Filosofia Unisinos
Unisinos Journal of Philosophy
19(3):294-301, sep/dec 2018
Unisinos – doi: 10.4013/fsu.2018.193.11

DOSSIER

Debunking and fully apt belief

Desmistificação e a crença plenamente apta

Joshua C. Thurow[1]

ABSTRACT

One of the contentious philosophical issues surrounding the cognitive science of religion (CSR) is whether well-confirmed CSR theories would debunk religious beliefs. These debates have been contentious in part because of criticisms of epistemic principles used in debunking arguments. In this paper I use Ernest Sosa's respected theory of knowledge as fully apt belief—which avoids objections that have been leveled against sensitivity and safety principles often used in debunking arguments—to construct a plausible debunking argument for religious belief on the assumption that religious belief is formed simply through processes theorized by CSR. But, in fact, most believers also rely on arguments of various sorts, and their beliefs are not debunked.

Keywords: debunking argument, cognitive science of religion, Ernest Sosa.

RESUMO

Uma das questões filosóficas controversas que cercam a ciência cognitiva da religião (CCR) é se as teorias de CCR desmitificariam crenças religiosas. Esses debates têm sido controversos, em parte, por causa das críticas aos princípios epistêmicos usados para desmistificar argumentos. Neste artigo, uso a respeitada teoria do conhecimento de Ernest Sosa como crença plenamente apta – que evita objeções que foram levantadas contra princípios de sensibilidade e segurança frequentemente usados em desmistificar argumentos – para construir um argumento de desmistificação plausível para a crença religiosa na suposição de que crença religiosa é formada simplesmente por meio de processos teorizados pelo CCR. Mas, de fato, a maioria dos crentes também conta com argumentos de vários tipos, e suas crenças não são desmistificadas.

Palavras-chave: argumento de desmistificação, ciência cognitiva da religião, Ernest Sosa.

One of the interesting philosophical issues raised by the cognitive science of religion (CSR) is whether well-confirmed CSR theories would debunk religious beliefs. What exactly it means to debunk a belief will be discussed shortly, but as a first pass: to debunk a belief is to give good reason to think that the belief is poorly formed/unreliable/incompetent. There has been some controversy about whether well-confirmed CSR theories would debunk religious beliefs; some scholars say 'yes' (Bering, 2011; Bloom, 2009; Bulbulia, 2013; Leben, 2014; Wilkins and Griffiths, 2012), others say 'no' (Barrett, 2007; Leech and Visala, 2011; Murray, 2009; Murray and Schloss, 2013; Thurow, 2013; 2014; van Inwagen, 2009). This whole debate is mirrored by a debate in metaethics over whether evolutionary explanations of moral beliefs

[1] University of Texas at San Antonio. One UTSA Circle, San Antonio, TX, 78249, USA. E-mail: joshua.thurow@utsa.edu

debunk such beliefs—with just as much controversy (see e.g. Joyce, 2006; Shafer-Landau, 2012; Street, 2006; Vavova, 2014, 2015; Wielenberg, 2016).

Much of the controversy rests ultimately on how to understand debunking arguments and on whether there is a plausible epistemic principle undergirding such arguments. In this paper I want to explore whether a compelling debunking argument can be built using Ernest Sosa's epistemological framework, which prizes fully apt belief as a particularly valuable human form of knowledge. Sosa's framework may help to advance discussion on our central question because (i) his framework has gained widespread acceptance, unlike some of the principles used in previous versions of debunking arguments, and (ii) Sosa's central notion of apt belief has various advantages over the notions of sensitivity and safety, which have featured prominently in the epistemological principles used in previous debunking arguments.

I shall begin by presenting a general schema for debunking arguments and then discussing the challenges that face some of the prominent epistemological principles that have been plugged into this schema. In the second section I briefly present Sosa's epistemological framework and in the third section I use that framework to construct and evaluate a few debunking arguments using epistemological principles derived from Sosa's framework. I argue that a plausible epistemological principle can be drawn from Sosa's framework that can be used to construct a plausible debunking argument for religious belief on the assumption that religious belief is formed simply through processes theorized by CSR. But, in fact, most believers also rely on arguments of various sorts, and their beliefs are not debunked.

