

Abstracts

Gabriele De Anna – *How can we know a transcendent reality?*

The idea of a transcendent reality is that of something, which we cannot have experience of, but can nonetheless somehow think about. Transcendent reality must therefore be “other than” our reality, but not completely other, otherwise it would be an object of our thinking at all. The talk will discuss the relevance of analogy for the possibility of our thinking about transcendent realities, and it will exemplify the possibilities of analogical thinking by considering the explanation of the existence of normativity and value, in connection with the analogical attribution of agency.

Paul Clavier – *Belief in a Revelation: a social division of belief*

There is a claim that the natural capacity for knowledge of God (but not its complete *exercise*) is presupposed by the acceptance of any revelation. We inquire into whether this restriction is satisfactory and to which extent natural knowledge has to be exercised for someone to welcome revelation (or belief through revelation).

There is an additional claim that natural knowledge of the preambles to the articles of faith may not obtain. We try to make sense of this doctrine of impeached preambles to faith, by considering its phrasing not only in the first person singular (where it generates a Moore’s paradox), nor in the third person (where the role of the preambles still remains problematic), but in the first plural person, where it may suggest a kind of social division of tasks among believers. By the way, we try to articulate the possibility of faith without preambles with the traditional evidentialist challenge.

Marek Dobrzeniecki – *Is the fact that other people believe in God a reason to believe? Remarks on the “Consensus Gentium” Argument.*

In my presentation I shall take up an argument in favour of God’s existence that in the past centuries lost the attention of philosophers. According to The Consensus Gentium Argument from the preise: “Everyone believes that God exists” one can conclude that God does exist. It seems that the modern idea of autonomy, which demands epistemic self-reliance (that is relying only on one’s own cognitive faculties), made the *Consensus Gentium* Argument impossible to defend. Moreover, today’s popularity of atheism seems to falsify the premise of the argument. In spite of it one could notice a growing interest in the argument among some philosophers. In my lecture I intend to analyze two contemporary ways of defending the claim that somebody’s belief in God is a *prima facie* reason to believe in God. The first one, represented by Thomas Kelly, takes the fact of the commonness of the belief in God as a datum to explain. Kelly argues that the best explanation has to indicate the truthfulness of the theistic belief. The second, represented by Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, is based on the defence of rationality of epistemic trust in other persons. If the fact that someone believes that p is a *prima facie* reason to believe that p, then the reason gets stronger when a large number of people share the same belief. I shall argue that the second line of reasoning is more promising for someone who would want to rehabilitate the thesis that the commonness of theism is a *prima facie* reason in favour of its truthfulness.

John Greco – *Transmitting Faith*

Cultures transmit knowledge from generation to generation. For example, we learn all sorts of things about health, nutrition, local history, etc. by internalizing the “common knowledge” of our communities. Indeed, to deny this would be to accept a broad-ranging skepticism. Here is a

problem: Common knowledge is transmitted along side lots of garbage. That is, besides transmitting genuine knowledge, cultures manage to transmit lots of beliefs that are irrational, superstitious and flat out false. So how is that possible? How is it that the very same cultural channels manage to transmit both knowledge and garbage together? Call this The Garbage Problem. This paper formulates and explores this problem, in general and for religious faith in particular. The religious version of the problem is this: How is it that genuine faith, considered as a kind of religious knowledge, is transmitted along side garbage? For example, how can churchgoers come to know that God created the world and loves His creation, if this is learned right alongside self-serving prejudices and anachronistic superstitions?

Rev. Miłosz Holda – *The Idea of Perfect Religious Beliefs*

The purpose of my presentation is to find answers to three questions. The first is: what role in epistemology of religion the idea of the perfect religious beliefs can play?

The second: what is the content of the idea of the perfect religious beliefs?

The third: who could hold such beliefs?

At first glance, it seems that we should consider two entities: God and Man. I would like to defend position that God does not have religious beliefs, although He has an excellent religious knowledge. Human religious knowledge undoubtedly contains beliefs, however is not perfect knowledge. Then perhaps the only entity that could satisfy the condition of perfect religious knowledge, that contains beliefs, is the God-Man: Jesus Christ. In my presentation I would like to propose a speculation about the content of the knowledge of Jesus. Against the background of different types of knowledge, that was attributed to Him in the theological and philosophical discussions, I will show the place of religious beliefs in the whole of His knowledge.

I will also point out the importance of the idea of the perfect religious beliefs to the problem of religious disagreement. If the idea of God-Man holding perfect religious beliefs was realized in Jesus Christ, it entails that we should settle religious disputes, as He solved them.

