

A Way of Intellectually Responsibly Trusting Theism

Emanuel Rutten

VU University

Introduction

I propose a way of trusting (accepting, relying on, being committed to, having confidence in) theism in an intellectually responsible manner. I do not hold that this way is the only way of having such trust. Consider a human being *S* whose cognitive faculties function properly. Let *W* be a worldview. A worldview is a specific perspective through which the whole of reality is apprehended. Due to a careful, critical and thorough process of intellectual deliberation *S* voluntarily chooses to trust *W*. Perhaps contrary to the attitude of belief, trust seems to be an attitude that can indeed be voluntary. Consider these statements about *S*'s trust in *W*:

- i. It is intellectually reasonable for *S* to trust *W*,
- ii. It is intellectually rational for *S* to trust *W*,
- iii. *S* is intellectually justified to trust *W*,
- iv. *S* is within *S*'s intellectual rights to trust *W*,
- v. *S*'s trust in *W* is intellectually responsible,
- vi. *S*'s trust in *W* is the result of well-functioning intellectual faculties,
- vii. *S*'s trust in *W* is the result of intellectually responsible conduct,
- viii. *S*'s trust in *W* is intellectually virtuous.

For present purposes all the *(i)-(viii)* can be taken to express the same proposition. Many philosophers claim that this proposition must be understood solely epistemically. They hold that all that matters is whether one has good epistemic reasons for *W*. That is, all that matters is whether one has good reasons to believe that *W* is true. They claim that *(i)-(viii)* each entail that *S* is epistemically justified to hold that *W* is true. Yet, this seems misguided. Those who claim that *(i)-(viii)* are solely to be understood epistemically, ignore good non-epistemic, namely pragmatic or existential reasons, *S* might have for trusting *W*. I take it that the list below contains most if not all prima facie proper reasons *S* might have for *S*'s trust in *W*:

- a. *W* is consistent, coherent and simple (*epistemic*),
- b. *W* has explanatory power and scope (*epistemic*),
- c. *W* is 'background knowledge'-compatible and supported by evidence (*epistemic*),
- d. *W* is in line with our common sense and with deep universal intuitions (*epistemic*),

- e. W contributes to our self-understanding and our understanding of universal human experiences, such as moral and aesthetic human experiences (*epistemic*),
- f. W is livable and enables personal growth and self-realization (*non-epistemic*),
- g. W shows us how to practically live and enhances one's quality of life (*non-epistemic*),
- h. W fulfills deep existential needs and longings (*non-epistemic*),
- i. W is able to inspire, motivate and inspirit (*non-epistemic*),
- j. W accommodates and fits well with fundamental personal experiences and major events that deeply impacted and changed one's life (*non-epistemic*).

A deductive argument

Consider the following deductive argument for the conclusion that if due to a process of critical intellectual deliberation S chooses to trust a worldview because it sufficiently meets sufficiently many of the criteria (a)-(j), then (i)-(viii) hold – and thus S's trust in W is intellectually responsible:

1. A human being needs to live his life. (*premise*),
2. In order to live his life, a human being must orientate in the world, navigate the world, and interpret and guide his life. (*premise*),
3. In order to orientate in the world, navigate the world, and interpret and guide his life, a human being needs to trust a worldview that enables such orientation, navigation, and interpretation and guidance. (*premise*),
4. A human being needs to trust a worldview that enables said orientation, navigation, and interpretation and guidance. (*from 1, 2, 3*),
5. A human being cannot trust two or more worldviews simultaneously (*premise*),
6. If due to a process of critical intellectual deliberation S chooses to trust a worldview that sufficiently enables said orientation, navigation, and interpretation and guidance, then S trusts that worldview as a result of successful critical intellectual deliberation. (*from 4, 5*),
7. If a worldview sufficiently meets sufficiently many of the categories (a)-(j), then it sufficiently enables said orientation, navigation, and interpretation and guidance. (*premise*),
8. If due to a process of critical intellectual deliberation S chooses to trust a worldview because it sufficiently meets sufficiently many of the categories (a)-(j), then S trusts that worldview as a result of successful critical intellectual deliberation. (*from 6, 7*),
9. If S trusts a worldview as a result of successful critical intellectual deliberation, then (i)-(viii) hold. (*premise*),
10. If due to a process of critical intellectual deliberation S chooses to trust a worldview

because it sufficiently meets sufficiently many of the criteria $(a)-(j)$, then $(i)-(viii)$ hold – and thus S’s trust in W is intellectually responsible. (*conclusion from 8, 9*).

This argument is logically valid. None of its premises is contentious. They are either existential (1, 2), conceptual (3, 9) or psychological (5) truisms. Since theism sufficiently meets sufficiently many of the criteria $(a)-(j)$, it’s possible to trust theism in an intellectually responsible manner. Thus anyone who due to a process of critical intellectual deliberation chooses to trust theism because it sufficiently meets sufficiently many of the criteria $(a)-(j)$, is intellectually justified to accept theism. There are actual instances of these. The actuality of intellectually responsible trust in theism doesn’t exclude that theism is false. Such trust is compatible as well with theism not sufficiently meeting sufficiently many of the epistemic criteria in $(a)-(j)$ for being epistemically justified to maintain that theism is true. That is to say, intellectually responsible trust in theism is compatible with not having sufficiently many sufficiently strong epistemic reasons to epistemically justifiably maintain that theism is true.

The actuality of intellectually responsible trust in theism doesn’t exclude there being non-theistic worldviews that also sufficiently meet sufficiently many of the criteria $(a)-(j)$ for being intellectually responsibly trusted – also by those that did put their trust in theism but have since then chosen to redeliberate. The aforementioned three observations do not deflate the conclusion that intellectually responsible trust in theism is actual. I do have an elaborated stance on whether theism fits $(a)-(j)$ better than other worldviews, and on whether theism sufficiently meets sufficiently many of the epistemic criteria in $(a)-(j)$ to also epistemically justifiably hold that theism is true. But both questions are irrelevant for present purposes.

Non-epistemic truth?

What if not just $(i)-(viii)$ but even truth itself is not solely to be understood epistemically? What if there could be non-epistemic truth? There might be existentially loaded situations, such as having to trust a worldview for living one’s life, in which we want to be able to speak legitimately of truth without having to suppose that all that is considered in such speak is epistemic. In such cases truth is at least partly non-epistemic. Truth would have an epistemic part (for example: correspondence to the facts of the world) and a non-epistemic part (that is not strictly factual). If such a broader or more inclusive account of truth can be developed, we might also be intellectually justified to maintain that theism is true in this broader sense, even in case theism would not sufficiently meet sufficiently many of the epistemic criteria in $(a)-(j)$ for being epistemically justified to hold that theism is epistemically true. Developing here a notion of non-epistemic truth would move us too far away from present purposes.