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ACQUIRING UNIVERSAL VALUES THROUGH A PARTICULAR TRADITION: A PERSPECTIVE ON JUDAISM AND MODERN PLURALISM

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Abstract. Religious traditions can be sources of values and attitudes supporting the liberal polity in ways that political theorizing and conceptions of public reason often fail to recognize. Moreover, religious traditions can give support through the ways reason is crucial to their self-understanding. One understanding of Judaism is examined as an example. Also, the particularism of traditions can encourage commitment to universally valid values and ideals. Reason's role in Judaism and other religious traditions makes possible constructive interaction between those traditions and between religious and secular thought. Exclusion of religiously grounded considerations from the discourse and deliberations of liberal polities can be counterproductively illiberal.

This paper considers some aspects of the relation between religion and the liberal-democratic polity. The two main themes of the discussion are: (1) Much contemporary theorizing concerning liberal-democracy fails to recognize significant religiously grounded supports for the liberal polity; and (2) There are ways that religious traditions can interact constructively, with mutual benefit, in the pluralistic liberal polity. Both issues are explained, at least in part, by a failure to recognize the role reason has in the self-understandings of some religious traditions. The more we recognize that aspect of those traditions, the more clearly we will see that some of the main reasons given for excluding religiously grounded considerations from public, political discourse are unconvincing, and in some respects, unfair to religion. The discussion focuses on Judaism but the chief considerations apply to other religious traditions, as well.

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The main elements of the view defended are the following:

(a) Religiously grounded considerations are an important source of the commitment to some of the fundamental values the pluralistic liberal polity both respects and reflects, and they are a basis for perspectives and attitudes that can support a liberal political order.

(b) Religiously grounded values are, in fact, of more fundamental concern, to many people than political principles, and it is not necessarily an error of reason that they should see things that way.

(c) Acquiring values and attitudes through participation in a particular religious tradition does not, as such, limit the scope and applicability of many of those values and attitudes. One can acquire universally valid moral commitments through a particular tradition. Also, different traditions, even when anchored in histories claimed to involve revelation, can engage each other rationally and constructively.

(d) The contrast between religion and reason, especially when there is an emphasis on the contrast between revealed religion and reason, is often overstated. Even in revealed religion there can be a crucially important role for reason in articulating and explicating religious values and commitments.

There surely are politically repugnant, intolerant, and intolerable forms of religiously based conduct. There is plenty of religiously fuelled hatred, cruelty, and violence, and there are many forms of religion that could not – and should not – be accommodated by the liberal polity. But they are not just extreme versions of an illiberal feature intrinsic to religion. Indeed, I will argue that there are respects in which religion has been a vitally important support to the liberal polity, historically and conceptually. Religion can be a support to the liberal polity, and interaction between different religious traditions can contribute to a deepened, shared understanding of moral values even in the absence of a standard of public reason.[1]

[1] My argument draws upon Nicholas Wolterstorff's critique of some contemporary forms of liberalism as unfair to religion and his broader critique of some of the most influential recent liberal theory and its employment of the notion of public reason. See, for example, his, 'Why We Should Reject What Liberalism Tells Us about Speaking and Acting in Public for Religious Reasons', in Paul J. Weithman, ed., *Religion and Contemporary Liberalism* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), pp. 162-181. And see his, 'Habermas on Religious Reasons in the Public Sphere', in N. Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press,

I.

By 'liberal polity' I mean a political order in which rights and liberties of individuals are fundamentally important, as is the rule of law and the role of citizens and their elected representatives in making the law. Also, a liberal polity enforces morality less rather than more, providing wider rather than narrower scope for persons to choose and pursue ends and interests, being accommodative with regard to people's different conceptions of what makes for a good life. Thus, the liberal polity's restraint with regard to enforcing morality permits a significant measure of pluralism. There is no conceptual requirement that a liberal polity *must* be as morally austere as possible, striving to be as close to neutrality as possible.[2] The liberal order *itself* reflects significant valuative commitments and its institutions are informed by certain principles, especially concerning extensive individual liberties. In that way the liberal order makes possible a diverse, pluralistic civil society. To coherently sustain the freedoms required for civil society of that kind broad, stable endorsement of certain fundamental values and principles is required. The restrained legal moralism of a liberal polity itself needs to be underwritten by widely shared substantive moral commitments.

A liberal order is not 'naturally' or automatically self-sustaining. It requires that people have a genuine, efficacious commitment to certain values and that they will not hate or despise their neighbours simply for being different, and will not demand that differences be repressed, and will tolerate at least some behaviours and people they neither admire nor even approve. It is *work* to sustain a liberal order, and that work requires participatory endorsement on the part of citizens. Pluralism requires a coherent, broadly supported framework.

Some ways of life and some value-commitments are symptomatic of moral corruption, error or perversity. A liberal polity has no obligation to accommodate them though it may elect to err on the side of tolerance. If conduct is objectionable to some but there is no clear evidence that it is harmful, then liberal principles – if not majoritarian politics – are likely

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2013), pp. 353-376. The notion of public reason figures prominently in recent work by Jurgen Habermas, John Rawls, and Robert Audi, to mention just a few influential contemporary theorists of the liberal-democratic state.

[2] There is a brief, very helpful summary of the main issues involved in the debate concerning liberalism and legal moralism – especially in regard to criminal justice – in Jeffrie Murphy, 'Legal Moralism and Liberalism', in *Character, Liberty, and Law*: *Kantian Essays in Theory and Practice* (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), pp. 89-117.

to support permissibility. In this sort of disputed matter democratic politics and political principles may be in tension with each other. (In the United States at present, some political controversies are disputes over where the lines between 'objectionable' and 'impermissibly wrong' should be drawn. Examples are the question of whether homosexuals should be allowed to marry, and the decriminalization of marijuana.) Pluralism can be tested severely when groups with different values believe that their differences constitute conflicts that must be resolved. There is not some single formula or well-defined principle applicable to all such cases.

That fact makes it all the more significant that, in addition to institutional forms and legal permissions certain moral-psychological attitudes and dispositions are needed in order for a liberal polity to succeed *as* a liberal polity. A social world characterized by dispositions of civility – including restraint with regard to insistence on moral uniformity – is less vulnerable to moral differences motivating bitter alienation and hostility. Of course, faith-traditions can exhibit firm limits on how pluralistically accommodative they will be. But traditions can transmit and support dispositions of civility and the willingness to engage in dialectic rather than conflict. For example, religiously based traditions might habituate people in a concern for fairness, respect for others, civility in political discourse, and toleration of differences as ways of loving the neighbour.

Adherents of a specific tradition are, of course, likely to regard its values as true values. But that does not imply that those persons will be opposed to pluralism. Regarding others as mistaken need not immediately translate into political exclusion, discrimination or civil disqualification. Religiously committed persons can acknowledge the merits of the liberal rule of law even as they maintain their specific commitments.

Moreover, why must commitment to the values and principles crucial to the liberal order have a single source or be articulated by a single set of terms, which all reasonable persons would find acceptable? Indeed, it might be unreasonable to expect that to be the case. Historically, religion is a source of principles such as the equal standing of all persons as participants in a common moral world, the central importance of justice, that persons are not to be regarded or treated with contempt or in degrading ways, and so forth. In some respects liberal principles such as the equal standing of free persons under the rule of law, and the importance of respecting persons in a distinctive manner, not contingent

upon their achievements, skills, or station have religious bases. Torah teaches that we are 'to love our fellows' (Lev. 19:18), to aid the distressed and the unfortunate (Exod. 22:24), to do justice and to be merciful (Deut. 10:12, and Micah 6:8), to enact and uphold good laws (see Deut. 5:30, 6:2-3, 8:6-18), and overall, to 'walk in the ways of the LORD', to pattern our own activity on God's activity (Deut. 13:5, 28:9). Such values and attitudes are often acquired through participation in a particular tradition. That need not be an obstacle to people seeing that they have universal applicability, a point discussed further below.

One might suggest that values, if they are rationally supportable, can be supported independently of the religious traditions in which they have figured. However, that supposes that people's attachments to the values crucial to the political order can be independent of the particular sources in which the values are rooted. For many people politics is not fundamental; the question of what values should inform the political order is not an exclusively political issue for them, and it is not clear that someone is being irrational or immoral for regarding something other than political principles as the source of values regarding the political order. For many rational persons, political principles depend, at least to some extent, upon values with other sources or grounds. That the values crucial to liberal-democracy and its conception of the rule of law might have religious sources among their roots is more than an interesting *historical* fact. And it is not clear that persons are *irrational* for remaining faithful to the source of a value even if the value is supportable by considerations independent of that source.

Here I want to comment on the relevance of an important tradition of Jewish thought. Maimonides is a key figure in it but its elements are not uniquely Maimonidean nor uniquely medieval.[3] In this understanding of Judaism there are rational justifications for the commandments through which Jews are constituted a people in covenant with God. (The view concerns all six hundred thirteen commandments, not just the Decalogue.) The commandments are not tests of thoughtless obedience, and fulfilling them is not brittle legalism. The view maintains that among

[3] In 'The Epistemology of Moral Tradition: A Defense of a Maimonidean Thesis', I develop the notion of 'rational tradition' more fully, and I explicate elements of Maimonides's contribution to that notion. See, *The Review of Metaphysics*, September 2010. See also my, 'Tradition, Rationality, and Moral Life: Medieval Judaism's Insight', in *Judaic Sources and Western Thought*: *Jerusalem's Enduring Presence*, ed. Jonathan Jacobs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.127-152.

the commandments is the injunction *to study the Law in order to deepen and enlarge one's understanding of it*. This is integral to appreciating the divine wisdom and benevolence informing the commandments and it is a way to more fully appreciate the gratitude and obedience we owe to God.

Jewish thinkers regularly point to *Deuteronomy* 4: 5-8 as the Scriptural basis of the requirement to employ reason in the study of the commandments as a way of living in accord with them. The passage says:

> Behold, I have taught you statutes and ordinances ... that ye should do so in the midst of the Land whither ye go in to possess it. Observe therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the people, that, when they hear all these statutes, shall say: 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that hath God so nigh to them, as the LORD our God is whensoever we call upon Him? And what great nation is there, that hath statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day.

Maimonides and other influential medieval Jewish philosophers, such as Saadia and Bahya ibn Pakuda were anxious to elaborate the role of reason in Judaism and the role of understanding in human perfection. There are aspects of their views that are not merely 'local' to the medieval period. Their conceptions of how reason and revelation are modes of access to one body of truth can survive the abandonment of much of their medieval metaphysics and epistemology.

There is a complex debate over the question of whether this view of the rationality of the commandments is, or is like, a natural law conception of ethics. There is not space to explore that issue here but it is indicative of the plausibility of interpreting the commandments as rationally justifiable. Commenting on the role of reason in regard to fulfilling the commandments, while denying that the commandments should be interpreted as reflecting natural law, Michael Levine writes:

> In saying that the law is not natural Maimonides does not mean that it is not rational or objective. Certainly divine commandments are objective, and for Maimonides they are accessible to reason as well, in the sense already stated. We can discover what the reasons for the laws are. Moral rules and human law are also objective insofar as a moral rule or law must fulfill a function if it is to be counted as a moral rule or law at all. Merely the fact that Law has been revealed does not imply that it cannot be known through reason as well and extended in the establishment and embellishment of the moral-legal code.[4]

The chief point for present purposes is that a significant current of Jewish thought regards revelation as a gracious act of divine guidance, and regards the content of that guidance as rationally intelligible. Of course there are many different traditions and perspectives within Judaism. Also, there are many people whose illiberal commitments and hostility to an open, diverse civil society – and antipathy to reason – are grounded in and fuelled by religion. However, there are significant currents of thought in Abrahamic monotheism in general, and in Judaism in particular, lending thoughtful, reasoned support to values supportive of the liberal rule of law and a civic culture in which rights, freedoms, and moral standing are centrally important.

The notion that elements of a religion's moral teaching can be explicated in rational terms figures in important forms of Christian and Islamic tradition, as well. Assuming a clean break between religion and reason can lead to serious misrepresentations. One is the notion that, for a religious person, religion trumps rational considerations without concern for the epistemic (or moral) cost. That ignores those religious traditions in which seeking fuller understanding is itself a fundamental religious obligation. The medievals articulated sophisticated accounts of how reason and revelation, in mutual support, concern one body of truth. There are plenty of reasons not to think of that period as a source of liberal principles. Still, it is a mistake to dismiss medieval thought as so alien to liberal values that it has nothing to offer regarding the relation between reason and religion. All three Abrahamic monotheisms developed rationalistically oriented accounts of their own commitments and traditions.

We should not expect there to be some single, rationally compelling basis for the liberal-democratic political order and rational consensus on its basic features. That is unrealistically optimistic, given that there are rival reasonable conceptions of such an order and of why it is important to establish it. While the liberal order makes pluralism of values politically acceptable it can also benefit from the latter in the sense that there are different sorts of reasons for being committed to the liberal order. It is not clear why endorsement of such an order *should* come through just one, common pathway or why a religious source of liberal values should be regarded as suspect or be disqualified.

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[4] Michael Levine, 'The Role of Reason in the Ethics of Maimonides', *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Fall 1986), 285.

In Rawls' view, '[u]nderstanding how to conduct oneself as a democratic citizen includes understanding an ideal of public reason.'[5] And, 'with respect to fundamental political issues, we are to debate in the public arena and to act (or to be ready and able to debate and act), on the basis of principles of justice that we can reasonably expect all those of our fellow citizens who are reasonable and rational to accept.'[6]

If we consider what motivates endorsement of the sorts of principles crucial to a liberal polity, and ask whether the principles and the motivations can come entirely from political considerations, we can see that, for many people, the relevant principles and values are supplied from outside of political thought. It is not evident that such grounding is necessarily less than rational. Moreover, the notion of 'public reason' is as contestable as the notion of natural law or the notion of a liberal polity. Consider the debates about various fundamental economic issues, about the scope of legitimate state power, about what conduct should be criminalized, and about what form criminal sanction should take. The contestability does not mean we cannot distinguish between plausible and implausible conceptions of such matters. There is a vital role for reason even if there are not strict criteria for what counts as satisfying a standard of public reason.

In his critique of Rawls' theory of the principles of justice of the liberal state Wolterstorff argues that, if we suppose that someone has followed the method Rawls advocates:

> ... no matter what those resultant principles of justice may be, the reasonable thing for her to expect is *not* that all reasonable people who use their common human reason will agree with her results, but that *not all* reasonable people will agree. It would be utterly unreasonable for her to expect anything else than disagreement.[7]

Nor is it necessary that all persons should agree on fundamental political issues. It is perhaps just as important – if not more important – that people should have a habit of civility such that disagreement and argument remain tolerable. As Wolterstorff observes, '[r]arely do we succeed in reaching consensus even among reasonable people of all these different stripes; but we try. Then, finally, we vote. Are we, in voting under these

[5] Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'Why We Should Reject What Liberalism Tells Us about Speaking and Acting in Public for Religious Reasons', p. 172.

[6] Ibid., p. 174.

[7] Ibid., p. 174.

circumstances, all violating somebody's freedom and equality?'[8] A habit of civility can be much more important to keeping a frictional dialectic going instead of hostile alienation or a resort to force.

In addition, in moral-psychological terms the strategy of compartmentalization of the political and the religious might leave us needlessly diminished resources for supplying and supporting ideals and principles.[9] There may be many persons for whom commitment to religion is crucial to their commitment to some of the values we would expect a liberal polity to endorse but, for those persons, the values are anchored in religion and not in autonomous political principles. The notion of the individual as meriting respect and as never to be treated merely as a means has deep roots in the Biblical anthropology of human beings as created in God's image. That the individual has irreducible worth is one reason why doing justice is felt by many people to have a deep, abiding claim on us. That political rule is to be the rule of *law*, its legitimacy grounded in the justice of law and not the will of the ruler, has Biblical roots. The notion that it is wrong to degrade or humiliate another, that it is wrong to oppress others or to abandon the weak, the helpless, and the destitute, all have Biblical roots. Why should politics require that religious grounds for such values be excluded?

One way of arguing for only nonreligious grounds for values is that such an approach makes the same justifying considerations accessible to all, and it claims that there are distinctively political principles reason can ascertain independent of any particular tradition. In such a view the normative considerations in favour of the political order (liberal values making for a liberal polity) are values that people should share *in the same way* because that is what makes possible the liberal order. It has normative priority because it is the enabling condition for the diverse values of individuals living in that political order. This understanding of the liberal polity has elicited a good deal of support. Yet, there are reasons for thinking that, for many persons, the motivational and

[8] Ibid., p. 175.

[9] For many persons, moral education occurs in a way that is thickly informed with religious ideas and ideals. The acquisition of moral concepts is learned through coming to understand the significance of paradigmatic examples, which are often Scripturally based. That does not mean the scope and meaning of the relevant moral values are confined to a religious context. However, religion can be a significant source in regard to moral education, the shaping of attitudes and perspectives, and a disposition of moral seriousness.

substantive roots of a strong liberal order are in deeper soil than that of rationally endorsable political arrangements. For many people, religious commitment and the way religion is a guide to conduct and to life are more fundamental to them than politics.

It is not just that it is unlikely that people will give up their religious commitments or refuse to distance them from the discussion of political issues. Rather, several religiously important values are not only consistent with the liberal political order but they also are enduringly relevant supports for it. For example, many people hold that the fact that we are created in the image of God underwrites the moral regard due to each human being. It is what makes possible relations with others on the basis of an understanding of the distinctive value of a person and on the basis of requirements fashioned by wisdom and benevolence, rather than human convention. It is what underwrites our conceptions of ourselves as having worth and dignity, whatever our station in life and whatever our circumstances. That human beings possess intellect and will is the basis of respect for, and concern for, all human beings. It is also the basis for the inestimable value of each person as an individual, for the 'separateness of persons' as distinct individuals.[10]

Biblical moral anthropology includes the notion of the community being governed by the rule of law along with the notion of the individual having significant standing. Each individual possesses reason and will, and each person is an accountable agent with a relationship to God through the exercise of his own thought, choices, and actions.

As a matter of historical fact, at least in the West, there is wide acknowledgment that the social world is likely to be religiously diverse and that the political order should tolerate such diversity. Even those who argue that their religion requires them to take specific stands on social issues rarely, if ever, argue that the political community should be theocratically governed. What are at issue are values, not sovereignty. As remarked above, there is a strong current of Jewish thought that maintains that we are to strive to understand and articulate our ethical commitments and judgments as fully rationally as we can. However, that is not the same as requiring that such commitments and judgments must

[10] Rawls employed the notion of the 'separateness of persons' as part of his critique of utilitarianism in *A Theory of Justice*. Rawls argued that one of the defects of utilitarianism is that it fails to adequately recognize the separateness of persons. The failure is in the way that utilitarianism focuses on the good overall brought about by an action or a policy, without morally distinguishing the impact on individuals.

be fully or purely rational – whatever that might mean – or must satisfy a standard of public reason. The religious grounding is not a built-in impediment to rational reflection or criticism.

