

The Honest Seeker’s Duty: Critically Evaluating God-Concepts — 01

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Central claim

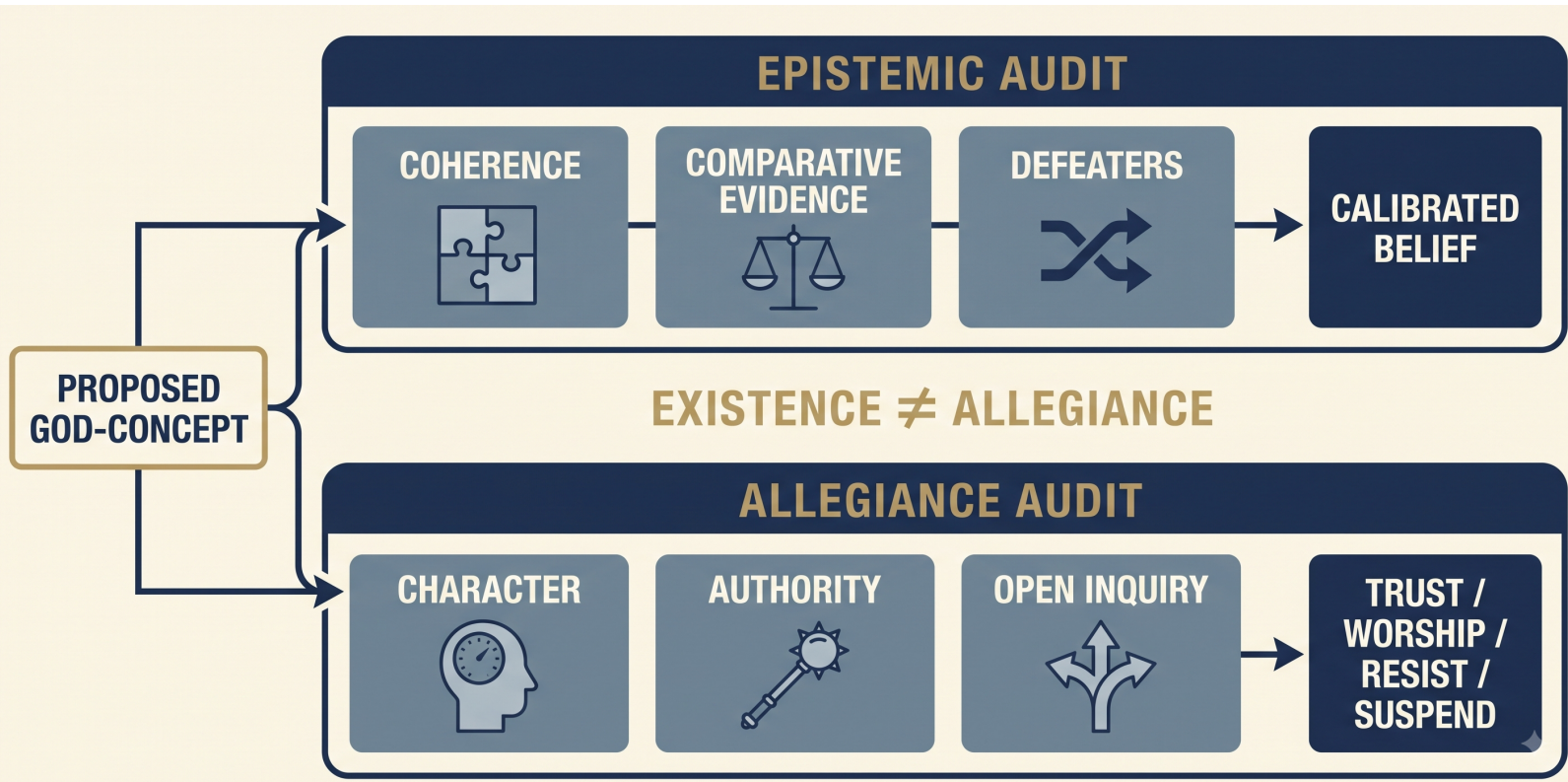
Anyone considering life-shaping trust, obedience, or worship toward a specific God-concept has a defeasible duty to investigate when careful inquiry is feasible and likely to reduce consequential error. Standards used to distinguish trustworthy from self-protecting human authorities cannot be suspended merely because an authority is called divine. This does not show that no God exists or require endless inquiry; it shows that untested allegiance is not made responsible by calling it faith.