Debunking arguments

To debunk a belief is to challenge that belief in a certain sort of way. Familiar claims of bias are examples of debunking arguments. Joe says to Jane, "you just believe the cops are innocent of murder because you are fearful of black people." Joe thus challenges Jane's belief that the cops are innocent. Notice that the challenge doesn't attempt to provide evidence against Jane's belief—Joe does not in this statement attempt to show that her belief is false or doubtful in itself. Rather, he challenges her belief by charging that it was formed improperly—using some method or under some influence or in some circumstances that are risky. In this case, he charges that her belief is formed under the influence of fear rather than through any competence at assessing the guilt or innocence of the cops. Fear is assumed to be an improper or risky ground for this belief. Why? Different versions of the debunking argument, assuming different epistemic principles, will answer this question differently. Some will say that fear doesn't track the truth, others that it is an unreliable guide, or that it is an insensitive or unsafe ground for belief.

Many debunking arguments fit the following schema:

(1) My class of beliefs C are influenced by factor F.

(2) When C beliefs are influenced the way they are by F, they do not satisfy epistemic condition R.

(3) Once I become justified in believing that a set of beliefs do not satisfy epistemic condition R, then I lack epistemic status E in continuing to hold those beliefs. [=Epistemic Debunking Principle]

C. I lack epistemic status E in continuing to hold the beliefs in C.

Premise (3), the Epistemic Debunking Principle, is the lone philosophical premise in this argument. Different substitutions for R and E will yield different epistemic debunking principles. Possible instances of R include being reliable, sensitive, or safe. Typically, the instances of E will be either knowledge or justification.

To illustrate one way to fill in the debunking argument schema, return to the example of Joe and Jane. Joe claims that Jane's belief that the cops are innocent is influenced by fear of black people. A common way to fill out the debunking argument is as follows: believing that one person is innocent on the basis of fear of others is an improper way of forming a belief because if the cop were guilty, Jane would still believe he was innocent because her fear of black people would still be present. In other words, beliefs of this sort formed in fear are not sensitive to the truth. And once we realize a belief is formed insensitively, we are thereby unjustified in continuing to hold that belief. This debunking argument rests on the following epistemic debunking principle:

Sensitivity EDP: once I become justified in believing that a set of beliefs are insensitive to the truth given the way that they are formed, then I lack justification in continuing to hold those beliefs.

This principle is but one of many possible principles one might use as an epistemic debunking principle. However, sensitivity debunking principles like this one are frequently appealed to—implicitly or explicitly—in debunking argument literature (e.g. Bedke, 2014; Thurow, 2013; White, 2010; Wilkins and Griffiths, 2012). In the remainder of this section I will briefly describe the problems that face this and one other popular principle. We will then be left with a question: is there a more plausible epistemic principle we can use in debunking arguments, and can a plausible CSR-based debunking argument be built on it? Our subsequent investigation of Sosa's epistemology will begin to answer these questions.

Many have found the sensitivity principle plausible because it captures an intuitive idea: that we want our belief-forming methods to track the truth in such a way that we are not led astray when we use them. Sensitivity is one way of having a tight connection between beliefs formed by our methods and the truth. A sensitive method M won't lead us astray because if it is sensitive, then the following is true: if p were false, then I wouldn't believe p using method M.

Despite the intuitive attractiveness of this principle, it has faced many objections—most derived from classic objections to the truth-tracking theory of knowledge developed by Robert Nozick (1981), which employed a sensitivity requirement. (A) Every inductively-inferred belief is insensitive, even when the inductive inference is very strong. To take an example inspired by Jonathan Vogel (1987): Knowing I am inebriated and a poor shot, I decide to attempt to hit the bullseye with a dart by throwing the dart backwards over my shoulder while looking away from the dartboard. I am very unlikely to succeed. I am justified in believing that I will miss. But my belief is insensitive because if my belief were false—i.e. if I were to hit the bullseye—I would still believe that I was going to miss. But even knowing my belief is thus insensitive, I seem justified in maintaining my belief that I will miss. (B) The principle will imply that justification is not closed under recognized entailment. (C) It implies that I can never be justified in believing that my belief that p arrived at using M is not incorrect, because if that belief were false—i.e. if my belief that p arrived at using M were incorrect—I would still believe otherwise (because, trivially, I would still believe that p and so still believe that that belief is not incorrect). This appears absurd.

Just as sensitivity principles in the theory of knowledge were superseded by safety principles, some have responded to these worries by employing safety epistemic debunking principles. Tomas Bogardus (2016) considers a debunking argument that implicitly employs the following principle:

Safety$_K$ *EDP:* if a set of beliefs are unsafe given the way they are formed, then these beliefs do not count as knowledge, where a belief is safe given it is formed using method M just when if I were to believe p using M, then p would be true.

