The Justifiability of Ordinary Belief in God through Epistemology Based on Trusted Hearings

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Abstract

There have been many epistemological challenges about the justification of belief in God over the past three centuries, so that some, such as Plantinga, have merely proposed warranted belief rather than justifying an argument in this regard and showed the belief in God's existence as a basic belief. But regardless of these challenges, millions believe in God's existence as justified for themselves without being a fideist. Where does this justification come from? Can their justification be explained epistemologically? This article aims to elucidate the new currents in social epistemology and "testimony," demonstrating the significance of epistemology based on trusted hearings. It will then argue that our trusted hearings about the existence of God and His attributes traced back to the prophets and ultimately to God's affirmation and explanation can serve as the best justification for our beliefs. Finally, the question of how God's testimony to His existence and attributes, which has come to us through the prophets, can be one of the best epistemological justifications for believing in the existence and attributes of God. And what advantages can this type of religious epistemology have over evidentialism or various forms of arguing for the existence of God and his attributes?

Keywords: social epistemology, testimony, belief based on trusted hearings, justification of belief in God

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1. Introduction

The epistemological tradition of the modern era acknowledged only justified true beliefs as valid. Those beliefs are valid that individuals have justified for themselves. However, does most of our knowledge come about this way? How can we examine the contributions of others in acquiring knowledge? How can social knowledge, testimony, or knowledge based on trusted hearings actively play a role in our understanding, especially religious knowledge? After addressing these questions, it is essential to explore whether, instead of relying on the tradition of evidentialism, which often is based on foundationalism, we can use the method of our ordinary and comprehensive knowledge based on hearings to justify our beliefs about the existence and attributes of God. How can the testimony of God about His existence and attributes, conveyed through many individuals and prophets, serve as one of the best epistemic justifications for believing in God's existence and attributes? What advantages could this religious epistemology have over evidentialism or other forms of justifying belief in God and His attributes?

2. Epistemology and Justified True Belief

Traditionally, "justified true belief" was considered the sole criterion for discerning true knowledge of a proposition; propositions that could not pass the three tests of being a belief, being true (reflecting reality), and having adequately justification were not regarded as knowledge, and thus, true knowledge could not be attributed to them. However, through a brief article, Gettier questioned this criterion by showing that propositions could meet these standards yet not constitute knowledge. With this small gap, each of the elements of knowledge was gradually examined and it was seen that corrections should be made to them. Whether it concerned belief, truth, or justification, adjustments were deemed essential to ensure that what intuitively seemed to be true knowledge could meet the criteria of truth.

However, people pursue other avenues instead of analyzing knowledge and evaluating it based on the aforementioned tripartite standards. They have realized that they unconsciously accumulate vast knowledge, which they constantly share with other knowledge-seekers, leading to a carefree epistemic life. When faced with inaccuracies, they can, if they choose, rectify them. Just as people naturally and ordinarily speak logically without learning logic and can easily recognize the illogicality of a statement, they also enrich their knowledge daily without considering whether it is believed, or being a truth, or having justification. Many possess a wealth of true knowledge within their capability without waiting for an epistemologist or even having met one, constantly enriching their lives with proper knowledge. They have observed that many of the talker of true knowledge

are so confused that they seem to have only achieved a few knowledge in their lives.

Here, we intend to follow a path other than the traditional path of epistemology, which is closer to these epistemological realities. Let us adopt an inductive method. People often consider their daily knowledge accurate, and consider some of them are subject to scrutiny for its truthfulness or falsehood. Let's see inductively which of their own and even others' knowledge is correct. The question then arises: how do individuals trust this type of knowledge? What steps do people take to acquire new and true knowledge? How do they recognize inaccuracies in their knowledge, and what actions do they take to correct these mistakes? Individuals possess a wealth of true knowledge across various domains such as professional fields, social relationships, personal planning, health plans, meeting diverse needs, political matters, and even cooking. How is this knowledge acquired? Notably, even prominent philosophers of epistemology in the modern era often gain some knowledge without adhering to traditional epistemological criteria; instead, they unconsciously follow alternative ways to acquire new, accurate knowledge.

