

TCA:ICT?

Thinking Critically About:

"Is Christianity True?"

Thinking Critically About: “Is Christianity True?”

**Podcast #2: Objections to Thinking Critically About
The Question “Is Christianity True?”**

Introduction to Your Host

My Name:

Bradley Bowen

My Role:

Your host and guide for this series of podcasts on
Thinking Critically About: “Is Christianity True?”

My Educational Background:

- BA in Philosophy from Sonoma State University (in Northern California).
- MA in Philosophy from the University of Windsor (in Windsor, Ontario, just across the border from Detroit, Michigan).
- Completed all requirements for a PhD in Philosophy from UC Santa Barbara (on the central coast of California) except for completion of my doctoral dissertation.
- Main interests in philosophy: critical thinking, philosophy of religion, and ethics.

The Main Question at Issue

QUESTION 1: Is Christianity true?

This is the main *question at issue* that I will investigate in this series of podcasts.

QUESTION 2: How can we answer Question 1?

In this series of podcasts, I will try to answer Question 1 by *thinking critically* about Question 1.

QUESTION 3: What is *critical thinking*?

“critical thinking” is (roughly speaking) thinking that is careful, judicious, objective, and fair.

QUESTION 4: Why should anyone care whether Christianity is true?

In Podcast #1, I gave ten reasons why we should care about whether Christianity is true or false.

Critical Thinking Defined

Here is an excellent definition of "critical thinking" from two leading experts on critical thinking:

Critical thinking is that mode of thinking--about any subject, content, or problem--in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully taking charge of the structures inherent in thinking and imposing intellectual standards upon them.

(The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts & Tools, p.1, by Dr. Richard Paul and Dr. Linda Elder)

The Value of Critical Thinking

Here is a brief justification of the value of critical thinking from the same two leading experts:

Everyone thinks; it is our nature to do so. But much of our thinking, left to itself, is biased, distorted, partial, uninformed, or downright prejudiced. Yet the quality of our life and that of what we produce, make, or build depends precisely on the quality of our thought. Shoddy thinking is costly, both in money and in quality of life. Excellence in thought, however, must be systematically cultivated.

(The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts & Tools, p.1, by Dr. Richard Paul and Dr. Linda Elder)

Critical Thinking In These Podcasts

- I plan to make full use of the concepts and tools of critical thinking in my investigation of Question 1.
- When I do make use of a concept or tool of critical thinking, I will point that out and will often provide some *explanation and guidance* about that concept or tool.
- As a result, anyone who listens to these podcasts will be able to *become a critical thinker* or to strengthen their critical thinking skills, habits, and knowledge.

My View about Investigating Question 1

My view is this:

We should invest significant time into *thinking critically* about whether Christianity is true or false.

In this podcast, I will consider and reply to *ten objections* from *various points of view* against my view that we should invest significant time into thinking critically about whether Christianity is true or false.

Consideration of objections from various points of view is one way of conforming one's thinking to the intellectual standard of **BREADTH.**

Objections and FAIRMINDEDNESS

One of the greatest philosophers of religion in the history of the world was Thomas Aquinas, and one of his greatest works is *Summa Theologica*. One very admirable characteristic of the *Summa* is that Aquinas starts the consideration of each basic question by raising objections *from various points of view* against his own position on that matter.

That procedure shows respect for two universal *intellectual standards*:

- (1) the standard of BREADTH, and
- (2) the standard of FAIRNESS.

These two standards are closely related to a very important *intellectual virtue*: FAIRMINDEDNESS.

The Intellectual Standard of BREADTH

BREADTH:

Do we need to consider another point of view? Is there another way to look at this question? What would this look like from a conservative standpoint? What would this look like from the point of view of ...? A line of reasoning may be clear, accurate, precise, relevant, and deep, but lack breadth (as in an argument from either the conservative or liberal standpoints which gets deeply into an issue, but only recognizes the insights of one side of the question).