Preview: The argument at a glance

Starting point	If-then bridge	Pressure	Required response
A specific God-claim asks for life-shaping trust.	If proportionate checking can reduce serious error, inquiry is owed.	Rival traditions, dependent evidence, and self-sealing replies make untested confidence unreliable.	Separate belief from allegiance; compare alternatives; name defeaters.

The duty is real but defeasible: ability, access, urgency, competing obligations, and the likely value of further inquiry all matter.

Visual preview:



One proposed God-concept enters two equal but distinct audits. Coherence, comparative evidence, and defeaters govern calibrated belief; character, authority, and openness to inquiry govern trust, worship, resistance, or suspension. The map separates existence from allegiance without assuming the answer to either question.

Abstract

High-stakes religious commitment should not receive a lower standard of care than medicine, finance, political authority, or marriage. This paper argues that when a person is considering consequential trust, obedience, or worship toward a specific God-concept, and proportionate inquiry can reduce serious error, that person has a defeasible duty to investigate. The case is cumulative: religious allegiance can shape an entire life; public God-claims are mediated through fallible human testimony and institutions; incompatible traditions offer similar credentials; apparently independent evidence often shares sources; and self-sealing explanations can turn every outcome into confirmation. These pressures support four plain inferential bridges. Existence does not entail authority. Desirability does not establish existence. A method that equally confirms incompatible claims cannot by itself identify one as true. A claim that permits every possible result cannot cite favorable results as public confirmation. The practical remedy is a two-stage audit: first ask what is coherent and comparatively supported, then ask what kind of trust or allegiance would be warranted if the candidate exists. The conclusion is limited. It does not prove that no God exists, deny all person-relative religious justification, or demand professional expertise and endless investigation. It rejects a narrower double standard: life-shaping divine allegiance should not be insulated from the honest scrutiny required for responsible trust elsewhere.

Keywords: religious epistemology; epistemic duty; inquiry; God-concepts; worship; religious disagreement

Inquiry Before Allegiance

The governing claim is simple: if you are being asked to organize your life around a particular religious authority, and careful inquiry can reduce a serious risk of error at a proportionate cost, you owe the question honest attention before granting or renewing allegiance. Calling the authority divine raises the stakes. It does not cancel the need to identify the authority, examine the evidence, and ask whether trust is warranted.

We recognize this duty in ordinary life. We investigate before allowing a surgeon to operate, a financial adviser to control our savings, or a political leader to wield coercive power. We ask whether a prospective spouse is who they claim to be and whether their character merits trust. Religious commitment can reach further than any of these. It can govern intimate conduct, family relations, moral judgment, education, political action, money, community membership, and expectations about death. It would be strange if greater stakes made scrutiny less appropriate.

The marriage analogy exposes a confusion. Establishing that a suitor exists is not the same as establishing that marriage is wise. In the same way, evidence that a supernatural being exists would not by itself establish that the being is good, truthful, or entitled to obedience. Conversely, describing a perfectly admirable being does not establish that such a being exists. The honest seeker must therefore keep two questions apart: *What should I believe is real?* and *What relationship, if any, would that reality warrant?*

The conditional duty argument

1. When a contemplated commitment risks serious error for oneself or others, and proportionate inquiry can reduce that risk, one has a defeasible duty to inquire or responsibly rely on competent inquiry.
2. Religious allegiance often involves such commitments, and some useful inquiry is often feasible.
3. Therefore, religious allegiance often carries a defeasible duty of prior or continuing inquiry.

The argument is deductively valid if its two premises are true. Its second premise is not a theorem; it is an ordinary judgment supported case by case. Some people lack time, access, safety, health, or intellectual resources. Some decisions are urgent. Sometimes further inquiry is unlikely to change anything that matters. That is why the duty is *pro tanto*: a real reason that can be outweighed, not a command that everyone become a professional philosopher.

The duty may have several grounds. Epistemically, inquiry may be needed to manage evidence responsibly. Prudentially, avoidable error can expose the believer to serious loss. Morally, religious commitments can affect children, patients, students, voters, spouses, and outsiders. The ethics of belief extends from Clifford's severe demand to more recent defenses and critiques of evidential responsibility, positive epistemic duties, and duties to inquire (Clifford, 1877; Conee & Feldman, 2004; McCain, 2023; McGrath, 2025; McWilliams, 2023). Arpaly presses the opposing view that, absent strict doxastic voluntarism, reasons to act here are practical rather than epistemic (Arpaly, 2023). The present claim need not settle that classification. Even if belief is not directly chosen, people do choose what to read, whom to consult, which objections to hear, and whether to double-check a favored conclusion (Friedman, 2020).

