

EVIDENCE, UNCERTAINTY AND BELIEF

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A Critique of the Common Epistemic Grounds for Fideism and Agnosticism

Abstract

Uncertainty elicits more than one *doxastic* attitude towards God's existence, namely agnosticism and fideism, which have very similar epistemic foundations despite the dissimilarity in their outcomes. This similarity mainly depends on the alleged uncertainty of evidence, and to disclose both attitudes in all their bearings, two fundamental theses, *epistemic* and *practical*, will be suggested. Employing these two theses, this study aims to investigate the crucial points where agnosticism and fideism overlap and diverge depending on the uncertainty and argue that the epistemic common ground, the basis of many criticisms of fideism, is self-destructive. The uncertainty concerning the evidence for God, ambiguity, or vagueness will be

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explored to justify this claim. This will bear the question of whether the evidence is ambiguous because it is absent mainly or because it is present but vague. Or is it neither absent nor vague but still ambiguous because both sides have clear evidence? Consequently, the current study shall object to the idea that agnosticism equals vagueness which implicitly means that agnosticism is a necessary stance and defends that fideism's having loose or no relation to evidence is irrational.

Keywords: Philosophy of Religion, Agnosticism, Fideism, Uncertainty, Ambiguity, Vagueness.

Kanıt, Belirsizlik ve İnanç

Öz

Belirsizlik, sonuçlarındaki farklılıklara rağmen, Tanrı'nın varlığına yönelik oldukça benzer epistemik temellere sahip agnostisizm ve fideizm olmak üzere birden fazla önermesel tutumu ortaya çıkarır. Söz konusu benzerlik, esasen, Tanrı'nın varlığına dair kanıtların yeterli olmadığı varsayımına dayanır. Bu çalışma bağlamında, her iki tutumu da kanıtla dair yaklaşımları bakımından tüm yönleriyle ele almak adına *epistemik* ve *pratik* olmak üzere iki temel tez önerilecektir. Bu tezler aracılığıyla, agnostisizm ve fideizmin belirsizliğe bağlı olarak kesiştiği ve ayrıldığı kritik noktaları ele alacak ve fideizme yönelik birçok eleştirinin temeli olan epistemik ortaklığın fideizm açısından yıkıcı olduğunu savunacağız. Bu iddiamızı kanıtlamak adına, öncelikle, Tanrı'nın varlığına dair belirsizliğin –muğlaklık ya da müphemlik- mahiyeti üzerinde duracağız. Bu bağlamda, belirsizlik noktasında, iki konu üzerinde duracağız: (i) kanıt var olmadığı için mi muğlaktır, yoksa var ancak müphem midir? (ii) Kanıt, hem Tanrı'nın varlığını hem de var olmadığını destekleyen yeterince kanıt olduğu için mi muğlaktır? Sonuç olarak, mevcut çalışma, agnostisizmin müphemlik olarak anlaşılması fikrine karşı çıkararak agnostisizmin zorunlu bir tutum olmadığını savunacak; fideizmin kanıtlarla ilişkisinin zayıf olmasının ya da hiç *olmamasının* irrasyonel olduğunu göstermeye çalışacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Felsefesi, Agnostisizm, Fideizm, Belirsizlik, Muğlaklık, Müphemlik.

Introduction

Agnosticism is the *attitude* that God's existence or nonexistence is not or cannot be known. Accordingly, since one does not or cannot have sufficient evidence to decide whether there is a God, the best thing –for some, the best moral thing- to do is to suspend judgment. As this attitude defends a neutral approach towards God's knowability, it has been considered anti-religious in terms of theistic belief. Its alleged anti-belief nature has continuously been brought into the discussion by some theists.² Besides, the works of some philosophers,

² See Amos Waters, "The God Problem - Criticism of an Agnostic- with an Editorial Reply, Is Dr. Carus a Teist?" *The Monist* 9/4 (1899), 624; Henry Wace, "On Agnosticism", *Christianity and Agnosticism: A Controversy*, ed. Thomas Henry Huxley, Henry Wace

including the paradigmatic fideists like Blaise Pascal, seem to have been written as an objection to suspending or refraining from judgment.³ Similarly, William James's "The Will to Believe" developed a landmark rejection of the *agnostic principle* proposed by Thomas Henry Huxley and William K. Clifford.⁴ Clifford is an agnostic, suggesting insufficient evidence for affirming God's existence or non-existence. Thus, the suspension of judgment is necessary for such circumstances. In contrast, James is a fideist responding to the agnostics' thesis and arguing that there are cases in which one can believe even with insufficient evidence. Presenting the debate this way leads to the opinion that these two attitudes are fundamentally different in *all* aspects. This paper will challenge this impression.

Recently, the philosophy of religion has presented us with some works on the relationship of suspension of judgment with evidence for and against God's existence. These works share the common idea that agnosticism is justified over uncertain evidence. This uncertainty may come in different forms. For instance, some philosophers argue that this uncertainty is due to the ambiguity of the evidence, whereas some are *clear* that the evidence is vague. The ambiguity of evidence is different from the vagueness in the sense that the former entails that the very essence of evidence for God's existence is comprehensible, yet for the latter, let alone one's being able to distinguish between the evidence for or against God's existence, it is impossible to discern whether it is an evidence in itself or not. For instance, Bas van Fraassen, offers that agnosticism is characterized as a specific type of *vagueness* on a set of probability functions.⁵ Van Fraassen understands agnosticism in a Bayesian framework which in turn extends over to the idea that "*x is a Bayesian agnostic about a p iff her opinion about p is represented by an interval with zero as the lower limit.*"⁶ Although, as Monton puts it, it is a valiant attempt to represent agnosticism in a Bayesian framework, I object to the idea

(New York: The Humboldt Publishing Co., 1889), 5-9; William Connor Magee, "Agnosticism", in *Christianity and Agnosticism: A Controversy*, ed. Thomas Henry Huxley, Henry Wace (New York: The Humboldt Publishing Co., 1889), 44-45; Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam Press, 2006), 46.

³ See Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 122.

⁴ See William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1960), 5-7.

⁵ Bas C. van Fraassen, *Laws and Symmetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 193-194; Alan Hájek, "Agnosticism Meets Bayesianism", *Analysis* 58/3 (1998), 200.

⁶ See Hájek, "Agnosticism Meets Bayesianism", 200.

that agnosticism equals vagueness which implicitly means that agnosticism is a necessary stance.⁷ As for the ambiguity of evidence, which is of more importance in the current study, Paul Draper, Graham Oppy, and Robin L. Poidevin have presented the basics. To start with Draper,

“[T]here are several good arguments for theism and several good arguments for naturalism and hence against theism.... although these arguments support their conclusions, none of them proves that a perfect supernatural person exists or that there are no supernatural beings.... None of it [the evidence] proves ... that naturalism or theism is true. But some of it raises the ratio of the probability of theism to naturalism, and some of it lowers this ratio. Certain facts are more likely obtained if God exists than if nothing supernatural exists. These facts are evidence favoring theism over naturalism. And other facts are more likely to obtain if nothing supernatural exists than God exists. These facts favor naturalism over theism.”⁸

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Draper, and others, likewise, for their ‘ambiguity thesis’, employ specific evidence and conclude that the evidence is not absent or vague but ambiguous.⁹ There is plenty of clear evidence, but the clear evidence for theism is offset by clear evidence for naturalism. The upshot is that as it is very difficult to compare the strength of the innumerable pieces of evidence, it is not easy to conclude between theism and atheism. Although the such comparison may be possible, determining which side is supported more by the arguments is not easy. In such circumstances, one must suspend judgment, not because one lacks clear evidence or because one believes each side’s evidence is perfectly balanced. Instead, one must suspend judgment because it is unclear which side is supported by the more substantial evidence.¹⁰ Oppy, Poidevin, and many others agree with Draper on the issue. Agnostics demand that a loving God, as theism suggests,

⁷ Bradley Monton, “Bayesian Agnosticism and Constructive Empiricism”, *Analysis* 58/3 (1998), 207.