He then goes on to critique this principle by pointing out that knowledge need not be safe: imagine Jones has the world's most accurate atomic clock in his office which is accurate due to a sophisticated radiation sensor. That sensor, however, can be made to malfunction if a nearby radioactive isotope were to decay. Earlier this morning, someone left a sample of radioactive isotope near the clock in Jones's office. Unlikely enough, the isotope has not decayed. Jones is unaware of the isotope's presence. He walks into his office, checks his clock, which is functioning properly and accurately reads "8:22" and he thus believes it is 8:22. Bogardus contends that Jones clearly knows it is 8:22 despite his belief being unsafe, for in many nearby worlds he would have believed the time the clock read, but the clock would have been incorrect because it would have been made to malfunction by the isotope.[2]

Of course, there are other safety-related epistemic principles one might consider using, for instance:

Safety$_{K2}$ *EDP:* once I become justified in believing that a set of beliefs are unsafe given the way they are formed, then these beliefs no longer count as knowledge for me,
Safety$_J$ *EDP:* once I become justified in believing that a set of beliefs are unsafe given the way they are formed, then I lack justification in continuing to hold these beliefs.

I won't discuss these now, but some of what I have to say later about Sosa's epistemological framework will be useful for evaluating these principles as well.

So, there is some controversy about which epistemic principle(s) can plausibly be used in debunking arguments. Can Sosa's sophisticated epistemological framework supply such a principle? Before answering this question, we first need to lay out his framework.

Sosa and fully apt belief

According to Sosa's virtue epistemological theory of knowledge, knowledge is a certain sort of quality performance of belief (or affirmation, as he puts it). Performances in general can be evaluated for their accuracy (i.e. whether they achieve their aim), their adroitness (whether they were performed competently), and for their aptness (whether they were accurate because adroit). Beliefs are accurate when they are true, they are adroit when they are formed competently, and they are apt when they are accurate because they were formed competently—or, as he sometimes puts it, the accuracy of the belief manifests competence. Knowledge is apt belief.

Aptness differs from safety. A belief can be apt though unsafe—as illustrated by the following example from Sosa (2017, p. 215-217). I can competently form a belief that my car will start a moment after I turn the key and that competence will then lead me to be correct, since my car actually does start. My belief is thus apt and constitutes knowledge. All of this can remain true even if there is a mad bomber who will detonate an atomic bomb right when I turn my key if the coin he flips turns up heads (in fact, lucky me, it comes up tails). In these circumstances my belief arrived at using my competent method is not safe because in half the nearby worlds my belief turns out to be false (the half in which he detonates the bomb, destroying me and my car and so my car, contrary to my belief, does not start).

The notion of a competence is central to Sosa's system. For him a competence is "a disposition to succeed when one aims at a given objective, in certain (favorable enough) conditions while in (good enough) shape" (Sosa, 2017, p. 193). A competence has a SSS structure—that is, a person's competence is composed of a skill, the shape one is in, and one's situation. One's skill is whatever it is inside one that grounds one's disposition to succeed in a certain range of conditions and situations. 'Shape' refers to other personal characteristics

[2] Sosa (2007, p. 28-29; 2017, p. 215-217) has similar counterexamples to a safety requirement on knowledge.

relevant to performance—being alert, sober, with one's eyes open, and the like. 'Situation' refers to aspects of the environment that must be present for competent performance—for instance, if the competence is playing basketball, the situation might include things like playing with a properly inflated ball, on an indoor surface that is dry, with rims that aren't crooked. To be competent in a performance you must use your skill in an appropriate shape and situation.

So, for Sosa, a belief is formed competently when it is formed using a belief-forming skill, while in an appropriate shape and situation. Perception is one example of a belief-forming skill. The skill is the inner ability to form beliefs based on certain perceptual inputs. That skill operates properly when in a certain range of shape and situation—e.g. while being sober and alert, in normal lighting and in normal atmospheric conditions (if one couldn't breathe properly one's skill wouldn't operate properly and one's beliefs wouldn't likely be true). One has perceptual competence in forming a belief provided that one's perceptual skill, when operating within the appropriate range of shape and situation, produces beliefs that are reliable (that is, safe for the most part). So, a belief can issue from a skill even if the skill that produces the belief is unreliable—because, for instance, in fact one only uses that skill in inappropriate shapes or situations. And, again, a belief can issue from a competence and yet be unsafe (unreliable)[3] because, even though it does issue from a skill in an appropriate shape and situation, it could have very easily been the case that your shape or situation was inappropriate, resulting in a false belief. A competence (with a certain SSS structure) has to be reliable (safe) only in this sense: beliefs produced with this particular skill would mostly be true in appropriate shape and situation pairs.