A meta-epistemological view of what has been discussed in the modern Western epistemology tradition reveals that this field has been pursued in special way, representing a specific and constrained arena for epistemological debates. Moser states that some cultures may focus on individualism, in the sense that only an individual can carefully examine new evidence—whether it comes from others' testimonies or direct experience—and decide what to accept and what to reject. Some critics within the Western philosophical tradition have accused them of excessively emphasizing individualism as the sole possessor of knowledge (Moser et al. 2006, 21).

Western modern epistemology, which expanded from Descartes' narrow scope of knowledge about the external world to another scope such as empirical knowledge, still overlooked many aspects of knowledge. As epistemology broadened, its investigative scope extended to other areas, including religious experiences and aesthetic experiences, exploring them within a broader context. Knowledge sources also evolved beyond the narrow confines of rationalism, empiricism, and innatism, to include aspects such as memory and testimony for analysis. However, a common observation across these explorations is that knowledge is evaluated from the perspective of a "singular" epistemologist. Critics of Western modernity, including postmodernists and non-Western cultures, have viewed Western efforts, in Moser's terms, as confined to individualism. Some postmodern thinkers have paid attention to the social aspect of knowledge, thereby empowering sociologists of knowledge. They believed that instead of analyzing knowledge from an individualistic perspective, another path could be followed, one that has been previously explored by philosophers of science. Philosophers of science have employed numerous analytical methods to

distinguish scientific propositions, aiming to analyze "observation" and "theory" logically and validly. However, Thomas Kuhn assessed scientific propositions from a historical and social perspective. In Kuhn's historical approach, instead of logically recognizing a proposition as scientific, he examined the succession of dominant scientific theories over time. He considered various theories deemed scientific to analyze the origination of a scientific theory and the criteria for a theory to be scientific.

These criticisms led some of them to regard knowledge as a social construct and were less inclined towards individualistic efforts to justify knowledge, recognizing that an individual's knowledge is not independent of others' knowledge. Much of our knowledge is shaped by interaction with other knowers. However, the path of sociologists of knowledge, like other aspects of postmodernism, led to relativism, which not only contradicted our intuition but also faced other epistemological problems. Many sociologists of knowledge were not seeking to uncover true knowledge from a social context but analyzed new knowledge that social phenomena create, such as "discourse" and its relations. Phenomena like discourse are social constructs that do not claim to provide access to true knowledge.

For this reason, some epistemologists, recognizing that society and a collective of individuals can assist us in achieving justified knowledge, distinguished their approach from sociologists of knowledge, thereby creating a branch known as "social epistemology" in contrast to "socialized epistemology." Moser emphasizes that different cultures may engage with philosophical issues of knowledge in diverse ways. For example, some cultures might emphasize the social identity of knowledge by valuing the role of authoritative sources such as scholars, religious leaders, political and military figures, or other acquaintances as knowledge sources (Moser et al., 2006, 21). This emphasis on the social identity of knowledge is not necessarily a constructivist approach. Since the early 21st century, social epistemologists like Alvin Goldman have categorized epistemologies into social and individual epistemology. Goldman identifies conventional processes commonly accepted in the ordinary world and endorsed by the public as reliable processes. These reliable processes are not solely dependent on the knowing subject and their internal and individual states. Social epistemologists are thus described as "those who view social, political, and scientific realities as epistemological issues, not as irrelevant or marginal matters" (Peykani & Sadeghpour 2020, 46).

Moser describes this shift as follows: the quest for justification often leads us beyond ourselves, to the physical and social realms of the world. If we are to be epistemologically responsible, we sometimes must trust others. Trustworthiness stems from a social dependency on the particular position a trusted person holds. This specific position takes various forms: technical expertise based on theoretical and specialized information (like expertise in physics), practical expertise (like

expertise in plumbing or farming), and natural perceptual skills, anda cellular biologist's justification for believing his instruments are reliable. The social dependency of knowledge in other more ordinary contexts is evident and clear (Moser et al. 2006, 217-219).

This insight expands the theory of reliabilism. Although reliabilism is not solely discussed within social epistemology, relying on what others say to acquire knowledge has paved the way for social epistemology. This understanding that the relevant expertise is relatively reliable field in terms of epistemology has caused renewed attention to the cultural and social influences on justification issues (Moser et al., 2006, 219).