(The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts & Tools, by Dr. Richard Paul and Dr. Linda Elder, p.8)

Thinking that lacks BREADTH is “narrow-minded” thinking, thinking that ignores other relevant points of view, and that ignores reasons and evidence that appear to support other points of view.

The Intellectual Standard of FAIRNESS

FAIRNESS:

Do I have any vested interest in this issue?

Am I sympathetically representing the view points of others?

(The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts & Tools, by Dr. Richard Paul and Dr. Linda Elder, p.9)

Those are questions that a person concerned with the *intellectual standard* of FAIRNESS will often ask themselves.

One very common error or problem in thinking is called the “Straw Man” fallacy. This happens when someone distorts the view or argument of an opponent in order to make that view or argument seem foolish or weak. Critical thinkers watch out for such unfairness, both in the thinking of others and in their own thinking.

The Intellectual Virtue of FAIRMINDEDNESS

FAIRMINDEDNESS:

Having a consciousness of the need to treat all viewpoints alike, without reference to one's own feelings or vested interests, or the feelings or vested interests of one's friends, community or nation; implies adherence to intellectual standards without reference to one's own advantage or the advantage of one's group.

(The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts & Tools, by Dr. Richard Paul and Dr. Linda Elder, p.14)

FAIRMINDEDNESS is both one of the *most important* of the intellectual virtues and also one of the *most difficult* to develop and to achieve, because of various social and psychological forces that push us away from this intellectual virtue.

Why I Will Consider Various Objections

In keeping with the fine example of Aquinas in *Summa Theologica*, and in keeping with the intellectual standards of BREADTH and FAIRNESS, and also with the intellectual virtue of FAIRMINDEDNESS, I will focus the rest of this podcast on *objections from various viewpoints* to my view that we should invest significant time into thinking critically about the question "Is Christianity true?"

Also, because I am asking listeners to *invest their time* in listening to future podcasts in this series and in thinking critically about the question "Is Christianity true?", it is only reasonable for me to consider and reply to various objections that listeners are likely to raise about the idea of investing their time in these activities (in addition to my previously providing, in Podcast #1, *ten reasons why* we should care about whether Christianity is true or false).

Objections To Thinking Critically About “Is Christianity True?” – Optimistic Views

My view: We should invest significant time into thinking critically about whether Christianity is true or false.

There are at least four objections to this view that are based on confident or *optimistic views* of religious knowledge:

- **OBJECTION 1: “All Roads Lead to Rome”:** All religions are true.
- **OBJECTION 2: “Religion is the opium of the people”:** All religions are false.
- **OBJECTION 3: “Blind Men and the Elephant”:** All religions are *partially* true.
- **OBJECTION 4:** I *already know* that Christianity is true (or that Christianity is false).

Objections To Thinking Critically About “Is Christianity True?” – Pessimistic Views

There are a few objections to my view that are based on skeptical or *pessimistic views* of religious knowledge:

- **OBJECTION 5: Relativism and Truth: What is true depends on your point of view.**
- **OBJECTION 6: Agnosticism: Knowledge about God or ultimate reality is not available to human beings.**
- **OBJECTION 7: Facts vs. Values: Religion is concerned with morality and values, not with objective knowledge and facts.**

Objections To Thinking Critically About “Is Christianity True?” – Alternatives to Reason

There are a couple of objections to my view that are based on alternative ways of obtaining religious knowledge:

- **OBJECTION 8: Faith vs. Reason: Religion is a matter of faith, not of reasons and evidence.**
- **OBJECTION 9: Religious Experience: The primary source of religious knowledge is direct experience of God (or ultimate reality), not reason.**

Objections To Thinking Critically About “Is Christianity True?” – Indifference to Truth

There is at least one objection to my view that is based on indifference to religious truth or knowledge:

- **OBJECTION 10: Objective Truth is Unimportant in Religion: The real purpose of religion is *happiness* or *goodness*, not truth or knowledge.**

OBJECTIONS 1, 2, & 3: Hasty Generalizations

OBJECTION 1: “All Roads Lead to Rome”: All religions are true.

