



Theistic Arguments and an Evidentialist Approach in Richard Swinburne *

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Abstract: This study examines how Richard Swinburne epistemically justifies belief in God through probabilistic reasoning. Rejecting the claim that classical theistic arguments can yield metaphysical certainty, Swinburne bases belief not on deductive proof but on high probability, using Bayesian probability theory to defend the rationality of theism. The study first outlines the conceptual and historical background of evidentialism and then situates Swinburne's position within this context. While he treats the ontological argument with caution and excludes it from his cumulative case, his analysis centers on the cosmological, teleological, moral, and religious experience arguments, which together form a cumulative inductive case. Examined alongside Reformed epistemology and contemporary critiques, Swinburne's approach presents theistic belief as a rationally defensible commitment grounded in probabilistic reasoning and epistemic responsibility.

Keywords: Philosophy of religion, evidentialism, probabilistic epistemology, cumulative case argument, Richard Swinburne.

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Introduction

The existence of God has been a fundamental question for centuries. The faith-reason relationship proves decisive in attempts to ground belief in God. Strong rationalism holds that religious beliefs can be conclusively proven and established as true through rational means¹ fideism maintains that faith lies beyond the scope of rational grounding.² By contrast, critical rationalism views faith and reason as complementary.³ In this context, evidentialism emerges as a particularly significant approach to belief justification.

In philosophy of religion, evidentialism offers a particularly significant approach for theistic belief. According to this view, a belief is rationally acceptable only if supported by sufficient evidence. While conclusive proof may be unattainable in metaphysical matters such as God's existence, this does not render such beliefs rationally unjustified. The central issue concerns not absolute certainty but rather the strength of evidential support. Arguments for God's existence function as modes of justification that render belief in God reasonable.⁴ Such arguments provide evidence rather than formal proof in the strict sense.⁵ Although evidentialism typically emphasizes inferential evidence, many contend that in theistic contexts, experiential factors such as religious experience must also be considered alongside abstract argumentation.⁶

Richard Swinburne (b. 1934) stands as a leading contemporary defender of evidentialism in philosophy of religion. He maintains that belief in God can be justified through reason and evidence, grounding

¹ Michael Peterson et al., *Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 5th ed. (Oxford University Press, 2013), 69.

² Ferit Uslu, "İman, Akıl ve Bilgi İlişkisi," in *Din Felsefesi El Kitabı*, ed. Mehmet Sait Reçber (Grafiker Yayınları, 2014), 40.

³ Cafer Sadık Yaran, *Din Felsefesine Giriş* (Dem Yayınları, 2012), 53.

⁴ C. Stephen Evans and David Baggett, "Moral Arguments for the Existence of God," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, 2022, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2022/entries/moral-arguments-god>.

⁵ Michael Peterson et al., *Akıl ve İnanç: Din Felsefesine Giriş*, 3rd ed., trans. Rahim Acar (Küre Yayınları, 2012), 130.

⁶ Cafer Sadık Yaran, *Günümüz Din Felsefesinde Tanrı İnancının Akliliği* (Etüt Yayınları, 2000), 18.

theistic belief within Bayesian probability theory and arguing that belief can rest on reasonable inductive inference supported by appropriate evidence. This study addresses a gap in existing literature by providing systematic analysis of Swinburne's evidentialism and theistic arguments together, examining his epistemological foundation, evidentialist approach, and the criticisms directed against them through comparative analysis of his major works and surrounding contemporary debates.

1. Evidentialism and Swinburne's Epistemology

Evidence provides rational grounds bearing on the truth or falsity of a belief,⁷ while proof constitutes a logical structure in which propositions support a conclusion, termed an "argument."⁸ Throughout this study, these terms will occasionally be used interchangeably to denote the epistemic grounds invoked to support belief in God.

Evidentialism is an epistemological approach holding that a belief can be considered rational only if grounded in sufficient evidence.⁹ According to this view, a belief's justification must be proportionate to the strength of its supporting evidence, though epistemologists lack consensus on the definition of "evidence," so evidentialism itself admits of varying interpretations.¹⁰ William K. Clifford (1845–1879) famously summarized this approach: "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence."¹¹ Evidentialists maintain that rational belief requires robust justification.¹² Strong evidentialism accepts as rational only beliefs based on explicit, direct, and conclusive evidence, while moderate evidentialism regards probabilistic and indirect considerations as epistemically

⁷ Richard Feldman, "Evidence," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 3rd ed., ed. Robert Audi (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 338.