⁸ Paul Draper, “Seeking but not Believing: Confessions of a Practicing Agnostic”, *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, ed. D. Howard-Snyder, P. K. Moser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 197-198.

⁹ For the discussions of Poidevin and Oppy, see Graham Oppy, *Atheism and Agnosticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 28-48; Robin Le Poidevin, *Agnosticism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 56-76.

¹⁰ Draper, “Seeking but not Believing”, 206.

shall provide evidence that removes reasonable nonbelief toward God's reality. If not, then uncertainty guarantees agnosticism.

However, as many think this kind of justification for agnosticism is in place, there may also be many who reject this approach and maintain that the uncertainty of any type of the rational evidence calls for belief in God, specifically a fideistic one. At this point, I suggest that fideism, which denies that God's existence is known based on evidence by drawing attention to the boundaries of the human mind, shares some common grounds with agnosticism.¹¹ These common grounds comprise some modest similarities regarding their foundations concerning the evidence and its so-called ambiguity. Fideism and agnosticism may be presented in such a way that they appear to oppose one another in all aspects. Since the focus has been on solutions suggested by the agnostics and the fideists, the mutual thesis these two approaches take as the basis is neglected. Although there is indeed a contrast between agnosticism and fideism concerning their approach to belief in God, it is also striking that both are remarkably similar regarding their mutual ground about the knowability of God's existence. So, this study will concentrate on the nature of agnosticism and fideism in terms of the similarity of the theses they stand for and the claim that the two attitudes have the same epistemic basis, despite the contrast in their rationales and outcomes. For this purpose, two fundamental theses, *epistemic* (ET) and *practical* (PT), will be suggested. The epistemic thesis will assist in showing to what degree agnosticism and fideism have a common ground, whereas the practical one will demonstrate how they differ. This way, we will have a framework for the crucial points where agnosticism and fideism overlap and diverge. Before that, let's dig into the relation between agnosticism, fideism, and their relation to the evidence and ambiguity a little more.

¹¹ I am thankful to one of the anonymous referees for this journal who has addressed that the common grounds that I am employing at this point may only be applied to Pascal but not to Kierkegaard. For Kierkegaard describes faith as objective uncertainty but not as ambiguity sort of uncertainty. As a result, the referee suggested me to use 'moderate fideism' instead of only 'fideism' throughout the article. But the common uncertainty that I am referring is not a vagueness-driven uncertainty as this kind of uncertainty is not a case for fideists but only agnostics, in general. Ambiguity is the only type of uncertainty that I suggest there is between fideism and agnosticism. For a contrary view of mine see, Osman Murat Deniz, *Fideizm nedir?: Teolojik ve Felsefi bir Değerlendirme* (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2022), 31, 161-162.

1. Fideism and Agnosticism: A Brief Comparison

Huxley was the first to coin agnosticism to introduce his philosophical and epistemic stance to the literature.¹² He was a scientist, and his agnosticism, bathed in science, "... is not a creed, but a method, the essence of which lies in the rigorous application of a single principle... Positively the principle may be expressed: In matters of the intellect, follow your reason as far as it will take you, without regard to any other consideration. And negatively: In matters of the intellect, do not pretend that conclusions are certain which are not demonstrated or demonstrable."¹³ Huxley's principle is almost the same as the atheist philosopher William Clifford's far-famed principle, "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence."¹⁴ The principle directly opposes 'blind faith,' which argues for belief in *things* despite the lack of decisive evidence. It claims that believing something for which one lacks evidence is immoral. Thus, in epistemology and metaphysics, the only way for one to attribute a truth value to a proposition is only permissible if one has decisive evidence that is so overwhelming that it requires judgment. If there is no such evidence, or if it is not yet known what the logical conclusion to be deduced from the available evidence, then, according to the agnostic principle, no conclusion should be adopted as an expression of absolute truth.

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Recently, agnosticism has been characterized as the state of mind in which one realizes that doubts about once unquestioned beliefs will not go away, to be replaced either by a confident reaffirmation of those beliefs or else an equally confident rejection of them.¹⁵ This characterization is much less strict than the *agnostic principle*. Philosophers aware of the tension between weak and strong senses of agnosticism and fideism tend to define these attitudes in more than one sense. Agnosticism, the suspension of judgment about *some* or *all* human knowledge, has been described in two main types: weak and strong.¹⁶ Strong agnosticism is the view that a reasonable per-

¹² George W. Hallam, "Source of the Word Agnostic", *Modern Language Notes* 70/4 (1955), 265-266; Thomas Henry Huxley, *Science and Christian Tradition: Essays* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1896), 239.

¹³ Huxley, *Science and Christian Tradition*, 246.

¹⁴ William K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief", *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, ed. M. Peterson et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 103.

¹⁵ Poidevin, *Agnosticism*, 6.

¹⁶ Alvin Plantinga, "Agnosticism", *A Companion to Epistemology: Blackwell Companions to Philosophy*, ed. J. Dancy, E. Sosa and M. Steup (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 223; Graham Oppy, "Weak Agnosticism Defended", *International Journal for Philoso-*

son *must* suspend judgment on the question of God's existence. In contrast, the weak one entails that a reasonable subject *should* suspend judgment on the same question. It seems appropriate to interpret weak agnosticism as refraining from judgment about God's existence, a kind of indecision, i.e., one *does not* know (under the current circumstances and for now) whether God exists or not, whereas strong agnosticism implies that one *cannot* know whether *a(ny)* God exists or not. For strong agnosticism "*in circumstances in which the available evidence no more -and no less- supports p than it supports logically incompatible hypotheses p_1, \dots, p_n, \dots , one ought to suspend judgment between all of the hypotheses $p, p_1, \dots, p_n, \dots$* "¹⁷ Here, it is clear that strong agnosticism is defended by appeal to the lack of good evidential support for the claim that God exists. On the other hand, weak agnosticism, sometimes called *contingent agnosticism*, introduced by Anthony Kenny, is the attitude that "*I do not know whether there is a God, but perhaps it can be known; I have no proof that it cannot be known.*"¹⁸ Oppy, known for his defense of weak agnosticism, maintains that strong agnosticism prevents any possibility that God exists; Kenny's contingent agnosticism allows for the belief that some knowledge claims about theism or atheism may be justified. Kenny's account tends to generate a state of mind or an attitude that some theists, via reference to extraordinary evidence like a religious experience, may know that the proposition *God exists* is true. In this regard, weak agnosticism is a personal preference and *mostly* does not make any comments on others' beliefs. However, strong agnosticism argues that we cannot know whether God exists or not due to the nature of the subject.

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On the other hand, Fideism argues that there is tension between reason and faith. Accordingly, the reason is incapable of justifying religious claims, so in explaining these claims, there is no need to reason due to its inadequacy. Plantinga defines fideism as the "*exclusive or basic reliance upon faith alone, accompanied by a consequent disparagement of reason and utilized, especially in the pursuit of philosophical or religious truth.*" Therefore, according to him, the fideist "*urges reliance on faith rather than reason, in matters philosophical and reli-*

phy of Religion 36 (1994), 147; Poidevin, *Agnosticism*, 9-10; William Rowe, "Agnosticism", *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig (London: Taylor & Francis, 1998), 121-122.

¹⁷ Oppy, "Weak Agnosticism Defended", 147.