Sosa accepts that there are levels of knowledge. Apt belief is what he calls animal knowledge, but humans often find good reason to reflect on whether their beliefs are apt. An apt recognition that a belief is apt is what he calls reflective knowledge. More recently, Sosa has made reflective knowledge subsidiary to a more important kind of knowledge—what he calls knowing full well. One knows p full well when reflective knowledge guides animal knowledge—in other words when an apt recognition of the aptness of belief-formation methods leads one to employ an apt method in coming to believe p (see Sosa 2017, p. 95-101; 2011, p. 1-14).

Knowing full well is important, according to Sosa. He points out that it is an instance of a valuable sort of performance—one that is not only well done but also well-chosen. In addition, (A) the distinction helps explain why Gettier cases like the 10 coins case are clear cases of a lack of knowledge (because the agent in the case lacks both animal knowledge and knowledge full well), whereas barn façade cases are more controversial (because the agent in the case has animal knowledge but lacks knowledge full well). (B) Humans judge propositions and judgment is a state in which they consider which first-order attitude to take (belief or disbelief). Judgement thus essentially involves considering whether a belief that p is apt and aims to come to an apt belief about whether the belief would be apt. (C) Humans regularly have reason to take a perspective on their beliefs and how they are formed, and their knowledge should reflect the reasons provided from this perspective. Knowing full well is the knowledge that can result from taking this perspective. (D) The belief we come to at the reflective level should take precedence over the belief we come to at the animal level. If, at the reflective level, I competently judge that I should suspend judgment about whether a belief about p would be apt (or if I competently judge that forming a belief about p would be inapt), then I should suspend judgment about p. As Sosa states, "it would seem deplorably stubborn to sustain and endorse a belief in the teeth of total available evidence strongly against it. And this is so even if that belief is correct through diachronic first-order competence that is supremely reliable… once a belief is under scrutiny, only such reflective knowledge qualifies as a proper basis for conscious reasoning, practical or theoretical" (Sosa, 2017, p. 164-165).

Lastly, we come to Sosa's view on justification. He treats justification as necessary for knowledge. He does this by identifying justified belief with a skillful attempt to get things right. If you employ a cognitive skill in attempting to get the truth and come to a certain belief, then that belief is justified even if you fail to get the truth, and even if you weren't competent because you didn't use your skill in a proper shape or situation. With this notion of justification he can explain why people who are being deceived by an evil demon have justified beliefs: they are genuinely using cognitive skills (perceptual faculties) to come to beliefs. They just happen to be in a situation that is not appropriate for those skills, and so their beliefs are not competent.

CSR debunking in Sosa's epistemology

Debunking arguments criticize the way a belief was formed, so they dwell at the reflective level. Sosa's epistemology thus already provides a place for such arguments and acknowledges their potential significance for our first-order beliefs. If, at the reflective level, we can acquire good reason to believe that our belief-forming method for a first-order belief that p is in some way ill-formed, then we shouldn't continue to believe that p.

We'll proceed by extracting a series of epistemic debunking principles from Sosa and then discussing whether a successful CSR-based debunking argument for religious belief

[3] Sosa often uses 'safe' to mean not strict safety, but instead the following: a belief is formed in a safe way just in case beliefs formed in that way would mostly be true. Safety in this sense is a sort of reliability that allows for a little more leeway than strict safety.

can be constructed using these principles. The centrality of competence to Sosa's system implies the following principle:

$Comp_1$ EDP: if I come to know that my belief that p wasn't formed competently, then I lack animal knowledge, reflective knowledge, knowledge full well, and justified belief that p.

On Sosa's view knowledge, which is apt belief, requires competence. So, if I know my belief wasn't competent, I know I don't have animal knowledge of it. Thus, I also can't have reflective knowledge or knowledge full well of it. I also won't have a justified belief because if I know my belief was formed incompetently, then I know that I did not form it in a way (using a skill given my shape and situation) that was likely to guide me to the truth. And if I know that, then I won't be justified in continuing to hold on to the belief, for given what I know the likelihood of getting the truth would appear to be too low.

Sometimes it might be hard to know, although one has good justification for believing, that a belief wasn't formed competently. $Comp_1$ EDP would not be useful on those occasions. But there is a very similar principle that would be applicable:

$Comp_2$ EDP: if I become justified in believing that my belief that p wasn't formed competently, then I lack reflective knowledge, knowledge full well, and justified belief that p.