OBJECTION 2: “Religion is the opium of the people”: All religions are false.

OBJECTION 3: “Blind Men and the Elephant”: All religions are *partially* true.

In order to rationally conclude that ALL religions are true, or that ALL religions are false, or that ALL religions are partially true, one must first carefully study ALL religions, or at least *a large portion* of them. But very few people have done this, so this claim appears to be a *hasty generalization* based on a small sample of religions. There are about a dozen major world religions, and there are hundreds of smaller religions. Very few people have carefully studied and evaluated the dozen or so major world religions, let alone the hundreds of smaller religions.

OBJECTION 1: “All Roads Lead to Rome”

OBJECTION 1: “All Roads Lead to Rome”: All religions are true.

All religions are valid paths to God, valid ways to learn about the spiritual dimension of reality. So, determining that "Christianity is true" would not show that Christianity is better than any other religion.

BUT religions contradict each other, sometimes even on very basic issues: Does God exist? What is the most basic and important problem faced by human beings? How can this most basic and important problem be resolved? Has God communicated to humans through a particular person and/or book? If so, who did God communicate through, and what book contains messages from God? Because religions contradict each other, they cannot all be true. They might all be false, but if one religion is true, then most of the other religions are false, or contain some false beliefs about basic religious issues.

If Christianity is true, then (for example) there are some basic beliefs in Islam that are false. According to Christianity, *Jesus is God incarnate*. According to Islam, *Jesus is NOT God incarnate*. So, if Christianity is true, then Islam is wrong about Jesus. Conversely, if Islam is true, then Jesus is NOT God incarnate, and thus one of the most basic doctrines of Christianity is false.

OBJECTION 2: “Religion is the Opium of the People”

OBJECTION 2: “Religion is the Opium of the People”: All religions are false.

From the point of view of Karl Marx, religion serves the purpose of making poor and working-class people complacent about the injustice and cruelty of the social and economic system that causes them to suffer, thus preserving the unjust status quo by promising them happiness in an afterlife.

Karl Marx did not know what he was talking about, in this case. His intellectual focus was on political and economic theory. He was not a theologian nor was he an expert in world religions. He knew almost nothing about Buddhism or Hinduism, for example. He never wrote a book about Christianity or Judaism or Buddhism or Islam or any other religion. Marx was thus in no position to confidently conclude that ALL religions serve the function of making poor and working-class people complacent about the injustice and cruelty of the social and economic system in their country or nation.

Furthermore, even if Marx was right in the case of Christianity, and this religion does in fact serve the function of making workers and the poor complacent thus helping to maintain an unjust social and economic system, that doesn't mean that Christianity is false. True beliefs can sometimes be problematic and have *negative consequences*. If I have terminal cancer and only a month or two to live, that information may be very *distressing and depressing* to learn. The fact that believing this information has negative consequences for my mental state does NOT show that the information is false.

OBJECTION 3: “Blind Men and the Elephant”

OBJECTION 3: “Blind Men and the Elephant”: All religions are *partially* true.

A group of blind men were taken to experience an elephant. One touched the trunk of the elephant, another man touched an ear, another felt a leg of the elephant, and another touched the tail. The men each described the elephant in very different ways, and they disagreed vehemently about the nature and characteristics of the elephant. But in reality, they were all *partially correct*. They each correctly described a particular part of the elephant; they just did not have a good grasp of the elephant as a whole. Religions are like these blind men. Each religion correctly describes one part or aspect of spiritual reality, but no one religion captures the whole truth.

Religions often disagree on *very basic issues*, such as: “Does God exist?” or “What is the most important problem faced by humans?” or “What is the most important goal for humans?” or “What person or book has God used to reveal himself to humans?” So it seems clear that many religions must be mistaken about some *very basic and important* religious issues. In such cases, being “partially correct” is *of little value*. What matters is whether a religion is correct on these basic and important issues.