Why the Case Is Cumulative

No single feature of religious life proves that inquiry is owed in every case. The force comes from several pressures that converge. Each is limited; together they make a special exemption for religious allegiance increasingly difficult to defend.

1. The commitment is unusually consequential

Religious belief is not always a private guess about remote metaphysics. It can authorize practices, leaders, laws, sacrifices, exclusions, and lifelong identities. High stakes do not make a claim more likely. They make careful checking more valuable. A feared hell or promised heaven may affect the cost of error, but the threat or promise cannot supply its own probability. Otherwise incompatible religions could each bootstrap themselves into credibility by announcing the most extreme consequence.

2. Public God-claims arrive through human channels

Even a genuine revelation would be heard, remembered, written, transmitted, translated, interpreted, and institutionalized through human faculties. Those faculties can be reliable without being infallible. Recognizing mediation is not assuming that revelation is false. It is acknowledging why source identification and error correction matter. Naturalistic accounts of religious formation and classic philosophical critiques belong in the comparison set for this reason; they need not be assumed true in advance (Dawes, 2009; Dennett, 2006; Mackie, 1982; Oppy, 2013).

3. Incompatible traditions present structurally similar credentials

Sacred texts, testimony, answered-prayer stories, conversion, moral transformation, inherited community, and inward assurance appear in traditions that cannot all be correct in the same respects. Religious diversity does not prove that every tradition is false or equally likely. It does show that sincerity and familiar religious experience do not uniquely identify a tradition (Basinger, 2002; Dormandy, 2023).

The problem is not that similar-looking evidence must have identical weight. Provenance, specificity, reliability, and background evidence can differ. The problem is the shortcut from "this experience fits my tradition" to "this experience publicly confirms my tradition." Compatibility is not yet comparison.

4. Several apparent witnesses may share one source

A sacred text, a sermon interpreting it, an experience shaped by the sermon, and testimony reporting that experience may form a meaningful web. They are not automatically four independent confirmations. Dependence changes evidential weight even when it does not erase value. The same caution applies to historical reports sharing literary sources, communities repeating a founder's account, or later experiences interpreted through earlier doctrine.

5. Self-sealing claims can survive at the cost of evidential force

A claim becomes self-sealing when every apparent result is redescribed as support: success shows blessing, failure shows a hidden plan, silence teaches trust, contrary evidence tests faith, and rival evidence shows deception. Any one of those explanations could be true. The problem arises when no independent constraint tells us which explanation to expect before the outcome is known. Philosophical work on epistemic defense mechanisms shows why such systems can preserve conviction while weakening responsible error correction (Boudry & Hofhuis, 2024).

Pressure	What it contributes	What it does not prove
High stakes	Increases the value of checking before reliance	That a feared or desired claim is true
Human mediation	Creates ordinary routes for error and correction	That revelation is impossible
Rival traditions	Defeats the shortcut from sincerity to unique truth	That all traditions are equally credible
Source dependence	Prevents double-counting downstream evidence	That dependent evidence has no value
Self-sealing rescue	Shows why survival under every outcome is weak confirmation	That a protected claim must be false

The conclusion is inductive, not deductive: the five pressures make responsible inquiry more appropriate and untested confidence less reliable. They do not predetermine what the inquiry must conclude.

Four Inferential Bridges

The following arguments make the paper’s logical burden visible. Their forms are simple; disagreement will concern their premises and applications.

Existence is not allegiance

Two verdicts

1. Evidence that an agent exists and has a certain identity does not by itself establish that the agent is good or has legitimate authority.
2. Evidence that a described agent would be good and authoritative if actual does not by itself establish that the agent exists.
3. Therefore, rational belief and warranted allegiance require distinct assessments.

Philosophers disagree about whether worship-worthiness belongs to the very concept of God and about what could make worship fitting or obligatory (Cahn, 2017; Murphy, 2025; Rachels, 1971). Those disputes cannot be settled by sliding between “God” as a label for any powerful supernatural agent and “God” as a title reserved for perfect goodness. Interpersonal knowledge adds depth but not an escape from identity: a relation can feel immediate while the question of whom one is relating to remains contested (Benton, 2024).