⁸ David Alan Johnson, "argument," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 3rd ed., ed. Robert Audi (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 51–52.

⁹ William Hasker, "evidentialism," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 3rd ed., ed. Robert Audi (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 339.

¹⁰ Alexander Bird, "Evidentialism, Justification, and Knowledge-First," *Noûs* 59, no. 1 (2025), 23–24.

¹¹ William Kingdon Clifford, "İnanç Ahlâkı," trans. Ferit Uslu, *Hitit Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 5, no. 9 (2006), 135.

¹² Richard Feldman and Earl Conee, "Evidentialism," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 48, no. 1 (1985), 24.

sufficient.¹³ Evidentialism has frequently been deployed as a challenge to religious belief. “Evidential atheism” maintains that disbelief in God is epistemically justified based on available evidence.¹⁴ However, evidentialism need not entail atheism; thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) sought to demonstrate that religious belief admits of evidential defense,¹⁵ indicating that more flexible, moderate forms of evidentialism remain viable.

Richard Swinburne maintains that grounding both belief and disbelief in solid reasons constitutes a moral obligation, though some characterize him as a strict rationalist.¹⁶ However, given the importance he accords with religious experience as evidence, Swinburne emerges more plausibly as a moderate evidentialist. For him, beliefs cannot be demonstrated with absolute certainty but can be justified through sufficient probability and explanatory power. Swinburne’s evidentialism is not confined to propositional evidence; testimony, experience, and intuition also count as evidence in his epistemology.¹⁷ His moderate evidentialism is reflected in his method of grounding theistic belief, arguing that belief in God provides a coherent basis for explaining both the universe and human existence.¹⁸ Swinburne’s originality lies in combining evidentialism with Bayesian epistemology and employing a “cumulative case argument,” in which multiple independent arguments collectively strengthen the probability of a single hypothesis.¹⁹

Swinburne’s philosophical defense of God’s existence unites classical theistic arguments with contemporary analytic epistemology. In *The Existence of God* and its shorter version *Is There a God?*, he

¹³ Bird, “Evidentialism, Justification, and Knowledge-First,” 26–28.

¹⁴ Paul K. Moser, “Undermining the Case for Evidential Atheism,” *Religious Studies* 48, no. 1 (2012), 83.

¹⁵ Hasker, “Evidentialism,” 339.

¹⁶ Yaran, *Tanrı İnançının Aklılığı*, 60.

¹⁷ Kenneth Konyndyk, “Evidentialist Agnosticism,” *Religious Studies* 27, no. 3 (1991), 319.

¹⁸ Aliye Çınar, *Modern Batı Düşüncesi Ekseninde Rasyonel Teoloji* (Düşünce Kitabevi Yayınları, 2008), 96.

¹⁹ Ralph Kennedy, “cumulative case argument,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 3rd ed., ed. Robert Audi (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 229.

grounds belief in God on probabilistic inference and inductive reasoning, centered on Bayes's theorem, which mathematically measures how evidence increases or decreases the probability of a hypothesis.²⁰ Swinburne distinguishes between C-inductive and P-inductive arguments. C-inductive arguments indicate that certain evidence increases the probability of a hypothesis, though not beyond fifty percent, whereas P-inductive arguments show that a hypothesis is more probable than its alternatives. For Swinburne, facts such as the existence of the universe, the regularity of natural laws, and the emergence of consciousness exemplify C-inductive reasoning; yet, when assessed cumulatively with the argument from religious experience, they form a strong P-inductive case.²¹ He maintains that a hypothesis must be judged by three criteria: prior probability, explanatory power, and simplicity.²² Swinburne applies this approach to the hypothesis of God's existence, arguing that divine attributes such as omniscience, omnipotence, and perfect freedom make theism a simple yet comprehensive explanation that can account for the existence and order of the universe, the emergence of conscious beings, and the credibility of religious experience.²³

Swinburne argues that faith is neither a voluntary decision nor an irrational inclination but a cognitive and existential orientation developing over time. Religious belief rests not only on rational reasoning but also on practical and transcendent dimensions. Although such belief cannot be verified with certainty, it gains meaning when integrated with practical aims such as salvation. Swinburne also notes that the same evidence may affect individuals differently; thus, faith may not rest on equally convincing grounds for all, yet it should be rationally justified within one's epistemic limits.²⁴

²⁰ Hanti Lin, "Bayesian Epistemology," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, 2024, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2024/entries/epistemology-bayesian>.