OBJECTION 4: I *already know* that Christianity is true

OBJECTION 4: I *already know* that Christianity is true (or that Christianity is false).

Many who are currently Christians would object that they already know that Christianity is true, and so don't need to use their time and energy investigating this question. Many who are currently Muslims, or Jews, or Buddhists would object that they already know that their religion is true and thus that Christianity is false, and so they don't need to use their time and energy investigating this question.

Most people who are Christians were raised by Christian parents or raised in a community where Christianity was a widely-held religion. The same is true of people who accept other major religions. Most people either grow up believing and practicing the religion of their parents or they adopt a religion that is widely accepted in their community, city, or nation.

There are at least four psychological forces involved here: (1) social conditioning—we tend to accept the beliefs that we are raised to believe, (2) what we become familiar with in our own group or community seems normal, natural, and correct, (3) we are all inclined to be *sociocentric*, to believe that the ideas and practices widely accepted in our own group, community, or nation are true and good, and (4) we all tend towards *confirmation bias*—noticing evidence that supports our current beliefs while ignoring evidence that disconfirms them.

Because of these psychological tendencies, it is only natural to think that the religion one grew up with is good and true, and that other religions that are less familiar are bad and false. Such feelings are common and are in fact found across many different cultures and nations. But these natural feelings are deceptive, because they are based not on reasons and evidence, not upon careful and judicious thinking but on prejudice. These psychological forces combined with the sociological fact that one's religion correlates with how one was raised, provide a reasonable explanation for why so many people think that they KNOW their religion or worldview to be true, and that they KNOW that other religions and worldviews are false, when in fact they don't KNOW this.

OBJECTION 5: Relativism and Truth

OBJECTION 5: Relativism and Truth: What is true depends on your point of view.

There is no such thing as objective truth. Various specific Christian beliefs are judged to be "true" from a Christian point of view, and those same beliefs are judged to be "false" from some other points of view (such as Secular Humanism or Islam). But there is no way to objectively evaluate a general point of view, and to determine that one point of view is the "truth" and that other points of view are "false".

But the claim that "There is no such thing as objective truth" is a self-refuting claim. It can reasonably be understood to assert that:

"It is *an objective truth* that there is no such thing as objective truth."

If the claim "There is no such thing as objective truth" is an objective truth, then there is at least ONE objective truth, and thus this claim would be FALSE.

OBJECTION 5: Relativism and Truth

OBJECTION 5: Relativism and Truth: What is true depends on your point of view.

Also, there are in reality at least some *objective facts or truths*:

- $2+2 = 4$
- Humans need air (or at least oxygen) to stay alive.
- Humans need water to stay alive.
- The human heart functions as a pump that causes blood to circulate through the human body.
- Many diseases are caused by microscopic organisms.
- Water boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit (at sea level).
- The planet Earth is (roughly) a sphere.
- The planet Earth rotates, and one rotation takes about 24 hours, or one day.
- The cycle of day and night on the planet Earth is caused by the rotation of the Earth, and by the light produced by the Sun.
- The planet Earth orbits around the Sun, and one orbit around the sun takes about 365 days, or one year.

OBJECTION 5: Relativism and Truth

OBJECTION 5: Relativism and Truth: What is true depends on your point of view.

It does not matter if you were born and raised in China, Africa, Europe, North America, Asia, Australia, or South America; the above claims are *objectively true*. It does not matter if you were born and raised as a Muslim, or Hindu, or Christian, or Buddhist, or Secular Humanist, or Marxist, or Jew; the above claims are objectively true.

So, there are *some objective truths*, and those truths can, at least potentially, be used to help evaluate alternative religions and worldviews.

One sort of objective truth that can be used to evaluate religions and worldviews are *the truths of logic*. A religion or worldview that contains many *self-contradictions* is clearly less true than a religion or worldview that contains no self-contradictions, other things being equal.

So, we have at least two ways of objectively evaluating alternative religions and worldviews:

- (1) Does the religion/worldview contradict some well-established objective facts?
- (2) Does the religion/worldview contain any self-contradictions?