¹⁸ Anthony Kenny, *What is Faith? Essays in The Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 60.

gious; and he may go on to disparage and denigrate reason.”¹⁹ Similarly, Penelhum emphasizes the concept of justification and describes fideism as “the insistence that faith needs no justification from reason.”²⁰ Elsewhere, he professes that fideism “will involve the denigration of reason as a source of spiritual truth,” and the fideist “will hold that faith does not meet standards of evidence or proof.”²¹ According to the fideists, while engaging in religious claims, one should rely not on reason but on faith itself because the most basic claims on which the believer builds his life are included in this belief system.²²

Fideism, like agnosticism, is roughly divided into two accounts: the first is strong fideism, and it sustains that reason is useless in evaluating religious claims. The other type is a weaker attitude called moderate fideism, as its name suggests. Strong fideists such as Tertullian (160-220) and Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) argue that faith will appear as a paradox when approached with the criteria of rationality instead of reason.²³ However, according to moderate fideists such as Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) and William James, although faith is based on a reality beyond the limits of reason, it is not entirely contrary to reason. Again, it can be said to have distinctive rationality.²⁴ Thus, although faith comes before reason, the investi-

¹⁹ Alvin Plantinga, “Reason and Belief in God”, *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. A. Plantinga, N. Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 87. For different understandings of fideism see, Richard H. Popkin, “Fideism”, *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1972), 201; Kelly James Clark, *Return to Reason: A Critique of Enlightenment Evidentialism and a Defense of Reason and Belief in God* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 7; Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, “Faith”, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998), 543; Simon Blackburn, “Fideism”, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 139.

²⁰ Terence Penelhum, *God and Skepticism: A Study in Skepticism and Fideism* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1983), 1.

²¹ Terence Penelhum, “Fideism”, *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. C. Taliaferro, P. Draper and P. L. Quinn (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 442.

²² See Michael Peterson et al., *Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 45.

²³ Kierkegaard is also taken to be a moderate fideist. In the current study, as I associate the evidence with being ‘objective’, ‘non-pragmatic’, ‘dispassionate’ and such, I take Kierkegaard as a radical fideist in terms of his relation to the evidence. If emotional and passionate justification of evidence is taken to be rational, then Kierkegaard would be a moderate fideist. See Marilyn Gaye Piety, “Kierkegaard on Rationality”, *Faith and Rationality* 10/3 (1993), 375-376 for an interpretation of Kierkegaard’s account on human rationality as a positive alternative to the traditional conception of reason as disinterested and dispassionate.

²⁴ See Linda T. Zagzebski, *Philosophy of Religion: An Historical Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 58-59; Penelhum, “Fideism”, 441-444.

gation and explanation of religious beliefs, reasoning, and rational evaluation still exist.

These two attitudes' strong and weak senses may point to some similarities between agnosticism and fideism. The strong form of agnosticism will not carry the debate to a further point, as the evidence for God's existence is impossible. On the other hand, a fideist does not ascribe such importance to the issue of evidence for God's existence; for her, even if there is no evidence, one can have a belief. While the strong agnostic finds it impossible also for others to have evidence for God's existence, the fideist does not. But strong fideist does not have a reasonable attitude, as well. In this respect, although there is a radical distinction between a strong agnostic and a fideist regarding belief possession, a weak agnostic and a fideist have a very similar point of departure. Furthermore, neither weak agnosticism nor moderate fideism evidence is labeled inadequate or despised. As a matter of fact, in weak agnosticism, especially for ambiguity defenders, evidence-evaluation is quite decent. For moderate fideism, as rational evaluation is still a part of the discussion in religious beliefs and reasoning, it also is a sensible attitude compared to its stronger version. Comparing vulnerable versions of agnosticism with fideism, evaluated independently of the results they adopt, (weak) agnosticism presents a more rational framework in terms of its approach to evidence than the weak form of fideism, while the weak form of fideism has a more reasonable attitude when evaluated in terms of its consequences – in that it does not see proof as impossible like radical fideism. These comparisons between weak and strong forms of agnostic and fideist attitudes will be helpful in terms of making sense of ET and PT in the last chapter of the paper. Before that, I will concentrate on what I have in mind when I say uncertainty.

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2. Uncertainty as Evidence

There are two types of uncertainty: ambiguity and vagueness. Whereas ambiguity means that evidence is abundant, but it is not decisive whether the evidence supports x or y, the vagueness suggests that one cannot be sure on even x and y's being evidence. As some philosophers like Kenny argue that the evidence is absent, most of the discussion is on the idea that either the evidence is present but vague or that it is neither absent nor vague but still ambiguous because there are ample amounts of clear evidence on both sides.²⁵

²⁵ Agnosticism seems to have no positive evidence but the ones which depend on the

Before ambiguity, I aim to show that vagueness of evidence is not a sound stance to hold. The vagueness is employed as evidence for agnosticism.²⁶ This has something to do with the definition one presents for agnosticism. If agnosticism is understood as a *judgment* on suspension,²⁷ then vagueness cannot be a reason for espousing agnosticism because in such a situation, as the evidence is vague, it seems impossible for one to be sure of the accuracy of agnosticism and theism, and atheism. Agnostic literature takes Van Fraassen's approach also as the Russellian view.²⁸ According to this view, agnosticism consists in assigning some probability between 0 and 1 to the proposition that 'there is a God.' For Van Fraassen, as agnosticism is vague over the interval of 0 to 1, it is impossible that a conditionalization can take place, i.e., agnosticism about the existence of any *unobservable* should be characterized, not by some precise degree of confidence that x exists, but by 'vagueness over an interval that includes zero.'²⁹ So, agnosticism is necessary due to the vagueness that

discussions between theism and atheism. For an attempt to demonstrate that agnosticism has positive evidence see Alexandra Zinke, "Rational Suspension", *Theoria* 87/5 (2021), 1056-1058. Besides ambiguity, one possible evidence for justifying an agnostic attitude proposed to be the peer disagreement. According to this proposal, when peers are confronted over a controversial topic, the correct thing to do is to suspend judgment. See Richard Feldman, "Reasonable Religious Disagreements", *Philosophers without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*, ed. Louise M. Antony (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 194-214.

²⁶ See Sebastiano Moruzzi, "Vagueness and Agnosticism", *Issues of Vagueness. Methodology and Agnosticism*, ed. S. Moruzzi, A. Sereni (Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2005), 131-153; Sven Rosenkranz, "Metaethics, Agnosticism and Logic", *Dialectics* 60/1 (2006), 47-61; Sven Rosenkranz, "Radical Scepticism without Epistemic Closure", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 85/3 (2012), 692-718; Sven Rosenkranz, "Wright on Vagueness and Agnosticism", *Mind* 112/447 (2003), 449-463; Crispin Wright, "Rosenkranz on Quandry, Vagueness and Intuitionism", *Mind* 112/447 (2003), 465-474.

²⁷ For the discussions on agnosticism's being an active, cognizant, and inquiring *act* see, Michael Bergmann, "Defeaters and Higher-level Requirements", *The Philosophical Quarterly* 55 (2005), 420; Jane Friedman, "Suspended Judgment", *Philosophical Studies* 162/2 (2013), 166; Jane Friedman, "Rational Agnosticism and Degrees of Belief", *Oxford Studies in Epistemology*, ed. T. Gendler, J. Hawthorne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 57; Earl Conee, Richard Feldman, *Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 3; Ralph Wedgwood, "The Aim of Belief", *Philosophical Perspectives* 16 (2002), 272; Hájek, "Agnosticism Meets Bayesianism", 205; Matthew McGrath, "Being neutral: Agnosticism, inquiry and the suspension of judgement", *Noûs* 55 (2021), 466-467.

²⁸ See Yuval Avnir, "Unicorn Agnosticism", *Inquiry* 64/8 (2021), 820.