A liberal order (even more than other types) depends on the kinds of agents participating in it and how they regard each other. Shared commitments to regard each other as having equal status as moral agents are crucial. Each person is a locus of judgment, valuative perspective, and thought-informed activity. A liberal order requires more than merely tolerating a wide range of behaviours and preferences. Honouring the equal status of other persons' rights and claims can require more than just not actively harming. In the Jewish understanding one is to relate to others not only in accord with terms restricting harm and interference but also through understanding others as neighbours in a community capable of open-ended striving toward moral improvement.

A liberal polity needs a common valuative core, commitment to which may have multiple sources as, for instance, in different faith-traditions. It is important that the values are rationally supportable and that they are common, but not essential that some single line of reasoning has led to them. In discussing modern politics David Novak remarks that,

> Fortunately for Jews and Christians, the type of democratic polity that has emerged in the West does not in principle require the absolute commitment required by God and his covenanted community. Only secular totalitarians have attempted to replace the covenant with their own absolute claims on the existential commitments of those under their control.[11]

Jews may see their values as grounded in covenant with God but that does not distract the focus of their commitment away from life with neighbours of different faiths or none at all. Novak adds, 'It is in the best communal interest of Jews and Christians to live in societies that affirm in law and public policy what Jews and Christians consider universally just.'[12] And, 'Jews and Christians also bring these forms of human community to civil society for the benefit of all its citizens, even for those of other religions, even for those who are secularists.'[13] The religious traditions themselves can be sources of the relevant values and can encourage the enlargement

[11] David Novak, *The Jewish Social Contract* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 204.

[12] Ibid., p. 204.

[13] Ibid., p. 204.

of articulate understanding of them and rational engagement with other persons regarding them and their implications.

It is obvious that cultural differences (of many kinds, not just religious) *can* be impediments to the recognition that we are participants in a common moral world. Yet, one's neighbour, supposing that person's life to be shaped by different traditions, need not remain a *moral* stranger, alienated or inaccessible because of the difference in traditions. People can differ over what they take to be authoritative sources of evidence for moral views without rational dialectic and reciprocity being thwarted or grinding to a halt.

II.

Tradition can be a source of moral learning in which the values learned are universal in scope while the tradition is particular in its concreteness. There are ways in which traditions can habituate people in narrow perspectives, a kind of moral selectivity, and lack of regard for persons who are not participants in the tradition. But that is not an integral feature of tradition; those are ways a tradition can be morally corrupt. Many people acquire their values and attitudes through education in a tradition, and tradition can encourage civility, respect for human dignity, concern for others, and a commitment to justice, for example. It may be that such values are *more* effectively learned through the rich, lived detail of specific practices, modes of attention, and disciplines of conduct than they are learned through transmission of abstract principles. It is a mistake to think of tradition as a ladder on which to climb to universal or objective values and then do away with the ladder. The practices associated with a tradition can be ways of sustaining genuine commitment to the values.

Indeed, in the Maimonidean view of tradition there is a spiral of mutual reinforcement involving practice on the one hand, and enlargement of understanding on the other. Practice habituates people and shapes dispositions to act in certain ways for certain kinds of reasons. The agent is then in a position to reflect on those dispositions and the reasons for them, and attain a fuller, more critical understanding of them. That understanding, which enables the agent to appreciate the practices, can strengthen the motivation to act in the relevant ways. And because reflection is itself part of what one is habituated into, the agent is better able to engage with persons outside the tradition, is better able to

elucidate its point and to see how other traditions might strive to realize similar values.

Traditions can do much to support values and practices crucial to the liberal order and civil society, practices of justice, charity, integrity, and moral awareness. Tradition should not be interpreted as habituating people in narrowness of vision and close-mindedness. There are traditions that enjoin critical thought rather than hostile defensiveness or habits of not thinking for one's self.

In the rationalistically-oriented Jewish tradition to which I have made reference, part of living in accord with tradition is the way people learn universal values and principles.[14] The particularism of revelation and tradition is not essentially at odds with moral universality or objectivity. The values learned are not values only for the particular community though a great deal of the form of life and activity through which they are learned reflects the particularity of the community. While many of the tradition's requirements are clearly specific to that particular tradition – and may seem inscrutable or just plain strange to others – they are understood as parts of the textured, complex, overall discipline of acquiring virtues. They are one people's special responsibility but the virtues that are shaped are *human* virtues, and they are not meaningful only within a particular community or people. In fact, Maimonides argued that the perfection to which Torah guides people is *human* perfection, not something limited to the Jewish people as having a distinct nature.[15]

The covenanted community has a vital place in how commitments, ideals, and principles are acquired and transmitted. Tradition supplies a specific architecture of moral life through which individuals and the community engage with objective valuative considerations and come to understand them. The view combines a rationalist disposition with a kind of epistemic humility. One reason tradition is to be respected is that it sustains the project of seeking improved understanding. Hence, even when the justification of what is required is obscure we still have

[14] I develop this view further in, 'The Reasons of the Commandments: Rational Tradition Without Natural Law', in *Reason, Religion and Natural Law*: *Plato to Spinoza* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 106-129.

[15] See Menachem Kellner's *Maimonides on Judaism and the Jewish People* for explication of this Maimonidean view and its intellectualist perfectionism. Maimonides (in contrast to, say, Judah Halevi) did not believe that the Jewish people had a distinct nature or that in order to be a Jew one had to have a certain lineage. *Maimonides on Judaism and the Jewish People* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

a tether to it in a way that connects it with the understanding we have achieved so far. That way, the requirement's meaningful connections with our overall understanding can be more effectively realized.

Maimonides argued that we cannot attain understanding without practice, and practice needs to be guided by Torah and tradition. As indicated above, the view is that we cannot grasp the rationality of some of the commandments without leading lives in accord with them.[16] The practices associated with tradition are a way of making the values real elements of our lives and world. And, we have a responsibility to seek to understand those values and the reasons that justify them. Lenn Goodman describes the Law's role in facilitating human perfection as follows:

> ... right actions facilitate right choices by forming good habits; virtues promote right actions, since a virtue is, by definition, a disposition toward appropriate action. The commandments nurture certain kinds of choices, both for the life those choices foster for the individual and the community. Neither virtuous actions nor the virtues themselves are valued solely for their intrinsic worth. Both contribute to the good life materially, morally, and intellectually.[17]

The practices and dispositions cultivated by fidelity to tradition are intended to do real good in the life of the community rather than having value solely in terms of disciplined conformity. One could maintain the latter – scrupulously, even – and not have enlarged one's understanding or genuinely acquired a virtue. Mere legalistic conformity lacks the spiral of mutual reinforcement between understanding and conduct that Maimonides and others took to be the point of the commandments. They are meant to perfect persons, not just test them for obedient conformity.

Tradition's normative authority is not automatically an impediment to adherents having the sorts of dispositions and values-horizon needed for participation in a liberal polity. There are reasons to recognize tradition

[16] See the articles and chapters mentioned in notes 3 and 14 for a fuller account of the spiral of mutual reinforcement resulting from the relations between ethical virtue and intellectual virtue, especially in Maimonides though detectable in Bahya ibn Pakuda, too. See Bahya's *The Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2000). Many of the medievals had a much more rationalistic conception of religion than is prevalent in many places in the modern world. Many of the medievals regarded reason and religion as modes of access to one body of truth, and they sought to explicate how reason and faith complement and reinforce each other, rather than drawing a bright line separating and compartmentalizing them.

[17] Lenn Goodman, *God of Abraham* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 192.

as a possible source of valuable support for liberal democracy. We should consider the substance of particular traditions to see what values they endorse and what sorts of dispositions, attitudes, and perspectives they encourage. It would be illiberal, and almost certainly counterproductive, to dismiss traditions at the outset, simply for failing to satisfy a standard of public reason or because it is supposed that they inevitably narrow people's moral view. Also, it can be important to consider how a tradition responds to changing historical circumstances and to the ways of life and views of the world commended by other traditions.

III.

I have remarked that a disposition of civility may be more important to the political order than rational agreement on all fundamental political matters. A civil civic culture can accommodate a measure of disagreement and participants are likely to be disposed to seek constructive resolutions rather than there being a fixed standard for how the matter should be concluded. How can different, historically particular traditions contribute to civil society?

By 'civil society' I mean all of those contexts, activities, associations, and interactions in which persons engage voluntarily and not by requirement of the law of the state.[18] That a young person should attend school or at least be educated to a certain level might be a requirement of the state but in a liberal political order there are multiple options for educating young people and, to that extent, education counts as an activity of civil society. Economic activity, professional associations, religious organizations, leisure activities, the arts, and all manner of cultural activity count as elements of civil society. In a liberal political order persons have extensive liberty to participate in civil society in accord with their own interests, values, and preferences and participation in civil society can supply people with reasons to strive to preserve the liberal order.

When civil society is extensive, when people's lives are shaped in large part by voluntary association, decision, and activity, and the texture of the social world is largely spontaneous rather than commanded, individuals exercise voluntary, purposeful agency. This is so even if the spontaneity is

[18] The way in which I use the notion of civil society in this paper is strongly influenced by Edward Shils' treatment of the topic, especially in *The Virtue of Civility.*

informed by tradition, orderliness, and considerable predictability. Civil society in this sense is not a *thing*; it is a way of living. It is not possible without liberty and the converse is true, as well. Civil society is a mode of social and economic life in which a diversity of values is pursued and there is openness to changing patterns of interaction, shifting interests, and patterns of association but not necessarily a hurried pace of change. There is extensive scope for individual and group purposefulness but there is no overall 'plan'.

The values necessary for a flourishing civil society find some of their strongest cultural anchors in Biblical religion, even if their idiom in secular society fails to refer to that anchor. Edward Shils writes:

> Our appreciation of the value of the individual human being and of the value of his self-expression and self-protection is fundamentally an appreciation of the sacredness of his existence. That we call this appreciation self-evident is itself a product of a long tradition. The system of freedom – with its self-restraint of the powerful, its acknowledgment of the worth of other persons, its reluctance to submit to authority, and, above all, its aspiration to rational self-determination – can flourish only if it is permeated with a largely unreflective acceptance of these rules of the game of the free society.[19]

The more informed we are concerning religious roots of values, principles, and ideals we take to be fundamental, the more puzzling it sounds that religion – at least certain forms of it – should be thought *threatening* to liberal values. It is true that the language of a faith-tradition is not an idiom of value-neutrality. It is also true that much of the most important early modern political thought that led to the theory of the liberal state was motivated by the horrors of religious warfare and spectacular sectarian violence and cruelty. However, religion is not a uniquely accountable motive for civil war and neighbour slaughtering neighbour, and despite the sorry historical record it remains true that many of the fundamental values of the liberal polity have religious roots and are sustained by religious commitment.

Theistic considerations figure centrally in some of the most important moral/intellectual history by which we have become able to articulate politically fundamental values. In addition, the values and the traditions can be understood in such a way that their particularity is not necessarily

[19] Edward Shils, *The Virtue of Civility*, Ed. by Steven Grosby (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1997), p. 110.

in conflict with universal validity. The particularism of a tradition can be a way in which the vitality and significance of values is preserved. That elements of tradition remain living convictions for many people is not, in its own right, evidence of the dubious rationality or narrow-mindedness of such people. It is not as though, in the political context, the choice is between public reason on the one hand, and religion and tradition on the other, as mutually exclusive, antithetical possibilities.

It is vitally important to be able to articulate one's rationale for political judgments and positions in a manner intelligible to others. However, any putative notion of public reason will almost surely limit and constrain political discourse in a needlessly presumptive manner. Forgoing a standard of public reason does not mean abandoning a concern to support one's views on grounds aspiring to intelligibility and even objectivity. There may be multiple pathways to objective values and to principles meriting universal endorsement. Diverse, particular traditions can be sources of objective, universal values. Rootedness in a tradition is not, as such, a basis for concluding that the values in question are wholly 'domesticated' to that tradition, relative to it, having validity and significance only for it.[20] Traditions can encourage a disposition of civility and an interest in mutual understanding without ceasing to be particular, historically individuated traditions with special significance to their adherents.

Discussing ways in which tradition can develop and be responsive through reason while having roots in particular origins, MacIntyre writes:

> For such a tradition, if it is to flourish at all, as we have already learned, has to be embodied in a set of texts which function as the authoritative point of departure for tradition-constituted enquiry and which remain

[20] In recent moral philosophy it would be unsurprising to find that tradition is given an important role in moral epistemology and moral life by persons defending relativism. If one denies that there are objective or universal moral values, then a focus on tradition could be an important way of explaining a society or a culture's morality. Its morality would be domesticated to the values and the norms the society happens to accept, and tradition could be a way of preserving moral perspectives and the coherence of the group's moral view. However, there is this other way of regarding tradition, namely, understanding it as a mode of *access* to objective moral value rather than being what is relied upon in the *absence* of objective value. If there are objective moral values but our comprehension of them is not via self-evidence, intuition or the *a priori*, then tradition can be an important way of educating persons in the habits and practices that are a basis for coming to comprehend those values. That is one of the main ways in which tradition can be related to a realist or objective conception of moral values.

> as essential points of reference for enquiry and activity, for argument, debate, and conflict within that tradition.[21]

The embedding, the anchoring, should not be presumed to thwart critical considerations and interaction with others. Tradition can be open to historical development and to elaboration via encounter. Tradition need not be the enemy of criticism, engagement with other traditions and views, and reflective self-assessment. It is easy to overlook the fact that when we refer to 'the Jewish tradition' or 'the Catholic tradition', for example, we are almost certainly referring to multiple traditions exhibiting differences of practice and to some extent differences in belief and commitment.[22] Perhaps certain founding texts, historical particulars, and theological doctrines are essential to being recognizable as 'the Jewish tradition' or 'the Catholic tradition'. But a tradition that is not hysterically defensive – even if it is committed to certain dogmas – need not be closed to rational, critical interaction, and to development.

Earlier, I mentioned that there is a debate over whether Jewish moral thought is properly interpreted as including or being a version of natural law.[23] Perhaps, outside fairly small academic circles that debate is of

[21] Alisdair MacIntyre, *Whose Reason? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), p. 383.

[22] The expression, 'Judeo-Christian tradition' is used rather freely in discussions of the morality of the West or of the United States or Atlantic civilization, and the like. In fact, Judaism and Christianity differ in some significant respects. The place of theology in Christianity suggests some of the differences. Judaism does not have a dogmatic, doctrinal core in the same manner as Christianity, and theology does not have a role in Judaism in the way it does in Christianity. Also, the understanding of divine graciousness and what is involved in redemption, both its character and the means of it, differ in important ways. Yet, there are significant, shared elements and of course, Christians regard the *New Testament* as having essential roots and anticipations in *Tanakh*, read as *Old Testament* (with some changes in contents and order of texts). There are fundamentally important aspects of moral overlap regarding Judaism and Christianity; that is not to be denied. Still, it is not the case that the religions are so similar, and that the relationship between human beings and God is so similar, that it makes unproblematic good sense to refer to them together as 'the Judeo-Christian tradition' as though each differs from the other only in certain details.

[23] There is a growing literature on the question of whether Jewish moral thought, and especially medieval thought, should be interpreted as including or resembling natural law theorizing. David Novak's *Natural Law in Judaism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), has been an important contribution to the debate. I criticize his view and argue for interpreting medieval Jewish moral thought as *not* involving natural law in 'Judaism and Natural Law', *The Heythrop Journal* (2009), pp. 930-947. See also, chapters six and seven of *Law, Reason, and Morality in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford

little interest. It is important, though, as an illustration of something of possibly wide significance, even if explicit interest in it is not widely shared. It involves different religious traditions and important currents of secular thought in a manner that is an occasion for all participants to more articulately understand the other parties to the debate and in the course of doing so, more articulately and critically appreciate their own traditions and views. The conduct of the debate does not require the prior formulation of a fully defined standard of reason. The commitment to reason and reasonableness in a much broader, more informal sense, and to civility are sufficient. Discussants can enter into the debate genuinely only because they are already disposed to a combination of conviction and openness.

Much of the significance of the debate over natural law turns on the ways that different traditions understand the reasons for certain moral judgments and principles. It is not a 'merely' academic debate; it concerns action-guiding considerations of real relevance. Such a debate requires a high degree of intellectual and moral self-awareness, something quite the opposite of dogmatic intransigence. Granted, it may be much less problematic to attain dialectical civility in a scholarly or intellectual context than in a political context. (Well, maybe.) But the debate illustrates how traditions can be committed to the universality of numerous significant values, and can be open to learning how other traditions understand the grounds of those values and their implications for the business of living. The interaction of traditions can reinforce the disposition of civility and can contribute to ethical education.

The recent history of dialogue between the Abrahamic monotheistic faiths and the recognition that there is significant overlap between them regarding many fundamental values is encouraging evidence that thoughtful, morally serious persons can find ways for religious

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University Press, 2010). I distinguish the metaethics of a conception of Jewish tradition from the metaethics of practical wisdom and of natural law, while acknowledging significant overlap between the Maimonidean conception of tradition, practical wisdom, and natural law. The chief point is that the particularities of a tradition can be a mode of access to objective, universally valid ethical judgments. It is likely that a great many people come to endorse values that are universally valid (or at least have a plausible claim to universal validity) through learning moral concepts and familiarity with paradigm cases within the contexts of particular traditions. Moral education in objective, universal values does not have to be achieved (and is probably rarely achieved) through abstract considerations 'uncontaminated' with the concrete particularities of specific traditions.

commitment to expand the disposition of civility. One of the chief gains from this is that a much more articulate fluency with value-pluralism will be achieved, hopefully displacing the brittle compartmentalization that characterizes 'multiculturalism' in its currently prevalent forms. The religious traditions can provide a socially significant example of how a common core of anchoring values can support multiple forms of expression and a diversity of practices promoting common goods.

One of the chief obstacles to this is the way that so much recent political thought – in the name of liberal neutrality – has excluded religiously grounded considerations from public political discourse in a manner that has helped render people inarticulate with respect to a rich vocabulary of value and silenced certain forms of expression of moral conviction. Much more would be gained by political discourse that provided more opportunities for people to learn about each other (and themselves) by permitting much more open expressions of religion. This could be helpful by making it necessary for people to negotiate conflicts of value, concern, and interest by understanding each other's valuative idioms and their reasons for their commitments. If people are not given a chance to demonstrate the respects in which their religious commitments are amenable to rational support and articulation it is very likely that mutual suspicion and ignorance will remain the prevailing modus operandi regarding the role of religion in politics.

