Pinker, 2018). The conflict between science and religion—frequently illustrated by the case of Galileo Galilei—became paradigmatic[2]. In the twentieth century, logical positivism radicalized this tendency by treating religious propositions as meaningless, on the grounds that they can neither be reduced to logical or analytic truths nor verified through empirical observation (Creath, 2022).

Against this background, the aim of this article is to investigate the conditions under which religious belief may be regarded as rational in light of contemporary debates in epistemology. To this end, we focus particularly on the notions of justification and defeaters, understood as central elements in the dynamics of epistemic rationality: whereas justifiers provide support for a belief, defeaters may weaken or eliminate that support

[2] For an excellent, up-to-date, and philosophically rigorous discussion of the alleged conflict between religion and science, see Plantinga (2011).

(Fett, 2025, p. 78-80).\

The discussion proceeds as follows. Section 2 revisits the concept of belief, understood as a propositional attitude and, more specifically, as a doxastic attitude. Section 3 examines the notion of epistemic rationality, introducing the distinction between internalism and externalism and briefly presenting the approaches of Richard Swinburne and Alvin Plantinga as paradigmatic examples of these competing perspectives on religious belief. Section 4 introduces the notion of epistemic justification in connection with epistemic defeat and defeaters, distinguishing different kinds of defeaters and examining how familiar objections—such as the problem of evil, divine hiddenness, and naturalistic critiques of religion—may function as defeaters of religious belief, together with possible responses to them. Finally, Section 5 offers some concluding remarks concerning the conditions under which religious belief may properly be regarded as rational.

2 Belief and Knowledge

In contemporary epistemology, belief is traditionally understood as a propositional attitude: for any proposition p, to believe that p is to take p to be true. This characterization emphasizes the representational role of beliefs: they are mental states through which a subject takes a cognitive stance toward the world. There are two other possible attitudes one may adopt toward a proposition: disbelief, when one believes that ¬p, and suspension of judgment, when one withholds belief as to whether p is true. These three propositional attitudes—belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment—are therefore more specifically referred to as doxastic attitudes.

Belief is one of the necessary conditions for knowledge. The so-called belief condition captures this point: "It is impossible to know that p without at least believing that p, that is, without at least taking p to be true" (Fett, 2019, p. 33). Belief is therefore not merely one element among others but a necessary condition for knowledge: there can be no knowledge without belief.

However, not every belief amounts to knowledge. Since Plato, the philosophical tradition has emphasized the distinction between mere true belief and knowledge. This is the Socratic insight expressed in the *Meno*: a belief may be true merely by luck or chance without thereby constituting knowledge (Fett, 2019, p. 30-31). Consider, for example, someone who correctly believes, but without any supporting reason, that the total number of stars in the universe is odd. Even if the belief happens to be true (by stipulation), it lacks stability and epistemic grounding. Hence Plato's famous metaphor of the statues of Daedalus: unjustified true beliefs are unstable—they are "untethered"—whereas knowledge requires something that secures them, namely, reasons or explanations. It is in this context that the notion of *epistemic justification* emerges. True beliefs become knowledge when they are "supported by reasons," that is, when one can provide "an explanation of why they are true" (Fett, 2019, p. 32). This idea lies at the heart of the classical analysis of knowledge as justified true belief.

This distinction may also be expressed in terms of epistemic quality. Recall the classical Greek distinction between *doxa* (opinion or belief) and *epistēmē* (knowledge), according to which beliefs generally possess a lower epistemic standing, whereas knowledge is characterized by "solid grounds that allow us to affirm with confidence that [our beliefs] are true" (Fett, 2025, p. 32). The difference between believing and knowing is therefore not merely a matter of content but of epistemic basis: beliefs may be fragile, resting on impressions or limited evidence, whereas knowledge involves a more robust connection with reality (Fett, 2016).