²⁹ In Bayesian epistemology when an agent is to update her degrees of belief for a case for which she is not certain or she does not have evidence, the common (but not the necessary) solution is that she needs to update the degrees for her belief by Jeffrey Conditionalization. For more about 'conditionalization' see Richard Jeffrey, "Bayesianism with a human face", *Testing Scientific Theories*, ed. John Earman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 133-156; Hájek, "Agnosticism Meets Bayesianism", 201.

never vanishes. Because according to the Bayesian way of updating, if a credence interval includes 0, there is no way it does not have 0, so an agnostic can never rationally become a non-agnostic.³⁰ Monton criticizes this point as follows:

“The analysis entails that a Bayesian cannot cease to be agnostic and instead come to believe a proposition. I maintain that the requirement that agnosticism is permanent in this sense is too restrictive. An agnostic should be able to recognize the possibility of obtaining evidence that will cause him to give up agnosticism and embrace belief.”³¹

This analysis of Monton is appealing, and robustness is not one of the truth conditions of agnosticism. Although in terms of conserving one’s belief, especially for God, being steadfast is more appealing than being conciliatory all the time, any believer or non-believer should consider the evidence in the face of new evidence. This does not necessarily require one to question every belief she constantly has. Instead, this is an attempt to prevent anybody from enjoying beliefs that are incorrect in the light of available evidence. In every similar position, I think one should be able to revise her work. If a revision-only (conditionalization) is not going to help, then she should be able to abandon that belief.

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On the other hand, the ambiguity of evidence ensures a more vivid setting for a discussion. The philosophers who defend the view ‘that there is ample evidence for God’s existence, but this evidence’s strength is counterbalanced by the strength of the evidence for naturalism’ propose some confronting evidence for or against God’s existence. Most of this evidence is employed by the agnostics but not fideists. Fideists have a more no-evidence-needed kind of justification for their belief. So, at this point, I shall present some examples (of evidence) of how agnosticism is justified over ambiguous evidence and then argue for the case that only an ‘inquiring way of justification’ can be labeled as a quest-for-true-belief no matter whether it is agnosticism or fideism. For the sake of brevity, I will not propose and defend the arguments in full length and detail but rather outline some of them in a simplified vein, hoping that it will suffice to clarify what kind of ambiguity we are discussing.

³⁰ Avnur, “Unicorn Agnosticism”, 820-821.

³¹ Monton, “Bayesian Agnosticism and Constructive Empiricism”, 207.

To begin with, agnostics argue that the arguments for the existence of God result in ambiguity and that the evidence for God's existence and nonexistence provides equal justification for theism and atheism. Therefore, neither theism nor atheism has arguments strong enough to prove that a perfect supernatural being exists or does not exist.³² I shall now attempt to clarify what sort of ambiguity philosophers have in mind by presenting arguments, some of which raise the probability of theism over naturalism and some of which lowers it.

Among many, one of the first evidence is cosmological evidence, including debates like the universe's design, intelligent life, and its evolution. Within these highly disputed areas, the idea that the proof of the existence of God is ambiguous begins with the discussion of whether an intelligent creator creates the universe. Theism's response is affirmative. Yet, naturalism argues that if the world is eternal, despite its contingency, there is no need for a transcendent reason for its existence. Otherwise, the universe would not be explained by itself; but by reference to a supernatural power other than itself.³³ Although he accepts that the current universe is more likely to have been created by an intelligent being, for the same discussion, Draper thinks that the evolution-based universe hypothesis should also be considered remarkable evidence for naturalism.³⁴ According to him, although there is still much to learn about the mechanism necessary for evolution to occur, it is undoubted that evolution has taken place. Thus, if evolution is correct, the universe can exist without the need for a creator since it is more consistent with naturalism than with theism. The arguments are not limited to these, but all the discussions are nearly the same in their methodological nature.

For the materialization of the ideas stated above, see a comparison of the arguments for and against God/naturalism:

"I believe the abundance of tragedy in the world is much stronger evidence against theism than the abundance of beauty is for it. The same can be said about the systematic connection between pain and pleasure and reproductive success. I also believe the cosmic co-

³² Draper, "Seeking but Not Believing", 197-198.

³³ See Draper, "Seeking but not Believing", 200-201; Poidevin, *Agnosticism*, 60-61; Oppy, *Atheism and Agnosticism*, 38-39, 55-56 for the discussion.

³⁴ Draper, "Seeking but not Believing", 201. For Plantinga's critique of Draper's argument for naturalism, see Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion and Naturalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 49-52.

*incidences that make intelligent life possible are stronger evidence for theism than evolution is against it. But I am unable to judge the relative strength of, for example, the argument about pain and pleasure and the argument about intelligent life. And because of this, I cannot judge whether the conjunction of all the facts I have considered is more probable on theism or naturalism. So I'm left with various arguments on each side but no clear answer to the question, "which side is supported by the stronger arguments?"*³⁵

The quote indicates that, for Draper and others, agnosticism seems to be the best option both for practical and metaphysical purposes. The point I want to draw attention to is that the facts presented as evidence are vast in number, and when these are brought together, it is claimed that the only conclusion one can draw is ambiguity. So, moving from this ambiguity, agnostics find it appealing to espouse a suspension towards the proposition that 'there is a God, whereas fideists take a leap of faith.'³⁶

Similar to agnostics, fideists also have a negative epistemic approach to the knowability of God's existence. The arguments put forward by the fideists display a great distrust of reason in grounding the existence of God. Kierkegaard, a prominent advocate of strong fideism, claims that if we rely on reason and evidence as epistemic tools, we will have to postpone our judgment on the decision of religious belief constantly. Because we will not reach a definitive conclusion on these grounds, as new arguments need to be continuously examined, a persistent suspension will be entailed.³⁷ This circumstance indicates that we do not have epistemic means that will enable us to reach a decisive judgment about God's existence. According to Kierkegaard, religious belief is based on *uncertainty* in this respect. He marked this point: "I observe nature to *find God*, and indeed I also see omnipotence and wisdom, but I see much else that troubles and disturbs. The summa summarum [result] of this is the objective uncertainty...."³⁸ Thus, for Kierkegaard, the result of a search for evidence

³⁵ Draper, "Seeking but Not Believing", 205-206.

³⁶ A fideist may argue that one can believe in God with a certainty that no epistemic evidence can ever provide. Although I accept the fact that a fideist can argue for such a stance, I am quite sure that the epistemic ground or justification for a belief in God is way ahead of any psychological attempt for justification in terms of rationality. The argument fideist proposes here, as prone to justifying many inconsistent beliefs simultaneously, seems to be vicious.

³⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, ed. and trans. Alastair Hannay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 107-108.

³⁸ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 171.

of God's existence will not end with positive evidence. In this regard, his position is very close to strong agnostics like Bertrand Russell. According to Russell, acquiring proper knowledge about God and the afterlife is impossible. Thus, an entity without insufficient evidence for its existence is not worthy of belief.³⁹ Although Kierkegaard and Russell seem to be in tune, they dissent regarding what attitude they espouse due to evidential ambiguity. Russell opposes the argument that 'belief's having a good effect on the man can be used as evidence for God's existence, which is a primary claim in fideistic attitudes, especially pragmatically justified ones. Because, for him, a belief that is not based on conclusive evidence and which occasionally turns out to be true or has a true conclusion cannot justify the truth of that particular belief.⁴⁰ On the other hand, Kierkegaard risks the fact of the proposition that 'there is a God as a conclusion of the ambiguity of evidence.

Pascal, rather a moderate fideist himself, says "... [E]ither God is, or he is not.' But to which view shall we be inclined? Reason cannot decide this question. Infinite chaos separates us."⁴¹ By this phrase, he points out that the reason is insufficient to ground God's existence. According to Pascal, if there is a God, He will be an unlimited and indivisible being with no limits. However, the limited human mind cannot grasp such an absolute being. So, knowing "what he is or whether he is" would be beyond our ken if there is a God.⁴² Pascal finds it impossible to show God's existence based on the universe's existence and its functioning. On this basis, he reveals why God cannot be proven with the following statement:

"I look around in every direction, and all I see is darkness. Nature has nothing to offer me that does not give rise to doubt and anxiety. If I saw no sign of a Divinity, I should decide on a negative solution: if I saw signs of a Creator everywhere, I should peacefully settle down in the faith. But, seeing too much to deny and not enough to affirm, I am in a pitiful state, where I have wished a hundred times over that if there is a God supporting nature, he should unequivocally proclaim him, and that, if the signs in nature

³⁹ Bertrand Russell, "What is an Agnostic?" *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell*, ed. Robert E. Egner and Lester E. Denonn (London: Routledge Classics, 2009), 557.