Perhaps both political and epistemic benefits can flow from the fact that multiple traditions can commend and encourage similar values while maintaining their distinctive cultural features. There would be possibilities of constructive interaction between traditions, efforts at elaboration and response to difficult cases and to objections and critique, and civil society could include educative cultural 'traffic' between diverse groups while accommodating many of their differences. There are ways in which the different traditions participating in a pluralistic society can be gainers from it rather than constantly at risk of 'dilution'. Interacting – practically and intellectually – with others' traditions can be a way of enlarging and adding depth and texture to one's own moral understanding through seeing how different narratives, images, and foci of concern can anchor valuative commitments. Tradition can be valuable for supplying stability of reference to moral ideas as those ideas are elaborated, extended, and revised in response to new kinds of cases relevant to them.[24]

In Judaism, Christianity, and Islam considerable thought has gone into engaging with the moral and social issues faced in the contemporary world, including matters of medical ethics, criminal justice, education, and other issues. This is not to say that in each tradition a single, normatively authoritative voice speaks for it. The reality is much more interestingly complex than that. The point is that a liberal polity could gain by permitting that multiplicity of voices to participate in the common discourse of politics, instead of compartmentalizing and restricting it in ways that are impediments to people learning from each other. Differences over eschatology and over the metaphysics of redemption need not be translated directly into an inability to jointly address issues with substantial valuative dimensions. Religious traditions, with their long practice at connecting the realities of actual historical circumstances with permanent, enduring ideals could prove to be sources of considerable help.

There is no question that religious traditions are often embraced and defended in ways that are hostile to any doubt or challenge. But that is because of the content and character of *those* traditions, and not simply because they are traditions or simply because they are *religious*. A tradition can value rational reflection and criticism, and can be responsive to challenges, hard questions, and new situations. A tradition is not, as such, necessarily closed to fruitful interaction or dogmatically sealed off from reflective criticism. A tradition can be a *rational* tradition without claiming a monopoly on rationality, without stubbornly refusing to be open to criticism and to being informed by ideas and sources external to it. A religious tradition can be rational in how it is elaborated and articulated, even if it is rooted in claims of revelation. Having that origin is not automatically a mark against the rationality of those for whom religion is a source of living conviction, a guide to right conduct, and to how to engage with others with different beliefs and commitments.

[24] Anchoring points in tradition may not always supply a kind of fixity or clarity of the values at issue. Some anchoring points are important because of the perplexity they motivate, generation after generation. Consider, for instance, the Akedah or Job, and also the moral imperfections of individuals such as Jacob and David. In those cases, tradition motivates moral thought, the testing of moral imagination, and the need for experiments in insight because of the difficulty and morally equivocal aspects of individuals and acts. This is a kind of stability of reference, not to paradigmatic moral resolution or certainty but to enduringly challenging moral difficulty.

Thinkers in the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions have formulated conceptions of how rational aspiration could be a central element of Abrahamic monotheism. I am not suggesting that Maimonides, Aquinas, and Alfarabi, for instance, are directly relevant to contemporary politics. Nor am I suggesting that their views of their respective religious traditions should be normative. The point is the more general one that it is a mistake, and an illiberal burden upon religion, to assume that the rational intelligibility of political discourse requires the exclusion of religiously grounded considerations. There is a rich history of interpenetration of those traditions and of influences flowing in multiple directions. At the same time, they share some fundamental values and commitments, and there is a solid, anchoring basis for mutual respect and a continuing dialectic of moral engagement with each other, along with enlarged self-understanding attained through responsiveness to those values and commitments.

Excluding religiously grounded considerations from political discourse is likely to impede civil interaction and mutual understanding. In doing so, it only makes interaction between different views less educative, more guarded, and less trusting. It shuts out a sphere of rational interaction and thereby diminishes civil society. This presupposes rather considerable virtues on the part of religious persons. But why should we start out by thinking that those virtues are less likely to be characteristics of religious persons?[25]

[25] A version of this paper was originally presented in Berlin, at a Workshop for the Analytic Theology Project, generously funded by the John Templeton Foundation. I am very grateful to the Foundation and to the organizers of the Workshop.

RESPONDING TO THE RELIGIOUS REASONS OF OTHERS: RESONANCE AND NON-REDUCTIVE RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

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Abstract. Call a belief 'non-negotiable' if one cannot abandon the belief without the abandonment of one's religious (or non-religious) perspective. Although non-negotiable beliefs can logically exclude other perspectives, a non-reductive approach to religious pluralism can help to create a space within which the non-negotiable beliefs of others that contradict one's own non-negotiable beliefs can be appreciated and understood as playing a justificatory role for the other. The appreciation of these beliefs through cognitive resonance plays a crucial role to enable the understanding of those who hold other perspectives. Epistemological and spiritual consequences of this claim are explored.

INTRODUCTION: NON-REDUCTIVE RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

In the philosophy of religion, the phrase 'religious pluralism' is used with a number of definitions that differ both in content and in precision. Just for starters, one may distinguish the following types of religious pluralism: soteriological, normative, epistemological, alethic, and deontological.[1] In each case, there is some value, respectively: salvation, recognition, knowledge, truth, the fulfilment of religious duties, which are considered by the pluralist to be available to the adherents of a plurality of religious beliefs. Then there are questions about how wide the plurality of religious beliefs to which these values are accorded is taken to extend. There is also a difference between *degree* pluralisms and *equality* pluralisms. Equality pluralists claim that all the adherents of any of the faiths included in

[1] See Legenhausen (2005); (2006); (2009).

the plurality of denominations over which a type of pluralism is defined are equal with regard to the value that defines that type of pluralism. Finally, we come to the difference between reductive and non-reductive pluralisms. Reductive pluralists claim that there are some common factors among a plurality of religions by virtue of which these religions have the value that defines a type of pluralism. Non-reductive pluralists, to the contrary, claim that the factors that give some value to different traditions may differ from one another.

Over the course of some years, I have defended a form of *non-reductive soteriological religious pluralism*,[2] a view inspired by the work of the Shiʿite scholar and martyr Murtaḍā Mutahharī.[3] The defence has been both philosophical and theological. Philosophically, there are two arguments, one moral and one based on the implausibility of exclusivist claims. The moral argument is that it is wrong to hold that those outside one's own denomination are bound for eternal damnation because this sort of belief violates moral norms. Norms that favour the recognition of the value of different traditions can also support the claim that what is distinctively valuable in each tradition deserves recognition. The other argument is that the exclusivist belief lacks credibility if it holds that there is a God who is omnibenevolent and omnipotent, but who condemns to perdition those who through no fault of their own do not belong to one's denomination. Furthermore, it may be argued that it is similarly implausible to believe that there is an omnibenevolent omnipotent God who does not recognize the distinctive merits found in different traditions. This argument is related to the theological argument, based on the assumption of principles of Islamic theology, that God is merciful and does what He wills, from which we may conclude that God would not punish people for beliefs for which they are not culpable, and furthermore, that He could guide different groups of people by what is specific to them, even when such specifics cannot all be combined in a consistent way, and even if we hold that the alternatives to Islam through which He may guide people are in various ways inferior to Islam. The trope of the spiritual path might be adapted to suggest that even those on what we consider to be the wrong path may be guided by markers specific to that path to prevent them from certain kinds of catastrophes.

[2] This was begun in a series of articles culminating in Legenhausen (1999); and the most recent publication in defence of this view is Legenhausen (2013).

[3] Mutahharī (1978: 352 ff.). (Note that standard diacritical marks for Arabic and Persian words have been altered to facilitate typesetting.)

Philosophically, it may be argued that we should not confine our notion of divine guidance to that which is available only within the confines of a given denomination; and theologically, Muslims should recognize such possibilities of divine guidance, and may consistently do so without compromising claims about the finality and universality of the mission of the Prophet Muhammad (ص).[4]

In what follows, I will consider how to view some epistemological issues concerning religious belief from the perspective of a non-reductive religious pluralism.

NON-REDUCTIVE RELIGIOUS EPISTEMOLOGY: JUSTIFICATION

Any epistemic value (such as knowledge, certainty, reliability) can be used to generate a form of epistemic religious pluralism according to which the value is to be found across denominational boundaries. I will defend the plausibility of versions of non-reductive epistemic pluralism with regard to epistemic justification, trust, and understanding. Most important is understanding, because it affords a kind of passage across conflicting beliefs through which we can appreciate how beliefs we do not accept function in the doxastic practices of others. My thesis with regard to justification is only that there are some appropriate senses of epistemic justification with respect to which epistemic peers[5] may belong to different denominations, hold contradictory non-negotiable beliefs, and may be justified in holding these beliefs, despite mutual recognition and availability of evidence. With regard to epistemic trust, I will argue that there are kinds of epistemic trust that we can have in others with whom we have fundamental disagreements.

Sextus Empiricus (*c.* 160-210) wrote: 'Different people have different and discordant beliefs about the gods, so that neither are all of them to be trusted, because of their inconsistency, nor some of them, because of their equipollence (ἰσοσθένεια, *isostheneia*).'[6] There are several points in this passage that are relevant to contemporary philosophical controversies about religious disagreement: first, contrary to Sextus,

[4] A salutation upon the Prophet Muhammad and his progeny is abbreviated with the Arabic letter: ص.

[5] In what follows, I will say that S_1 and S_2 are *epistemic peers* when neither is significantly inferior to the other with regard to the proper functioning of cognitive faculties and epistemic virtues, including general intelligence, conscientiousness, and logical acumen. See Gelfert (2011).

[6] *Adv. Math.* bk. IX, 192, cited in Rescher (1985: 224, n. 6).

some have claimed that the inconsistency among religious views is only apparent;[7] second, some claim, like Sextus, that the opposition among views leads them to cancel one another out (*isostheneia*), while others deny this;[8] and third, there is the issue of trust, whether the parties to sustained disagreement are worthy of trust.[9]

In order to elucidate a non-reductivist position on religious disagreement, it will be instructive to contrast it with the views of Peter van Inwagen.[10] First, van Inwagen thinks that I am within my 'ethico-epistemic' rights to base my beliefs on incommunicable insights and experience, and to believe that such incommunicables can give one an epistemic edge in philosophical disagreements. It is part of van Inwagen's argument to allow for rational disagreement based on the idea that disputing peers use up their communicable reasons by a mutual disclosure of information, and then differ by the incommunicable part that is left over. It is more likely that they disagree on the evaluation of many pieces of evidence and inferences drawn from them, and that attempts to get to the bottom of these disagreements will only reveal further disagreements. Through the process of dialogue and disagreement, there can occur a modification of positions, even when neither side is willing to consider giving up non-negotiable beliefs. If S_1 and S_2 disagree about some set of doctrines, Δ, such that their positions on the truth values of the elements of Δ are non-negotiable, then although S_1 and S_2 will not change their truth value assignments to the members of Δ after dialogue, they may come to reinterpret some of those elements, and to revise supporting beliefs that fall outside of Δ.[11] Giving reasons for our beliefs is not a simple matter of displaying the evidence we have. When we give reasons we construct complex arguments in support of our positions, and in doing so we reflect upon and revise our views of whatever evidence becomes available, including our understanding of why others disagree.

Second, religious beliefs are a complex mix of beliefs about what ought to be done, beliefs about the supernatural, and beliefs about how these various kinds of beliefs and religious practices relate to a community,

[7] See Hick (1989) and Nasr (1985). I criticize these views in Legenhausen (1999).

[8] See Feldman and Warfield (2010), and Jäger and Löffler (2011) and (2012).

[9] See Foley (2001) and Zagzebski (2012).

[10] See van Inwagen (1996).

[11] For a theory of theological reasoning that draws on the notion of a research program as developed by Imre Lakatos, see Murphy (1990) and in Persian, Nasiri (2003).

and how they serve to put one in relation to God. It is not credible to expect reasonable decisions about what one ought to believe in such matters to be made simply by examination of the implications of some body of evidence, even if the evidence base is expanded to include incommunicable insights. Religious systems of belief, like general political outlooks and comprehensive philosophical views include practical as well as theoretical dimensions, each of which is multifaceted. Such beliefs are justified when they form an integrated worldview that enables one to arrive at explanations and decisions and serve as a framework in which to gain further insight and understanding.[12] Judging the overall merits of such systems of belief, outlooks, and views can be carried out rather well in different ways, resulting in inconsistencies among the beliefs that are incorporated in different systems.

Third, van Inwagen frames the problem of persistent disagreement as one between two individuals who draw conclusions from shared evidence plus incommunicable insights. However, epistemic attitudes are not justified by inference alone, but through the process of defending one's positions and arguing against alternatives. One does not engage in this process alone. Positions are defended by a large group of people who investigate, research, and make judgments. It may be appropriate for me to take a stand on an issue, with epistemic justification, even though I admit lack of expertise, on the basis of what I have been able to understand, and the trust I have in the work of others.

In sum, I believe that the idea that the proponents of opposing sides of controversial issues can always just sit down and disclose their evidence to one another to reach agreement is a kind of philosophical fantasy. Of course, in some fairly straightforward cases an examination of the evidence might suffice to bring about consensus among those who are rational; but in more complex cases of disagreements in such areas as religion, philosophy, economics, and politics, the way in which one reasons about an issue according to a generally reliable doxastic practice may justify taking a stance other than suspension (or revision) of belief – even though there are others who are at least one's peers and who disagree.[13]

When faced with disagreement, even persistent disagreement, one often looks for more reasons. Reasons are not used up when evidence

[12] See Löffler (2006), ch. 5, and Muck (1999: 101-105).

[13] See Oppy (2010: 197-198).

is shared. When faced with disputes in the humanities and the natural sciences, we rationally respond to disagreements by trying to find errors and merits, stronger and weaker lines of argumentation, and by reformulating our positions. Sometimes this work leads to a dead end, not only personally, but for the bulk of those engaged in what Lakatos called a 'research programme'.[14] Then the program is abandoned, and belief is suspended until another program is found that seems promising and for which there is good reason to think it will be successful. But as long as the program is advancing, one may have reason to trust its assumptions, even in the face of stiff competition.

What justifies one's beliefs is not just a body of evidence, but also what William Alston has described as good *doxastic practice*.[15] When one forms beliefs in accordance with a generally reliable policy, one is justified in holding those beliefs. There is no unique doxastic practice that is recognized as being most reliable. Opposing parties might adhere to doxastic practices that are equally reliable (or which appear to each of them to be most reliable), but which result in the acceptance of beliefs by the parties that cannot be conjoined without contradiction. When we discover that another party is following a reliable practice that yields results that contradict our own, suspension of belief might have disastrous consequences to one's doxastic practice, for since overall reliability is a matter of having a significant proportion of true beliefs as well as the avoidance of error, the policy of suspending belief when faced with peer disagreement might result in a policy that lacks coherence, or that forces us to suppress our natural desire for truth.[16]

An epistemic non-reductive pluralist with regard to the justification of religious belief will hold: first, that there may be epistemic peers with contradictory religious beliefs; second, that the reasons that justify the different beliefs will differ, and even the standards of rationality to which appeal is made in the justification of these beliefs may differ;[17] and, third, that it may be rational to remain steadfast in one's beliefs despite the recognition of persistent peer disagreement.[18] To elaborate this position further, we need to consider the issue of trust.

[14] See Lakatos (1970). For related discussion see D'Costa (1993) and Enoch (2010: 963).

[15] See Alston (1991), ch. 4.

[16] See Zagzebski (2012: 45); and Lam (2011).

[17] See MacIntyre (1988) and D'Costa (1993).

NON-REDUCTIVE RELIGIOUS EPISTEMOLOGY: TRUST

At the midpoint of his drama of ideas of 1779, *Nathan the Wise (Nathan der Weise),* Gotthold Ephraim Lessing presents a discussion about religion between the Sultan, Saladin (Arabic: *Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn*), and a Jewish merchant, Nathan. The Sultan asks Nathan how to find the truth about religion. Nathan responds with the famous story of the three rings from the *Decameron*. In the course of telling the story, the Sultan becomes impatient, and Nathan responds that conflicting religious beliefs are due to different beliefs about history.

> Do not all [the religions] ground themselves in history?
> Written or transmitted! And
> history must indeed be accepted solely on trust
> and faith? – No? –
> Now, in whom do we place our trust and faith
> with the least doubt? Surely, in our own people?
> Those of whose blood we are?[19]

I think that there is something profound in Lessing's reflections, but also something wrong. What is profound is the role that trust plays in religious belief, especially with regard to the acceptance of sacred history. Furthermore, and most urgently for our discussion, with regard to many areas of concern to us, we do not find that those with whom we share blood ties are the least dubious in their opinions. In politics we trust the opinions found in our party more than those of our own fathers and mothers. A non-reductive pluralism about the value of trustworthiness, would emphasize the fact that we often have reason to trust others because of features that are peculiar to them. Indeed, in the normal everyday cases in which we put our trust in others, it is because they have an ability or some knowledge we lack. Likewise, it may be that my self-trust with regard to religious beliefs is not based on trust in the general faculties common to all humanity, but on the particular doxastic practices that I employ in this area. There need be no epistemic presumption in favour of the veridicality of the deliverances of the faculties of other persons on religion, given that they employ very different kinds of doxastic practices, even if in other areas they are

[18] See MacIntyre (2009), who argues that a position may be rationally vindicated although intelligent people opposed to the position may remain steadfast in their opposition.

[19] Lessing (1779: 132).

judged to be epistemic peers. The similarity of the general faculties in the self and others may not be sufficient for other's beliefs to yield even a *prima facie* reason for accepting the other's belief, unless there is reason to think that we are utilizing the same doxastic practices.[20]

Knowing that an astrologer is extremely conscientious in calculating the positions of the planets, and is careful to draw appropriate inferences according to astrological principles will not increase my trust in the predictions of the astrologer, even if the astrologer displays cognitive virtues that (in part) provide me with reason to trust myself. Hence, the cognitive virtues alone do not provide a sufficient ground for trust, but must be coupled with other factors, such as the rejection of principles that are not tenable in the light of modern science or other central elements to one's worldview.

In Linda Zagzebski's treatment of issues related to epistemic authority and trust, she also concludes that people might have reason to trust in the doctrines of their own community rather than in the beliefs of conscientious people of another community on issues over which the communities have differing teachings. Zagzebski takes this to stem from the fact that a person may have reason to trust the community to which they belong more than that of the other person.[21] This brings us back to the point made by Nathan in Lessing's drama.