A symmetric method cannot uniquely identify one rival

The symmetry argument

1. A method that, under materially similar conditions, equally supports incompatible claims cannot by itself identify one of them as true.
2. Text, tradition, testimony, inward assurance, and interpreted experience often support incompatible religious claims in structurally similar ways.
3. Therefore, those methods need further discriminating support before they can publicly establish one tradition over its rivals.

This does not deny person-relative justification. Alston argues that religious experience can have *prima facie* force within a socially established practice, and Plantinga offers a model on which theistic or Christian belief could be warranted without inferential proof (Alston, 1991; Plantinga, 2000). The symmetry argument makes a narrower demand: a model of how a belief could be warranted if true is not yet public evidence that this tradition, rather than an incompatible rival, is true.

If every outcome counts, no outcome discriminates

The every-outcome problem

1. Public confirmation requires some outcomes to fit a claim better than relevant alternatives do.
2. If every possible outcome is treated as equally expected on a claim, no outcome favors that claim over those alternatives.
3. Therefore, a claim insulated from every possible result cannot cite favorable results as discriminating public confirmation.

A believer may coherently say that God has reasons beyond human knowledge. That preserves logical possibility. It does not, without more, explain why this result should raise confidence. Mystery may limit what can be inferred; it cannot serve as a one-way device that blocks counterevidence while leaving favorable evidence untouched.

High stakes call for checking; they are not evidence

If a diagnosis is dangerous to miss, that is a reason to order another test. It is not evidence that the diagnosis is present. Likewise, eternal consequences may make a religious decision urgent, but the allegation cannot certify itself. The honest response to high stakes is better inquiry and cautious action under uncertainty, not a higher probability assigned by fear alone.

Two Audits, Kept Separate

The approved visual preview places the two audits in matching lanes because neither is secondary. They answer different questions and can yield different results.

The epistemic audit: what is rational to believe?

The epistemic audit asks whether a specified God-concept is coherent and better supported than live alternatives. It should answer five questions.

1. **What exactly is the claim?** “God exists” is too thin when the commitment concerns a particular revelation, church, moral code, or authority.
2. **What would be more expected if it were true?** Evidence matters comparatively. Showing that an event is compatible with a claim does not show that it favors the claim.
3. **Which items share sources?** A cumulative case grows through partly independent strands, not through repeated descendants of one assumption.
4. **Which serious rivals are live?** The comparison should include theistic, non-theistic, intratraditional, and residual unknown options rather than one convenient opponent.
5. **What would lower confidence?** A responsible claim has identifiable defeaters or pays an evidential cost for having none.

No finite inquirer can imagine every alternative. Recent work on unconceived alternatives in inquiry about God and science supports an explicit reserve for possibilities not yet well formulated (Kopf, 2025; Stanford, 2025). The reserve is a reason for calibration, not for treating every imaginable claim as equally likely.

The allegiance audit: what relationship is warranted?

Conditional on a candidate's existence and identity, a second audit asks about character, authority, and the terms of relationship.

1. **Character:** Do the attributed actions and policies support trust under recognizable standards of goodness, justice, and love?
2. **Jurisdiction:** What grounds the scope of the authority's claim: creation, beneficence, covenant, consent, perfect goodness, or something else?
3. **Openness:** May the agent question, verify, appeal, refuse, or exit without punishment that is irrelevant to truth?
4. **Proportion:** Does the evidence warrant worship, limited trust, provisional participation, resistance, or suspension?

Calling human judgment finite does not remove these questions. If human concepts of goodness and justice are too unreliable to count against a divine claim, they are also too unreliable to establish that God is good or just. Selective skepticism about human reason—trustworthy for praise but incompetent for criticism—is a double standard, not humility.

Trust is not maximal confidence. Accounts of faith as resilient commitment, practical venture, or action at less than full credence show why a person may remain faithful through some uncertainty (Bishop, 2007; Buchak, 2023; Howard-Snyder & McKaughan, 2022; Jackson, 2019; James, 1897). Resilience still needs boundaries. Trust that could survive every betrayal is no longer responsive to the trusted party's record.