This characterization helps explain why the notion of belief is central to the epistemology of religion. If religious belief, like any other belief, is a propositional attitude that can be assessed in terms of truth and justification, then its rationality depends precisely on the conditions under which it is formed, sustained, and eventually challenged. It is at this point that the notions of justification and defeaters come into play, and these will be explored in the sections that follow.

3 What Makes a Belief Rational?

3.1 Epistemic Rationality and Justification

The notion of epistemic rationality is closely connected to that of justification. Indeed, the two are often treated as synonymous. As noted above, the Platonic tradition suggests that what distinguishes mere true belief from knowledge is precisely the element that "ties" belief to the truth—namely, the support provided by reasons. In contemporary epistemological terminology, this element is known as epistemic justification.

By connecting justification to the concept of knowledge, we may say that justification is what anchors true belief to reality, preventing its truth from being merely a matter of luck. In this sense, the rationality of a belief is not exhausted by its being true; rather, it depends on the way in which that belief is supported.

Here, the distinction between propositional justification—having sufficient reason or warrant to believe—and doxastic justification—actually basing one's belief on those reasons—is crucial (Firth, 1978). This distinction is well illustrated by the familiar Holmes and Watson example. Holmes has good reasons for believing that the butler is the murderer and forms his belief on the basis of those reasons. Watson, by contrast, possesses exactly the same evidence but believes the butler is guilty merely because of prejudice. Merely possessing good reasons is therefore insufficient; one's belief must actually be based upon them. Epistemic rationality thus requires not only access to adequate reasons but also their proper use in the formation of belief.

Yet this characterization immediately raises a fundamental question: what exactly makes a belief justified? It is here that competing theories of epistemic rationality emerge. Two opposing positions have dominated this debate: internalism and externalism. Let us briefly examine each.

3.2 Internalism and Externalism

According to internalist theories, "the justificatory status of a belief is determined solely by factors internal to the subject's mental life, such as evidence and reasons" (Fett, 2019, p. 33). In general, these theories also require some form of reflective accessibility: the subject must be capable, at least in principle, of accessing and articulating the reasons that justify the belief. Such approaches are commonly grouped under the label *accessibilism*. Weaker forms of internalism require only that whatever justifies a belief be internal to the subject's mental life, a position commonly known as *mentalism*. Historically, this has been the dominant view in epistemology, extending from ancient philosophy through Descartes to Bertrand Russell in the early twentieth century. Among its most influential contemporary defenders are Earl Conee and Richard Feldman (2004).

Externalist theories, by contrast, reject the claim that a subject's justification depends exclusively on factors internal to the subject's mental life. According to externalism, justification may depend on factors outside the subject's perspective, such as the reliability of the cognitive processes that produce the belief or the proper functioning of the subject's cognitive faculties. On this view, a person may be justified in holding a belief even if unable to articulate reasons in its defense. Reliabilism, the paradigmatic externalist theory proposed by Alvin Goldman, maintains that a belief is justified if it is "produced by a reliable cognitive process" (Goldman, 1979). This approach shifts the focus from reasons accessible to the believer to the objective conditions under which the belief is formed.

This distinction is especially important for the epistemology of religion. If internalism is correct, the rationality of religious belief depends on the availability of reasons or evidence accessible to the believer. If externalism is correct, however, religious belief may be rational even in the absence of such accessible reasons, provided that it is formed in an epistemically appropriate way.

A brief historical survey helps to illuminate this

contrast. Taking Christianity as an example, one can observe that throughout its history religious belief has been continuously defended, systematized, and theoretically refined. In the theological writings of Augustine of Hippo, for instance, we already find a sophisticated articulation of the relationship between faith and reason, expressed in Anselm's famous maxim *credo ut intelligam* ("I believe in order that I may understand"), which suggests that belief does not exclude rational inquiry but rather motivates it.

Later, during the medieval scholastic period, Thomas Aquinas developed a paradigmatic model of the rational defense of religious belief through philosophical arguments for the existence of God—the celebrated Five Ways. Here, the rationality of religious belief is clearly conceived in internalist terms: faith can be supported, at least in part, by philosophical arguments accessible to natural reason (Reale; Antiseri, 2004).