By the expansion of the social perspective of knowledge, the concept of "testimony" emerged in epistemology. According to Goldman, like perceptual beliefs, beliefs derived from others' testimony are valid. The testifier, like any other cognitive agent, acquires his belief through a valid process. The recipient of the testimony may not be aware of the justificatory reasons of the testifier, but is aware of the credibility of the conventional processes in the testifier's society and accepts the testimony based on this credibility. Accepting others' testimony is a component of virtue theories. The testimony of a virtuous cognitive agent is trustworthy, and his belief is truthful. Goldman describes knowledge based on testimony as a prevalent form of social knowledge. An individual seeks to determine the truth value of proposition P by consulting others. He may refer his question to a trusted person, or verifying it through printed or online sources. After receiving a response, he evaluates it to form a judgment about the proposition's accuracy, commonly referred to as "belief based on testimony." The informant can be a single person, but requesting testimony from another moves into the realm of social epistemology (Goldman, 2021).

The main question is: Under what conditions is it justifiable for a listener to trust a statement made by a stranger, a consulted person, or any speaker? David Hume argued that we generally have the right to trust what others tell us, but this right arises from the approval of what we have previously learned from others. We can all recall situations where we were told things we could not verify personally with our understanding but later turned out to be true. This reliable memory of the past assures us that testimony is generally trustworthy. As James Van Cleve articulates this view, testimony gives us justified belief, not because it shines with its light, but because it has often been illuminated well enough by our other lights (Van Cleve, 2006, 69).

This perspective, known as "reductionism" in the context of testimony, reduces the justificatory power of testimony to the combined forces of perception, memory, and inductive reasoning. More precisely, it is often referred to as "universal reductionism" because it argues that listeners are justified in believing specific instances of testimony based on the general reliability of testimony.

However, universal reductionism has been challenged. Coady argues that the ordinary epistemologist's reliance on an observational foundation is so narrow and limited that it does not allow us to infer a general reliability of testimony. He writes that it seems unreasonable to suggest that we perform everything in a set of activities as reductionism requires. Many of us have never witnessed the birth of a baby, nor have we tested the circulation of blood, nor have we seen the actual geography of the world as the observational aspect of reductionism would necessitate (Coady 1992, 82).

Goldman suggests a substitute for universal reductionism, which is local reductionism (Fricker 1994). Local reductionism does not require listeners to be justified in believing the general reliability of testimony but only requires them to be justified in trusting the reliability of specific speakers whose current testimony about a particular subject is under discussion. This requirement is more satisfyingly met than that of universal reductionism. Local reductionism may still be too strong. If I am at an airport or train station and hear a public announcement that the departure gate is ready for boarding passengers, am I only justified in believing this testimony if I have prior evidence of the general reliability of the announcer? Typically, I do not possess such evidence from a public announcer. Yet, I am surely justified in trusting such announcements (Goldman 2021).

Goldman (2021) notes that, given the challenges associated with both forms of reductionism, some epistemologists (Coady, 1992; Burge, 1993; Foley, 1994; Lackey, 2008) have gravitated towards anti-reductionism in the context of testimony. Anti-reductionism posits that testimony itself is a fundamental source of justification or evidence. Regardless of how much positive evidence a listener might have regarding the reliability and truthfulness of a speaker or a group of speakers, they can initially or by default form a judgment about believing what is said. Tyler Burge argues that one is entitled to accept the truth of a statement presented as accurate and found reasonable unless there are stronger reasons to reject it (Burge, 1993, 457).

By highlighting testimony and social epistemology, a valuable path for epistemology is opened. Let us consider our everyday knowledge.

3. Hearings-Based Epistemology

Much of our daily knowledge falls into propositions like:
- Saeed was present at his job today.
- Municipal fruit and vegetable markets sell fruits cheaper than stores.
- Shiraz has the best hospitals for treating liver diseases.

Indeed, these propositions form truthful beliefs for us, but where does their justification come from? When asked, "Why do you believe this to be true?" or more colloquially, "How do you know this?" the response often is, "I've heard it." If

challenged with, "How can you be sure something is true just because someone said it?" the answers range from "I heard it from reliable sources," to "Many people are saying it," or "Expert doctors have stated this." So, one of the most important criteria that can justify a belief is relying on trusted hearings.