A Bounded Protocol for Honest Inquiry

The following protocol makes the two audits usable without pretending that every judgment can be reduced to a number.

Step	Question	Required record
1. Decision	What belief, reliance, obedience, or public claim is being considered?	Stakes, affected people, urgency, and reversibility
2. Target	Which God-concept and authority claim are actually at issue?	Core claims, variants, and scope
3. Evidence	What is more expected on this claim than on relevant rivals?	Support, contrary evidence, and comparative direction
4. Dependence	Which items share testimony, texts, institutions, or formation?	Source map and cautions against double-counting
5. Alternatives	Which serious religious, nonreligious, and unknown options matter?	Comparison set and reasons for exclusions
6. Defeaters	What would lower confidence, and which replies were independently credible?	Revision conditions stated before the next result
7. Allegiance	If the candidate exists, what grounds trust or authority?	Character, jurisdiction, openness, and proportional response
8. Stop rule	Would more inquiry probably change the decision enough to justify its cost?	Proceed, suspend, or inquire further, with a review trigger

The protocol does not demand neutrality in the impossible sense of having no background beliefs. It demands reciprocity: reasons used to discount an outsider's testimony, rescue a favored prediction, or excuse ambiguity should remain available to relevant rivals under materially similar conditions. It also demands provenance: the conclusion should reveal which evidence and assumptions produced it.

Inquiry can responsibly pause when the decision is clear, the strongest accessible alternatives and objections have received proportionate attention, further checking has low expected value compared with its cost, and specified evidence would reopen the question. A settled choice can coexist with moderate confidence and a live revision condition.

A Relational Christian God as a Worked Example

Consider a familiar claim: a perfectly good, powerful, knowledgeable, and relational God acted decisively through Jesus and the Christian tradition, seeks a human response, and communicates sufficiently for that response. The point here is not to settle Christianity in a few pages. It is to show where its inferential burdens belong.

The claim has layers: a divine reality; personal agency; perfect goodness; relational intention; historical action through Jesus; reliable revelation; and perhaps the authority of a church or canon. Evidence for an earlier layer can make a later layer more plausible, but it does not automatically establish the entire conjunction. An argument for an ordering cause, for example, is not yet an argument for Trinity, incarnation, resurrection, or a particular institution. The philosophical literature on theism and explanation shows why specificity and alternative comparison matter (Dawes, 2009; Oppy, 2013; Swinburne, 2004).

The Christian case may draw on cosmological order, moral experience, scripture, historical testimony, religious experience, transformed lives, institutional continuity, and answered prayer. The audit asks how much more expected each is on this Christian claim than on other Christian models, other theisms, human cultural production, or an unknown alternative. It then maps dependence. Scripture shapes expectations, sermons, experiences, and interpretations of prayer. These later items may matter, but they are not wholly independent confirmation of the scripture that formed them.

Private experience deserves more than the forced choice between fraud and universal proof. A powerful apparent encounter may rationally affect the experiencer more than an outsider. The outsider may still ask about source identification, cross-tradition analogues, known error conditions, and independent consequences. The result can be person-relative justification without equal public force (Alston, 1991; Plantinga, 2000).

Defenders also appeal to free will, soul-making, divine accommodation, skeptical theism, noncoercive revelation, or purposes beyond human view. These replies should be stated in their strongest forms. The audit then asks whether a reply was independently plausible, whether it predicts the pattern or merely permits it afterward, whether it preserves the original claim, and whether the same strategy would be accepted from an incompatible religion. A reply can preserve Christianity while narrowing what its public evidence establishes.

The allegiance question remains even at substantial credence. Creation, power, and knowledge are not identical to perfect goodness or unlimited jurisdiction. A doctrine that portrays sincere source-checking as rebellion is itself part of the package under review. Threats can raise practical stakes, but cannot certify the threatening authority. A trustworthy authority may require prompt action in some circumstances; a system that blocks every route of identification removes the means by which trustworthy and predatory authorities are distinguished. Work on epistemic authority rightly emphasizes the rational role of deference, but responsible deference depends on competence, track record, domain, and available checks (Zagzebski, 2012).

The process can end in confident Christian commitment, provisional participation, doctrinal revision, another religion, agnosticism, or nonbelief. Its achievement is narrower: the path is visible, and allegiance is not smuggled into the evidence for existence.