⁴⁰ Bertrand Russell, "Am I An Atheist Or An Agnostic?" in *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell*, ed. Robert E. Egner and Lester E. Denonn (London: Routledge Classics, 2009), 566-567.

⁴¹ Pascal, *Pensées*, 122.

⁴² Pascal, *Pensées*, 122.

*are deceptive, they should be completely erased; that nature should say all or nothing so that I could see what course I ought to follow. Instead of that, in the state I am, not knowing what I am nor what I ought to do, I know neither my condition nor my duty.*⁴³

It can be deduced from the passage above that the universe or nature as a reference to prove God's existence seems insufficient because nature not only contains proof for God's existence but also for His nonexistence. Therefore, as underlined in his quote, 'Seeing too much to deny and not enough to affirm,' we can affirm that, according to Pascal, the universe remains uncertain in proving that one of the two parties prevails in this matter.

Similarly, James, regarded as a moderate fideist, argues that reason is inadequate in proving God's existence. So, according to him, it is impossible to decide in favor of one side based on reason. In "The Will to Believe," he laid out his central thesis: "*Our passionate nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds....*"⁴⁴ 'Intellectual grounds' refers to the epistemic conditions determining an issue's truth or falsity. According to the crucial point put forward by James, we do not have sufficient evidence to decide on the existence/nonexistence of God on epistemic grounds. This is due to the significant uncertainty regarding the decision to be made. He emphasizes that in every decision one will take, she will ultimately act without relying on solid knowledge; therefore, whatever the decision is, it will be on unsound grounds.⁴⁵

James employed a quote from James Fitzjames Stephen (1829-1894) to illustrate this situation as follows:

"In all important life transactions, we have to a leap in the dark... If we decide to leave the riddles unanswered, that is a choice; if we waver in our answer, that, too, is a choice: but whatever choice we make, we make it at our peril. If a man chooses to turn his back on God and the future, no one can prevent him; no one can show beyond a reasonable doubt that he is mistaken. If a man thinks otherwise and acts as he thinks, I do not see that anyone can prove that he is mistaken. Each must act as he thinks best, and if he is

⁴³ Pascal, *Pensées*, 134-135.

⁴⁴ William James, "The Will to Believe", in *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, ed. Giles Gunn (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 205.

⁴⁵ See James, "The Will to Believe", 217-218 and "Is Life Worth Living?" *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, ed. Giles Gunn (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 238.

*wrong, so much the worse for him. We stand on a mountain pass in the midst of whirling snow and blinding mist, through which we get glimpses now and then of paths that may be deceptive. If we stand still, we shall be frozen to death. If we take the wrong road, we shall be dashed to pieces. We do not certainly know whether there is any right one.*⁴⁶

The quote indicates that whatever decision one makes regarding God's existence will be justified over ambiguous evidence. Based on such epistemic foundations, it is impossible to predict which side we should turn on. In such a case, no matter whether we decide in favor of God's existence or nonexistence, we will bear the risk of the wrong decision since the decision made will not be based on strong knowledge and evidence. At this point, it is clear that James presumes that evidence for or against God's existence is *impossible* on epistemic grounds. This parallels the point sketched by strong agnostics, although James is a moderate fideist. As we will refer to in the following chapters, the impossibility that James employs is not the kind that prevents a belief but rather one that is not involved in the justification of the belief. At this point, inspired by James, I tentatively claim that for moderate fideists, evidence and justification are not going hand in hand. From the quote, "*If a man chooses to turn his back altogether on God ... no one can prevent him; no one can show beyond a reasonable doubt that he is mistaken.*", I conclude that James is sure that God's neither existence nor nonexistence is evidence-dependent as he refers to its being impossible to be shown 'beyond a reasonable doubt.'⁴⁷ I think it is ironic that a theist depends on no evidence for God but a reasonable doubt. In contrast, agnostics who suspend judgment on God's existence justify their attitude on proof. In terms of being a doxastic attitude, weak agnosticism seems to be a step ahead.

The strong forms of agnosticism and fideism's relation to evidence are way more unsound. Some of the philosophers espousing these attitudes tend even to despise evidence. However, as being

⁴⁶ Quoted in James, "The Will to Believe", 218.

⁴⁷ An anonymous referee has rightfully (partially) warned me that "For James, contrary to Pascal, God's existence would outweigh all other options. His decision is the outcome of a rational intuition, not a leap of faith despite the reason." Even so, James' relation to the evidence is a perfect fit of a paradigmatic fideist. For me, one function of evidence is to remove doubt and the idea that God's existence cannot be known beyond 'reasonable doubt' leads to a close resemblance between him and the agnostics. Also, *rational intuition* seems ambiguous to an extent, anyhow.

epistemically permissive for *genuine* believers is necessary, hating the evidence and the inquiry for evidence seems irrational. For any doxastic attitude, ‘inquiring way of justification seems to be essential if these attitudes are in a search for true belief. Because if there is no inquiry, then it does not seem possible for the attitude in question to be entertained on purpose but by accident; and second, this attitude is not a doxastic epistemic attitude, but a non-doxastic psychological one since accidental beliefs are not doxastic. To sum up, agnostics and fideists must be about evidence and adopt their attitudes based on inquiry concerning evidence and continue to be epistemically justifiable, or else they will lose their epistemic and doxastic qualities and become psychological attitudes. So, basing belief on inquiry and evidence seems to be the best way out. Vagueness and no-evidence-needed kinds of justifications or pseudo-justifications, as I would say, seem so alike that any belief or quasi-belief could be justified according to their *amorphous* criteria. So, can ambiguous evidence be a reason why one starts to believe in God or encourage a suspension on the issue? It seems to me that it is not the case for non or anti-evidence enthusiasts. However, it may be the case for weak and moderate attitudes toward any doxastic approach.

3. Belief or Suspension?

The assertions made by agnostics and fideists about the existence of God indicate that these two approaches have a common epistemic ground. Both attitudes argue that the evidence is either insufficient or indecisive, which blurs to confirming God’s existence or nonexistence. Therefore, assessed in terms of epistemic justification, there is significant uncertainty about God’s existence. This common ground can be formulated with a principle that I call *Epistemic Thesis* (ET) as follows:

ET: The evidence available for God’s existence is not sufficient or decisive enough to show epistemically that there is a God or not.

I am not the only one who draws such a conclusion that, based on ET, agnosticism and fideism share an epistemic common ground. Some philosophers also have applied this kind of epistemic foundation to reveal the similarity between agnosticism and fideism and uncover the religious roots of agnosticism. Accordingly, when we carefully examine the points emphasized by agnosticism regarding the limits of human knowledge, as Lightman rightly points out, agnosticism owes a lot to an epistemological approach Christian philo-

sophers defend in religion. This points to the religious origins of agnosticism.⁴⁸ In this respect, Henry Longueville Mansel (1820-1871), a moderate fideist himself, seems to be one of the philosophers who can be mentioned to point out these common epistemic roots. Many critics have stated that his religious attitude is close to agnosticism. Stephen, for instance, expresses this point as follows:

*“The last English writer who professed to defend Christianity with weapons drawn from wide and genuine philosophical knowledge was Dean Mansel. The whole substance of his argument was simply and solely the assertion of the first principles of Agnosticism. Mr. Herbert Spencer, the prophet of the Unknowable, the foremost representative of Agnosticism, professes his program to carry a step further the doctrine put into shape by Hamilton and Mansel.”*⁴⁹

So, which claims of Mansel brought him this close to agnosticism? When scrutinizing his thoughts, one can see that he tries to philosophically defend traditional Christian beliefs, with some ideas borrowed from Kant’s epistemology, about the limits of human understanding. According to him, since man is a finite being, one has to admit that his knowledge is also finite. Because his knowledge is limited, man cannot know God and the transcendent world, and rational efforts to understand God’s nature are contradictory. Therefore, God and the transcendent realm are unknown to man.⁵⁰ Some of the essential claims of Mansel supporting his moderate fideistic position provided powerful missiles to many philosophers, especially Huxley, to defend their agnostic attitudes. Of course, it is ironic that agnostics employ these claims. “From Huxley’s point of view,” as Lightman states, “to come across a Christian theologian who, in holding to the notion of the limits of knowledge, is self-destructive and supplies unbelievers with powerful arguments.”⁵¹ Lightman’s quote suggests that a believer’s attempt to know God, regardless of evidence, is actually choosing the grueling path. The greater the distance between God and the evidence, the less the possibility of knowing God on rational grounds. This situation offers the upper hand to non-believers.