If I am justified in believing that my belief that p wasn't formed properly, then I do not aptly believe that p was formed aptly, and so I lack reflective knowledge and knowledge full well. I will also lack justification for reasons similar to those given regarding $Comp_1$ EDP. However, I might still have animal knowledge—for I might have a justified false belief that my belief that p was formed incompetently. But this will be cold comfort because Sosa argues (as noted above) that our beliefs should align with our reflective-level assessment when we have such an assessment. So, when the antecedent of $Comp_2$ EDP is satisfied, I might still have animal knowledge that p, but I nevertheless shouldn't rationally continue to believe p. I should suspend judgment even if I might well be able to animally know that p.

Our next question is this: do CSR theories, assuming belief in them is well-justified, give us good reason to think that religious beliefs are formed incompetently? To answer this question, we first need to characterize the religious belief-forming process, as theorized in CSR. Then we will need to examine whether that process constitutes a skill and whether we are in the right shape and situation for the skill to operate reliably.

CSR theorists have developed several different theories of why humans have religious beliefs. Byproduct theories hold that religious beliefs commonly result as a non-selected byproduct of the operation of cognitive processes that have been selected-for (Barrett, 2004; Boyer, 2001). Adaptive theories hold that religious beliefs are individually or collectively adaptive and so have been culturally selected-for (Wilson, 2002; Bering, 2011). And then there are exaptation theories which hold that religious belief entered the human scene as a byproduct, but was later selected-for (Norenzayan, 2013; Bulbulia, 2007). I'm not going to argue for one of these views. Fortunately, I don't need to; the philosophical points I make will apply mutatis mutandis to whichever theory you like. So, I'm just going to pick the exaptationist theory, in part because it combines the explanatory hypotheses of the other two kinds of theories. It is thus particularly useful for my purposes because it enables me to, in a way, be most generous to CSR—allowing the debunker to assume a robust, richly developed, multifarious explanation of religious belief.

Here then, to briefly and brutally summarize a lot of interesting work, is the theory we shall accept of why humans have religious beliefs. Humans have a variety of cognitive mechanisms that incline them towards belief in invisible agents: a highly sensitive agency detection module that is prone to fire at the slightest indication of agency (Barrett, 2004); a preference for spreading and considering minimally counterintuitive concepts—which include concepts of invisible, nonphysical agents (Boyer, 2001); a mechanism for attributing and speculating about the mental states of others that operates independently of mechanisms for thinking about the behavior of bodies—and this mechanism tends early in life to attribute a lot of knowledge to agents (Bering, 2011; Barrett, 2012); and an inclination toward teleological reasoning about the features of the physical world (Kelemen, 1999, 2003, 2004). All of these mechanisms make it so that we can very easily think about invisible agents, their minds, and their desires, and we are prone to talk about them and to consider them as explanations for various events and aspects of the physical world. Certain of these concepts are socially adaptive—namely concepts of powerful, knowledgeable, nonphysical agents who care about what we do. If we believe in these beings—gods, we'll call them—we will feel watched, which will encourage pro-social behavior and discourage free-riding. This is generally adaptive. But then, in addition, we will begin to provide signals of being particularly devoted to the gods so that we can find and cooperate with those people who are most likely to cooperate with us, thus further benefiting us. A community that has a decent number of people who believe in such gods will thus thrive, and the belief in these gods will spread (Norenzayan, 2013).

Given this theory, how should we characterize the human religious belief-forming process? Notice that this theory is a theory of why religious beliefs, particularly beliefs in invisible agents like gods and ancestor spirits, are widespread in humanity. But it doesn't propose to explain why any particular human holds religious beliefs. We shall draw further attention to this point later. But given the explanation appeals to what are proposed as roughly universal human characteristics and situations, if the theory is true, then probably many if not most humans' religious beliefs are influenced by the

various factors the theory mentions. This process appears to work as follows: it takes as input (i) various experiences of the physical world that seem to involve agency where there isn't a clear physical agent, and (ii) testimony about possible invisible agents and then, through the mechanisms described above, produces or maintains a belief in an invisible agent. The shape one must be in for the process is just whatever shape allows these mechanisms to function—so having normal use of your perceptual faculties, being alert, not suffering from various disabilities. The situation for the proper operation of this process would appear to be the situation in relation to which these mechanisms evolved: an environment with a wide range of agents and obstacles that make cooperation beneficial.

Does this process count as a skill—that is, is it a disposition to produce beliefs that are mostly true in the proper shape and situation? The process probably is reliable at producing beliefs about agents in general—when and where there are agents in the environment and what those agents might intend and believe. But we're interested in a more specific set of beliefs—beliefs about invisible agents. A process could produce reliable beliefs of type B, but also produce unreliable beliefs of type C (even if C is a subset of B).