OBJECTION 6: Agnosticism

OBJECTION 6: Agnosticism: Knowledge about God or ultimate reality is not available to human beings.

Agnosticism is the view that humans cannot KNOW the answer to the question “Does God exist?”; we can only guess or speculate about the answer. There may be some reasons or considerations that appear to support the view that God exists, but there are also reasons or considerations that appear to support the view that there is no God. When we look closely at considerations used to support the view that God exists, we find serious objections and counterarguments, and when we look closely at considerations used to support the view that there is no God, we also find serious objections and counterarguments. Reasons and evidence that initially seem to solidly support one side or the other end up being *ambiguous upon closer examination*, so reasons and evidence fail to lead us to a clear conclusion on this issue.

There are several considerations to be examined on the issue “Does God exist?”, and thus it is *very unlikely* that ALL significant considerations are ALL equally balanced between theism and atheism.

Agnosticism *must be earned* through careful consideration of several relevant arguments, objections, and counterarguments; it cannot be assumed at the start of an investigation into the question “Does God exist?”. It would be unreasonable to simply assume that ALL of the considerations on this issue are *always equally balanced* by opposing points.

Even if agnosticism turns out to be correct, there are OTHER important Christian beliefs which could be determined to be true or to be false, and thus Christianity could be determined to be FALSE even if agnosticism is correct. Alternatively, Christianity could be determined to be *partially true* and *partially unknowable*.

OBJECTION 7: Facts vs. Values

OBJECTION 7: Facts vs. Values: Religion is concerned with morality and values, not with objective knowledge and facts.

Moral values and principles, unlike factual claims, are neither true nor false, so it makes no sense to talk about a religion being "true" or "false".

BUT religions make some claims that go beyond morality and values. Religions sometimes make *historical claims* (e.g. Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem in the first century), and religions make *metaphysical claims* (e.g. God exists, and God created the universe), and religions make *epistemological claims* (e.g. The teachings of the Bible are all true), and religions (or the supporters of a religion) make *psychological and sociological claims* (e.g. believing in Jesus as the savior of mankind and striving to follow the teachings of Jesus helps people to live happy and productive lives).

Moral judgments and moral principles might not be "true" or "false" in the way that scientific and factual claims are true or false, but it seems to be the case that we can *rationally discuss* moral judgments and moral principles, and it seems to be the case that people are sometimes very *unreasonable and illogical* in their thinking about moral issues, and that people are sometimes very *reasonable and logical* in their thinking about moral issues, so reasons and arguments can play an important role in our thinking about moral issues, even if moral judgments and moral principles are not "true" or "false" in the way that scientific and factual claims are true or false.

OBJECTION 8: Faith vs. Reason – 2 Concepts

OBJECTION 8: Faith vs. Reason: Religion is a matter of faith, not of reasons and evidence.

REASON may play a small role in obtaining some religious knowledge, but reason is limited and ultimately we must rely on FAITH in order to obtain significant religious knowledge.

There is no generally agreed upon understanding of what constitutes “faith”. However, I will briefly discuss two widely-held concepts of faith:

- Faith as belief that is based on *religious experience*.
- Faith as belief that is based on *religious authority*.

I will cover the first concept of “faith” in the discussion of Objection 9.

There are different kinds of *religious authorities* that could serve as the basis for religious beliefs:

1. Revelation: Holy books or Religious Leaders (e.g. prophets and bishops)
2. Scholars of Religion: Philosophers, Theologians, Scripture Experts.
3. Deeply Religious People: Saints, Monks, and Mystics.

OBJECTION 8: Faith vs. Reason - Disagreement

OBJECTION 8: Faith vs. Reason: Religion is a matter of faith, not of reasons and evidence.