But what is important is that most of our beliefs and knowledge are obtained from a collection of hearsay, which we consider to be true beliefs by relying on trusted hearings. Such knowledge falls into the category of social knowledge, which cannot pass the tests of individual knowledge but is justified by different criteria from those epistemologies related to the tradition of the modern era. This set of beliefs is not like mathematics, where each proposition is individually proven, though many people's beliefs about mathematical propositions are also based on hearsay.

Reliance on what others say justifies a significant portion of our knowledge. Often, what we believe and act upon derives its justification from others' statements. We even tend to believe many scientific facts based on trusted hearings. Therefore, "hearings" or testimony, as termed by social epistemologists, forms the foundation for justifying many of our beliefs. We also organize our daily lives based on these testimonies. In such cases, inference from basic beliefs, as traditionally emphasized in epistemology, does not have much place.

4. The Justification of Religious Knowledge Based on Trusted Hearings

Let us explore religious knowledge through the lens of social epistemology, specifically focusing on "testimony," or as we have termed it, through trusted hearings. In the modern era, evidentialism has been the prevalent method for justifying religious beliefs, primarily using arguments for the existence of God that draw from empirical or rational sources. Despite the intellectual efforts spanning three centuries in this area, these arguments have faced significant challenges. In the twentieth century, figures like Plantinga and Wolterstorff, who found the presupposition of evidentialism to be foundationalism, sought alternative routes to justify belief in God and certain fundamental religious teachings. They deemed traditional epistemology insufficient for justifying religious belief and proposed a reformed epistemology and warranted belief, positioning belief in God as a basic belief that does not need to follow the path of evidentialism.

We aim to legitimize the ordinary belief in God's existence through social epistemology based on testimony. As mentioned, much of our knowledge comes through hearings, and religious knowledge is no exception. This includes testimonies from experts, social knowledge previously discussed, or the trusted hearings elaborated on in this article. Much religious knowledge primarily derives from what others have said. These hearings get the necessary justification when they show that they have reassuring conditions for the truth of the speaker's

claims. For instance, if the speaker has heard the information from another reliable individual, and the honesty of that speaker is evident to us, allowing us to trust in it. This reflects the varied conditions religious scholars of all faiths observe to validate their claims.

One of the most fundamental beliefs in monotheistic religions is the existence of God, His attributes, His relationship with the world, His presence in human life, and our duties towards Him. Religious thinkers have explored various ways to justify such beliefs. According to the mentioned preliminaries, we would like to say that one of the most important reasons for justifying the belief in the existence of God and His attributes is firstly God's acknowledgment of His existence and His attributes and His expression of His relationship with humans and the duty of humans towards Him. Just as one of the best reasons to understand why Hamid saw Isfahan is his own confession to travel to Isfahan, in the same way, if God somehow informs us that he exists and has certain attributes, it can be the best reason for God's existence. It is obvious that this testimony of God is justified for those who have understood it. So the prophets are fully justified in believing in the existence of God in this way. Consequently, others who base their belief on the prophets' testimony are also justified, especially because not only one but many prophets have attested to this, and people following them find their justification through a social epistemology based on the testimony of many, especially religious scholars (as is the case with belief in historical events).

Obviously, in order to ensure that the prophets are retelling the divine message, there must be methods, the most important of which is to trust their truthfulness. The miracles of the prophets are only to be a sign that the prophets are related to the Almighty God and the things they say are caused by divine inspiration, as a result of a message from God who introduces himself in this way. This sign is not a rationale that demands logical evaluation but simply evidence of the prophets' ability to communicate with God, like signs we rely on in trusting others' testimonies or the approach of reliabilism.

Another factor reinforcing the justification for belief in the sayings of prophets is that reason does not find their news and messages alien. Another strengthening aspect of their testimony is the observation of signs and symbols, such as the harmony within the universe, indicating the existence of a God, some of which are mentioned by the prophets. Additionally, there exists a strong inclination among humans to devote part of their lives to worshiping a being, and many of them assume various properties for it. This indicates that humans are naturally inclined to worship and generally seek a relationship with a sacred being. The sole task of God is to inform them of His existence, boasting unique characteristics no other being can possess, thereby directing worship towards Himself instead of other entities.