This process produces lots of different beliefs about invisible agents. Some people believe in ancestor spirits, sprites, ghosts, others in gods of various sorts, and some in one supreme god. Almost surely not all of these things exist. But even if many of them exist, the process as described doesn't track which ones exist; it'll produce a belief involving whatever kind of invisible agent concept happens to be floating around one's community (provided it is minimally counterintuitive). So, it would be pretty easy for this process to arrive at a false belief, thus it appears not to be a skill.

But what if we consider the more general belief, "there is some sort of invisible agent"? Might the process produce beliefs like this that are mostly true? Well, it is hard to answer this question without some independent way to evaluate whether there are invisible agents and, by hypothesis, we're imagining that the only way we have is the CSR belief-forming process. One might thus argue that when we move to the reflective level we can rely on a default entitlement to follow our basic belief-forming methods, which confirm themselves, and remain untroubled by this sort of circularity (as Sosa has long argued; see especially Sosa, 2009). Thus, at the reflective level we are not justified in thinking that religious beliefs are formed incompetently through the CSR process, and so we can't employ $Comp_2$ EDP in an argument to debunk religious beliefs.

In reply, one might note that the belief that there is some sort of invisible agent is presumably inferred from another belief in some particular invisible agent. Since that latter belief is not reliably formed, any belief logically inferred from that can't be any epistemically better than the epistemically flawed belief it is based upon. By way of rejoinder, however, one might suggest that perhaps the CSR mechanism sometimes directly produces more general beliefs like, "some sort of invisible agent is at work here." And if that is so, then we are brought right back to the argument of the previous paragraph. In addition, one might argue that if a god like the Judeo-Christian God exists, then he would probably intend for humans to form beliefs through this process that there are invisible agents. Thus, part of the situation of the process would include God's existence and intention. But once again, by hypothesis, we don't have any independent means of determining whether that situation obtains, and so we are again brought back to the argument of the previous paragraph. Debunking arguments based on $Comp_2$ EDP appear sunk.

Sosa's epistemology gives us another debunking principle that may well be more successful, however. The principle goes as follows:

Apt EDP: if I become justified in believing that my belief that p wasn't formed aptly because I might easily have formed it incompetently, then I lack reflective knowledge, knowledge full well, and justified belief that p.

Return to Sosa's example of my belief that my car will start, arrived at while the mad bomber flips his coin. Let's modify the example slightly: now I know about the mad bomber and his plan (but not how the coin flip comes out). In this modified example I have good reason to doubt whether my belief that my car will start is apt because I have reason to doubt that the background conditions of the situation will continue to hold. My belief might turn out to be competent and apt, and thus amount to animal knowledge (if the bomber's coin flip tells him not to detonate), but it might not and the risk of the latter is pretty high. So, at the reflective level, I can't tell that my belief is apt, thus I lack reflective knowledge, knowledge full well, and justification (because there is a sufficiently high chance of forming the belief incompetently).[4]

In short, once we rise to the reflective level we want good reason to think that we are going to employ a first-order process that would likely enough be apt. If we lack such a reason, then (for the reasons given above) reflective knowledge, knowledge full well, and justification are absent. Let me give one more example to illustrate this point. In the film *Total Recall*, Douglas Quaid purchases a "virtual vacation" to Mars through the Rekall company.[5] The vacation is virtual because the company merely implants in the "vacationer" a bunch of false memories as if the vacationer had gone on vacation. However, while Quaid is hooked up to the machine that is about to deliver him false memories, he tries to escape—believing that he is a secret agent whose cover will be blown. He proceeds, without undergoing the false memory implantation—or so it seems—to go on an adventure

[4] Very similar reasoning shows that SafetyJ EDP is quite plausible as well.

[5] The film is based on the Philip K. Dick story, "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale."

that takes him to Mars. At the end of the film he wonders whether all the experiences he has had on his adventure really happened, or whether they were themselves implanted vacation memories.

Take one of Quaid's beliefs arrived at during his adventure—"I have visited Mars." This belief of Quaid's is not one that he reflectively knows, full well knows, or justifiably believes. He has good reason to doubt that he formed it competently for he might well have had the procedure at the Rekall company and if he did, then his memory isn't competent for this belief. But he might really have escaped the company before having the procedure (as he seems to remember), in which case his memory is competent and he could have animal knowledge that he visited Mars. But from what he can tell there is a good chance of either. So, there is a good chance he formed the belief incompetently, thus unreliably in the circumstances. These grounds for doubting whether his memory is competent indicate that he rationally shouldn't trust his memory, and so he should suspend judgment (again even if he in fact didn't have the procedure and thus is able to have animal knowledge).