²¹ Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed. (Clarendon Press, 2004), 66–72.

²² Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed., 53.

²³ Richard Swinburne, *Tanrı Var mıdır?*, trans. M. Murtaza Özeren (İz Yayıncılık, 2023), 51–60.

²⁴ Yaran, *Tanrı İnancının Aklılığı*, 51–52.

His evidentialist stance has faced criticism from classical foundationalists, atheists, and Reformed epistemologists. Critics argue that even cumulative inductive reasoning yields probability rather than certainty.²⁵ Reformed epistemology, advanced by Alvin Plantinga (b. 1932) and Nicholas Wolterstorff (b. 1932), contends that religious belief can be rational without dependence on arguments or evidence.²⁶ For Plantinga, if such beliefs withstand known objections, they may be considered warranted and serve as the basis for other beliefs.²⁷

Plantinga holds that belief in God is a basic, innate belief that can be rational without evidential support.²⁸ Swinburne, by contrast, argues that while religious belief need not satisfy every evidentialist demand, rational faith must rely on sufficient evidence. The inductive reasoning employed in science and history, he maintains, is equally applicable to religion. In this respect, Swinburne remains more firmly committed than Reformed epistemologists to objectivity, clarity, rationality, and the evidential principle, although his approach also gives rise to certain methodological difficulties.²⁹

Swinburne's commitment to objective justification exposes his Bayesian model to specific challenges. In this model, each testimony of religious experience counts as independent evidence increasing the probability of the God hypothesis. However, this produces the problem of probabilistic convergence, namely that as testimonies accumulate, the probability of God's existence should approach certainty, whereas Swinburne seeks only high probability. This tension compels either a reconsideration of evidential independence, or a clarification of where rational belief departs from certainty. Christoph Jäger (b. 1965) adds that the model overlooks an epistemic saturation point,

²⁵ Musa Yanık, "Reformcu Epistemoloji: Temel Unsurlar, İtirazlar ve Yeni Bakış Açıları," *Felsefe Dünyası*, no. 78 (2023), 222.

²⁶ Chase B. Wrenn, "Reformed Epistemology," in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, July 22, 2025, <https://iep.utm.edu/ref-epis/>.

²⁷ Peter Forrest, "The Epistemology of Religion," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, July 22, 2025, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/religion-epistemology/>.

²⁸ Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 175–80.

²⁹ Yaran, *Tanrı İnancının Akliliği*, 23–26.

creating a conceptual gap.³⁰ Further critique suggests that Swinburne's inductive conclusions are disproportionate to the cumulative strength of his evidence; the method is rigorous, yet its outcomes remain comparatively weak.³¹ These critiques indicate that although Swinburne's evidentialism preserves explanatory force, its probabilistic boundaries demand careful acknowledgment.

2. Swinburne and the Theistic Arguments

In philosophy, arguments for God's existence have usually been part of broader systems rather than isolated proofs. For Swinburne, such argumentation seeks not only to defend but also to rationally justify belief in God. A rational belief, he holds, must display logical coherence, empirical adequacy. Arguments are classified as *a priori* (ontological) or *a posteriori* (cosmological).³² Although reason's limits prevent certainty in metaphysics, Swinburne maintains that faith can still be rationally grounded. Unlike Alvin Plantinga, who views belief in God as properly basic, Swinburne argues that it must rest on rational support and remain open to critique.³³

Swinburne defends the possibility of rationally justifying God's existence through five key arguments within his cumulative case,³⁴ including the ontological, cosmological, teleological, moral, and religious experience arguments, each illustrating his evidential and probabilistic approach.