Zagzebski contends that when different communities can find shared beliefs, this can serve as a basis for trust between communities.[22] Here we need to distinguish between trusting in a community because we are epistemically justified in thinking that they have true beliefs and trusting in a community for practical reasons, e.g., because the community will provide a good social environment for us. The fact that a community provides a healthy social environment for its members due to human experiences, moral qualities, and background beliefs that are shared with my community does not give me reason to trust that the other community would provide a good social environment for me. So, similar practical goals can be used to justify conflicting allegiances. Likewise, even if epistemic virtues and powers are exhibited by two communities equally, I may have reason to believe that one community's beliefs are true on matters over which they disagree. Trusting in the virtues and

[20] See Zagzebski (2012: 214).
[21] See Zagzebski (2012: 221-228).
[22] Zagzebski (2012: 222).

talents of one side in a dispute when the virtues and talents are displayed on the other side as well may be practically justified, but it will not necessarily provide epistemic justification or practical justification for accepting a belief. For epistemic justification, there is no other recourse but to engage in the practice of examining the reasons that can be offered in support of one's beliefs. But the recognition of intellectual honesty and ability in another community may provide epistemic justification for yet another kind of epistemic trust: trust that the other community will conscientiously employ its own doxastic practices. We may thus find (at least) three ways in which a community may be trusted: (1) one may trust a community to come up with true beliefs; (2) one may trust a community in some practical affairs, e.g., to issue honest statements, to provide a secure social environment for its members, to negotiate fairly; (3) one may trust a community to employ its own doxastic practices in a reflectively conscientious manner. Trusting a community in any of these ways may be either practically or epistemically justified. We might have good evidence for trustworthiness of a community in any of these senses; or we may find moral or political reasons for extending one or more types of trust.

The non-reductive point to be made here is that we need not trust others only on the basis of finding in the others that which gives us reason to trust ourselves. For example, I might trust the literature on alienation written by Marxists to provide a kind of guide to the relevant issues and debates, even if I do not accept the major conclusions Marxists draw from these discussions, reject the main philosophical principles on which the analysis is based, and even while I hope to find a better view of the issue that is consistent with Islamic traditions of thinking.

Faced with peer disagreement, Zagzebski offers several reasons for engaging with other communities: Through such engagement we may become aware of errors; presuppositions may come to be recognized; reasons may be considered of which one was unaware, or of whose significance one was unaware. All of this seems to be beyond dispute. What is disputable, however, is the foremost reason that Zagzebski gives for engaging with those with whom we disagree, which she describes as a rational principle:

> *Need to Resolve Conflict Principle:*
> It is a demand of rationality for a community to attempt to resolve putative conflicts between its beliefs and the beliefs of other communities.[23]

While there are a number of very good reasons for engaging with other communities with which we disagree, this Need to Resolve Conflict Principle is dubious. It is extremely unlikely that our various religious communities are ever going to agree on all their religious beliefs. Given that we are not going to come to any such agreement, there can be no demand of rationality to achieve it.

In the field of conflict studies, which concerns itself with practical social and political conflicts, especially armed conflicts, and not logical or epistemological conflicts, the Mennonite scholar John Paul Lederach has developed a theory of conflict transformation[24] whose arguments may, with suitable adjustments, be a source for insights in the epistemology of disagreement. Just as the parties to a political conflict might have good reason to remain steadfast in their commitments to their value systems, even when this results in conflict, likewise, given that we operate with different doxastic practices that may be fairly reliable overall, so that reliance on these practices is epistemically justified, rationality cannot demand that the parties to the conflict give up their commitments by withholding belief on disputed issues, or by accommodation or compromise.

Lederach argues that there are cases in which parties to a social conflict are not prepared to withdraw their claims, and they may feel that doing so would amount to abandoning legitimate demands. This leads to suspicion that attempts at conflict resolution would result in injustice. Conflict transformation is proposed as a strategy for recognizing that a conflict is not going to disappear while transforming it in such a manner that it becomes less harmful. Likewise, in cases of philosophical conflicts of beliefs, it may be that neither side could abandon its basic stances without destroying the philosophical doxastic practices each had developed. The philosophical conflict may be considered to be harmful when each side can do little more than undermine the doxastic practices of the other. What the parties to a scientific dispute can do, however, and what they are professionally and rationally obliged to do, is to consider the arguments and refine their positions in response. As Lederach explains, a transformational approach allows us to see conflict as an opportunity for constructive change. So, the members of one community might learn to trust members of another community as conscientious critics

[23] Zagzebski (2012: 224).

[24] See Lederach (2003).

and partners in constructive dialogue, even when the partners to the dialogue know in advance that fundamental disagreements will remain.

NON-REDUCTIVE RELIGIOUS EPISTEMOLOGY: UNDERSTANDING

Understanding, like justification, is not merely being in the possession of information, but it requires the ability to respond appropriately to questions about what is understood, especially when the questions are unexpected. Understanding a position or a view implies knowing how the position or view is to be applied in various circumstances, and knowing its strengths and weaknesses. I am concerned with the nonfactive sense of *understanding*, which is the kind of understanding that can occur when one understands things that may or may not be true, and about which one might not have any belief.[25] So, one might understand a proposition, say, some formulation of the principle of sufficient reason, or a theory, such as Cartesian dualism, without subscribing to them. In Iran, it is often said that Shahid Mutahhari understood Marxism better than most Marxists.

Nonfactive understanding provides a way of overcoming the logical exclusion of contradictory beliefs in the sense that I can understand different positions that are not consistent with one another. Given several rival theories that are pairwise inconsistent, I can understand all of them while believing in at most one of them.

One can believe with insufficient justification or with insufficient understanding. A tendency to either is an epistemic vice. One who tends to believe without sufficient justification is deficient in rationality; one who tends to believe without sufficient understanding is deficient in wisdom. Wisdom presupposes rationality; but one may be rational without being very wise.

Both rationality and wisdom come in degrees. Beliefs are held more rationally when they are better supported by reasons that justify them and when there is greater integrity in the worldview of which they are a part. Religious views are held with greater wisdom when one has a deeper understanding of the creed and religious laws one accepts.

Justification and understanding are both epistemic values, and both of them are directed toward truth (even nonfactive understanding). I seek to have well justified beliefs in order to avoid error and to raise the likelihood that my beliefs will be true. I seek to understand theories, texts, people

[25] For more on factive and nonfactive types of understanding, see Elgin (2007), Elgin (2009), and Kvanvig's replies to Elgin in Haddock *et al* (2009: 342-343).

and events in order to avoid making errors about them, coming to have false beliefs about them, and in order to arrive at truths related to them. If I want to understand Marxism, I seek to gain a true understanding of this philosophical and social movement, but it is not necessary for me to take Marxist theory as providing a true account of surplus value or that I give any practical allegiance to the social movement.

Despite the shortcomings that understanding without acceptance or belief may have, it provides the sole instrument capable of overcoming the barriers that arise between two people or two communities that hold non-negotiable conflicting beliefs. Of course, there are other ways to overcome barriers, such as personal friendships. However, understanding provides the sole rational means to achieving an *epistemological* appreciation of the justifiability of the beliefs of others that are in contradiction with our own. Furthermore, even practical means, such as friendship, require understanding if they are to achieve cognitive depth.

Understanding takes place through dialogue, according to Gadamer. The emphasis on dialogue can help us to bring out the contrast between justification and understanding. In dialogue for justification, we seek to defend our own views and to defeat views that are inconsistent with our own by showing that our views have better rational support than their rivals. In dialogue for understanding, we seek to explore how others think about issues and to reveal to others the ways in which we reason about them. In dialogue of justification, we seek to identify agreed standards to which appeal can be made in contesting our views. In dialogue of understanding, we seek to identify common ground, or areas of agreement, in order to provide entry to alien territory. Both kinds of dialogue involve risk. In dialogue of justification, there is the risk of defeat, of losing the debate. In dialogue of understanding, the risk is that one will change in ways that are not expected, and perhaps are undesired. The changes will involve either or both one's understanding of the other and one's self-understanding.

One can only engage in the enterprise of seeking understanding through dialogue by relying on one's own epistemic situation, one's relation to intellectual traditions, and one's presumptions and prejudices. One does not arrive at understanding merely by deriving conclusions based on presumptions and evidence, however, but by engaging in the dialogic practice of seeking and offering reasons and criticisms. One of the most prominent themes in Gadamer's hermeneutics is that the particular standpoint or *horizon* (*Horizont*) from which one attempts

to gain understanding, including one's prejudices, is not merely a factor that limits understanding, but is the means by which understanding is gained. Through dialogue, one may seek to gain understanding of another person's religious views; and in the course of this dialogue, one will also come to identify one's own prejudices and reform them when they are found to lead to distortions. Hence, in seeking to understand others, we must be ready to gain new understanding of ourselves. Although there is no escape from one's horizon, horizons are not static, but change in response to dialogue. Gadamer speaks of understanding as a 'fusion of horizons' (*Horizontverschmelzung*) or a 'transposing' of ourselves.[26]

Gadamer rejects any analysis of understanding in terms of empathy because he considers this to be limited to a first-personal psychological phenomenon. In her work on empathy, however, Edith Stein was careful to reject any purely psychological view of empathy.[27] For her, the problem of empathy was essentially epistemological. Stein maintains that in empathetic understanding, it is not necessary for one to have the feelings one understands in another. She begins with Husserl's recognition of empathy as the basis of all intersubjective experience, and explores the conditions that make empathy possible. She considers the dialogical nature of empathy as a process through which we may learn to understand ourselves as we seek to understand others, while admitting, with Scheler, that errors may occur in the process leading not only to misunderstandings of others but also of the self. Our efforts to avoid errors in self-understanding and the understanding of others requires us to continually shift perspectives from our own first-person standpoint to that of how we are perceived by others.[28]

Our task, however, is to attempt to understand the kinds of reasons that the followers of other religions have for their beliefs, especially when these beliefs logically exclude our own beliefs. For this project, considerations of empathy can only provide some clues, for we are concerned not so much with feelings but with reasons. At the same time, the language employed by Gadamer of the 'fusion of horizons' requires agreement, while our problem is how to reach understanding when there is intractable disagreement. Gadamer does not tell us how horizons can be fused when they have non-negotiable contradictory contents.

[26] Gadamer (2004: 304); Gadamer (1990: 310).

[27] Stein (2008: 33-35); Stein (1989: 21-22).

[28] See MacIntyre (2006: 83-85).

NON-REDUCTIVE RELIGIOUS EPISTEMOLOGY: RESONANCE

If two communities forge their identities with reference to conflicting non-negotiable intractable beliefs, must they be unintelligible to one another? If their beliefs are justified according to divergent standards and doxastic practices, does it become impossible to reach any understanding? In this section, I will sketch the optimistic defence of negative answers to these questions. The suggestions are presented through the metaphor of *resonance*.

Resonance is the opposite of dissonance. The notion of *cognitive dissonance* was introduced in psychology by Leon Festinger in the 1950s, who argued that people use various mechanisms in order to avoid or attenuate internal psychological conflicts.[29] Festinger's notion of dissonance included conflicts between feelings and beliefs, and not merely formal contradictions, and if we are to understand the beliefs of others, the emotional associations of the beliefs cannot be overlooked. By *resonance*, however, I do not intend a mere absence of dissonance. In ordinary language we say that certain kinds of advertisement resonate with customers and motivate them to make purchases. What is meant is not merely the removal of psychological obstacles but the arousing of a kind of acceptance that the customer feels toward the salesperson or the advertising message. The sales pitch is welcomed, both cognitively and emotionally.

Resonance need not be of the sort at which advertising aims. Acoustic resonance can be confined to a limited space. Each room is said to have its own resonant frequencies. A driving force of a resonant frequency can produce sustained high amplitude oscillations. Understanding occurs through dialogue when the conversation is able to produce sustained exchanges in which the parties to the dialogue are able to gain knowledge (or justified beliefs) about the topic of discussion, about their dialogue partners, and about themselves. In the process of such exchanges, opportunities for developing trust between the participants emerge. Regardless of the question of justification, resonance is needed for understanding. Resonance can be emotional or cognitive or both. Here I am concerned with cognitive resonance, or with the cognitive aspect of a phenomenon of resonance in which cognitive and emotional elements are inseparable.

[29] Festinger (1957).

Stein's discussions of shifting one's perspective[30] may be interpreted as special kind of a more general type of phenomenon of compartmentalization. We are able to compartmentalize our beliefs so as to have good discussions with teachers about the topics they teach, regardless of the differences we may have with them about politics or religion. The integration of what the student has learned with the rest of the student's network of beliefs and commitments is left to the student. Compartmentalization serves as a tool by means of which we can make use of inconsistent beliefs in our reasoning without incoherence: Inconsistent beliefs are relativized to their own compartments or perspectives. The American philosopher, Wilfrid Sellars, proposes this sort of strategy in response to the inconsistency he finds between what he calls 'the manifest image' and 'the scientific image'. Sellars suggests that although our ordinary pre-scientific view of the sensible world is inconsistent with the picture of the world that modern physics draws for us, we can bring the two together, not by immediately forging a 'synoptic vision', but through the coordination of our intentions.[31] Exactly how this is to be done, and whether it results in a kind of relativism are left unclear in Sellars' writings. Regardless of how these issues are to be sorted out, the strategy of compartmentalization and subsequent attempts at a stereoscopic view may prove practically valuable techniques in the pursuit of understanding.

Sometimes we gain theoretical expertise without subscribing to the theories we learn. One who rejects logical intuitionism may nevertheless gain an expertise in intuitionist systems of logic. There have been Orientalists who have gained a profound knowledge of Islam without becoming Muslims. Some of these Orientalists have gone much further than just gathering an enormous amount of information about Islam. Likewise, I know Muslims who have let the beliefs of Christian communities resonate with them without converting to Christianity or taking on an eclectic set of beliefs.

As Stein points out, one can empathize with the feeling of joy expressed by one's brother even though one does not have that feeling oneself, but one imagines how the brother feels; and this may even happen while one's own feelings are quite contrary to those with which one empathizes. So, I might feel annoyed at seeing our mother on a particular occasion,

[30] Stein (2008: 80-81); Stein (1989: 61-63).

[31] See Sellars (1971), ch. 1.

although that does not prevent me from empathizing with my brother's joy at seeing her. Something similar can happen at a more intellectual level. One may gain an appreciation of how a Marxist thinks about religion, even while maintaining that the Marxist view of religion is fundamentally flawed. I can allow the Marxist view to resonate within me, without accepting the view as my own. I can learn how Marxist views on religion fit into the bigger picture of Marxist philosophy and politics. I can even get to the point of knowing how Marxist views on religion may develop in the face of new challenges. I can come to appreciate how the view fits in Marxist doxastic practices.

While justified beliefs are necessary for knowledge, resonance is necessary for depth of understanding. Greater cognitive resonance makes for deeper understanding. Needless to say, resonance can be illusory. We can think that we know exactly how someone thinks about an issue, and be able to predict how the person will respond to some questions, but yet fail to correctly see how the beliefs in question fit into the other's worldview. So, just as there can be justified beliefs that turn out to be false, there can be cognitive resonance that accompanies misunderstanding.

A certain kind of parochialism occurs when we do not allow the beliefs of other groups to resonate with us. We refuse to understand them. Sometimes it is through a wilful stubbornness, but sometimes it is just innocent inability. We simply are unable to devote the time and energy needed to understand every group that seems to have members who are our epistemic peers but with whom we disagree. Part of understanding another is knowing what to expect, how they will respond and why. With some people, I draw a blank. Epistemic resonance is a kind of filling in the blank. One learns how the other reasons.

If my rejection of another belief is to have the fullest justification possible, and that belief is held by those whom I take to be epistemic peers, I will need to let their beliefs resonate with me before I can be sure that there is nothing in the view that I have rejected that would enable those who hold it to respond effectively to whatever objections I have to it. But achieving maximal justification is not the most important reason for seeking to let the beliefs of others resonate. We miss opportunities for self-understanding and for understanding others when we are focusing exclusively on where we agree and differ in our beliefs, and on debating strategies. Understanding is to be won through resonance, and not

merely by the elimination of conflicting beliefs. Indeed, in the absence of resonance misunderstanding can persist despite agreement.

In order for there to be successful resonance with a view, one must learn to navigate the space of reasons in the manner of those who are one's epistemic peers and who hold the view, that is, one must learn how they would judge cases and apply their view to various kinds of dialogue. One must learn what sorts of questions to ask, and how to respond to the questions and objections of others. This is not a matter of sharing feelings or beliefs. Navigational skills in foreign intellectual waters cannot be achieved by even the most sensitive kinds of empathy, for one can empathize with another's religious commitment, but be completely at a loss with regard to the other's theological position.

There are various strategies that might be employed in order to achieve cognitive resonance with the views of a group whose beliefs one does not share. First, one can imagine that one holds other beliefs. Even though I am not a Calvinist, for example, I can learn about Calvinism and use my powers of imagination to envision myself as a Calvinist. One can engage in various kinds of fictionalist strategies for the purpose of gaining understanding. Here, I will mention only two. First, I could pretend to be a Calvinist, but not to deceive anyone. I could tell my Calvinist friends that I was going to pretend to be a Calvinist in order to get to understand their theology so that I could pass an exam in religious studies, for instance. Second, I could suppress my true beliefs though a kind of *mentalis restrictio* or mental reservation. Mental reservation was a way to mitigate lying in situations in which the lie was justified by mentally adding words to what is spoken aloud so that the complete statement would be true, although what is heard would be untrue. As a strategy for resonance, the purpose is not to deceive, but to learn to reason as others do, when the others' reasoning is based on premises one rejects. So, instead of pretending to believe as Calvinists do, when I want to try to reason along with Calvinists, I could mentally preface my claims with 'If I were a Calvinist, I would believe that ...' or some such conditional.

An important technique for learning to resonate with views that conflict with our own is to begin with beliefs that we share with the others whom we seek to understand. The shared beliefs can serve as a basis from which we can begin to develop an appreciation of how another view may be imagined with its own integrity, different from one's own, yet sharing significant beliefs. Once a set of common or shared beliefs is identified,

the process of learning to resonate with the beliefs of others can take various forms. At one extreme, one can put aside or bracket one's own beliefs that fall outside the common set, and try to imagine how that set could be expanded in a reasonable way to yield the complete belief set of one's dialogue partner. Call this strategy *bracketing*. At the other extreme, one might attempt to attribute as many of one's own beliefs to the dialogue partner as possible and revise one's view of the partner only as needed to maintain integrity. Call this strategy *projection and revision*. Either of these methods, or a combination of them, is employed in ordinary conditions of attempting to learn about a view that we are not prepared to accept. Thus, if I want to learn to understand intuitionist logic, I will first identify the kinds of inference and axioms that intuitionist logic shares with the standard logic that I accept. Next, I will try to learn how the exclusively intuitionist beliefs can make sense in terms of the shared beliefs to form a consistent belief set. To gain a deeper understanding of how new forms of intuitionist logic may be developed, I will either draw upon my own previous beliefs to the extent that they can be adapted to the intuitionist views, or I will ignore my own previous beliefs and try to find other forms of intuitionist reasoning solely on the basis of what I have learned about intuitionism.