⁴⁸ Bernard Lightman, *The Origins of Agnosticism: Victorian Unbelief and the Limits of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 5.

⁴⁹ Leslie Stephen, *An Agnostic’s Apology and Other Essays* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1903), 8-9.

⁵⁰ See Henry L. Mansel, *The Limits of Religious Thought Examined in Eight Lectures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁵¹ Lightman, *The Origins of Agnosticism*, 9.

What has been revealed so far shows that agnostics and fideists have common (especially Kantian) arguments that point out (i) human knowledge's epistemic limits and (ii) that these limits cannot grasp the core of the evidence decisively among the ambiguity. If we accept agnosticism *only* as a negative *epistemic thesis* about God's knowability, it will make it possible to label many philosophers within religious thought as agnostic. Because when the knowability of God is approached *solely* from an epistemic point of view, it is clear that philosophers such as Pascal, Mansel, and James, who defend religious claims, have considerably similar arguments to the agnostic philosophers such as Huxley, Clifford, and Spencer.⁵²

So, if agnosticism and fideism have similar claims in epistemic terms, how do they differ from each other? The two attitudes' approval of ET raises the question of *what one should do* when evidence for God's existence or nonexistence is insufficient. The answer to the question "What kind of attitude should we adopt in such a situation?" brings us to the main point that distinguishes an agnostic from a fideist. I can express this with what I call *Practical Thesis* (PT) as follows:

PT: In cases where ET is approved, one should act according to ...⁵³

PT tells us how to act when the evidence for God's existence or nonexistence is insufficient. However, agnostics and fideists fill the blanks of this thesis on *how one should react differently when the evidence is inadequate, insufficient, inconclusive, etc.*. According to the fideist, when the evidence for God's existence and nonexistence is insufficient, it is legitimate for one to have faith for different reasons.⁵⁴ At this point, the fideists differ in the reasons they propose to have faith. For example, Pascal and James argue for having faith by appealing to one's interest and benefit, Kierkegaard to one's subjectivity, Mansel to revelation, etc.

Unlike the fideist, agnostic argues that the reasonable step to take when ET is accepted is to suspend judgment. We can say that agnostics have a consensus regarding the suspension of judgment.

⁵² Randolph Feezell, "Religious Ambiguity, Agnosticism, and Prudence", *Florida Philosophical Review* 9/2 (2009), 92.

⁵³ The blank indicates that anyone who accepts PT can fill this blank however s/he desires, e.g., James fills with 'live option'.

⁵⁴ For instance, one can always have a belief in God justified pragmatically. For a comprehensive study see, Abdulkadir Tanış, *Pragmatik İman* (Ankara: Episteme Yayınları, 2021), 81-97 and "İnanma İradesi: William James'in İmanın Pragmatik Savunusu Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme", *Dini Araştırmalar* 19/48 (2016), 188-189.

Of course, it is also possible to come across some philosophers who argue that it is not impossible for an agnostic to take a practical step towards belief and who, in this respect, is very similar to fideists in terms of their starting points. However, these philosophers do not take this reasonable step identical to a leap of faith. Instead, it is possible to come across philosophers who argue that to live in a constant state of suspended judgment may not have a practical or satisfactory outcome since it should also be possible for agnostics to believe in God for at least spiritual well-being. Accordingly, a weak agnostic who thinks that the evidence for the existence of God is either scarce that it cannot be told whether there is a God or abundant that this abundance of evidence makes it difficult to decide between naturalism and theism, considering the benefits she will get, can argue that she can live her life *like* a theist. This approach shows that agnosticism does not necessarily require one to live like a practical atheist and is quite similar to what Pascal proposed. For example, according to Draper, God's existence is a real possibility; therefore, an agnostic may behave, unlike an atheist. The agnostic can keep himself open to new arguments for the existence of God; he may even pray to reach these arguments.⁵⁵ Draper shares his attitude as follows:

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"I don't believe that "seek and ye shall find (in this life)" is an essential part of a theistic worldview. Since I regard God's existence as a real possibility, I wholeheartedly agree with Price that it is reasonable – indeed, I would say rationally required – for me to behave differently than I would if I were an atheist. For example, I ought to pray – unlike the atheist, I believe there just might be a God listening. More generally, I ought to do what I can to cultivate or at least prepare for a relationship with God. Also, it is not unreasonable for me to spend considerable time looking for new evidence and reexamining old evidence both for and against theism. If I were an atheist, then I wouldn't bother to search for evidence for or against God's existence because I wouldn't expect to find any confirming evidence, and I wouldn't need any more disconfirming evidence."⁵⁶

⁵⁵ For agnosticism and religious commitments see Samantha Corte, "Following God without Belief: Moral Objections to Agnostic Religious Commitment", *Philosophy Compass* 3 (2008), 381-96; John Lemos, "Agnostic Defence of Obligatory Prayer", *Sophia* 37 (1998), 70-87.

⁵⁶ Draper, "Seeking but Not Believing", 210-211.

Draper asks “*what the consequences of agnostic religious practice can be*” and answers as follows:

*“It may or may not lead to belief, even on the assumption that God exists. Indeed, it may or may not lead to belief (in this life), even on the assumption that it leads to (or prepares one for) a closer relationship with God. Religious practice is challenging for an agnostic, and for some, there may be value in that difficulty.”*⁵⁷

Anthony Kenny also argues that an agnostic attitude does not necessarily prevent one from prayer. Kenny argues that there is no limit preventing an agnostic from worshiping God, praying to God, and leading a religious life. Kenny says,

*“Agnosticism, unlike atheism, makes room for prayer. Being agnostic does not mean that one cannot pray. In itself, prayer to a God whose existence one is doubtful is no more irrational than crying out for help in an emergency without knowing whether anyone is within earshot.”*⁵⁸

It is clear that for both Draper and Kenny, there is no reason to prevent one who doubts God’s existence from praying for help on any topic. Kenny says, “*such prayer seems rational whether or not there is a God*” and “*if there is a God, then surely prayer for enlightenment about his existence and nature cannot be less pleasing to him than the attitude of a man who takes no interest in a question so important, or in a question so difficult who would not welcome assistance beyond human powers.*”⁵⁹ After referring to agnosticism’s common grounds in a weak sense and fideism, we should turn to the difference that coins them under their names. While fideists think that belief in God –whether it constitutes by the wager or not- is necessary, there is –unquestionably- no such condition for agnosticism.⁶⁰ At least the ones mentioned above, Agnostics think that one’s living their life as if they are theist while remaining agnostic on ‘whether God’s existence is ever knowable’ is possible.

⁵⁷ Draper, “Seeking but Not Believing”, 211.

⁵⁸ Anthony Kenny, “Agnosticism and Atheism”, in *Philosophers and God: At the Frontiers of Faith and Reason*, ed. J. Cornwell and M. McGhee (New York: Continuum, 2009), 123.

⁵⁹ Kenny, “Agnosticism and Atheism”, 124.

⁶⁰ Indeed, ‘belief’ is a truth condition for agnosticism in the philosophical sense. But it is not the same kind with fideism’s. Agnostic shall have at least one belief that ‘she is in a doxastic attitude towards agnosticism’, i.e., her agnosticism is the true stance to adhere to.