So, if someone asks what justification you have for believing in God's existence, we will answer because God has testified about His existence and His characteristics through His prophets and has confessed to them. And we have reached this knowledge through trusted hearings.

5. Assessing Other Methods of Justifying Belief in God and Acquiring True Knowledge of Him

Let us evaluate belief in God. To justify this belief, some have followed a logical reasoning method based on foundational beliefs and introduced some arguments. Could empirical methods prove God's existence, and if so, would these methods provide appropriate and comprehensive knowledge of God? We aim to demonstrate that empirical knowledge is limited and insufficient for attaining effective knowledge of God and establishing a relationship with Him.

If the Lord wished to reveal His omnipresent existence to humans, the path of empirical phenomena would not be considered effective for understanding His non-phenomenal nature. The nature of God's existence is such that knowledge of Him is not easily accessible through mathematical, empirical, historical, or geographical knowledge.

If we consider God as a being whose relationship with us is not like other relationships between objects, but rather like the relationship between us and our imaginary images, how can He reveal His existence to us and tell us "I am"? If we imagine ourselves as imaginary beings in someone's mind, possessing all the empirical tools of our real world, how can we prove that we are constantly dependent on another being who has created us in his imagination? God's existence is not something that can be reached through the usual methods of experiencing in an imagined world. To make the imaginary beings realize that someone else (the imaginer) has created them in his imagination, empirical methods based on the experiential relationships in the mind of that imaginer are ineffective. How can the imaginer remind the (imaginary) human in a way that "you exist in someone else's imagination, and at every moment of your existence, you are dependent on him, and he is always aware of everything he has created with his imagination"? Certainly, the imaginer cannot reveal himself to those confined within the fence of imagination. One of the best ways is to suggest to these people that He exists and that the entire world of imagination is evolving under His governance, and He has complete knowledge of all beings. These individuals then convey to other humans that such a supreme imaginer exists, endowed with attributes. If not once or twice but repeatedly, the imaginer makes the imaginary humans aware of his existence, and these humans, one after another, become aware of this reality and are commanded to share this reality with others, then collectively, they would attain knowledge of the existence of the imaginer, just

as he is. Consequently, their belief in the existence of this imaginer would be justified. Some individuals (from the imaginary world)—who meet the epistemological conditions of a valid testimony—must convey this news to others. The crucial point here is that the best justification for these humans' belief in the imaginer and his attributes, and how he relates to the imaginary humans, is the social knowledge of many imaginary humans, which has been obtained through the testimony of the prophets, and that, in turn, from the testimony of the imaginer himself.

Now, let us evaluate the traditional methods of justifying belief in God to highlight the advantage of relying on trusted hearings for them.

5.1. The Method of Reasoning for the Existence of God through Foundational Empirical Beliefs

Reasoning for the existence of God based on foundational sensory and empirical beliefs encounters several problems:

1. As previously mentioned, the nature of God is not like other empirical entities that can be proven based on empirical laws. By definition and believers' faith, God cannot be an empirical matter subject to our senses. Moreover, empirical reasoning for God's existence must draw from empirical relationships among entities in the empirical world, while the relationship between God and these entities, by definition, does not belong to the types of relationships established among empirical matters. If we consider the relationship between God and the empirical world as that between an imaginer and their imagined forms, it is impossible to reach the imaginer through relationships among the imagined entities. Therefore, this kind of knowledge about God will not provide a comprehensive understanding of Him.

2. The history of challenges to the proofs of God's existence shows that empirical methods at best can demonstrate the presence of a consciousness beyond the natural world. According to Kant, such arguments, termed as the argument from design or teleological argument, only indicate the existence of a regulator beyond nature and cannot prove that this being is the creator of the world, self-sustaining, omnipotent, omniscient, the permanent cause of the world, and always present. Thus, knowledge derived from reliance on foundational empirical beliefs will provide us with an incomplete understanding of God.