This example of Randy Quaid is useful because we can give a parallel sort of argument regarding religious belief (on the assumption that the CSR process is what produces humans' religious beliefs). We have some independent reason to doubt that God exists—the problem of evil, for instance. Now, I realize that my belief that God exists issues from the CSR process. I'm like Randy Quaid—if God exists, as the process itself tells me, then my process is competent (for the reasons given in my discussion of $Comp_2$ EDP) and can easily be apt (just as Quaid's belief can be competent and apt if he really did escape the company and get to Mars, for his memory would then competently deliver him a true belief that he had escaped). But if God doesn't exist, then the CSR process is incompetent (again, for the reasons given above). Given the independent reason to doubt God's existence, it (epistemically) could turn out either way. I thus have good reason to doubt that the CSR process that issues in my belief in God is competent, so I shouldn't trust it. Belief in God, as well as other religious beliefs issuing from the CSR process, are thus debunked. And this argument rests on Apt EDP.

This debunking argument relies on the claim that there is at least some good reason to doubt that God exists. But it also essentially relies on the description of the CSR process. Other sorts of belief-forming processes wouldn't be debunked in this way—for instance reliance on some classic argument for God's existence. The fact that we have reason to doubt that God exists doesn't give us any reason to believe that we are incompetent at assessing arguments for God's existence. So, if we had such arguments that we found plausible, they would count as good reason to believe and then would just need to be balanced off against the reason to doubt God's existence in order to determine whether belief in God was justified.[6]

This brings me to the final move in my examination of the debunking argument. We've seen that Sosa's epistemology, via Apt EDP, does ground a plausible debunking argument for religious belief on the assumption that religious belief is formed via the CSR process described earlier. But I don't think that the CSR process completely captures most believers' belief-forming process because most believers in a god have fairly specific beliefs about that god and those specific beliefs are supported by various arguments that believers typically find plausible—e.g. cosmological arguments, design arguments, arguments from miracles and religious experience, and the like and reliance on testimony from those who are familiar with these arguments. I'm not saying that every religious believer has carefully thought through these arguments; and I don't think one needs to do so to be reasonably persuaded by an argument. Often with arguments for God's existence there is some phenomenon that is taken to be a sign of God's existence. There are many ways of trying to argue from that sign to God's existence—many bad ways, possibly some good ways. I think that as long as there are some good ways and the phenomenon really is a sign of God's existence, it can be rational to believe on the basis of that phenomenon even if one hasn't carefully thought through specific versions of theistic arguments.[7] Many people who believe in God do believe at least in part on the basis of the phenomena that are taken to be signs of God's existence. It is only in this sense that I say that most believers believe at least in part on the basis of arguments. And as I just argued in the previous paragraph, the debunking argument does not succeed in debunking our ability to evaluate these arguments. And so the rationality of believing in a god in this way—perhaps primed by the CSR process, but boosted by arguments—isn't debunked.[8]

References

BARRETT, J.L. 2004. *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?* Walnut Creek, AltaMira Press, 156 p.

BARRETT, J.L. 2007. Is the Spell Really Broken? Bio-psychological Explanations of Religion and Theistic Belief. *Theology and Science*, **5**(1):57-72. https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700601159564

BARRETT, J.L. 2012. *Born Believers*. New York, Free Press, 320 p.

BEDKE, M. 2014. No Coincidence? *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, **9**:102-125. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198709299.003.0005

[6] I think a similar argument can be given to show that the evidential force of religious experience wouldn't be debunked by the fact that there is reason to doubt God's existence.

[7] See Evans (2010) for defense of this position.

[8] I've defended this way of responding to debunking arguments in past work. In Thurow (2013, 2014) I respond to various other objections to this move.

BERING, J. 2011. *The God Instinct: The Psychology of Souls, Destiny, and the Meaning of Life*. London, Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 252 p.

BLOOM, P. 2009. Religious Belief as an Evolutionary Accident. *In:* J. SCHLOSS; M.J. MURRAY (eds.), *The Believing Primate*. New York, Oxford University Press, p. 118-127. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199557028.003.0006

BOGARDUS, T. 2016. Only All Naturalists Should Worry about Only One Debunking Argument. *Ethics*, **126**(3):636-661. https://doi.org/10.1086/684711

BOYER, P. 2001. *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought*. London, Vintage, 430 p.

BULBULIA, J. 2007. Evolution of Religion. *In:* R.I. DUNBAR; L. BARRETT (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology*. New York, Oxford University Press, p. 621-636. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198568308.013.0043

BULBULIA, J. 2013. Bayes and the Evolution of Religious Belief. *In:* J.P. MORELAND; C. MEISTER; K. SWEIS (eds.), *Debating Christian Theism*. New York, Oxford, p. 223-241.