In summary, PT clarifies that agnosticism and fideism diverge about how we should take a step when we do not have an epistemic tool sufficient to know God's existence. In such a case, while the agnostic finds it reasonable to suspend the judgment on the topic, the fideist argues that one should believe in God based on other grounds (like faith, revelation, interest, benefit, etc.) other than epistemic ones. This point is the fundamental reason why agnosticism is understood as anti-religious.⁶¹ As it is more common among scholars to focus more on the main point where agnosticism and fideism differ on PT, and as agnosticism at this point argues that religious belief should not be approved, it has generally been interpreted as anti-religious. Because of this anti-religious interpretation, the common ground on which agnosticism and fideism epistemically overlap has often been neglected. However, given the point I have underlined with ET, it can be seen how agnostics and fideists (for example, Clifford and James, who have often been considered counterparts in the literature) share an *epistemically* similar claim.

Two attitudes' having different approaches in terms of PT is also a crucial point. The agnostic says if one approves ET by considering only epistemic evidence, then she has no choice but to suspend judgment. Because if one bases her beliefs on entirely epistemic grounds and acts accordingly and is limited to what the epistemic evidence points out, in any circumstance in which the evidence is insufficient to show the truth or falsehood of an issue, the most reasonable attitude is to suspend her judgment on the matter. Of course, many religious belief advocates have severely criticized this claim, especially fideist philosophers such as James. The idea that we should have a belief based solely on epistemic grounds has been rejected. In this respect, fideism has developed various ways of defending the faith in God for non-epistemic reasons. Although such different attempts point to a profound philosophical endeavor, we should note that disabling the epistemic foundations for God's existence damages the religious defense that the fideist attempts to do for two reasons. First of all, the fideists' acceptance of ET, that is, religious beliefs, especially belief in God, does not have an epistemically sufficient basis, has led to the strengthening of anti-religious agnostic approaches, as this study has tried to demonstrate. Philosophers such as Huxley and Spencer defended their agnostic positions by benefiting from the arguments of these fideist approaches that emerged within religion.

⁶¹ Lightman, *The Origins of Agnosticism*, 3.

Secondly, fideism is labeled as irrational and used as a pejorative concept in many cases because it advocates belief in God despite its affirmation of ET. That is to say, although fideism confirms ET, there is not enough evidence in favor of God's existence; it still tries to establish a belief in God based on other reasons, which are mostly irrational.

Conclusion

Although agnosticism and fideism are often presented as opposed to each other in the literature, this study has tried to highlight their common epistemic grounds. For this, I put forward two theses, epistemic and practical. Based on these, I tried to show the common epistemic grounds for agnosticism and fideism and clarify the essential points where they differ. According to the *Epistemic Thesis*, agnosticism and fideism have a common epistemic claim about God's knowability due to inadequate evidence; God's existence or nonexistence cannot be known on epistemic grounds. Both agnosticism and fideism use similar arguments, such as the ambiguity thesis or Kantian claims pointing to the limits of human understanding to ground their common claim. Undoubtedly, it is possible to list many philosophical and religious reasons, such as the limits of human knowledge, the deterioration of human nature, the hiddenness of God, etc. However, the ambiguity thesis is the most prominent reason that seems to arise among agnostics and fideists. This common ground of the two approaches in ET is significant in disclosing epistemically agnostic attitudes within religious defenses, too.

On the other hand, agnosticism and fideism's claim that God's existence or nonexistence cannot be known on epistemic grounds raises the question of what kind of belief attitude one should adopt regarding God's existence. As I have shown through the *Practical Thesis*, the two approaches differ from each other regarding the belief attitude they propose. In this regard, agnosticism, taking epistemic considerations into account, argues that one's suspending judgment on a decision regarding belief in God is the most reasonable option. Because when the evidence on the subject is insufficient, staying neutral on both sides is the best choice. However, although fideism, similar to agnosticism, accepts that God's existence cannot be known, it emphasizes that epistemic means are not the only way to believe in Him. Fideists argue that they can refer to non-epistemic

elements such as revelation, tradition, and passion as the basis of belief in God.

So far, what has been stated reveals an agnostic essence at the basis of fideism. And I think one more question deserves to be discussed here. Is it possible for an attitude to be justified regardless of the evidence? Or, is it possible to be *even* an attitude without the precise relation to the evidence? If we can say that an attitude can be true regardless of the evidence, then wouldn't it be necessary to say that agnosticism, fideism, and even a position unrelated to evidence, are justifiable? Bringing this conclusion with the *unique thesis* of doxastic attitudes addresses a dead end. Thus, I suggest that strong agnosticism and fideism lack rational content; they can at best be psychologically grounded. Therefore, having a reasonable belief in fideism is only reasonable if it holds a reasonable relation to the evidence. Evaluated within this criterion, strong agnosticism is unreasonable, like strong fideism. For weak agnosticism, Kenny's position is unreasonable compared to Draper, Oppy, and Poidevin's. As for 'psychologically groundedness', I would say, if a position is not grounded on epistemic grounds but a psychological one, then it is not a doxastic attitude which in turn is a peril for its being an attitude. This endangers the fideistic approach. Because it seems to me that rejecting the evidence, considering it unnecessary, or believing because something is absurd is irrational. This irrationality is no less than the one who sees the evidence as impossible.

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When scrutinized, one can see that a significant part of the criticisms against fideism stems from the agnostic essence. Take the classical criticism towards fideism: "When we accept that the man cannot know God and that we must believe in Him, as fideism claims, which religion's God we will believe in?" At the basis of this criticism is the idea that if God's existence or nonexistence cannot be known to be accepted, that is, the epistemic basis is to be deactivated; we cannot have a good reason to choose one of the existing gods of different religions. In other words, the criticism in this discussion is all about neglecting the epistemic foundations of God. This situation shows us that the agnostic essence of fideism has a self-destructive nature in many respects, and those epistemic foundations for a belief are fundamental.

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KANIT, BELİRSİZLİK VE İNANÇ

Nesim ASLANTATAR*

Genişletilmiş Özet

Bazıları için Tanrı'nın varlığı kanıt bakımından belirsizdir. *Belirsizlik*, sonuçlarındaki farklılıklara rağmen, Tanrı'nın varlığına yönelik oldukça *benzer* epistemik temellere sahip agnostisizm ve fideizm olmak üzere birden fazla önermesel tutumu ortaya çıkarır. Söz konusu benzerlik, esasen, Tanrı'nın varlığına dair kanıtların ya yeterli olmadığı (bazı zayıf agnostikler); imkansız olduğu (güçlü agnostikler ve radikal fideistler) ya da agnostisizm ve teizm arasında karar vermeyi güç kılacak derecede fazla olduğu ve neticede ortaya bir belirsizlik çıkardığı (zayıf agnostiklerin çoğunluğu) varsayımına dayanır. Bu noktada, çalışmamızın temel amaçlarından biri, güçlü agnostik tutum ile güçlü fideistlerin kanıta dair ortak bir yaklaşıma sahip olduklarına dikkat çekmek olacaktır. Bu bağlamda, cevabını arayacağımız ilk soru, Tanrı'nın varlığını kabul eden bir yaklaşım (güçlü fideizm) ile hüküm ilelebet askıya alan bir yaklaşımın (güçlü agnostisizm) rasyonalite ile ilişkisini kanıt temelinde ele alamıyorsak, bu yaklaşımlardan hangisinin rasyonel olduğuna nasıl veya hangi temel üzerinde karar verilebileceğidir.