More recently, the tradition of Christian apologetics has renewed this concern by seeking to provide public defenses of the faith through cosmological, moral, and historical arguments. In this respect, apologetics clearly operates within an internalist framework, according to which the rationality of belief depends upon the availability and assessment of supporting reasons.

At the same time, however, testimony and religious experience have always played a significant role in the formation and maintenance of religious belief, even in the absence of explicit argumentation[3]. Religious beliefs are often acquired in contexts where individuals trust the testimony of a religious tradition, a community, or religious authorities, or where they interpret their own experiences as religious in nature.

This point is already recognized, in theological terms, by Augustine, who emphasizes the roles of authority and inwardness in the formation of belief. It receives a more explicit philosophical formulation in the work of William Alston, who argues that religious experience may, under appropriate circumstances, function analogously to sense perception by conferring justification on the beliefs it produces (Alston, 1991). Likewise, the epistemology of testimony has emphasized that a large proportion of our beliefs—including many outside the religious domain—is acquired through trust in other epistemic agents, without thereby becoming irrational; quite the contrary (Fett; Bonhemberger, 2022, p. 5).

Against this background, the demand that every rational belief must be supported by explicit arguments or articulable reasons may appear excessively restrictive. Many beliefs are formed non-inferentially from sources that, although not reducible to internally accessible reasons, may nevertheless provide genuine epistemic justification (Fett; Gaboardi, 2019).

With this background in place, we can now see more clearly how these two perspectives—internalism and externalism—are reflected in contemporary epistemology. Internalist approaches emphasize the role of accessible reasons in justifying religious beliefs, whereas externalist approaches allow justification to arise from appropriately functioning sources or processes, such as reliable testimony and religious experience, thereby more closely reflecting the way religious beliefs are actually acquired and sustained in practice.

3.3 Justifying Religious Belief: Evidentialism and Proper Function

Two of the most influential positions in the contemporary debate over the rationality of religious belief can be understood through the lens of the internalism–externalism distinction.

On the one hand, Richard Swinburne (2001) defends an evidentialist approach. For Swinburne, belief in God is rational only insofar as it is supported by evidence (Conee; Feldman, 2004). His strategy is to argue that the theistic hypothesis possesses a high degree of explanatory probability (Swinburne, 2004). Simplicity and explanatory power thus function as epistemic criteria that justify belief. Evidential support, understood in

[3] See Greco (2012) and Alston (1991) for discussions of the roles of testimony and religious experience, respectively, in the epistemology of religion.

probabilistic terms, occupies center stage. This approach naturally aligns with internalism: the rationality of religious belief depends on the believer's ability to marshal reasons in its favor.

On the other hand, Alvin Plantinga (2011) proposes an externalist alternative based on the notion of *proper function*. According to Plantinga, belief in God may be rational even in the absence of evidence possessed by the subject—whether reflectively accessible or merely present within the subject's mental life—provided that the belief is produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly in an appropriate epistemic environment according to a design plan (ultimately created by God) aimed at truth.

As Plantinga (2011) argues, belief in God may be properly basic, that is, not inferred from other beliefs and yet fully rational. On this account, justification does not depend upon possessing accessible reasons but upon the proper functioning of the cognitive process through which the belief is formed. In this respect, Plantinga's account resembles reliabilism, since both theories ground positive epistemic status in the manner in which a belief is produced. A belief enjoys positive epistemic standing because of the way it is generated, the function it fulfills, and the truth-directed aim that governs its production[4].

Plantinga's proposal significantly broadens the scope of epistemic rationality. Religious beliefs may be rational even when believers are unable to offer arguments in their defense, provided that their cognitive faculties are functioning properly and the beliefs in question are the appropriate products of those faculties.

3.4 Rationality, Fallibilism, and Degrees of Justification

Finally, it is important to note that epistemic rationality does not entail infallibility. Contemporary epistemology generally embraces a fallibilist perspective, according to which a belief may be justified and yet false. Rationality therefore requires not certainty but an adequate degree of justification. A difficult question nevertheless remains: how much justification is enough? There are no clear or universally accepted criteria for determining when a belief is sufficiently justified.