Using the bracketing strategy, I might imagine myself as an intuitionist, either through pretending or by mental reservation. Using the projection and revision strategy, I could imagine what it would take for me to actually become an intuitionist, how I could integrate intuitionist beliefs into my own belief set.

This process of learning to resonate with the views of another can achieve any of various degrees of success. In some cases, the success may be minimal. We may find ourselves to be incapable of understanding the other's view. I would not attempt to defend the view that resonance with views that we do not accept is necessary in order to be justified in rejecting them, although the highest degree of justification for the rejection of at least some views will require the kind of deep understanding of them that occurs when one allows oneself to resonate with them. Furthermore, in order to engage in dialogue with others whose beliefs I reject in a way that is conducive to mutual understanding, resonance will be necessary. By allowing resonance and deepening it, I can find truth, even in views that I reject – not that I will accept the view I reject as true, but I may find that the view includes truths in addition to the beliefs I consider to be incorrect. More importantly, by learning to use alien doxastic practices,

I may find ways in which to integrate aspects of these practices in my own in a coherent and fruitful manner.

NON-REDUCTIVE RELIGIOUS EPISTEMOLOGY: SCRIPTURAL REASONING

In the early 1990s, scholars of modern Jewish philosophy and Rabbinic texts began to meet together to develop an interdisciplinary approach to key questions about Judaism. The academic meetings that were held and their university forums, as well as the practice of study that evolved, came to be known as Textual Reasoning. In the mid-1990s, some Christian colleagues were invited to observe, and they suggested that the practice could serve as a model for interfaith dialogue. Later, Muslim scholars were also invited, and the result was dubbed 'Scriptural Reasoning' by Rabbi Peter Ochs.[32] The movement (commonly referred to as 'SR') has since sprouted various branches and Ochs also has founded an academic journal with the same name.[33] Scriptural Reasoning is a practice guided by views of mutual respect and the desire to understand others that resonates with non-reductive religious pluralism, particularly with regard to epistemological concerns, including the recognition of intractable differences and the promotion of wisdom and depth of understanding by learning how religious believers undertake *the practices of reasoning* about and on the basis of their scriptures in their own ways.

Other forms of dialogue continue to take place that focus on theology or philosophy instead of scripture, but that share in much of the non-reductive ethos of mutual respect and efforts to gain wisdom through the deeper understanding of the views of others. Most of these encounters have been between the adherents of different faith communities; but, in principle the general aims of mutual understanding and wisdom through the respectful attempt to learn the doxastic practices others use when they reason could be applied to groups and individuals beyond the Abrahamic tent.

In an interview in Qom, Ayatullah Ka'bi,[34] has interpreted the following verse of the Qur'an in an inclusive way. The verse specifically mentions the *People of the Book*, but the principle is more general:

[32] For an account of the origins of Scriptural Reasoning, see Ford (2006).

[33] *The Journal of Scriptural Reasoning*, available at: <etext.virginia.edu/journals/ssr/>.

[34] Abbas Ka'bi Nasab is a former member of the Guardian Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran. He currently holds a seat in the Assembly of Experts.

Muslims are enjoined to find shared beliefs on the basis of which they can enter into dialogue with others.

> Say: 'O People of the Book! Come to a common word between us and you, that we worship none but Allah, and that we associate no partners with Him, and that none of us shall take from among ourselves Lords aside from Allah.' Then, if they turn away, say: 'Bear witness that we are Muslims.' (3:64)

We are not to engage with others for the sake of disputing with them, but for dialogue. The shared basis from which we can begin dialogue with other monotheists is a commitment to the principles mentioned in the verse. If we are to engage with non-monotheistic dialogue partners, we should follow the same procedure of inviting them to participate with us in dialogue on the basis of shared commitments, which might be, for example, to strive for justice and the alleviation of oppression. It is important to notice that the 'common word' is only what serves for the invitation and initiation of dialogue.

For the Shī'ah, the need to engage with others on the basis of their own scriptures is found in narrations from the first and the last of the twelve Imams. It is reported that Imam 'Alī (ع)[35] publicly stated:

> [By Allah!][36] If I were given the cushion [the seat of judgment],[37] I would judge between the people of the Torah by their Torah, and between the people of the Gospel by their Gospel and between the people of the Qur'an by their Qur'an.[38]

In another narration, it is reported that Imam 'Alī (ع) said:

> If I were given the cushion [the seat of judgment], I would judge between the people of the Qur'an by the Qur'an so that it would glisten for Allah [or radiate to Allah], between the people of the Torah by the Torah so that it would glisten for Allah, between the people of the Gospel by the Gospel so that it would glisten for Allah, and between the people of the Psalms according to the Psalms so that it would glisten for Allah.[39]

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[35] The Shi'ah abbreviate the Arabic for 'peace be with him' after mentioning the Imams and certain other sacred figures by using the letter: ع.

[36] This phrase is omitted in some reports.

[37] Literally: 'If the cushion were unfolded for me.' The phrase is used to mean being provided with executive/judicial authority.

[38] al-Hilālī (2002: Vol. 2, 803), hadith 32; also Muntazir Qā'im (2005: 204-205).

[39] al-Safār al-Qummi (1984: 132). In this collection there is an entire chapter consisting of nine narrations similar to this, which is the first of them.

The narrations similar to these are so numerous that the Shiʿah consider the claim that Imam ʿAlī (ع) said words to this effect, and most likely on more than one occasion, to be *mutawātir*, that is, it is considered inconceivable that the content of the narration is untrue.

These reports are an important endorsement of the non-reductive perspective for three reasons. First, Imam ʿAlī (ع) claims that he would reason on the basis of the different scriptures, so that there is the engagement in reasoning to offer judgment based on each of the scriptures of the religious communities. Second, he is not to reason on the basis only of what is in agreement with the Qur'an, but on the basis of *their* Torah and *their* Gospel, that is, on the basis of the scriptures as accepted by their own communities of followers. Third, the fulfilment, blossoming, or radiant glistening of the scriptures is found through his recourse to them to issue judgments among their followers. According to the non-reductive epistemological pluralism I have sought to outline here, the following three corresponding points are to be noted: First, we are to seek understanding with others by learning to engage in their doxastic practices; second, we are not to attempt to reduce the views of others only to what we hold in common with them; and, third, each of the commitments of the faith communities to their scriptures may be found pleasing to God, without any need to claim that divine judgment is indifferent to their points of conflict.

These points receive further support in Shiʿi theology on the basis of another set of narrations according to which the Twelfth Imam (ع) will judge between the people of the various scriptures by their scriptures when he emerges from occultation.[40]

The doxastic practices of Jews, Christians, and Muslims include reference to scriptural authority. It is only with respectful regard to and resonance with the cognitive frameworks that arise from these practices and others that we can think of one another as sharing in the understanding and wisdom that make meaningful dialogue and rationality itself possible among us. We do not enter into dialogue with more than a little trust, which we can only pray will blossom and bear fruit if properly cultivated. Our doxastic practices neither need to be compromised by adapting to one another nor do they need to be boiled down to an empty formalism that could be abstracted from all of them; rather we require them to be reconciled by joining them together through

[40] E.g., al-Nuʿmānī (2003: 323-324).

the practical knowledge of how they enable us to reason with members of our own communities and others.[41, 42]

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[41] I would like to express my thanks to Hamid Vahid for discussions about the epistemology of peer disagreement and for introducing me to the current debate. Although we disagree on various aspects of the topic, I have learned much from the dialogue.

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GOD AND EVIDENCE: A COOPERATIVE APPROACH

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Abstract. This article identifies *intellectualism* as the view that if we simply think hard enough about our evidence, we get an adequate answer to the question of whether God exists. The article argues against intellectualism, and offers a better alternative involving a kind of volitional evidentialism. If God is redemptive in virtue of seeking divine-human reconciliation, we should expect the evidence for God to be likewise redemptive. In that case, according to the article, the evidence for God would aim to draw the human will toward cooperation with God's will. Accordingly, the available evidence for God would be volitionally sensitive in that one's coming to possess it would depend on one's volitional stance toward its source. The article identifies some implications for divine hiddenness, traditional natural theology, and the view that the evidence for God's existence is akin to evidence for a scientific hypothesis.

In the noisy courtroom of public opinion, a theology stands or falls with its accompanying epistemology, in particular, with its stand on the matter of the evidence for God. If God is truly redemptive in seeking divine–human reconciliation, as suggested by large strands in the Jewish and Christian traditions, we should expect the evidence for God to be correspondingly redemptive. The implications of this lesson for theology are significant but widely neglected. This paper draws out some of these implications, and explains why a theology of a truly redemptive God resists any quick and easy dismissal on epistemological grounds and instead offers a profound existential challenge for inquirers about God.

I. INTELLECTUALISM AND ITS UNDERPINNINGS

If we simply 'think hard enough' about our evidence, do we get an adequate answer to the question of whether God exists? If we answer *yes,* then we favour an *intellectualist* approach to the question of whether God

exists. Such an intellectualist approach includes among its supporters atheists as well as theists. If one holds that the adequate answer received by thinking hard enough is no, then one is an atheist (for purposes of our discussion). In contrast, if one holds that the adequate answer is yes, then one is a theist.

We may call a proponent of an intellectualist approach, whether atheist or theist, an *intellectual* about the question of God's existence. An intellectual, in this sense, can come from any academic discipline or from no such discipline. The discipline of academic philosophy, however, houses a large representation of intellectuals regarding God's existence, owing perhaps to its including some influential figures in the history of the intellectualist position. We may call their common position *intellectualism,* for lack of a better term. Bertrand Russell, for instance, was an influential proponent of intellectualism; he imagined himself protesting as follows upon meeting God: 'God, you gave us insufficient evidence.' (1970; cf. Dawkins 2006: 74–77) This paper contends that intellectualism is suspect at best and arguably false. In doing so, it will identify some widely neglected limits of human thinking relative to the evidence underlying human faith in God.

A person's 'thinking hard enough', according to intellectualism, is not just a matter of having a lot of thoughts, as if the sheer quantity of one's thoughts was the key. The hard thinking in question includes one's using arguments, that is, one's using premises to infer conclusions, either deductively or inductively. This raises the question of the value of arguments regarding God's existence. Is our thinking hard about such arguments sufficient for our having an adequate answer to the question of whether God exists? The answer is no if humans can, and sometimes do, have relevant evidence independent of arguments regarding God's existence. For example, if a human can have a direct experience of God, which is neither a thought nor an argument, then there will be room for relevant evidence independent of arguments regarding God's existence. We should not exclude such experiential evidence at the start, in order to avoid begging some important questions about the evidence for God's existence. (See Moser 2008, chap. 2, and 2010, chap. 4, for an attempt to make room for such evidence; cf. Farmer 1943, chaps. 3–4.)

When is an answer to the question of whether God exists 'adequate'? An intellectual will offer this reply: when an answer comes from our 'thinking hard enough' about our evidence, it is adequate. Even so, a convincing reply needs to offer more, given that adequacy in an answer

to our question comes from various domains. *Objective* adequacy requires the correctness or the truth of an answer, whereas *evidential* adequacy requires the suitable fit of an answer with one's overall evidence, but does not require the answer's truth. A person's overall evidence can be incomplete in a way that falls short of yielding truth in beliefs based on that evidence. For instance, widely shared astronomical evidence before Copernicus and Galileo was incomplete in this manner, at least in certain areas of inquiry.

Cognitive adequacy, let us assume, includes both objective adequacy and evidential adequacy. Genuine knowledge that a claim is true has this kind of adequacy, regardless of whether one knows that one has this knowledge. Many philosophers seek cognitive adequacy in their answers, because they seek to know that their answers are true. For current purposes, we may sidestep the many complications arising from Gettier-style problems for the view that justified true belief is sufficient for knowledge that a proposition is true (for some relevant details, see Moser 1989, Shope 2002).

If intellectuals seek cognitive adequacy in their answer, they seek not only evidential adequacy but also objective adequacy. We have suggested, however, that the connection between evidential adequacy and objective adequacy is contingent, because the suitable fit of a contingent answer with one's overall evidence does not entail that the answer is true. This raises the issue of whether our thinking hard enough about our evidence will automatically yield an adequate answer to the question of whether God exists, if cognitive adequacy is the goal. The gap between evidential adequacy and objective adequacy in various actual cases recommends a negative reply to this issue.

It would be implausible to retreat to the view that we (should) care only about evidential adequacy, and not objective adequacy. Many people do care about objective adequacy, because they seek a *correct* answer to the question of whether God exists. In addition, evidential adequacy as characterized above is too limited for the purposes of many people. These people seek an answer that fits not only with the evidence we have but also with the evidence *available* to us. The evidence we now have can be arbitrarily or prejudicially restricted by us, such as when we arbitrarily or prejudicially exclude the pursuit of further relevant evidence in a case. Our available evidence, in contrast, transcends such arbitrary or prejudicial exclusion.

Consider a case involving my trusted employee who has always exhibited honesty and reliability at his job in the past. An equally trusted supervisor, however, has just called my attention to what appear to be this employee's financial irregularities in some recent transactions at work. I now have a difficult choice to make, regarding whether to investigate my trusted employee by pursuing and gathering further available evidence regarding his reliability. My current evidence does not indicate that this employee is unreliable; on the contrary, my preponderant evidence, based on an extensive work history, indicates that he is reliable. As for available evidence I do not (yet) possess, it may undermine the previous evidence by indicating that the employee is actually unreliable. If I seek a resilient answer to the question of whether my employee is reliable, I will need to pursue further available evidence that I do not yet possess. Perhaps most employers would undertake this kind of pursuit, but I could refuse to do so, owing, for instance, to fear of destroying my longstanding friendship with this employee.

We may have difficulty in specifying exactly when evidence is available in some cases, but this general point does not count against a distinction between the broader evidence available to us and the more limited evidence we now have (or, possess). For current purposes, let's suppose that we now 'have' evidence only if we have had a salient awareness of it, but that we need not have had such an awareness of evidence available to us. This distinction will enable us to proceed with some clarity. (For an attempt to recruit this distinction to challenge evidence-based atheism, see Moser 2012a. The current paper identifies the broader significance of this distinction for an epistemology involving a redemptive God.)

II. INTELLECTUALIST SHORTCOMINGS

Evidence could be available to me but be sensitive, in its being *possessed* by me, to a certain volitional stance or inclination of mine, even if I do not actually possess the evidence in question. The volitional stance could include my being *willing* to love or to be faithful in a certain manner, perhaps toward the source of the available evidence. In this scenario, I could fail to possess the relevant available evidence as a result of my failing to love or to be faithful in a certain manner. I thus could be responsible, owing to my adopted volitional stance, for my not possessing evidence that is available to me. (Here we may use a conception of love, such as that of *agapē* in the New Testament, which requires one's intentionally

caring for what is good for people. For some helpful background for this conception, see Furnish 1972; cf. Ferré 1961.)

Suppose that you refuse to confide in me regarding your deepest motives in life, because (you know that) I do not have the proper love for you and hence should not be trusted with evidence regarding your deepest motives. We might imagine that I am the town gossip who cares only about the attention I bring to myself, even at the expense of others. Accordingly, you hide yourself from me in terms of who you really are, since I am a real threat to your good purposes, if not to your dignity as a person. In fact, it may be harmful to me as well as you to reveal your deepest motives to me, because I would handle this information in a bad way for all involved.

Understandably, you would have no desire to enable, or otherwise to promote, my harmful tendencies in handling confidential information. As a result, you plausibly would withhold from me evidence regarding your deepest motives and hence regarding yourself, that is, evidence concerning who you really are. Even so, that evidence would be available to me, because (we may suppose) you would give it to me upon my coming to love you or to be faithful to you. We may call this *volitionally sensitive available* evidence, because my coming to possess this evidence would depend on my volitional stance toward the source of the evidence.

God could have good, redemptive purposes in making at least some available evidence of God volitionally sensitive in its being possessed by us humans. This evidence then would be sensitive to our volitional stance toward God and God's will. God could be evidentially elusive in this manner for purposes of redeeming humans via moral-character transformation toward God's character of perfect love (*agapē*). That is, God could hide or withhold evidence of God's reality for the good of potential recipients of this evidence. This divine hiding could save (at least some) people from rejecting God outright when they are not ready to receive God as the rightful Lord of their lives. In that case, they would not be prepared to handle the evidence redemptively, in keeping with God's good purposes toward divine–human reconciliation.

As redemptive, God would care about how people respond to evidence of God's reality, and would offer such evidence accordingly. As a result, God would not be a promiscuous exhibitionist or a superficial entertainer regarding the divine evidence offered to humans. More specifically, God would preserve a redemptive role for available divine evidence by encouraging its pursuit with a cooperative, obedient human

will. Such a human pursuit of divine evidence would contrast with any passive reception of evidence by humans. A number of Biblical writers emphasize the importance of human pursuit of God. For instance, Jeremiah assigns the following announcement to God: 'When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the LORD.' (Jer. 29:13–14, NRSV; cf. Lk. 11:9–13, Matt. 7:7–11) Human pursuit of God and evidence for God can bring needed focus to human wills and lives, and prevent humans from becoming complacent and presumptuous relative to God. Such a pursuit, therefore, can contribute to the redemption of humans as reconciliation to God.

God could bob and weave in divine self-manifestation, for the sake of challenging people to approach God with due seriousness and reverence, and not to treat God as a controllable or dispensable object. In particular, some people may wake up to God as a valuable reality after feeling God's absence in their lives but then being confronted by God's self-manifestation, perhaps by the presentation of divine *agapē* in their conscience. We humans sometimes learn deeply from a sharp contrast between the absence and the presence of something in our experience. A redemptive God would seek to elicit a human decision in favour of God's character of *agapē,* in particular, a priority commitment that puts God and God's moral character first in human life. In this respect, redemption would be cooperative, as humans resolve to share in God's moral character as a priority in their lives. (On the central role of human decision in redemption, see Minear 1966, chap. 3; Moser 2013, chap. 4.)

The relevant idea of divine self-manifestation in *agapē* figures in the apostle Paul's understanding of the evidential basis for belief and hope in God (see, for instance, Rom. 5:5, 10:20). Following Isaiah, Paul invokes God's self-manifestation to unexpecting humans (in particular, Gentiles), and he understands it as seeking to 'pour out' divine *agapē* within receptive humans. This self-manifestation, being redemptive, would seek to have humans put divine *agapē* first in their lives, above all the alternatives, in keeping with the greatest love-command (see Ramsey 1943). Paul seems to hold that God's self-disclosure is sensitive, at least to some extent, to *human* disclosure to God, whereby one allows oneself to be known, and laid hold of, by God (see Gal. 4:9; cf. Phil. 3:12). In any case, we should allow that God can disclose God's will to a person, perhaps in conscience, without that person's knowing that it is *God's* will thereby disclosed. (On the role of conscience, see Forsyth 1909, chap. 7.)