5.2. Evaluation of Knowledge Acquisition about God through Reason

Reason, which can also analyze beyond the empirical world, potentially offers greater capability than experience in examining God's existence. The use of reason, whose rules also apply to the nature of the Creator, can take us beyond the sensory and empirical realm, providing a better understanding of a being like the Creator. Thus, rational methods can effectively prove God's existence. Islamic philosophers

like Avicenna have well understood this, hence employing rational arguments like the necessity contingency argument to prove God's existence. They recognized the limitations of empirical approaches, such as the occurrence argument discussed in *kalam*, in this context.

Contingency and necessity are generally understood as proofs for the existence of God, while Islamic philosophers' concern in this philosophical contemplation is also to demonstrate God's attributes and provide sufficient knowledge of Him.

However, this approach has its challenges. Since the rational method for divine knowledge, utilizing concepts like contingency and necessity is accessible only to those deeply engaged in philosophy and capable of grasping pure rational concepts through diligence, this path will not yield much for most people. They lack both the capacity and the opportunity for such an intellectual endeavor. Hence, a method of understanding God and justifying belief in Him based on foundational rational beliefs cannot serve the vast majority who form the bulk of believers needing knowledge of and a relationship with God.

5.3. Evaluation of Intuitional Epistemology for the Knowledge of God

Another route to have knowledge of God is through spiritual contemplation, meaning knowledge via religious, mystical experiences, or spiritual journeying. In the path of intuitive knowledge, what is certain is to transcend beyond material relations, , but how should the rest of the journey be traveled so that what will be achieved is a face-to-face encounter with God himself and not an intuitive discovery of other non-material beings? To answer this question and illustrate the path of spiritual journeying, the reason which is unfamiliar with this route cannot assist; having moved beyond experience, one method is for those who have traversed this path to show us how they did so. Therefore, contemplative methods have two crucial elements: practice and a guide. Yet, this path also has its problems:

1. Numerous individuals claim to have knowledge of the path, each offering a distinct method of spiritual journeying. Beginners lack the tools to discern which path is superior. Those claiming to have reached a state of union with the divine describe God in ways that often differ from one another, sometimes even contradicting each other's descriptions.
2. Such encounters, even if they lead to intuitive knowledge of God, only benefit the elite and do not concern the majority, whom this writing aims to address in their belief in God and His attributes.
3. Mystical intuition or religious experience provides a beautiful perspective for the observer, immersing them in the pleasure of this contemplation. However, this conception of God is more suited for observation than for a constant presence in every moment. This type of knowledge does not intervene in the

daily activities of most believers. Humans, with both material and spiritual needs, cannot neglect their material needs since their survival depends on meeting these needs. How, then, can contemplative knowledge manifest itself in our material lives while we are also addressing our spiritual needs?

6. Knowing God through the Explanations He Has Provided of Himself

The story of the elephant in the darkness, as told by Rūmī, is often used to illustrate that in darkness, each person who encounters an aspect of the elephant describes it based on that aspect alone—some see it as a fan, others as a throne, and yet others as a pillar, even though they all describe the same being. Each has a different encounter, leading to diverse explanations of the elephant. However, a crucial part of the story is frequently overlooked: those in a hurry to identify the elephant in the dark reacted differently. But in the meantime, a wise person, who knew that he cannot have a correct impression of an elephant in the dark, went to the elephant breeder and asked him to describe the elephant to him. While others were busy touching the elephant, this person spent time learning about the elephant from someone who had been with it in both darkness and light, thus obtaining the best description. This tale illustrates that individual encounters cannot provide a clear picture of the elephant to seekers. People cannot easily deduce the true nature of the elephant based on their preliminary findings. However, listening to the elephant breeder's words reveals the elephant's reality as it is, showing that knowledge gained through trusted hearings is the most accurate and correct form of knowledge.

To understand God, instead of clinging to empirical, rational, or contemplative methods, one can simply ask God, "Who are You?" If God describes Himself, this knowledge can be far superior to that obtained through other varied methods. Given that humans, unlike other creatures, possess the capacity to comprehend God as the creator of the universe, omnipotent, omnipresent, etc., it is incumbent upon God to make Himself known to humanity. Humans are the only beings capable of consciously and willingly establishing a relationship with God, understanding their dependence on Him, and perceiving their relationships with themselves, the world, and others through the connection all have with God. Thus, it is God's responsibility to show the way to remind humans of their duties towards Him. It appears that God has prioritized the simplest method—describing Himself to humans—over others, facilitating this knowledge through prophets.