One major problem with all three types of *religious authorities* is that they DISAGREE with each other, even on basic and important religious questions. The Quran disagrees with the Bible, and with the Book of Mormon. Muhammad disagrees with Jesus, and with Gautama Buddha. Philosophers disagree about the existence and nature of God, and although almost all Christian theologians believe that God exists, they disagree on almost every other point of theology, and they certainly disagree with the scripture experts of *non-Christian* religions, like Buddhism and Hinduism. Saints, monks and mystics *within* the Christian faith disagree on various theological beliefs, and they obviously disagree with the saints, monks and mystics of *non-Christian* religions on some very basic religious issues.

Because *religious authorities* disagree on most religious issues, including basic and important religious issues, we need some way to determine which religious authority or authorities (if any) are reliable sources of true religious information. Obviously, we cannot reasonably rely on an alleged religious authority to make this determination, because that would *presuppose the reliability* of the religious authority that one uses to make this determination, and this would usually involve *circular reasoning* (e.g. “The Bible says that the Bible is a reliable source of information about God, so the Bible is a reliable source of information about God.”). So, we are forced to rely upon reasons and evidence to make this determination, which makes FAITH dependent upon REASON.

OBJECTION 8: Faith vs. Reason – The Bible

OBJECTION 8: Faith vs. Reason: Religion is a matter of faith, not of reasons and evidence.

Another problem with belief that is based on holy books or the claims of prophets is that the belief in the *reliability* of the book or prophet typically rests on the ASSUMPTION that *God exists*. Christians believe that the Bible is a reliable source of theological information because they believe that the Bible was *inspired by God*. But the Bible can only be inspired by God if there is a God to inspire it.

This means that the Bible cannot be rationally used as a *religious authority* that confirms the existence of God, because the authority of the Bible rests on the ASSUMPTION that *God exists*. Thus, if we understand “faith” to mean belief that is based on the teachings of a holy book, such as the Bible, then faith cannot provide the basis for belief in the existence of God. We are forced to rely upon reasons and evidence to determine whether God exists and whether the Bible was inspired by God. Faith cannot help answer these most basic religious questions, so once again, FAITH is dependent upon REASON.

OBJECTION 8: Faith vs. Reason – Scholars

OBJECTION 8: Faith vs. Reason: Religion is a matter of faith, not of reasons and evidence.

In addition to revelation (i.e. holy books and religious leaders), there is another kind of *religious authority* that could serve as the basis for religious beliefs: Scholars of Religion (Philosophers, Theologians, Scripture Experts).

Scholars of religion get at least part of their authority from familiarity with relevant *reasons and evidence*. A philosopher who could not identify and explain key arguments for and against the existence of God should not be taken to be a reliable authority on that issue. A theologian who could not identify and explain key Biblical passages concerning the character and attributes of God should not be taken to be a reliable authority on those issues. So, philosophers and theologians and scripture experts have authority that is based in part on their ability to deal with reasons and evidence, and to help others to think clearly and carefully about relevant reasons and evidence.

In the case of theologians and scripture experts (but not philosophers) part of their *religious authority* is based on the authority of the scriptures or holy book that they study. But as we have already seen, different holy books disagree with each other and provide conflicting answers to basic religious questions. If we reject the claim that the Quran (or the Bible) was inspired by God, then a theologian or scripture expert who studies the Quran (or the Bible) should not be viewed as a reliable source of true information about religious issues, because the holy book they study is not a reliable source of religious information. The questions of whether the Bible or Quran or the Book of Mormon was inspired by God are, as we have seen, questions that cannot be answered by FAITH, but can be answered by REASON, by considering relevant reasons and evidence.

OBJECTION 8: Faith vs. Reason – Deeply Religious

OBJECTION 8: Faith vs. Reason: Religion is a matter of faith, not of reasons and evidence.

There is one more kind of *religious authority* that could serve as the basis for religious beliefs:

- Deeply Religious People: Saints, Monks, and Mystics.