We should not infer that a person must earn or merit (evidence of) God's self-manifestation or become morally perfect to be presented with it. Such an inference would seriously distort the moral character of a God who is worthy of worship and hence gracious and merciful. Instead, we should consider that a person may need to be willing to cooperate with God's perfect will if that person is to receive a clear self-manifestation from God. The problem is not that God would be personally injured in a devastating way by uncooperative humans; it is rather that such humans can dishonour (the dignity of) God and themselves. In fostering such dishonour, one can bring about a kind of relational harm, that is, harm to a potential good relationship between humans and God. One thereby could harm the purpose of God's self-manifestation to humans, if only by frustrating it, and thus harm oneself in turn.

Suppose that God seeks to redeem all constitutive aspects of human persons, including not just human thinking but also the willing, or volitional, activity integral to human agency. God then would offer a challenge to these aspects of human persons for the sake of their being transformed toward God's character and purposes and thus reconciled to God. This involves the question of who God wants a redeemed person to be in relation to God. It is plausible to suppose that God would desire redeemed human *agents* who reflect God's moral character and agency in intention and action, and not just redeemed thinkers. The volitional activity central to human agency is not just thinking or even thinking hard about evidence. It involves decisions regarding the kind of person one aims to be, in terms of moral character and practice. As a result, moral responsibility looms large in the make-up of a mature human agent. In being redemptive, God would not neglect the volitional make-up of human agents, but rather would aim to lead it, non-coercively, into cooperation with God's perfect will.

In the spirit of Job, humans often strive to understand God and God's providential ways to gain security and assurance for themselves. We should not expect God's security or assurance, however, to arise from mere human understanding, which is painfully limited in scope, especially regarding God's purposes in particular cases. Instead, we should expect divine security and assurance for humans to emerge from their volitional activity in response to God. This lesson fits with the following simple but profound remark from the prophet Micah: 'What is good, and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.' (Micah 6:8, NRSV)

In Micah's perspective, God aims for more than hard thinking by humans, even hard thinking with correct and well-grounded content. God aims, in addition, for volitional activity from humans that includes loving and obeying God. Clearly, such volitional activity is not captured by 'thinking hard' about evidence. I can think hard about, and even accept, evidence for God but not welcome, love, or obey God at all. The volitional activity in question can be an avenue to more, and even better, evidence regarding God, as a human conforms to God's redemptive expectations. So, the evidence for God's reality from divine self-manifestation could be sensitive to human wills, and thus could allow for divine hiding in the face of volitional resistance. In this portrait of God, we cannot simply think ourselves into an objectively adequate answer regarding God's reality, because God would want, by way of redemption, more than our thinking. God would want to redeem our full agency, including our volitional features (such as our love), because God would want us to reflect divine moral agency in willing cooperation with God. If God would not want the latter, then God would not want what is best for us, and this would rob God of worthiness of worship.

One's being willing to obey God, in keeping with God's perfect will, mirrors the crisis of Jesus in Gethsemane. Seeking to obey God and thereby to inaugurate God's kingdom, Jesus found himself called by God to give up his own life in self-sacrifice to God for the sake of others. This was a temporary struggle between Jesus and God, where Jesus anticipated his arrest and crucifixion by Roman officials as part of God's plan of redemption. Mark's Gospel sketches the situation: '[Jesus and his disciples] went to a place called Gethsemane ... He said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death ..." [H]e threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour [of his arrest and crucifixion] might pass from him. He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup [of suffering and death] from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want"'. (Mark 14:32–36, NRSV)

Gethsemane begins with a humanly experienced conflict between a human want and a divine want, but ends with a resolution in a human plea to God in favour of God's will. Accordingly, the Gethsemane approach to God puts God's perfect will first, even when a serious human want must yield to God's volitional challenge. The challenge from God could come in human conscience, where one is convicted by God of wandering away from what is good or right, and this challenge could be encouraged by other humans. Even if some people regard human

conscience as just socially informed by humans, God still could work in conscience to challenge people to cooperate with God's will. In that case, receptive humans could find the God who hides, not in mere reflection, but instead in the experiential and volitional conflict of a Gethsemane-style crisis, where God offers a new mode of life to humans on God's perfect terms. In following the example of Jesus in Gethsemane, humans then would resolutely allow God to be God at least in some area of their volitional and practical lives.

We might think of a Gethsemane crisis as providing an opportunity for a kind of practical rationality toward God, via one's willingly moving toward cooperation with God. That is, one's will could move toward God's will by one's responding in obedience to God's challenging self-manifestation in human conscience. If this is practical rationality toward God, its practicality consists in the non-coerced exercise of one's will to comply with God's will. It also would be substantive practical rationality, because it would encompass genuine goodness in cooperation with God's perfect will. In other words, it would not be purely instrumental practical rationality. God would represent a standard of goodness independent of the variability of human preferences or ends. In addition, God could nudge and encourage receptive people toward a Gethsemane crisis, and, therefore, they would not have to set up this crisis on their own. God would bring Gethsemane to humans as needed, at the opportune times.

In the perspective offered here, intellectualism is an inadequate approach to the question of whether God exists. It neglects the plausible view that God would have definite redemptive purposes for humans and would reveal the evidence for God accordingly. As a result, God could provide available evidence for God's reality that is volitionally sensitive, in its being possessed by a human, to the direction of one's will relative to cooperation with God's will. Many philosophers overlook this view, because they assume, in the tradition of Plato and Aristotle, that God is (or would be) immutable or static rather than purposively elusive. It seems, however, that a God who is worthy of worship and hence morally perfect would have to be purposively elusive for the good of potential human recipients of divine evidence. Such a God would oppose half-heartedness in humans toward God, and seek instead their whole-hearted commitment to God (see, e.g., Deut. 4:29, Jer. 29:13, Mk. 12:29–30; on the idea of God as elusive, see Minear 1966, chap. 8, Terrien 1978, Moser 2008).

We should acknowledge some pre-receptive evidence for God, where a person has initial evidence for God's self-manifestation (perhaps in conscience) but does not cooperate with God at all. Such evidence would be elusive, unstable, and thin, because God would not want people to rest content with it, apart from cooperating with God. Consider a resolute enemy of God such as the Biblical character called 'Satan', who believes that God exists but does not receive God cooperatively as the LORD of his life. Satan can reasonably believe (on elusive, pre-receptive evidence) that God exists, because God has self-manifested divine reality to Satan *to a very limited extent*. However, in rejecting God's will, Satan has freely prevented God from manifesting divine reality to a redemptive, cooperative extent, where God's powerful love is poured out in his heart (cf. Rom. 5:5). In the Biblical perspective, Satan is not volitionally receptive to God at all, and therefore his pre-receptive evidence does not lead to the kind of salient transformative evidence arising from cooperation with God.

III. MOTIVES FOR INTELLECTUALISM

Proponents of intellectualism have various motives for their position, three of which merit attention here. First, they often seek aid from considerations about a needed method. In particular, they adopt a method for belief formation and belief revision, and then wield it across the board. This strategy is not mistaken in principle, but it needs to be handled cautiously, in a manner that does not preclude reasonable acknowledgment of genuine features of reality. For instance, we should be suspicious of any method that precludes reasonable acknowledgment of either human agents or mid-sized physical objects, such as tables and human bodies. We might say, then, that an adequate method of belief formation will call for an adequate meta-method of belief formation: that is, an adequate method regarding (the identification of) an adequate method of belief formation. Inquirers must avoid, however, an endless regress of required methods, if only because we do not possess an infinite number of such methods in regress.

A key question arising from a meta-method about a proposed method for belief will be: what does this method set as parameters for (evidential) acceptability in a set of beliefs? More specifically, does the method allow for (potential) reasonable acknowledgment of an elusive God who aims to redeem humans non-coercively? Or, instead, does it

preclude such acknowledgment from the start? In the latter case, we may face methodological bias of a sort that can hinder the reasonable pursuit of truth. Of course, one might try to establish that our barring acknowledgment of an elusive God is well-grounded in our available evidence. That task, however, sets a tall order indeed for advocates of the position in question, because our available evidence does not seem exclusive in the manner required. It seems more open-ended than suggested by the position at hand.

If God exists and is available to humans, a method for inquiring about God should fit with reasonable, evidence-based acknowledgment of the character and purposes of God, and not preclude such acknowledgment. Philosophers have sometimes adopted methods that settle the issue of God's existence in advance of due attention to the relevant evidence. For instance, a method that requires an evidential basis in mundane sensory evidence will represent a highly questionable bias. The same is true of a method that requires conformity either to a materialist ontology or to the kind of experimental procedures typical of a chemistry laboratory. In general, then, we should not let a questionable method blind us from acknowledging genuine aspects of reality and the corresponding evidence. Instead, we should allow human experience of reality to play a key role in adjudicating among the many methods in circulation. Otherwise, we may have the proverbial oddity of putting the cart before the horse, or, at least, we may have an implausible bias in our method. More to the point, we should not allow a method to preclude volitionally sensitive evidence of God from the start.

The second motive for some commitments to intellectualism comes from an unduly restrictive demand for evidence of God. As suggested, Bertrand Russell (1970) anticipated his response if God were to meet him, perhaps after death: 'God, you gave us insufficient evidence.' Russell might have considered a bit more modesty in the presence of God, perhaps by inquiring about available evidence of God that is volitionally sensitive in its being acquired by humans. In that case, Russell might have asked: 'God, what purposes of yours led to your being subtle and elusive regarding the available evidence of your reality? Is such evidence volitionally sensitive in our acquiring it? If so, might this have a redemptive purpose?' It is disappointing that Russell gives no indication of being aware of such plausible questions for a God who is redemptive toward humans. He should have asked about the moral character and purposes of a God worthy of worship, in order to avoid begging key questions

about the evidence for God. In that case, however, Russell would have had a big challenge on his hands, or at least on his will, because he, rather than God, would be subject to challenge on volitional grounds.

The lesson is that intellectualism, advocating mere intellectual reflection to settle the question of God's existence, is existentially too thin for the kind of evidence suitable to a redemptive God. Humans in need of redemption should not expect to know a redemptive God on the cheap, as if no volitional challenge is needed. Just as there is no place for cheap grace in a robust theology, so also there is no place for redemptively cheap evidence of a gracious God who seeks the redemption of humans. Many proponents of the arguments of natural theology run afoul of this lesson. These theorists assume that if atheists and agnostic just thought hard enough on our common evidence, they would come to acknowledge the reality of God. These atheists and agnostics, they assume, then would see the crucial role in reality for a First Cause, a Designer, or a Perfect Being, which (at least according to Aquinas, the godfather of modern natural theology) we all know to be God. The needed evidence for God, according to this position, is in our midst and even in our possession, but we need to think more rigorously to see its bearing on theism. That position, however, is too shallow, volitionally and existentially.

A serious problem is that the god of traditional natural theology (and its corresponding evidence) is not elusive in the manner to be expected of a redemptive God who bobs and weaves, and even hides, to challenge humans for their own redemptive good. This kind of redemptive God would not be the static solution to merely intellectual questions, but instead would seek to move humans, non-coercively, toward God at the level of their wills, to put God's will first in all things. That is, this God would aim to redeem humans as agents, and not just as thinkers. Like intellectualism, traditional natural theology neglects this key lesson, and therefore is defective. (For elaboration, see Moser 2010, chap. 3; 2012b; 2013, chap. 3.)

We can put the problem at hand in terms of divine presence as divine self-manifestation to humans. If God self-authenticates divine reality for humans by the self-manifestation of God's moral character (including *agapē)*, but seeks not to coerce humans to receive this manifestation, then God's self-manifestation is rejectable by humans. That is, the self-manifestation of God's moral character to humans does not force the will of humans in a way that undermines their genuine agency in responding to God. As a result, God's self-manifestation allows humans to say no to it

by excluding it from their focus. In other words, God is willing to withdraw divine self-manifestation to leave room for genuine human agency regarding divine presence. Such basic evidence of God's reality, then, is not static across human experience. It can vary relative to the volitional stance of its potential recipients, so as not to trivialize or to obscure the redemptive intent of divine intervention in human experience. (A notion of divine self-authentication, not to be confused with self-authentication of religious experience or of scripture, can be found in Mackintosh 1912 and Stewart 1940; see also Moser 2013, chaps. 3, 5.)

The third motive is not an avowed reason for intellectualism, but it still plays a psychological role in some commitments to intellectualism. The unexpressed motive, I propose, is desired avoidance of a volitional struggle with a redemptive God. Such avoidance has a range of detrimental results, including a coupling of intellectualism with a destructive kind of intellectual pride. This pride manifests itself in the common attitude that opponents of intellectualism, of a theistic or an atheistic variation, are intellectually dim in a peculiar manner. Such an attitude emerges even from many proponents of natural theology when their favoured evidence fails to convince critics. (We need not name names here.) This paper offers an alternative to such misplaced pride by shifting attention to volitional sensitivity in humans, beyond their intellectual skills. In doing so, it acknowledges the significance of the kind of volitional attitude candidly expressed by Thomas Nagel: 'I want atheism to be true ... I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that.' (1997: 130) Nagel worries that the existence of God would pose a serious 'cosmic authority problem' for us. The obstacle for Nagel, among many others, is clearly volitional, and not (just or even primarily) intellectual. Even so, Nagel is right: the existence of a perfectly loving, redemptive God would raise a cosmic authority problem for us humans, because God's perfect will would challenge our imperfect wills.

IV. CONCLUDING EXPECTATIONS

In sum, intellectualism regarding the question of God's existence is a dead end relative to a truly redemptive God. It neglects the important consideration that a redemptive God would offer available evidence that is volitionally sensitive in its being possessed by humans. Whether atheist or theist, proponents of intellectualism have ignored this consideration to their own detriment. This lesson does not undermine the value of

thinking in human faith in God. Instead, it puts such thinking in a proper context, with proper, redemptive bounds. This context allows God to seek to engage agents not just with their minds but also with their wills, for the sake of a human volitional commitment to the priority of God's will. As a result, inquirers should not uncritically expect God or enduring evidence for God's existence to be accessible just by human thinking about the evidence we possess.

God would seek to engage humans redemptively as agents, not just thinkers, and we should expect evidence of God to be elusive, variable, and challenging to that end. In particular, we should expect salient evidence of God to come through a Gethsemane crisis rather than mere casual reflection on our evidence. As a result, we should doubt any suggestion, such as that of Dawkins (2006: 52, 59), that evidence for God's existence is to be treated just like evidence for a scientific hypothesis. As an elusive personal agent, God would differ in significant ways from typical scientific objects, and this would yield a relevant difference in the two kinds of evidence.

Human inquiry about God, in the perspective offered here, is inextricably bound up with who a human intends and resolves to be, either in cooperation with God or in opposition to God (the latter including indifference toward God). In addition, the salient evidence for God comes not from abstract philosophical arguments, but instead from God's self-manifestation to humans at God's opportune times. This self-manifestation can come in human conscience, but it cannot come just by human resources. We lack the power to manifest God's moral character on our own, and therefore we must be prepared to receive evidence for God as a redemptive gift rather than as our earning or creation.

The redemptive gift would include the power of righteous love experienced typically in human conscience, and this power (as representing the moral character of God) is to be received and obeyed. Given its immediacy, humans have no need to argue to it by natural theology. This power amounts to divine self-authentication via the self-manifestation of God's moral character to humans. Inquiry about God looks very different from this perspective, especially very different from the troubled position of intellectualism. It takes on an existential value that intellectualism omits. In particular, it suggests that inquirers of God may very well be under inquiry themselves, by a redemptive God. Each inquirer must settle firsthand whether this is actually so, specifically for his or her own will relative to a morally perfect will. In

this regard, the vital challenge of Gethsemane bears on all human agents, sooner or later. A theology accompanied by such an epistemology will be not only resilient in the face of familiar objections to theism but also existentially vital for cooperative humans. The outstanding question is, finally, whether we humans are sincerely willing to cooperate with God's perfect will.

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RELIGIOUS EVIDENTIALISM

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Abstract. Should religious believers proportion their religious beliefs to their evidence? They should: Religious faith is better, *ceteris paribus*, when the beliefs accompanying it are evidence-proportioned. I offer two philosophical arguments and a biblical argument. The philosophical arguments conclude that love and trust, two attitudes belonging to faith, are better, *ceteris paribus*, when accompanied by evidence-proportioned belief, and that so too is the faith in question. The biblical argument concludes that beliefs associated with faith, portrayed in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, are typically, and normatively, exhorted on the basis of evidence. I hope to convince religious believers and nonbelievers alike that religious beliefs should be evidence-proportioned.

I. INTRODUCTION

Is religious belief epistemically acceptable? This question is important: Beliefs that are not should not be held, and many people hold religious beliefs. There is disagreement over what makes beliefs epistemically acceptable. A common way to cash it out is as belief proportioned to *evidence*.

I shall argue for

Religious Evidentialism: One's religious beliefs ought to be proportioned to one's evidence.

Religious Evidentialism is a specific application of the more general claim

Evidentialism: One's beliefs ought to be proportioned to one's evidence.

Evidentialism is often formulated as a theory of epistemic justification, recently by Conee and Feldman (2004), although historically it was understood as pertaining to epistemic 'oughts'.[1] I employ epistemic 'ought'

[1] Locke 1690; Clifford 1877.

claims, which I'll clarify as needed. I'll argue for the more restricted Religious Evidentialism.

Why deny Religious Evidentialism? Some might think it is right to hold religious beliefs regardless of the strength of one's evidence: the normativity of faith overrides the normativity of evidence.[2] This might be because one thinks that strongly held religious beliefs are more likely to lead to salvation than weakly held ones, to say nothing of the effect on salvation of not holding such beliefs at all. Or it might be because one thinks that seeking evidence for religious beliefs, let alone holding them hostage to it, disrespects God: we show him great trust by believing more strongly than our evidence warrants. Or one might side with the 'new atheists' in thinking that religious belief simply does not stand up to one's evidence at all, yet still take belief to be better than unbelief.[3]

My arguments for Religious Evidentialism will debunk such views. It makes for better faith to have religious beliefs which are evidence-proportioned.

II. RELIGIOUS EVIDENTIALISM

This section clarifies some terms of discussion.

Religious beliefs pertain to religious matters. I won't offer a definition of religious matters but take it that these can be grouped in the same loose yet recognizable way as, say, culinary matters. We may understand *religious faith* as *the cultivation of relationship with God*. I am thinking of God as conceived of in the Judeo-Christian tradition, but I hope this paper will interest adherents of other traditions.