This indeterminacy is particularly significant in the case of religious belief. Given ambiguous evidence, persistent disagreement, and the possibility of defeaters (to be examined in the next section), judgments about the rationality of religious belief will largely depend upon the theoretical framework one adopts, whether internalist or externalist. We now turn to the dynamics through which rational beliefs are acquired and lost, and to the kinds of considerations that may function as defeaters for the justification of religious belief.

4 Justification, Defeaters, and the Dynamics of Religious Belief

4.1 Defeaters and Defeat: The Dynamics of Justification

As we have seen in the previous sections, the notion of epistemic rationality is closely tied to that of justification. In keeping with the Platonic tradition, justification may be understood as what "ties" belief to the truth, preventing the attainment of truth from being merely accidental. In this sense, justification plays an epistemizing role: it is what transforms true belief into knowledge (Fett, 2019, p. 31).

If the concept of justification explains how beliefs become rational, the notion of defeaters—or, in the terminology adopted by Fett (2022), *overriders*—explains how rationality may be lost. The basic idea is straightforward: just as we can acquire justification for believing a proposition, we can also lose it. Imagine a simple case. You see what appears to be a red wall. On the basis of that visual appearance, you believe that the wall is red, and this seems perfectly rational, since things generally are as they appear—assuming,

[4] Although it is common in epistemology to treat the notions of rationality and justification as synonymous, Plantinga introduces a further notion that carries important nuances, namely, the notion of *warrant*, and distinguishes it from the former in significant respects. For the purposes of the present introductory discussion, however, warrant may be understood simply as the property that makes a true belief epistemically more valuable. For a more detailed treatment, see Feldman (2003, p. 99-104).

of course, that fallibilism allows for rational belief even when it may ultimately turn out to be false. Suppose, however, that you are then informed that the wall is being illuminated by red lights. You thereby lose your justification for believing that the wall is red, because even if it were white, it would still appear red under the colored lighting. Your justification has been defeated. It is no longer rational to maintain the belief. This example illustrates an important point: a belief that was initially justified may become unjustified when *counterevidence* emerges. This phenomenon is known as *epistemic defeat*, that is, the loss of previously available justification (Almeida; Fett. 2016).

The dynamics of epistemic rationality may therefore be stated more precisely as follows: "The basic idea is that, just as we can gain epistemic justification for believing a proposition, we can also lose it. We lose justification because counterevidence attacks our beliefs" (Fett, 2022, p. 24).

Epistemic rationality is therefore not static but dynamic. Beliefs may gain or lose epistemic status as new evidence becomes available. A rational agent is one who responds appropriately to this evolving body of evidence by revising beliefs in light of relevant counterevidence. This dynamic is captured by what may be called *the No-Defeat Principle*: "A belief is justified—or rational—only if the subject possesses no undefeated defeaters for its justification" (Fett, 2019, p. 115).

This principle has important implications for the epistemology of religion. It implies that the rationality of religious belief depends not only on the presence of justifiers but also on the absence of relevant undefeated defeaters. Let us briefly consider some of the most important candidates.

4.2 Implications for Religious Belief

Within the epistemology of religion, the notion of defeasibility plays a central role. Religious beliefs may rest upon good reasons and evidence (from an internalist perspective) or upon sources such as testimony, tradition, and religious experience (from an externalist perspective), yet they are also vulnerable to a variety of potential defeaters, including the problem of evil, divine hiddenness, and naturalistic explanations of religion.

The crucial question is therefore not simply whether there are justifiers for religious belief, but whether those justifiers withstand relevant defeaters. Accordingly, the rationality of religious belief depends upon its ability to resist, neutralize, or adequately answer these challenges. This leads to an important reformulation of the central question addressed in this paper: rather than asking merely whether religious belief is justified, we must ask whether it remains justified after confronting possible defeaters.