Winfried Löffler – *Religious Beliefs as World-View Beliefs*

Ansgar Beckermann (*Glaube*, Berlin/Boston 2013, sect. 2.1) recently argued that religious beliefs cannot be world-view beliefs in propositions of the Moore style, since religious beliefs are a. not without alternatives, b. reasonably dubitable and a matter of actual dissent, c. empirically testable and d. existentially important for the (non-) believers in a way that Moore style beliefs typically are not. Let us call such a reconstruction of religious beliefs “world-view beliefs of the first type”. Beckermann’s analysis is broadly right (except for point c.). There is, however, a second type of world-view beliefs under which religious beliefs can more plausibly be subsumed, and before that backdrop the familiar epistemic dissents about religious beliefs become explainable in a natural way. Seen from this angle, religious dissents belong to a similar group of cases as fundamental dissents in mathematics about the nature of numbers or in ethics about the characteristics of good and bad actions: There are incompatible positions, they have arguments defending them, these arguments are even understandable to the opposing side, nevertheless quick and easy persuasion is not to be expected, and mutual verdicts of epistemic irrationality are not in place. In my talk, I will explore the structure, content and justification of such world-view beliefs of the second type in somewhat more detail, and I will finally show that the kalam cosmological argument can be seen as an application case of such beliefs.

Roger Pouivet – *Reason, Faith and Humility*

According to Anthony Kenny, “there is a tension between the two attitudes: that of humility and that of faith”. As a result, “the recitation of a creed ... is incompatible with the true humility which Christianity so rightly prizes”. Kenny concludes that “faith is not, as theologians have claimed, a virtue, but a vice, unless a number of conditions can be fulfilled”. “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16: 18). However, Kenny does not hesitate to present the vice by which sin entered the world as inherent in the virtue of faith. It’s daring. But was he right? By examining the virtue of humility, I think we can show that Kenny is wrong: the virtue of faith is not a form of pride. With all his intellectual assurance, it is perfectly humble. To show this, the recent concept of “conciliationism” will be discussed. The thesis that the believer and the unbeliever are epistemic peers will be contested. The certainty of receiving revelation and the sense of our own intellectual finitude (and fallibility) does not oppose. The reason is that we have to distinguish modesty and humility.

Duncan Pritchard – *Faith and Reason*

A novel account of the rationality of religious belief is offered, called *quasi-fideism*. According to this proposal, we are neither to think of religious belief as completely immune to rational evaluation nor are we to deny that it involves fundamental commitments which are arational. Moreover, a parity argument is presented to the effect that religious belief is no different from ordinary rational belief in presupposing such fundamental arational commitments. This proposal is shown to be rooted in Wittgenstein’s remarks on hinge commitments in *On Certainty*, remarks which it is claimed were in turn influenced by John Henry Newman’s treatment of the rationality of religious belief in *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*.

Bruce Alan Russell – *What Does the Total Evidence Support: Theism, Agnosticism, or Atheism?*

I believe that the strongest argument against the existence of God, understood as an all-knowing, all-powerful, wholly good being, rests on the claim that there is way more suffering of innocents than is needed either to bring about a greater good or to prevent more terrible evil. Theists counter in two ways: (1) offering reasons to believe that God exists and (2) trying to respond to the problem of evil against God’s existence. I will argue that Alvin Plantinga’s theory of knowledge and warrant, which he uses to support belief in God, is open to counterexample and that skeptical theism leads to skepticism about the age of the earth. Contra Richard Swinburne, I argue that inference to the best explanation supports atheism, not theism. Relatedly, Bayesian approaches fail because they focus on the likelihood that the world would be like it is if God exists versus if naturalism were true. The real issue is whether inference to the best explanation favors the God hypothesis over naturalism.

Christian Weidemann – *Does a Rational Theist Need a Theodicy?*

In general, emulating the behavior of authorities in their field of authority seems to be good advice. If you learn that the CEO of a company you hold stock in sells her share, you should consider doing the same. If you observe that the head of an etiquette school cuts his potatoes with a knife you obtain a good reason for thinking that this practice is not socially objectionable anymore. And if you witness a famous sommelier buying a dozen bottles of a certain vintage, you can be confident that presenting the same wine to your guests will not be an embarrassment.

However, the *prima facie* justification for emulating the behaviour of authorities can be defeated by obtaining additional information. E.g., you learn that the CEO is in urgent need of money due to an

ugly divorce, you are told that the head of the etiquette school likes to let himself go in private, or you actually try the wine bought by the sommelier and find it tasting like dishwater. If God exists, he is omnipotent, omniscient and essentially morally perfect, i.e. is the greatest possible *moral authority*. If he exists, he could have prevented, say, the torture of innocent persons, but had a morally justifying reason for non-intervening. If so, why are theists not justified in emulating God's behavior by remaining passive bystanders when witnessing the torture of an innocent person?

Because they might have additional information (a theodicy) about a morally justifying reason for permitting the torture of innocent people, a reason that God has, but human beings lack. However, many 'skeptical' theists think that a theodicy is unobtainable. According to them, while non-intervening against the torture of innocents is morally permissible for God, due to reasons that are beyond our ken, we nevertheless know that trying to prevent the torture of innocent persons is often (or even always) morally obligatory *for us*.

I will discuss several recent attempts to defend such a position, arguing that none is successful.