Ought. What kind of normativity is at issue in Religious Evidentialism? I am not thinking of it is as epistemic (though I endorse Evidentialism more broadly as an epistemic norm) or ethical (though I think that, given God's existence, Religious Evidentialism is likely to be a moral norm). I have in mind a sort of normativity originating in the natures of things, which I'll call 'kind normativity'. Let's suppose that there are natural kinds, such as water.[4] Let's suppose too that some natural kinds can have

[2] e.g. Kierkegaard 1843.

[3] One might also worry that religious propositions, pertaining to a transcendent reality, are not the kind of thing which human beings can have evidence *for*; I won't address this concern here.

[4] I am committed to few if any views about what natural kinds are, though an essentialist view along the lines of Kripke 1980 is attractive; see Mellor 1977 for criticism.

better or worse instantiations, and that there can even be borderline cases where it is unclear whether a thing instantiates the relevant kind at all. Water is one such kind: whether a sample qualifies as water, and its goodness as a sample, depends on how many other substances it contains. Pure H_2O is an ideal seldom found outside of scientific labs, but (let's assume) it sets the bar for a 'kind normativity' governing all instances of water.[5] We may similarly think of religious faith as a natural kind which can have better or worse instantiations. It is sometimes unclear whether a person's attitude counts as faith at all. Religious Evidentialism says that one feature which makes for ideal religious faith (though not the only one) is that the agent's religious beliefs be evidence-proportioned.

'Ought' and 'can'. How can Religious Evidentialism be true if doxastic attitudes are involuntary – doesn't 'ought' imply 'can'? It seems odd to make requirements which agents are not in complete control of meeting. My response is that not all 'oughts' do imply 'can', including 'oughts' about belief formation. Even without voluntary control over their beliefs, agents can do their best to attend to their evidence, to cultivate dispositions to respond virtuously to evidence, and so forth. Religious Evidentialism is analogous to the moral rule 'One ought always to do what is right', which we are bound by even when we aren't presently able to do what is right (say, because we don't know what that is). These are not rules which we can always be faulted for falling short of (though often we can), but from this it does not follow that they do not apply to us.[6]

An agent's *evidence* is any legitimate reason for belief. One condition on evidence is that it must have representational content. The reason is, the beliefs supported by evidence are themselves representations. Only something which presents things as being some way can legitimately affect one's views about how things are. Let's call a vehicle for such representational content a *proposition*. Propositions can convey all manner of representational content, even the content of mystical or otherwise inarticulable experiences. To see this, note that sentences which refer deictically to such experiences, as in (e.g.), 'I had that experience', express propositions.[7] Deictically expressed propositions are not, of course, informative for a listener who has not had the experience pointed

[5] This is a simplifying assumption for the sake of illustration; see Needham 2003 for discussion.

[6] See Williamson 2000.

[7] Brewer 1999; Williamson 2000.

to by the proposition. But this is not a problem: One person's evidence need not be communicable to others to be a legitimate reason for belief.

There are two ways for a proposition to be evidence for an agent: when she has a doxastic attitude towards it, and when she does not. If she has such an attitude, then that attitude must be *belief* (a second condition on evidence).[8] If she disbelieves *The moon is made of cheese*, then she should not fashion her representation of reality around it.[9] On the second way for a proposition to be evidence for an agent, she merely entertains it without having a doxastic attitude towards it. In this case, that proposition, in order to be evidence for her, must have been *presented to her by a representational experience* (the final condition on evidence). An experience as of a chocolate fountain presents the agent with the proposition *There is chocolate fountain*, which provides her with evidence about many propositions, such as *There is chocolate nearby*, *If I have money I will be enjoying myself soon*, as well as *There is a chocolate fountain* itself.[10] By contrast, a proposition which spontaneously enters the agent's mind, say, because she has eaten too much chocolate, is not evidence for her. To summarize, evidence is *any proposition which the agent believes or which is presented to her by a representational experience*.[11]

Proportioning. An agent proportions her belief to her evidence when that belief is an epistemically legitimate response to her evidence.

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[8] Since beliefs can be more or less confidently held (see below), the level of confidence an agent has in an evidential proposition will affect what beliefs this proposition supports for her. I'll ignore this feature of the account here.

[9] If she believes its negation of course then the latter is evidence for her.

[10] Thus a proposition *p* may sometimes be evidence for itself. But this result is harmless, not least because it is limited by the constraint that beliefs must be evidence-proportioned. First, an agent cannot use *p* as evidence about whether *p* unless an experience presents her with *p*. No belief that *p* can 'bootstrap' on another *belief* that *p*. Second, that a proposition may provide evidence for itself in such limited circumstances does not entail that that proposition is 'self-evident', even in those circumstances. Self-evidence implies indefeasibility, whereas a proposition presented by an experience can merely provide *defeasible* evidence for itself. If an experience presents me with *The cat is speaking Russian*, yet I am aware that I have been given LSD, any belief in *The cat is speaking Russian* is undermined.

[11] Williamson 2000 and Goldman 2009 construe evidence more strongly: for them the agent must have an epistemically privileged doxastic attitude towards their evidence (knowledge or justified belief). My account of evidence is more like that of Jeffrey 2004 in taking experiential content to be evidence too, with few if any restrictions on the agent's attitude towards that content. It also resembles Conee and Feldman's 2004 account, except that they take experiences and beliefs *themselves*, rather than propositions, as evidence.

I assume that beliefs can be held more or less confidently, and that the confidence with which a proposition should be believed correlates with the strength of the agent's evidence. Weak evidence might not merit belief in a proposition *p* at all, but rather suspension of judgement from *p* or disbelief in it.

I don't assume that the evidential support relation is objective (i.e., that, for some total body of evidence *e* and some proposition *p*, there is a correct epistemic attitude to have towards *p* on the basis of *e*). For all I am committed to, the support at issue might be community-relative. That said, the examples from my biblical argument for Religious Evidentialism do seem to assume an objective evidential support relation, although my case from the Bible does not rely on this feature of the biblical account.

I'll now argue for Religious Evidentialism. The first two arguments, from the nature of faith, are philosophical; the third, in the spirit of the present symposium on tradition-centric reasons for religious belief, originate (I argue) in Judeo-Christian Scripture. My arguments will thus give secularists and religious believers alike cause to endorse Religious Evidentialism. In addition, the biblical argument should interest those secularists who want to convince religious believers of Religious Evidentialism on premises which the latter should accept.

III. TWO PHILOSOPHICAL ARGUMENTS: LOVE AND TRUST

One important element of religious faith, perhaps definitive of faith, is cultivating relationship with God.[12] Cultivating relationship with any person, human or divine, requires knowing her. One major way to come to know a person is to believe truths about her. Of course, personal knowledge, to say nothing of relationship, requires more than this; nonetheless true belief is important.

The canonical way to acquire true beliefs about persons, as about anything, is to acquire evidence, whether from the world or from introspective reasoning,[13] and to proportion one's beliefs to it. I'll argue that relationship – with any person, including God – is *ceteris paribus* excellent, in the sense of kind-normativity introduced above, to the extent

[12] Specifically, it is cultivating a *good* relationship with God.

[13] It is a conceit to think that evidence-providing representational experiences must be empirical. Counterexamples include deduction, experiences of 'turning evidence over' in one's mind, introspective experiences resulting in self-knowledge, etc.

that one's beliefs about the other person are evidence-proportioned: evidence-proportioned belief is an ideal-making feature of relationship. Since at least a large part of faith includes the cultivation of relationship with God, any given person's faith is excellent (at least in one important way) when the beliefs associated with it are evidence-proportioned.

Many things make relationship good, but I'll focus on love and trust. Let's assume that relationships are better to the extent that these attitudes are present. But what do love and trust have to do with evidence? Both are often accompanied by beliefs, in particular about whether the other person is loveworthy or trustworthy. It is these beliefs which I'll argue should be evidence-proportioned in order to make love and trust, and thus the relationship with the loved and trusted person, the best they can be. Since faith constitutively involves cultivating relationship with God, a fortiori the faithful person's beliefs about God should be proportioned to her evidence.

An Argument from Love

Let's assume that there are such properties as loveworthiness and unloveworthiness, determined by more basic properties. To the extent that something has the basic properties, that thing is loveworthy or unloveworthy.[14] If Hermia has a loveworthy feature *F*, then Lysander, who loves her, believes that she has *F*, recognizes that *F* is loveworthy, and delights in Hermia's having *F*.[15] Suppose Hermia is kind. Lysander delights in kindness, which is loveworthy *per se*, but finds a twofold delight in *Hermia's* kindness: it is loveworthy and it is *hers*. Delight in the loveworthy properties of one's beloved is one thing that makes for excellent love.

Love, however, neither is nor should be restricted to loveworthy things.[16] It is often excellent when directed towards unloveworthy things. The difference is, a lover does not delight in her beloved's unloveworthy

[14] These properties might differ between types of object, and some properties may make for love- or unloveworthiness for the lover *just* because she values them.

[15] Psychological factors, from which I am abstracting, complicate this and any feature of love, of course. For one, some agents might not delight in some objectively loveworthy properties.

[16] I thus part ways with those who define love in terms of responding to the beloved's loveworthy aspects (e.g. Vlastos 1981, on Plato; Velleman 2008). Nor is my view committed to any special account of reasons-responsiveness (such as Jollimore's 2011). I say nothing about what if anything makes love reasonable; I argue only that the beliefs associated with it should be.

features, but loves him *in spite* of them, where you love *x* in spite of a property *F* only if you love *x* and *x*'s having *F* causes you grief. Although *F* is grievous in itself, you take twofold grief: in *F*'s being exemplified and in your beloved's exemplifying it. Loving someone in spite of her unloveworthy features also makes for excellent love, because it enables you to show her grace and gives her the opportunity to accept it.

I'll argue that love is better when the lover's beliefs about the beloved's loveworthiness are proportioned to the lover's evidence than when they are not. But what does love have to do with evidence?

Suppose Oberon casts a spell which makes Lysander believe that Hermia, whom he hardly knows, is kind (a loveworthy trait) and lazy (an unloveworthy one). These beliefs happen to be true, but Lysander has no evidence that they are (and is unaware of the spell). Yet he finds himself loving Hermia, delighting in her alleged kindness and directing grace her way in spite of her alleged laziness. What should Hermia make of Lysander's love when he declares it to her? Not much. For all that Lysander has reason to think, Hermia might not be kind at all. Proclaiming delight in her kindness here is like proclaiming delight in her beauty without ever having seen her. For Hermia this should seem like empty flattery at best. She shouldn't take Lysander seriously, for it seems impossible that it is even *her* kindness which engenders his delight. The same goes for the grace Lysander shows Hermia for her alleged laziness; she happens to be lazy but he has no evidence that she is. In particular Lysander has never himself been inconvenienced by her laziness. But surely grace is most potent when responding to particular *manifestations* of unloveworthy properties, above all towards the gracious lover. Here Hermia, although she is lazy (and knows it), is entitled to feel misunderstood because of an unfounded assumption Lysander makes about her: she may be lazy, but has certainly given Lysander no reason to think so. Imagine Lysander's being gracious about Hermia's warts when he has no evidence that she has any.

And what should Lysander make of this love which motivates him to delight in and show grace to someone he barely knows for features he has no evidence that she has? He should worry. He should be disconcerted at finding himself with completely unwarranted beliefs. But more to the point, love, perhaps more than other attitudes, makes one vulnerable to self-deception. In love it is too easy to believe more or less strongly than one's evidence warrants. To the extent that one self-deceives about one's beloved, it is arguable that it is not even *her* whom one loves, but

a fantasy of one's own engineering. Self-deceptive love, if love at all, is surely inferior to love in which one's beliefs about one's beloved are evidence-proportioned. Evidence is a safeguard against self-deception and thus facilitates honest love, for delighting and grace-showing alike.

The above remarks about love hold for God's love, which provides the perfect model for ours. God delights in the loveworthy features of his creation ('God saw that it was good'[17]), humanity most of all ('very good'[18]), and his love is undiminished by its unloveworthy ones, as his grief and grace on account of them testify.[19] One might object that I have argued that love's excellence is indexed to the lover's *evidence* about the beloved, whereas an omniscient God needs no evidence. This remark is true, but not a problem for my account. It merely observes that God has evidence trivially, indeed infinite amounts of it.[20] Moreover, this is just what makes his love perfect: every loveworthy and unloveworthy property alike, accompanied by every reason for belief about them, is on stark display to his omniscience, and he loves just the same.

Love and Faith

If God's love for human beings is excellent because fully informed, I don't see why human love for God should be any different. If God really is loveworthy, we do him a disservice by claiming to delight in his loveworthiness without evidence-proportioned belief that he is loveworthy, and we do ourselves one by missing out on cause for delight. If he is not loveworthy, then our love risks being empty or idolatrous. Love of God without evidence-proportioned belief about his loveworthiness is little more than ungrounded flattery and possibly self-deception.

What about grace? One might think that there is a place for showing God grace for unloveworthiness, for example in the face of suffering he allows. But this suggestion yields contradiction: being perfectly loveworthy, God cannot be at all unloveworthy. So grace towards God *on account of his unloveworthiness* is incoherent. But from this it does not follow that all grace towards him is misplaced: if he allows suffering, he

[17] Genesis 1:10.

[18] Genesis 1:31.

[19] Christians have the example of love among members of the Trinity, who delight maximally because of their maximum loveworthiness, and grieve maximally when the Son assumes sinners' unloveworthiness.

[20] I don't assume that God knows via perception. His evidence might be entirely introspective.

can surely be shown grace even if his doing so is not unloveworthy *per se*. But perhaps talk of grace towards God has more to do with trust than with love. So let's move on.

I have argued that love with evidence-proportioned belief about one's beloved is better, *ceteris paribus*, than love without it.[21] For the sake of having the most excellent love of God that one can, one's beliefs about his loveworthiness should be evidence-proportioned.

An Argument from Trust

I'll make a similar case about trust, another aspect of relationship with God. I'll argue that trust is better, *ceteris paribus*, in the sense of kind-based normativity introduced above, to the extent that one's beliefs about the trusted person are evidence-proportioned.

Trust is a three-place relation: A person trusts another person for something.[22] Discussion of the nature of trust centres around its three core aspects: the *belief* that someone can be trusted for something, the *act* of trusting him for that thing, and the *emotion* of trusting. I don't reduce trust to any single element;[23] I'll just be clear which one I'm talking about. These elements of trust can come apart: I can perform the action of trusting you to water my plants – by giving you instructions and housekeys – even if I don't believe that you'll come through. I can believe that you are trustworthy, but not feel trusting of you. And even if I feel trusting of you, I may decide not to entrust my plants to you. I'll argue that the *act* of trusting someone is excellent to the extent that *belief* in her trustworthiness is evidence-proportioned (and that evidence may come in part from *emotions* of trusting).

How does each element of trust relate to evidence? The belief, as I'll argue, should be evidence-proportioned.

The emotion of trust can provide evidence about trustworthiness. Emotions can include representational experiences: I feel as if you are sad, as if she is trustworthy. The evidence provided by such experiences is of course defeasible, but so is most evidence. To motivate the suggestion that emotions can provide evidence, note that they can be caused by things of which we are unconscious. One candidate explanation, say, for

[21] For more arguments for this conclusion, see my 'Should Love Ever be Blind?' (under review).

[22] I'll restrict the discussion to trust of persons.

[23] See Hardin 2002 for a reductionist view; for a pluralistic one see Simpson 2012.

your feeling distrustful towards me is that something about me sets off alarm bells below your conscious awareness.

As for the action: Trusting, like any action, can be instrumentally rational, a way to achieve some goal. I have many goals, some conflicting. One is to have flourishing plants, another is to finish this article before my holiday. I might value one goal more than another: my plants might be like my surrogate children, whereas the article deadline is soft. Conversely, I might regard my plants as fungible decorations, whereas making the deadline is necessary for inclusion in a valuable publication. Whether I should trust my neighbour, Grim Reaper, with my plants depends on how these goals weigh up – and on my evidence about Grim's trustworthiness. Say the evidence warrants a mediocre confidence that he is trustworthy. Whether this suffices for me to act in trust and surrender my housekeys depends on how much I value appearing in the publication versus having my plants survive. The more highly one values the object for which one is considering whether to trust, the better evidence one should have, *ceteris paribus*, that the potential trustee is trustworthy.

There are two exceptions. One arises when it is instrumentally rational *not* to act in trust in spite of having very high evidence-proportioned confidence that the person is trustworthy. You might value other goals more highly than obtaining that thing, or there might be a surer way to obtain it than by trusting. The other exception is more relevant here: cases where it may be instrumentally rational to trust someone in spite of having *low* evidence-proportioned confidence that he is trustworthy.

Some *define* trust partly in terms of imperfect confidence about whether the trustee will come through. Swinburne claims that to trust someone is 'to act on the assumption that [she] will do for you what [she] knows you want or need, when the evidence gives some reason for supposing that she may not' (2005: 143). On his view, I don't count as trusting Grim for my plants unless the evidence indicates that he might fail me. But the plant-watering example indicates that Swinburne is mistaken: trust does not *require* evidence that the trustee might fail. Similarly, a small child is perfectly confident that her father will catch her at the bottom of the slide; this example is arguably paradigmatic of trust. All that trust requires is putting oneself in a position of vulnerability vis-à-vis the trustee (Baier 1995: 152): however remote the possibility in which the trustee fails, his failing would have negative consequences for you simply because, by trusting, you place yourself in his power.

How, then, can it be instrumentally rational to act in trust in spite of having low evidence-proportioned confidence that the person is trustworthy? In one of two sorts of situation. In the first, call it a *desperate leap*, one values something enough to risk a great deal to obtain it, the only acceptable way to obtain it is to trust someone, and that person's coming through is a long shot on one's evidence. For example, I am far from confident that the masked stranger will hoist me up, but I value my life and if I refuse his hand I'll plummet to certain death. Or if one values something enough which only God can provide, such as eternal bliss, but lacks evidence that God is trustworthy (perhaps because, on one's evidence, he is unlikely to exist), it might still be instrumentally rational to trust him (say, by acting as if he exists).

The second sort of situation in which an act of trust may be instrumentally rational in spite of a lack of evidence about trustworthiness arises when one's goal is something *other than* obtaining the thing for which one trusts. Let's call this 'alternate-goal trust'. I could trust Grim with my plants for some other reason than that I care about my plants: to give him the opportunity to demonstrate trustworthiness, to teach him about responsibility, or even to encourage him to *become* trustworthy.[24] When trust is instrumentally rational vis-à-vis a different goal than that of obtaining the thing one is trusting for, trusting might be the most instrumentally rational action even though one's evidence suggests that the trustee is untrustworthy.