Objections

Finite humans cannot judge an infinite God

Finite agents cannot comprehend an infinite being exhaustively. The audit requires neither exhaustive comprehension nor superiority over its object. A patient can assess a surgeon's evidence and conduct without possessing greater medical knowledge. More importantly, global distrust of human rational and moral judgment blocks positive theology too. If humans cannot recognize justice or love when predicated of God, they cannot responsibly affirm that God is just or loving.

The proper response to finitude is narrower claims and calibrated confidence. Work on intellectual humility and resilient faith supports that middle path: humility is compatible with commitment, but it is not selective incapacity activated only by counterevidence (Callahan, 2025; Whitcomb et al., 2017).

Belief in God may be properly basic

Reformed epistemology allows theistic or Christian belief to possess warrant without inference from an argument (Plantinga, 2000). The present paper does not claim that all justified belief must be inferred. It claims that basic beliefs can encounter defeaters, reflective agents can have reasons to investigate the interpretation of an experience, and person-relative warrant does not automatically become a public conclusion for people who lack that experience.

Faith appropriately goes beyond the evidence

Faith may guide action when evidence permits more than one response. James defended commitment in certain live, forced, and momentous options, and contemporary accounts distinguish faith from maximal confidence (Bishop, 2007; Jackson, 2019; James, 1897). That permission does not require overstating what the evidence supports. A person can hope, trust, participate, or take a reversible venture while acknowledging uncertainty.

Independent standards beg the question against revelation

No method begins without background norms. The alternative to circularity is not presuppositionless inquiry; it is reciprocal, corrigible comparison. Logic, memory, testimony, and inductive reasoning are used by theists and non-theists alike. A purported revelation can contribute evidence, but a closed circuit in which the source

authenticates the text and the text authenticates the source discriminates less well than a circuit with independent anchors.

Religious disagreement would paralyze inquiry

Disagreement is neither a universal defeater nor noise to be ignored. Its force depends on independence, competence, shared evidence, and known asymmetries. A knowledgeable dissenter may reveal missing evidence or bias without forcing equal confidence. The protocol treats disagreement as a trigger for inquiry and a source of alternatives, not as an automatic argument for agnosticism (Dormandy, 2023).

The protocol privileges skepticism

The protocol can increase confidence. A God-concept that makes distinctive successful predictions, integrates partly independent evidence, survives strong objections without mobile rescue devices, and outperforms serious alternatives should gain credibility. Skeptics must also state alternatives and revision conditions. “A natural explanation will eventually appear” can become as self-protective as “God has unknown reasons” when neither claim is constrained.

The demand is symmetrical: do not grant any worldview a method of rescue or confirmation that would look unreliable in the hands of its rival.

Conclusion

The honest seeker does not owe a predetermined conclusion. The seeker owes proportionate attention to the truth-relevant features of a life-shaping commitment and to the people affected by it. That means refusing four shortcuts: value is not evidence of truth; generic metaphysical evidence does not automatically establish a specific religious authority; dependent products of a tradition are not automatically independent confirmation; and a favored view does not deserve rescue strategies denied to materially similar rivals.

The case for that duty is cumulative. The stakes of allegiance, the human mediation of public claims, the symmetry of rival traditions, the dependence among evidence streams, and the danger of self-sealing reasoning all point in the same direction. The four inferential bridges then clarify the discipline required: existence is not allegiance, symmetry needs a discriminator, every-outcome compatibility is not confirmation, and high stakes call for checking rather than belief by fear.

The principal limit remains: the duty is conditional and defeasible. It does not require certainty, endless inquiry, or equal access to every source. It does not show that no God exists or that no one is rationally entitled to religious belief. It shows that life-shaping allegiance should not be insulated from the scrutiny that makes trust responsible.

An actual God worthy of trust need not answer every demand or remove every uncertainty. But a human tradition that forbids proportionate, good-faith source checking assumes the very reliability it asks the seeker to establish. Honest questioning is therefore not a verdict against God. It is how devotion, if warranted, becomes responsible trust rather than untested submission.

Formal Reconstruction of the Central Thesis

The paper's central thesis is a conditional norm, not a proof that every person must investigate every religious claim. Its validity can be displayed in ordinary syllogistic form and in a compact predicate–deontic notation. In both versions, the logical inference is deductive; disagreement may remain about the normative bridge and about whether its factual conditions obtain in a particular case.