Bu bağlamda, agnostisizm ve fideizmin güçlü ve zayıf biçimlerini ve her birinin Tanrı'nın varlığına dair kanıtlarla olan ilişkisini tüm yönleriyle ele almak adına, *epistemik* ve *pratik* olmak üzere iki temel tez önerilecektir. Epistemik teze (ET) göre, mevcut kanıtlar, bir Tanrı'nın varlığını göstermek için yeterli veya kesin değildir. ET'den hareketle, agnostisizm ve fideizmin Kantçı ortak bir zeminde birleştikleri ve (i) insanın Tanrı'ya dair bilgisi üzerinde epistemik bir kısıtlama olduğu ve (ii) bu kısıtlamanın, kanıtın özünü kavrama bakımından da problem yarattığı noktasında ortak bir görüşe sahip olduklarını savunuyoruz. Epistemik olarak ortak bir özden hareket ettiklerini iddia ettiğimiz agnostisizm ve fideizm özdeş olmadıklarına göre, bu iki tutum birbirlerinden nasıl ayrılırlar?; ayrılmadıkları noktalar var mıdır? Fideizmin, Tanrı'nın varlığını onaylayan bir tutum olarak, özünde agnostik öğeler barındırması, irrasyonel olarak nitelenmesini gerektirmez mi?; gerektirmezse, agnostisizmin mi rasyonel olarak nitelendirilmesi gerekecektir? Bu soruların cevabını bulmak ve ET'nin iki tutum arasındaki benzerliğin temelinde yattığını gerekçelendirmek için, zayıf ve güçlü biçimleri arasında bir takım ayrımlar yaptığımız fideist ve agnostik yaklaşımın, mahiyetlerine dair detaylı bir soruşturmanın gerekli olduğuna inanıyoruz. Bu soruşturmanın detay ve sonuçlarını, iki tutum arasındaki en sağlam örnek olan Mansel başta olmak üzere, Pascal, James ve Kierkegaard gibi fideistler ile Kenny, Draper, Oppy ve Poidevin gibi agnostik

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düşünürler üzerinden göstermeye gayret edeceğiz.

Tanrı'nın varlığına dair kanıtların belirsiz olduğu iddiası karşısında hükmünü askıya alan agnostiklerin aksine fideistler inanmaya devam ederler; hatta bazı düşünürler imanın tam da böylesi bir risk üzerine bina edildiğini savunurlar. Bu noktada, hem agnostik hem de fideist ET'yi onayladığı için, Tanrı'nın varlığına veya yokluğuna ilişkin kanıtlar yetersiz olduğunda fideistin agnostikten farklı bir tavır takındığını ve Tanrı'nın varlığı için hükmü askıya almaktan ziyade yeni bir soru sorarak, belirsizlik durumunda ne yapılması gerektiğine dair bir de cevap verdiğini söyleyebiliriz. "Böyle bir durumda nasıl bir tavır takınmalıyız?" sorusunun yanıtı, bizi agnostiği bir fideistten ayıran ana noktaya getirir. Bu noktayı Pratik Tez (PT) ile şu şekilde ifade edebiliriz:

PT: ET'nin onaylandığı durumlarda, kişi göre hareket etmelidir.

PT, Tanrı'nın varlığı veya yokluğuna dair delillerin yetersiz kaldığı durumlarda kişiye nasıl hareket etmesi gerektiğini söyleyerek, hangi tutumun ona faydalı olduğuna dair bir yol çizer. Bununla birlikte, agnostikler ve fideistler, kanıtların yetersiz, ikna edicilikten uzak ve sonuçsuz olduğu herhangi bir durumda, bu tezin boşluklarını farklı bir şekilde doldururlar. Fideiste göre, Tanrı'nın varlığına dair deliller yetersiz olduğunda, kişinin farklı nedenlere dayanarak iman etmesi meşrudur. Bu noktada fideistler, inanca sahip olmak için öne sürdükleri gerekçeler bakımından farklılık gösterirler. Örneğin Pascal ve James, kişinin çıkar ve yararına; Kierkegaard öznelliğine, Mansel ise vahye başvurarak imanı temellendirir. Bu temellendirmelerden herbirinde rasyonel yönler bulunabileceği gibi, Tanrı'nın varlığını kanıttan bağımsız olarak ele alan her tutumun bir takım problemleri olduğu da açıktır.¹

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Bu çalışmada, ET ve PT aracılığıyla, agnostisizm ve fideizmin belirsizliğe bağlı olarak kesiştiği ve ayrıldığı kritik noktaları ele alacak ve fideizme yönelik birçok eleştirinin temeli olan epistemik ortaklığın fideizm açısından yıkıcı olduğunu savunacağız. Bu iddiamızı kanıtlamak için, öncelikle, Tanrı'nın varlığına dair belirsizliğin –muğlaklık ya da müphemlik- mahiyetine odaklanacağız. Bu bağlamda, belirsizlik noktasında, iki konu üzerinde duracağız: (i) Tanrı'nın varlığına dair kanıt var olmadığı için mi muğlaktır, yoksa var ancak müphem midir? (ii) Kanıtın mahiyeti, Tanrı'nın hem varlığını hem de var olmadığını destekleyen (yokluğunun

¹ Mansel, düşünce sisteminde Hıristiyanlık ve agnostisizm gibi farklı öğelere aynı anda verdiği referanslar nedeniyle çağdaş tartışmaların da konusu olmaya devam etmektedir. Mansel'in agnostik mi yoksa bir teist mi olduğunu ortaya koymaya çalışan bir çalışma da Timothy Fitzgerald tarafından kaleme alınan "Mansel's Agnosticism" (*Religious Studies* 26/4 (1990), 525-541.) adlı makaledir. Kant'ın felsefinden büyük oranda etkilendiği için agnostik olarak ele alınması gerektiği noktasında görüşler olsa da Mansel, felsefi çıkarımlar Hıristiyanlıkla çeliştiğinde vahyi önceler. Vahyi felsefi çıkarımların önünde tutan bir düşünürün, düşüncesinde bilinemezci öğeler barındırmasına rağmen, agnostik değil fideist olduğu söylenebilir. Bu görüşümüzü desteklemek adına, adı geçen makalede Fitzgerald'ın, Bevan'a referansla, Mansel'in vahiyle Tanrı'nın gerçek tabiatından bir şeyleri açmadığı konusunda Aquinas'tan bile daha az agnostik olduğu ifadesi örnek verilebilir. (Edwyn Bevan, *Symbolism and Belief* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1938), 322'den akt. Fitzgerald, "Mansel's Agnosticism", 528.) Her ne kadar Mansel'in genel felsefi sistemi içinde belli tutarsızlıkların bulunması mümkün olsa da vahye başvurarak imanı temellendirmesi kendisinin agnostisizmden ayrıldığı noktadır ve Bevan'ın Mansel'e dair okuması oldukça makul görünmektedir.

aksine) yeterince kanıt olduğu için mi muğlaktır? Kanıtın belirsizliği tartışmasında, mevcut çalışma, agnostisizmin müphemlik olarak anlaşılması fikrine karşı çıkarak, agnostisizmin zorunlu bir tutum olmadığını savunacak; fideizmin kanıtlarla ilişkisinin zayıf olmasının ya da hiç *olmamasının* irrasyonel olduğunu göstermeye çalışacaktır. Fideizmin agnostisizmle ortak özü olarak tanımlanabilecek ET, fideizme yönelik birçok eleştirinin temelinde yer almasının yanında, Tanrı'nın varlığına dair olumlu bir yaklaşım olan fideizm açısından kendi zeminini ortadan kaldırmaya yönelik bir tehlike olarak da okunabilir. Buna göre, fideizmin kanıtla yönelik tutumu, temelde agnostisizmin muhatap olduğu *zor* sorulara cevap vermeyi gerektirmesinin yanında, kimi zayıf agnostiklerin dahi Tanrı'ya dair kanıtı gereksiz ya da imkansız *görmemeleri* de dikkate alınca, Tanrı'nın varlığına dair kanıt hususunda güçlü agnostiklere yakın bir tutuma evrilebilir. Bu durum, varlığı için fazlasıyla kanıt olan Tanrı için fideizmi gereksiz bir tutuma dönüştürebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Felsefesi, Agnostisizm, Fideizm, Belirsizlik, Muğlaklık, Müphemlik.