EVANS, C.S. 2010. *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 207 p. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199217168.001.0001

JOYCE, R. 2006. *The Evolution of Morality*. Cambridge, MIT Press, 271 p.

KELEMEN, D. 1999. Why Are Rocks Pointy? Children's Preference for Teleological Explanations of the Natural World. *Developmental Psychology*, **35**:1440-1453. https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.35.6.1440

KELEMEN, D. 2003. British and American Children's Preferences for Teleological-functional Explanations of the Natural World. *Cognition*, **88**:201-221. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0010-0277(03)00024-6

KELEMEN, D. 2004. Are Children "Intuitive Theists"? Reasoning about Purpose and Design in Nature. *Psychological Science*, **15**:295-301. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0956-7976.2004.00672.x

LEBEN, D. 2014. When Psychology Undermines Beliefs. *Philosophical Psychology*, **27**(3):328-350. https://doi.org/10.1080/09515089.2012.731579

LEECH, D.; VISALA, A. 2011. The Cognitive Science of Religion: A Modified Theist Response. *Religious Studies*, **47**(3):301-316. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412510000302

MURRAY, M.J. 2009. Scientific Explanations of Religion and the Justification of Religious Belief. *In:* J. SCHLOSS; M.J. MURRAY (eds.), *The Believing Primate*. New York, Oxford University Press, p. 168-178. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199557028.003.0009

MURRAY, M.J.; SCHLOSS, J. 2013. Evolutionary Accounts of Religion and the Justification of Religious Belief. *In:* J.P. MORELAND; C. MEISTER; K. SWEIS (eds.), *Debating Christian Theism*. New York, Oxford, p. 242-260.

NORENZAYAN, A. 2013. *Big Gods*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 248 p.

NOZICK, R. 1981. *Philosophical Explanations*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 764 p.

SHAFER-LANDAU, R. 2012. Evolutionary Debunking, Moral Realism, and Moral Knowledge. *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*, **7**(1):1-38. https://doi.org/10.26556/jesp.v7i1.68

SOSA, E. 2007. *A Virtue Epistemology*. New York, Oxford University Press, 149 p. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199297023.001.0001

SOSA, E. 2009. *Reflective Knowledge*. New York, Oxford University Press, 254 p. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199217250.001.0001

SOSA, E. 2011. *Knowing Full Well*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 163 p.

SOSA, E. 2017. *Epistemology*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 235 p.

STREET, S. 2006. A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value. *Philosophical Studies*, **127**:109-166. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-005-1726-6

THUROW, J.C. 2013. Does Cognitive Science Show Belief in God to Be Irrational? The Epistemic Consequences of the Cognitive Science of Religion. *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion*, **74**:77-98. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11153-011-9300-y

THUROW, J.C. 2014. Some Reflections on Cognitive Science, Doubt, and Religious Belief. *In:* J. BARRETT; R. TRIGG (eds.), *The Roots of Religion*. Farnham, England, Ashgate, p. 189-208.

VAN INWAGEN, P. 2009. Explaining Belief in the Supernatural: Some Thoughts on Paul Bloom's 'Religious Belief as an Evolutionary Accident'. *In:* J. SCHLOSS; M.J. MURRAY (eds.), *The Believing Primate*. New York, Oxford University Press, p. 128-138.

VAVOVA, K. 2014. Debunking Evolutionary Debunking. *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, **9**:76-101. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198709299.003.0004

VAVOVA, K. 2015. Evolutionary Debunking of Moral Realism. *Philosophy Compass*, **10**(2):104-116. https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12194

VOGEL, J. 1987. Tracking, Closure, and Inductive Knowledge. *In:* S. LUPER-FOY (ed.), *The Possibility of Knowledge: Nozick and His Critics*. Totowa, Rowman and Littlefield, p. 197-215.

WHITE, R. 2010. You Just Believe That Because… *Philosophical Perspectives*, **24**(1):573-615. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1520-8583.2010.00204.x

WIELENBERG, E. 2016. Ethics and Evolutionary Theory. *Analysis*, **76**(4):502-515. https://doi.org/10.1093/analys/anw061

WILKINS, J.; GRIFFITHS, P. 2012. Evolutionary Debunking Arguments in Three Domains: Fact, Value, and Religion. *In:* G. DAWES; J. MACLAURIN (eds.), *A New Science of Religion*. New York, Routledge, p.133-146.

WILSON, D.S. 2002. *Darwin's Cathedral*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 268 p. https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226901374.001.0001

Submitted on September 6, 2018
Accepted on September 21, 2018