Categorical syllogism

Let M be the class of seeker–commitment cases that risk serious consequential error and for which feasible, proportionate inquiry is reasonably likely to reduce that risk. Let D be the class of cases in which the seeker has a defeasible duty of inquiry. Let R be the class of life-shaping-allegiance cases involving specified God-concepts and satisfying the conditions defining M .

The central thesis in Barbara form (AAA–1)

1. All M are D : in every seeker–commitment case meeting the serious-risk and error-reducing-inquiry conditions, the seeker has a defeasible duty of inquiry.
2. All R are M : every life-shaping-allegiance case involving a specified God-concept and meeting those conditions is a seeker–commitment case of that kind.
3. Therefore, all R are D : in every such religious-allegiance case, the seeker has a defeasible duty of inquiry.

This form makes the anti-exemption principle explicit. The word *religious* does not create the duty; the conjunction of consequential risk and feasible, proportionate error reduction does. A religious-allegiance case falls under the same bridge when it has those features.

Symbols

The variables and predicates have the following meanings:

- x : a person;
- g : a specified God-concept;
- p : a particular seeker;
- γ : a particular candidate God-concept;
- $A(x, g)$: x is considering life-shaping allegiance to g ;
- $H(x, g)$: serious error about that allegiance could significantly affect x or others;
- $F(x, g)$: relevant inquiry is feasible for x ;
- $V(x, g)$: the expected error reduction is proportionate to the inquiry's cost;
- $I(x, g)$: x investigates g , or responsibly relies on competent inquiry;
- $Z(x, g)$: an overriding consideration defeats the *pro tanto* duty in this case;
- O_x^p : the operator for a *pro tanto*—real but potentially outweighable—obligation of x ; and
- O_x^a : the operator for an all-things-considered obligation of x .

The standard signs $\forall$, $\wedge$, $\neg$, and $\rightarrow$ mean “for every,” “and,” “not,” and “if–then,” respectively.

Predicate–deontic formulation

The governing conditional is:

$$\forall x \forall g \left[A(x, g) \wedge H(x, g) \wedge F(x, g) \wedge V(x, g) \rightarrow O_x^p I(x, g) \right].$$

For a particular seeker p and candidate God-concept γ , any case in which the antecedent has been established is a direct instance of modus ponens:

Case-level application

1. If $A(p, \gamma) \wedge H(p, \gamma) \wedge F(p, \gamma) \wedge V(p, \gamma)$, then $O_p^p I(p, \gamma)$.
2. In the case under evaluation, $A(p, \gamma) \wedge H(p, \gamma) \wedge F(p, \gamma) \wedge V(p, \gamma)$.
3. Therefore, $O_p^p I(p, \gamma)$.

Defeasibility and limits

A possible further bridge from a pro tanto duty to an all-things-considered duty is:

$$O_x^p I(x, g) \wedge \neg Z(x, g) \rightarrow O_x^a I(x, g).$$

The paper does not assume $\neg Z(x, g)$ in every case. Inability, danger, urgency, or competing duties may defeat or delay an all-things-considered demand; very low expected value makes $V(x, g)$ false; and responsible reliance on competent inquiry may satisfy $I(x, g)$. The formal conclusion also does not entail that any God exists, that allegiance is warranted, or that inquiry must end in belief or nonbelief. It establishes only the bounded duty stated throughout the paper: when the specified conditions hold, proportionate inquiry is genuinely owed and cannot be dismissed merely because the proposed authority is divine.

Validity

The Barbara syllogism is deductively valid: if all M are D and all R are M , then all R are D . The case-level predicate argument is likewise valid by universal instantiation and modus ponens once the governing conditional and the case-specific antecedent are granted. The further bridge to an all-things-considered obligation is itself conditional; the paper does not assert its undefeated antecedent in every case.

Premise support

Validity does not establish the premises. The first categorical premise and the governing conditional express the paper's normative anti-exemption bridge: serious consequential risk plus feasible, proportionate error reduction normally generates a real duty to inquire. The cumulative case supports the claim that the factual conditions often obtain in religious-allegiance cases: allegiance can be highly consequential, public God-claims pass through fallible human channels, rival traditions present similar credentials, evidence streams share sources, and self-sealing replies can weaken error correction. Those are conceptual, empirical, and evaluative claims open to case-by-case challenge. The appendix therefore exposes the inference without turning the paper's defeasible thesis into an unconditional proof.

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