Therefore, the best way to acquire knowledge of God is by sitting before Him and listening to His description in His own words. This approach to knowing God avoids many previously mentioned problems and offers several advantages over other methods:

1. God Himself undoubtedly provides a truer description of Himself than any other description. A God who says, "I am thus," is more real than a God "found to be thus" by humans.

2. Knowing God through His descriptions is a path not exclusive to the elite but accessible to everyone, tailored to their capacity. This God will be for all people, not just philosophers, scientists, or mystics. Every individual, according to their existential capacity, will receive the knowledge of God. This God is the God of all beings.

3. When a person understands their dependence on God, they must be able to establish their relationship with Him. Understanding God's lordship imposes obligations on humans, recognizing their duties towards Him. Identifying these obligations and how one can fulfill their duties towards God is not easily achieved through empirical, rational, or contemplative means. However, God's self-description and the clarification of human duties towards Him can demonstrate our responsibility and role concerning God.

4. This approach to knowing God can indeed bridge the gap between the realities of material and spiritual existence, as humans grapple with them at every moment of their lives. This form of knowledge about God can reassure us about the things to which humans' reason, experience, or spiritual states point. Understanding God through His descriptions can enable individuals to realize that empirical, rational, and contemplative paths all lead to the same goal.

5. This method of knowing God aligns more closely with the epistemological framework that validates most of our beliefs. As previously mentioned, upon examining the set of beliefs we hold, it is evident that many of them are based on "hearings." Our primary network of beliefs is formed by relying on the words of others. Knowing God through His descriptions naturally follows the predominant path of our beliefs, making this path clearer, easier, more inclusive, more accessible, more natural, more reliable, and more practical for understanding God.

6. A vast number of believers in God and the afterlife have come to their beliefs based on reliable information received from others.

In summary, relying on the words of prophets, imams, and saints is the best and most natural way to know God and the afterlife, justifying our belief in them. Therefore, in religious epistemology, the best way to acquire knowledge is through reliance on trusted hearings.

7. Multi-aspect Approaches and Religious Knowledge

Paul Moser introduces an important method for justification and knowledge known as "multi-aspectuality." This method suggests that beliefs grounded on a greater number of separate and independent methods are generally more reliable

(or likely more truthful) than those based on a single method. The concept of "multi-aspectuality" is found in conventional reason and science. According to this approach, if different methods lead us to the same conclusion, then the likelihood of this convergence being coincidental is reduced, and it might even be considered insignificant from a rational perspective (Moser et al. 2006, 219).

In the context of testimony, multi-aspectuality arises from a variety of disciplines and perspectives through expert requests from different individuals. If we consider the knowledge of God's existence and attributes to be based on reliable testimonies from God Himself, we can employ other methods indicating God's existence as part of multi-aspectuality, thus gaining greater confidence in the justifiability of our belief in God's existence and attributes.

Ultimately, belief in God's existence and His attributes can be justified in that the collective knowledge derived from the testimonies of religious scholars has provided this justification for our belief. These testimonies, grounded in confidence from what has been heard leading to the words of the prophets, and those in turn being a testimony of God Himself on His existence and attributes, offer the best justification for belief in Him. However, other signs such as divine signs, mystical understanding, rational arguments, and human innate inclination all can provide us with greater assurance of God's existence and attributes through multi-aspectuality. Consequently, each of these paths provides a stronger justification for the statement "God exists, possesses a set of attributes, has a relationship with us, and we also have duties towards Him."

8. Conclusion

If we do not follow the individualistic path of epistemology before the 21st century in religious epistemology, we can achieve justification for our beliefs in God and some other religious knowledge through social epistemology and knowledge via testimony, without falling into the traps of the modern era's evidentialism based on inference from basic beliefs. Our hearings about the existence of God and His attributes, which have been assured to us through various means leading to the prophets and ultimately to God's admission and His explanation of Himself, can serve as the best justification for our beliefs in Him.

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