Deeply religious people, such as saints, monks, and mystics, get their religious authority in large part based on *religious experience*. They are supposedly “close” to God (or to ultimate spiritual reality). They experience God (or ultimate reality) directly and frequently, unlike the rest of us ordinary folk. Thus, the religious authority of deeply religious people rests largely upon the value of *religious experience* as a source of religious knowledge, so we will now turn to Objection 9, which focuses on religious experience as a basis for religious beliefs.

OBJECTION 9: Religious Experience - Disagreement

OBJECTION 9: Religious Experience: the primary source of religious knowledge is direct experience of God (or ultimate reality), not reason.

One of the main problems with basing religious beliefs on religious experience is that religious experiences are used to support nearly *every theology* and nearly *every religion*. Some religious experiences appear to confirm Christianity, others appear to confirm Islam, others Buddhism, others Hinduism.

But different religions have different and contradictory beliefs, even on very basic religious issues. Religious experiences thus provide support for many different contradictory beliefs. This suggests that religious experience is a *very unreliable source of information* about God or spiritual reality (if there is such a thing).

OBJECTION 9: Religious Experience - Subjectivity

OBJECTION 9: Religious Experience: the primary source of religious knowledge is direct experience of God (or ultimate reality), not reason.

Another problem with basing religious beliefs on religious experience is that the content of religious experiences *strongly correlate with the culture and religious beliefs* of the person who has the religious experience. Near Death Experiences are one kind of religious experience that are put forward as confirmation of religious beliefs, but these experiences are clearly shaped by the culture and religious beliefs of the experienter:

“It is true that those who report being greeted by a religious figure [in a Near Death Experience] will usually associate that being with either the religion of their youth or one they are familiar with. Thus, most Christians will report being visited by Jesus, Buddhists by Buddha, and so forth.” – PMH Atwater

<http://pmhatwater.blogspot.com/2007/09/are-there-ndes-in-which-buddhist.html>

Atwater is an expert on Near Death Experiences who has interviewed thousands of people from various religious traditions around the world who have had a Near Death Experience).

The fact that *the content* of religious experiences correlates with *the religious background and beliefs* of the person who has the experience suggests that these experiences are *subjective in nature*, produced by the mind of the experienter, and do NOT represent an objective spiritual reality.

OBJECTION 10: Objective Truth is Unimportant

OBJECTION 10: Objective Truth is Unimportant in Religion: The real purpose of religion is *happiness or goodness*, not truth or knowledge.

There is an ambiguity in this objection. Is the happiness (or goodness) that is the “real purpose” of religion limited to happiness (or goodness) in this life? Or does this “real purpose” encompass the possibility of obtaining eternal happiness (or eternal goodness)? If the “real purpose” of religion is asserted to be happiness (or goodness) *only in this life*, then this objection *begs the question* by ASSUMING that Christianity and other religions are false, because Christianity and Islam teach that humans have the opportunity to obtain eternal happiness (and eternal goodness).

On the other hand, if this objection allows for the possibility that humans could obtain eternal happiness (or eternal goodness), then it becomes clear that *truth is very important* in religion, because it would be of obvious importance, in this case, to know the *correct (i.e. true) answers* to these two questions:

- (1) Do humans have an opportunity to obtain eternal life and eternal happiness (or eternal goodness) or are humans limited to happiness (and goodness) in this life?
- (2) HOW can humans obtain eternal life and eternal happiness (or eternal goodness)?

This objection either *begs the question* by assuming that Christianity and other religions are wrong about the possibility of eternal happiness (and eternal goodness), or else it is wrong in asserting that *truth is unimportant* in matters of religion.

Closing Remarks

The Next Podcast:

In Podcast #3, I will consider Question 5: **What is Christianity?**

Thank You:

Thank you for listening to my second podcast of the series *Thinking Critically About: "Is Christianity True?"*. I hope that you will join me again for future podcasts as I continue to investigate this important question.

Critical Thinking Has Significant Value:

"...the quality of our life and that of what we produce, make, or build depends precisely on the quality of our thought. Shoddy thinking is costly, both in money and in quality of life."

(The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts & Tools, p.1)

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