2.1. The Ontological Argument

The ontological argument refers to *a priori* proofs that seek to establish the existence of God through conceptual analysis, without recourse to empirical experience.³⁵ Among its defenders are classical philosophers such as St. Anselm (1033–1109), René Descartes (1596–

³⁰ Christoph Jäger, "Religious Experience and the Probability of Theism: Comments on Swinburne," *Religious Studies* 53, no. 3 (2017), 356–65.

³¹ Charles E. Gutenson, "What Swinburne Should Have Concluded," *Religious Studies* 33, no. 3 (1997), 246–47.

³² Mehmet S. Aydın, *Din Felsefesi*, 10th ed. (İzmir İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı Yayınları, 2002), 20–26.

³³ Yaran, *Tanrı İnancının Aklılığı*, 46–47.

³⁴ Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed., 7–22.

³⁵ Engin Erdem, "Tanrı'nın Varlığının Delilleri," in *Din Felsefesi*, ed. Latif Tokat (Bilay Yayınları, 2018), 93.

1650), Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716), and Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), as well as modern philosophers including Charles Hartshorne (1897–2000), Norman Malcolm (1911–1990), Kurt Gödel (1906–1978), and Alvin Plantinga.³⁶

Anselm's claim that God is "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" developed into an independent form of proof and became central to later philosophical debate. The first systematic objection came from his contemporary Gaunilo (c. 994–1081), who introduced the example of the greatest possible island to argue that Anselm's reasoning could be generalized and thus lead to misleading conclusions.³⁷

Plantinga considers this criticism inadequate,³⁸ maintaining that while mental conception is unrestricted in the case of finite and material objects, the concept of God applies uniquely to God.³⁹ Plantinga acknowledges that the ontological argument has limited power to persuade nonbelievers but argues that it may strengthen the believer's faith.⁴⁰ Although many philosophical assessments find the argument unsuccessful, there is no consensus on the reasons for this, and it has been reformulated in various versions.⁴¹ Swinburne is among those who approach the ontological argument critically. Although he does not discuss it in detail, his critical stance toward deductive reasoning is evident in his treatment of the argument.⁴² According to Swinburne, attempts to prove God's existence through deduction may paradoxically support atheism.⁴³ Consequently, he regards the ontological argument as unconvincing and instead defends inductive reasoning as

³⁶ Charles C. Taliaferro, *Din Felsefesi Başlangıç Rehberi*, trans. Musa Yanık (DTA Yayıncılık, 2025), 71.

³⁷ Peterson et al., *Reason and Religious Belief*, 82–83.

³⁸ Alvin Plantinga, *Tanrı, Özgürlük ve Kötülük*, trans. Musa Yanık (Fol Yayıncılık, 2022), 117–19.

³⁹ Mehmet Sait Reçber, "Tanrı'nın Varlığının Delilleri," in *Din Felsefesi El Kitabı*, ed. Recep Kılıç and Mehmet Sait Reçber (Grafiker Yayınları, 2014), 125; Peterson et al., *Akil ve İnanç*, 130–33.

⁴⁰ Erdem, "Tanrı'nın Varlığının Delilleri," 99.

⁴¹ Graham Oppy, "Ontolojik Argüman," in *Din Felsefesi Klasik ve Güncel Meseleler*, ed. Paul Copan and Chad Meister, trans. Aydın Çavdar (Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2017), 162–63.

⁴² Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed., 8–9.

⁴³ Metin Pay, "Kozmolojik Delil," *Dini Araştırmalar* 19, no. 48 (2016), 42.

providing stronger probabilistic justification for belief in God.⁴⁴

2.2. Cosmological Argument

Richard Swinburne criticizes the deductive form of the cosmological argument and instead adopts an inductive and probabilistic approach grounded in explanatory power. For him, God's existence should be supported by the principle of the best explanation and by high probability.⁴⁵

He distinguishes two kinds of explanation for the universe: inanimate explanation, which refers only to powers and tendencies, and personal explanation, which includes intentions and purposes.⁴⁶ According to Swinburne, the ultimate explanation of all beings and laws is provided by a personal agent, an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly free God, whose existence also satisfies the principle of theoretical simplicity.⁴⁷

Swinburne holds that science cannot explain the universe's origin causally. Whether the universe is finite or infinite in the past, it requires an explanation. He concludes that accepting an uncaused God is more probable than accepting an uncaused universe, since simpler explanations carry greater probability of truth.⁴⁸ Swinburne's main contribution is to place the cosmological argument within an evidential and probabilistic context. As he writes:

If there is a God, it is highly probable that he would create a vast and complex universe. It is far less probable that the universe should exist uncaused than that God should exist uncaused. Hence, the argument from the existence of the universe to the existence of God is a good C-inductive argument.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Peterson et al., *Akıl ve İnanç*, 130.

