

ABSTRACT

Epistemic Duties and Blameworthiness for Belief

People sometimes believe things they shouldn't. Tommy believes in Santa Claus, Rev. Jones believes that the world is ending, and Adolf believes that some ethnic groups are superior to others. But are they somehow at fault (blameworthy) for holding these 'bad' beliefs? In my dissertation, I argue that people are blameworthy for a doxastic attitude *D* just in case they hold *D* and have unfulfilled epistemic duties regarding *D*. An epistemic duty is a duty to investigate or reflect on the evidence for one's doxastic state. Whenever we have some doubt about our doxastic state, as Tommy has about his belief in Santa, or don't have doubt we should have, as in Mr. Jones' case, we have a duty to investigate further. If we ignore this duty, even though circumstances allow us the freedom to investigate, we incur epistemic blameworthiness.

In the case of religious belief, epistemic blameworthiness is especially grave. Those who fail to form the required religious beliefs may find themselves, if blameworthy, subject to divine judgment. Some worry, however, that the evidence for god is insufficient to render anyone blameworthy. I argue that according to the traditional Christian view, the evidence is sufficient when we take into account both the ubiquity of religious experience and our natural predisposition to believe in God. Thus, only those non-believers whose cognitive faculties are not functioning properly (which may include many children and adult atheists) can be considered blameless.