4.3 Defeaters of Religious Belief

As Alvin Plantinga (2016) emphasizes, objections to religious belief frequently take the form of potential defeaters. Perhaps the best-known example is the problem of evil. In its evidential formulation, the argument maintains that the existence of suffering counts as evidence against theism (Plantinga, 2016, p. 115). As such, it constitutes a plausible candidate for a defeater, insofar as it provides evidence against the existence of an omnibenevolent God. Nevertheless, as Plantinga himself argues, although evil poses a genuine challenge for the believer, it does not necessarily constitute a successful defeater. One possible reply is that our assessment of suffering as "gratuitous" is epistemically limited, so that the existence of evil does not rule out the possibility that God has morally sufficient reasons unknown to us. Such responses—traditionally known as theodicies—therefore function as defeaters of the original defeater.

Another important case is the argument from divine hiddenness, associated with John Schellenberg (1993). This argument may likewise be understood as a defeater because it challenges both the reliability of the sources of religious belief and the coherence of the concept of God. Its central question is straightforward: if God desires our salvation, why does He not make His existence unmistakably evident so that we might know Him without doubt and thereby attain salvation? Yet one may respond that divine hiddenness is not

incompatible with God's existence. Rather, hiddenness may itself serve important purposes in moral development or the preservation of human freedom—for example, by encouraging a more genuine search for God or a more authentic commitment of faith. In this way, what initially appears to be an effective defeater may be reinterpreted within a broader theistic framework.

Naturalistic critiques of religion—such as those advanced by Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud—also function as potential defeaters[5]. These approaches seek to explain religious belief in terms of human projection, social mechanisms, or psychological processes, thereby suggesting that such beliefs are not truth-directed. Plantinga acknowledges the force of this line of criticism, particularly in its Freudian form, which challenges the warrant of religious belief. Yet an important response—that is, a defeater of the defeater—is that a causal explanation of a belief does not entail its falsity. The fact that a belief originates in psychological or social causes is not, by itself, evidence that it is false or unjustified. To infer otherwise would be to commit the genetic fallacy.

This discussion has necessarily been brief, but it illustrates the central point. The mere existence of potential defeaters does not automatically render religious belief irrational. A belief may remain rational despite serious objections, provided that those objections do not constitute successful defeaters, or provided that they are themselves defeated.

5 Concluding Remarks

The present study has sought to clarify the conditions under which religious belief may be regarded as rational by taking epistemic justification and its dynamics in the face of potential defeaters as its central focus. Our discussion of the distinction between belief and knowledge highlighted the foundational role of justification as that which "ties" belief to the truth, thereby conferring epistemic stability upon it. We then examined competing theories of epistemic rationality—most notably, internalism and externalism—showing that different epistemological frameworks yield different assessments of the epistemic status of religious belief. Whereas internalist approaches require that believers possess justificatory reasons, externalist approaches make room for basic forms of justification arising from sources such as testimony and religious experience.

The introduction of the notion of epistemic defeasibility enabled us to reformulate the central question of the paper. It is not enough to ask whether there are justifiers for religious belief; we must also ask whether those justifiers withstand potential defeaters. In this respect, our examination of familiar challenges—such as the problem of evil, divine hiddenness, and naturalistic critiques of religion—has shown, albeit only briefly, that while these objections raise important epistemic concerns, they do not automatically render religious belief irrational. Potential defeaters may themselves be neutralized by other defeaters, thereby preserving the justification of the belief in question.

The main conclusion of this article is that the rationality of religious belief should be understood in defeasible terms. This perspective allows us to reformulate our initial question in a more precise way. The issue is not simply whether religious belief is rational, but under what conditions, for which epistemic agents, and in which epistemic contexts it can remain rational in the face of potential defeaters.

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[5] In *Filosofia da Religião*, Urbano Zilles (1997) provides an insightful historical overview of the context and significance of each of these objections, namely those advanced by Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud. For a detailed examination of Feuerbach's anthropological atheism, see Souza (1994).

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