⁴⁵ Bruce Reichenbach, "Cosmological Argument," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2024, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/cosmological-argument>.

⁴⁶ Richard Swinburne, *Is There a God?*, Revised Edition (Oxford University Press, 2010), 20.

⁴⁷ Swinburne, *Tanrı Var mıdır?*, 51–60.

⁴⁸ Mehmet Sait Reçber, "Tanrı'nın Varlığının Delilleri," in *Din Felsefesi*, ed. Recep Kılıç (Ankara Üniversitesi Uzaktan Eğitim Yayınları, 2013), 109.

⁴⁹ Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed., 152.

2.3. Teleological Argument

The existence of specific structures and conditions in the universe raises the need for a teleological, or purposive, explanation. Richard Swinburne accepts evolutionary and biological processes in general but argues that evolution alone cannot provide a final explanation. The question of why the physical and biological laws that make evolution possible exist in precisely this form calls for a deeper account, for if these laws were different, evolution could not occur.⁵⁰ For Swinburne, the operation of evolution requires not only biochemical laws but also a physical order suitable for their functioning. The formation of atoms, galaxies, and planets under life-permitting conditions shows that the universe is structured not by chance but by intentional design. Even a minor alteration would make life impossible. Hence, the universe appears configured for both physical and conscious life, a condition best explained by an intelligent agent rather than coincidence.⁵¹

In the classical design argument, the order of nature is attributed to a designing mind. Swinburne maintains that the argument's strongest form rests not on human-made regularities but on the sequential regularities of natural laws themselves. Since physical processes cannot account for such continuity, the best explanation is a free, rational, and immaterial mind. For Swinburne, natural laws are not merely physical facts but phenomena requiring explanation. Science seeks not only observable outcomes but the causes that produce them, making personal explanation epistemically legitimate in accounting for the persistence of natural order.⁵²

Swinburne also takes seriously David Hume's objections in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Hume held that the analogy between natural order and human design is weak and that causal reasoning cannot generalize from a single universe. Given the imperfections of nature, he argued, such reasoning cannot rationally justify a

⁵⁰ Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed., 171–72.

⁵¹ Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed., 160; Reçber, "Tanrı'nın Varlığının Delilleri," 115.

⁵² Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Clarendon Press, 1979), 82–83.

transcendent, perfect deity. Moreover, since God's mind is unknowable, such arguments cannot qualify as scientific.⁵³ He further claims that the inscrutability of the divine mind renders such reasoning unscientific.⁵⁴ Swinburne responds that science often relies on unobservable causes and does not demand direct similarity between cause and effect. The uniqueness of the universe therefore does not preclude analogical inference, and the divine mind's incomprehensibility does not invalidate the hypothesis, for explanatory power in science also depends on entities that are not directly observable. Appealing to multiple deities, he adds, would make the theory unnecessarily complex; simplicity thus favors a single God hypothesis.⁵⁵

A contemporary form of the teleological argument that Swinburne emphasizes is the fine-tuning argument. It claims that the universe is finely adjusted to allow life, requiring that constants and boundary conditions take specific values.⁵⁶ This order is evident both in the cosmos and in living organisms, whose structure cannot plausibly be explained by chance alone.⁵⁷ Swinburne thus reformulates the design argument in light of modern science. His emphasis on the regularity of natural laws provides a stronger response to Hume's critiques, though he concedes that the argument's persuasiveness ultimately depends on how convincingly the analogy between natural and human order can be established. This evidential reinterpretation of classical argument reflects Swinburne's broader effort to integrate traditional theistic reasoning into a probabilistic epistemology.⁵⁸

2.4. Moral Argument

The moral argument holds that moral truths and moral awareness can be coherently explained only through the existence of God. It

⁵³ David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Second, ed. Richard H. Popkin (Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 36.

⁵⁴ Hasan Özalp, *Batı Düşüncesinde Tanrı ve Tasarım Bilimsel Felsefi ve Teolojik Bir Yaklaşım* (Otto Yayınları, 2015), 41–44.

⁵⁵ Richard Swinburne, "The Argument from Design," *Philosophy* 43, no. 165 (1968), 207–11.

⁵⁶ Richard Swinburne, "Tanrı'nın Varlığı Hakkındaki İnce-Ayar Kanıtı'nı Yeniden Değerlendirme," in *Allah, Felsefe ve Bilim*, ed. Caner Taslaman and Enis Doko, trans. Zikri Yavuz (İstanbul Yayınevi, 2013), 227–28.

⁵⁷ Swinburne, *Tanrı Var mıdır?*, 74.

⁵⁸ Swinburne, "The Argument from Design," 202–11.

has been advanced mainly by philosophers who affirm the objectivity of moral facts but find secular explanations inadequate.⁵⁹ Swinburne likewise accepts that certain moral truths are valid independently of God but argues that humanity's universal awareness of them cannot be explained solely by evolutionary or psychological means. He thus considers moral awareness more intelligible within a theistic and probabilistic reasoning.⁶⁰ For Swinburne, morally right actions promote human welfare or happiness, while those producing the opposite are wrong.⁶¹ The reality of moral facts, therefore, calls for an ultimate source and explanation. God, he argues, is a perfectly good being who always fulfills moral duties and refrains from evil. Divine commands may impose moral obligations on humans, yet once an act is declared obligatory, God cannot revoke it arbitrarily. Hence, God is not only the creator of the universe but also the foundation of moral order.⁶²

Swinburne's main claim is that universal moral awareness can be meaningfully explained only by positing a divine agent. Common convictions, such as the value of justice and the wrongness of betrayal, cannot plausibly result from chance or purely evolutionary mechanisms. For him, this awareness serves as a C-inductive argument supporting the God hypothesis: though it does not demonstrate divine existence conclusively, it significantly raises its epistemic probability.⁶³

2.5. Argument from Religious Experience

Among contemporary defences of God's existence, the argument from religious experience stands out for emphasizing individual experience while combining intuitive appeal with interpretive ambiguity. Its definitional difficulty stems largely from the diversity of religious phenomena.⁶⁴ To avoid this, Swinburne confines the concept to experiences of God.⁶⁵ Robert Audi (b. 1941) argues that evidentialism is

⁵⁹ Evans and Baggett, "Moral Arguments for the Existence of God."

⁶⁰ Swinburne, *Tanrı Var mıdır?*, 25–26.

⁶¹ Richard Swinburne, "Ahlakın Objektifliği," in *Din-Ahlak Okumaları*, trans. Hüsni Aydeniz and Fatih Topaloğlu (Elis Yayınları, 2016), 87.

⁶² Swinburne, *Tanrı Var mıdır?*, 27–30.

⁶³ Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed., 211–18.

⁶⁴ Mehmet Sait Reçber, *Tanrı'yı Bilmenin İmkânı ve Mahiyeti* (Kitâbiyât Yayınları, 2004), 92.

⁶⁵ Richard Swinburne, *Tanrı Var mı?*, trans. Muhsin Akbaş (Arasta Yayınları, 2001),

overly restrictive, since a belief justified only by propositional evidence excludes rational forms based on personal experience and intuition. In his experiential model, lived encounters with the divine, such as sensing God in nature, may serve as rational grounds for belief.⁶⁶

Swinburne grounds his version on two epistemic principles, namely the “Principle of Credulity” and the “Principle of Testimony.” The first states that it is rational to believe things are as they seem unless there is reason to doubt them; the second that one may accept others’ reports unless deception or error is evident.⁶⁷ Drawing on numerous testimonies, Swinburne argues that such experiences justify belief in God, directly or through others. He classifies them as public experiences revealing God, apparently miraculous events, private visions or dreams, mystical experiences, and non-sensory awareness of the divine.⁶⁸

The argument has faced strong criticism, mainly concerning the Principle of Credulity. Critics claim it assumes that appearances reflect reality, neglecting the psychological and cultural factors shaping religious experience. Michael Martin contends that believing one has experienced God does not guarantee truth, since such experiences are interpretive rather than perceptual. He views Swinburne’s extension of the Principle of Credulity to religion as arbitrary and indefensible, pointing to conflicting cultural reports that weaken its epistemic status.⁶⁹ A more balanced epistemic stance, as Yaran notes, should assess such experiences through critical, evidence-based, and pluralistic inquiry.⁷⁰ Thus, the argument’s philosophical value depends on justifying the epistemic role of religious experience while maintaining critical and rational evaluation. For Swinburne, when combined with other theistic arguments in a cumulative case, religious experience

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⁶⁶ Robert Audi, *Epistemoloji*, trans. Melis Tuncel (Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık, 2018), 320–21.

⁶⁷ Swinburne, *Tanrı Var mıdır?*, 146–48.

⁶⁸ Swinburne, *Tanrı Var mı?*, 119.

⁶⁹ Michael Martin, *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification* (Temple University Press, 1990), 166–69.

⁷⁰ Cafer Sadık Yaran, “‘Eleştirel Deneyimcilik’: Dini Tecrübede Swinburne’ün ‘Safdil-lik İlkesi’ Ne Karşı ‘Eleştirelilik İlkesi,’” *İstanbul Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, no. 15 (2007), 33–46.

strengthens the overall probability of God's existence, contributing to what he considers a good P-inductive argument.

Conclusion

Richard Swinburne holds a distinctive position in contemporary philosophy of religion for grounding belief in God on rational and evidential foundations. Embracing a probabilistic epistemology, he aims not at metaphysical certainty but at a coherent, evidence-based justification of theistic belief. This study has examined his evidentialism both in its conceptual structure and in its application to major theistic arguments.

Swinburne reinterprets evidentialism through Bayesian probability, combining cosmological, teleological, moral, and religious experience arguments into a cumulative inductive reasoning. Each argument carries limited epistemic force on its own, yet together they constitute a stronger probabilistic case for theism. Rejecting deductive proofs such as the ontological and classical cosmological arguments, he locates rational belief not in certainty but in high probability, thereby seeking to reconcile faith and reason. This cumulative methodology represents a significant epistemological innovation: it shows how individually inconclusive arguments can generate collective epistemic force, offering a middle way between demanding certainty and accepting fideism.

His approach has drawn criticism concerning the weakness of individual evidences and whether their accumulation genuinely increases epistemic strength. In particular, the principles of credulity and testimony raise questions about the reliability of subjective experience. These critics share a common concern: Swinburne's Bayesian model produces paradoxical results when applied rigorously. As evidence accumulates, probability should approach certainty, yet Swinburne seeks only high probability. This tension reveals a fundamental gap between his probabilistic method and its conclusions.

This evidential model contrasts with Plantinga's Reformed epistemology. While Plantinga regards theistic belief as properly basic and

independent of evidential support, Swinburne demands rational justification through probabilistic reasoning. This contrast reveals two fundamentally different conceptions of rationality itself, Plantinga defends internal rationality (belief warranted by proper function), while Swinburne defends external rationality (belief justified by publicly accessible evidence). Together, they represent complementary yet divergent poles in contemporary epistemology of belief, expanding the methodological scope of the field.

Future research should address three critical questions: (1) Can Swinburne's probabilistic convergence problem be resolved without abandoning evidential independence? (2) How might his epistemic principles engage with contemporary debates in formal epistemology (e.g., Bayesian coherence, peer disagreement)? (3) Does religious diversity undermine the universality claims of his cumulative case, or can it be incorporated into a revised Bayesian approach?

Ultimately, Swinburne's probabilistic evidentialism offers a distinctive contribution to rendering belief in God intellectually responsible. By demonstrating how individually inconclusive arguments can generate collective epistemic force, he provides a moderate position between demanding metaphysical certainty and accepting fideism. Although his approach does not yield certainty, it preserves the possibility of justified faith and underscores the enduring importance of rational accountability in religious belief. In bridging analytic rigor with theological reflection, Swinburne's work continues to shape contemporary discussions on how faith may coexist with the demands of reason.

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