I have argued that acts of trust are better, *ceteris paribus*, when they correspond with evidence-proportioned beliefs about trustworthiness, with the possible exception of desperate leaps and alternate goals. This might seem odd, making trust appear merely instrumental, which would be a pity since relationship (of which trust is a good-making feature) should not be about furthering one's ends. This objection is overhasty. One's goals need not be self-interested; they might instead promote the good of others or of the relationship itself. One's goal in trusting God, for example, may be to acquire eternal bliss, whatever is right for one, or localized needs or favours. Indeed, having such goals, and trusting God for their fulfilment, is partly *constitutive* of relationship with him – as when a child trusts her father for her needs. Such trust can strengthen the relationship. Trusting God, then, is instrumental for cultivating one's relationship with him, which is faith in a nutshell.

[24] Horsburgh (1960) calls the latter 'therapeutic trust'.

What about the exceptions of desperate leaps and alternate goals – do they violate Religious Evidentialism? Are they situations in which one's *beliefs* about God's trustworthiness need not be proportioned to one's evidence? No – on the contrary. Proportioning one's beliefs to one's evidence is crucial for instrumental rationality, for (scepticism aside) it maximizes one's chances of obtaining one's ends. If I desperately leap to trust God because I value eternal bliss, my confidence that eternal bliss is worth the risk, and that it can't be obtained more easily, had better be evidence-proportioned. Similarly, if my goal is different from obtaining eternal bliss (say it is to disconfirm theism by showing God to be untrustworthy), I'd better have evidence-proportioned belief that trusting God will come up empty. Thus Religious Evidentialism is vindicated: Beliefs about trustworthiness should be evidence-proportioned even when one acts, in trust, against that evidence.

Love and trust are better (*ceteris paribus*) when beliefs about love- and trustworthiness are evidence-proportioned; and thus so (*ceteris paribus*) is any faith of which they are a component.[25]

IV. AN ARGUMENT FROM THE BIBLE

The arguments from love and trust proceed from premises acceptable to religious and secular alike. This section argues for Religious Evidentialism from the Hebrew Bible[26] and the New Testament. Recognition of the philosophical value of biblical texts is coming into its own with such works as Stump's (2011) and Hazony's (2012). Biblical considerations should interest both those who regard these texts as sources of truth, and those who don't but who want to convince those who do to proportion their religious beliefs to their evidence.

I discuss the Bible at the textual level, without explicit appeal to critical techniques.[27] Although, like biblical theologians, I use one book or section to interpret others, I won't here use the New Testament to interpret the Hebrew Bible.

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[25] This does not mean of course that a relationship is always served by seeking more evidence. But the reason (as some of our biblical examples will illustrate) is that relationship works on the assumption that the parties already have a great deal of evidence about each other.

[26] 'Hebrew Bible' is a mildly infelicitous term, referring to the texts of the Christian Old Testament *in Hebrew*; I use it for lack of a better one.

[27] This is mainly due to limited space.

We'll examine some biblical examples pertaining to the evidential grounding of beliefs; first I'll support my case by appeal to biblical semantics.

'Emuna

In the Hebrew Bible, 'faith' usually translates *'emuna*. *'Emuna* derives from the verb *'aman*, meaning (in its Qal form) 'to confirm, support, uphold, establish', for example as pillars do when supporting a ceiling.[28] Its participle denotes someone who is 'confirmed, supported, upheld, established'. *'Emuna* has what Perry (1953) calls an 'active' sense (call it *'emuna*$_A$) and a 'passive' one (*'emuna*$_P$). *'Emuna*$_A$ means 'trust' or 'obedience'; someone who has it trusts, relies on, or obeys someone or something. *'Emuna*$_P$ means 'trustworthiness', 'firmness', or 'reliability', applying to someone or something which, having these qualities, is a suitable object of trust, obedience, or reliance. So the object of faith (i.e., of *'emuna*$_A$) must be genuinely trustworthy. But more importantly for our purposes, the person who has faith must be aware of that object's trustworthiness: '[B]iblical faith [*'emuna*$_A$] is an assurance, a certainty, in contrast with modern concepts of faith as something possible, hopefully true, but not certain' (Harris 1980: 116). Moses' leaning his arms on Aaron's and Hur's[29] counts as *'emuna*$_A$ both because their arms will support him *and* because Moses is aware that they will. Similarly, what makes for faith in God is his reliability *and* the faithful person's awareness of it.[30]

However, we are still short of Religious Evidentialism. The faithful person must believe that God is trustworthy and this belief must be true, but nothing we have said implies that it must also be evidence-proportioned. From a biblical point of view, why suppose that it should? Examination of the Bible shows that instances of faith in God typically, and normatively, *are* accompanied by evidence-proportioned beliefs about him. Space permits me barely to scratch the surface of a few biblical texts, but I hope to make an initial etching for further research.

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[28] e.g. 2 Kings 18:16.

[29] Exodus 17:12.

[30] The Greek correlate of *'emuna* is *pistis*, which has a similar semantic range to *'emuna*, though space prohibits discussion here; see Kittel and Friedrich 1964-1974.

Evidence in the Hebrew Bible

At the end of their sojourn in the desert, Moses reminds the Israelites that the strong beliefs they should have about God (in particular that there is no God other than the LORD) are proportioned to their and their fathers' experience of the Exodus (Deuteronomy 4:33-35, italics added):[31]

> Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you *it was shown, that you might know* that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him.

Similarly, in Joshua (3:7-17), God wants the Israelites to 'know'[32] that he is with their new leader Joshua as he was with their old leader Moses, thus giving them as evidence the miracle in which the Jordan stopped flowing when the ark was carried into it.

Of course, most people's beliefs about God are not supported by evidence derived from such dramatic experiences (a whole book would be needed to treat the nature of evidence in the Bible); for present purposes, such passages show that the Bible is concerned with the provision of evidence about God so that people may proportion their beliefs to it.

Why, one might object, should the norm arising from such cases *mandate*? Why not suppose it is permissive, allowing but not requiring beliefs about God to be evidence-proportioned? Perhaps these cases document a regularity rather than the meeting of an obligation. Perhaps God supplies evidence as a gracious condescension to timid human beings, whereas he might be just as happy, or happier, if we held strong beliefs about him without it. This might seem the case with Gideon (Judges 6:36-40), who, on the eve of battle, asks God for not just one sign but, upon receiving it, a second, as evidence that God 'will save Israel by my hand, as you have said' (6:36). Although God graciously provides the requested signs, surely Gideon's plea that God's 'anger not burn against' him upon requesting the second sign (6:39) indicates that Gideon expects God to disapprove of his epistemic scruples.

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[31] Bible citations come from the English Standard Version.

[32] We may assume that knowledge includes strong belief which is evidence-proportioned.

Gideon is indeed too needy of evidence; but the reason is that he *already has enough* to warrant strong belief. He has the evidence provided by the spontaneous combustion of the unleavened cakes, which he had received upon request from the angel at his initial commissioning (Judges 6:17-18). But even this sign, in God's eyes, was merely a gracious condescension to Gideon's doubt: God's *first* approach to Gideon employed what one might consider irrefutable evidence, the promise that 'I will be with you' (6:16). That the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will accompany Gideon, of which Gideon is informed by no less than a heavenly messenger of that God, is surely a knock-down reason for anyone acquainted with God's character (and even mildly impressed by the angel). Finally, 'the Spirit of the LORD clothed Gideon' (6:34), which we should expect to provide Gideon with significant experiential evidence. The evidence with which Gideon is first presented is more than sufficient, according to the text, for strong belief in the revealed proposition; this is why his request for more is excessive.

The Hebrew Bible is replete with references to evidence provision but space demands contenting ourselves with this representative taster. Some apparent counterexamples are discussed later.

Evidence in the New Testament

The New Testament supports Religious Evidentialism too.

Matthew, when narrating Jesus' healing of the paralytic, writes that Jesus claims to perform this miracle to provide evidence that:

(1) Jesus has authority under God to forgive sins.

After famously instructing the paralytic, 'Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven' (Matthew 9:2), Jesus says to the scribes, who think him blasphemous:

> 'Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, "Your sins are forgiven", or to say, "Rise and walk"? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins' – he then said to the paralytic – 'Rise, pick up your bed and go home.' And he rose and went home.

To provide the scribes with evidence for (1), Jesus performs the lesser miracle of healing the paralytic's physical disability, while stating that his aim is to provide evidence.

This story might suggest that Jesus provides evidence as a gracious or even scornful condescension to the scribes, whereas the people who

brought the paralytic would have believed (1) regardless of evidence. But elsewhere in Matthew, Jesus himself argues that provision of evidence about the Christ is built into Jewish tradition (Matthew 11). In doing so he provides evidence for two points:

(2) Jesus is the Christ.
(3) John the Baptist is a true prophet.

As evidence for (2), to convince John's the Baptist's disciples, Jesus cites his own miracles (Matthew 11:4-6):

> 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.'

Jesus also offers evidence for (3), which confirms Jesus' claims to be the one about whom John prophesies. First, Jesus appeals to his listeners' general knowledge about prophets' typical characteristics (Matthew 11:7-9):

> 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see [when you went out to see John the Baptist]? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you ...'

Not only is John a true prophet, Jesus says; he is the specific prophet, foretold by Malachi, who prepares the way for God's messenger. Hence Jesus' second appeal to evidence for John's prophet-hood comes in the Malachi citation (Matthew 11:9-11):

> '[John is] more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written:
> "Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
> Who will prepare your way before you"'.

The tradition of witness mattered in ancient Judaic law: No death sentence could be passed without evidence of at least two witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6), prophets were witnesses to God's decrees, and there were specific kinds of evidence which would help distinguish true from false prophets (Deuteronomy 13:1-3). Far from commanding, expecting, or desiring belief regardless of evidence, Jesus not only employs evidence to convince people, but in doing so takes himself to follow God-given tradition. For Jesus and the Jews of his day, evidence-proportioned religious belief is the rule, not the exception.

A complete biblical case for Religious Evidentialism would be a book unto itself, but I hope the considerations offered here provide a sense of what that book might contain. Let's consider some prima facie biblical counterexamples to Religious Evidentialism.

The Call of Abram

The narrative of Abram begins abruptly with God saying, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you', and continues, just as abruptly, 'So Abram went, as the LORD had told him' (Genesis 12:1-4). Let us assume that Abram believes that God is trustworthy. One might regard Abram's unquestioning belief in God's trustworthiness, with apparently no evidence about the LORD who sent him, as a counterexample to Religious Evidentialism. But it makes more sense to think that Abram already knew God personally. This reading is supported by observing that, in most other biblical passages where God first speaks to someone, addressees respond in shock or by expecting to die (e.g. Isaiah 6:5; Judges 13:22-23). It is thus highly odd that Abram does not even act surprised; a plausible explanation is that he already has an established relationship with God, which in turn suggests that Abram already has evidence that God is trustworthy. We return to the Hebrew Bible with a discussion of Job, but for now a few suggested counterexamples from the New Testament.

Doubting Thomas

After Jesus' crucifixion, Jesus' disciples tell Thomas, another disciple, that Jesus has appeared to them in the flesh. Thomas replies, 'Unless I see in [Jesus'] hands the mark of the nails [which fastened him to the cross], and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side [which was wounded by a Roman spear], I will never believe' (John 20:25). When Jesus appears to Thomas and the other disciples eight days later, he invites Thomas to touch his wounds, and comments, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed' (John 21:29).

Is Jesus' remark a counterexample to Religious Evidentialism? Our discussion of Gideon, who should not have needed more evidence than he initially received, shows why it is not. Thomas has accompanied Jesus from the start of his ministry and hence is intimately acquainted with Jesus' power. Jesus' comment is a rebuke to Thomas not for failing to believe against his evidence, but for failing to proportion is belief to the

great evidence which he already has. Jesus pronounces blessed those who believe without seeing him in the flesh, not those who believe against their evidence. Indeed, the very next paragraph makes clear that the writer's purpose in penning the gospel is to provide evidence for those who have not seen Jesus as Thomas and he himself[33] have (John 20:30-31):

> Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Far from contravening Religious Evidentialism, this passage from John endorses it by seeking to provide evidence for those who have not physically seen Jesus, and by narrating a Jesus who expects those who have seen him to believe on the basis of their acquaintance with him that he has risen from the dead.

Hebrews

Hebrews 11:1 famously characterizes faith as 'the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen', seeming to suggest that faith constitutively involves belief stronger than one's evidence warrants. But this interpretation is overhasty: this passage does not commend belief on insufficient evidence, but rather belief that, if God promises that a future (hence 'unseen') event will occur, it will occur. The passage assumes that those believing in God's promises already have evidence: namely, the believed proposition *God is trustworthy*.

Trust (which here includes the belief element) in God's promises on the basis of God's trustworthiness is what the passages immediately before and after the much-quoted 11:1 urge. In 10:23 it is on the premise that God is trustworthy – which readers are apparently assumed to believe – that the writer exhorts both the action and the belief elements of trust in God: 'Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.' Similarly, the list of the faithful immediately following 11:1 commends those who, in proportion to their beliefs about God's trustworthiness, believed that his promises would obtain. Sarah 'considered him faithful who had promised' that she would conceive a child (11:11); Abram believed God's promise of many descendants strongly enough to offer his son Isaac in sacrifice, because

[33] John 21:24.

he 'considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back' (11:19). The 'cloud of witnesses' (12:1), says the writer, believe that God's promises will obtain because they proportion this belief to their evidence, the believed proposition *God is trustworthy*.

But what about that proposition itself? Since this part of Hebrews is not concerned primarily with epistemology, it does not say explicitly whether the characters' belief in this evidence is or should itself be evidence-proportioned, or whether readers' belief in it should be. But evidence-proportioning is nonetheless implicitly on the agenda. Note first that the witnesses named, including Gideon (11:32) (who we saw had ample evidence), were aware of who God was, and that most were personally acquainted with him, when they acted on their beliefs that his promise would obtain. The passage thus seems to assume that the characters' belief in God's trustworthiness is proportioned to their evidence. Second, the writer employs the list of witnesses as evidence that readers should themselves believe and act on God's promises: 'since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also ... run with endurance the race that is set before us' (12:1). Finally, the passage calls readers to look 'to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross ...and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God' (12:2). If Jesus' faith is perfect, as the writer says, then perfect faith is accompanied by evidence-proportioned belief. For Jesus, being God's son, knew God more intimately than anyone and hence had ample evidence for his belief that God is trustworthy.

Far from showing that faith is somehow better without sufficient evidence about its object, this Hebrews passage expects beliefs associated with faith in God to be proportioned to one's evidence about God.

Job

Some might take the book of Job as a counterexample to Religious Evidentialism. Job, a righteous man, suddenly and traumatically loses his possessions, his children, and his health, yet refuses (rightly, it turns out), in spite of his companions' urging, to affirm that he deserves it. Instead he demands that God explain himself. Finally God does speak (out of a whirlwind), beginning with, 'Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?' (Job 38:4) and ending with, 'Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it' (40:2). Job answers, 'Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer

you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further' (40:4-5). This narrative would seem to regard it as inappropriate or even sinful to expect to have evidence in proportion to one's confident belief in God's goodness, justice, and so forth.[34]

I don't think that the book of Job contravenes Religious Evidentialism. Let's examine the narrative from an epistemological standpoint.[35] Job's innocent suffering provides him with evidence that God is unjust. The epistemological content of Job's communication to God[36] is, 'How can you be just when so much evidence indicates that you aren't?'[37] Job demands that God explain the incongruity between his supposed justice and the present counterevidence, in a way that provides evidence in proportion to the belief that God is just. The objection to Religious Evidentialism supposes that God has not done this and that he expects Job to believe, against this counterevidence,[38] that he is just.

But the narrative, on closer examination, does not support this interpretation. Let's look at God's response to Job, which arguably does four things. First, by appealing to God's knowledge of and sovereignty over creation, God's words provide Job with evidence for the proposition *There is much additional evidence for God's justice, pertaining to the setup of the universe as a whole, which Job, being human, does not have (and perhaps is not capable of understanding)*.[39] If Job knew what God knows, we may take the text to suggest, Job would not doubt God's justice.

Second, at least some of God's words may, if we accept Stump's reading,[40] provide evidence that God cares for creation as a parent and hence that he cares for Job in this way, which is in turn evidence that Job's suffering will somehow be redeemed for Job's benefit, which would render God just. For example, Stump calls our attention to an analogy

[34] Thanks to Sebastian Gäb.

[35] See Stump 2011 for a much more wide-ranging discussion of Job than space allows here.

[36] Job also conveys many non-epistemological communications, including hurt, betrayal, anger, and confusion.

[37] Job might also be thought to impugn God's goodness and love; for space we'll focus on justice.

[38] Let's assume for argument's sake that Job has no other evidence which contravenes the evidence of his suffering and which supports God's justice, even though the text is not clear on this.

[39] Job 38:4-40:2, 40:9-34.

[40] 2010, Chapter 9.

which God draws between the sea and a new-born child of God's: 'Who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band' (38:8-9); and to God's use of parental language to refer to his relationship with rain, ice, and frost (38:28-29); and so forth.[41]

Third, God's response provides evidence arising from an experiential encounter with God himself, in which Job (we can imagine) not only perceives God's splendour but also becomes personally acquainted with God's care and just intentions (*ibid.*).

Fourth, that the creator of the universe holds such a lengthy discourse with a human being at all – a rare event in the Hebrew Bible, reserved for prophets and God's closest servants – provides evidence. Although God's response does not provide an explanation in the sense of a theory explaining Job's specific suffering, we may suppose that God's words and his presence provide evidence that God is just generally: the judge has descended from on high to address the rightly aggrieved.

Thus, rather than high-handedly commanding belief in his justice out of proportion with Job's evidence, God has provided Job with evidence for his justice – in spite of not explaining Job's specific suffering. That this evidence satisfies Job (42:1-6) indicates that both Job and the text take it to suffice epistemically for confident belief that God is just.

Thus the book of Job (at least on this reading) is consistent with Religious Evidentialism. But it may also be consistent with its negation: For all we have said, God's provision of evidence may be merely a gracious condescension to Job's emotional turmoil, whereas God may prefer that Job believe without it. However, the narrative actively supports the claim that religious belief *should* be evidence-proportioned. To see this, note that God affirms all that his 'servant Job' has said about him (42:7). This includes – remarkably – Job's rebuke to his companions for defending God to Job in the face of the counterevidence of Job's suffering. Surely, Job has said, God – assuming he is just – will frown on such partiality (13:7 ... 10): 'Will you speak falsely for God and speak deceitfully for him? ... Will you plead the case for God? He will surely rebuke you if in secret you show partiality.' Job's companions advocate belief, against their and Job's evidence, that God is just, whereas Job says that such fawning, counter-evidential belief would displease God. Thus God, in affirming all that Job has said about him, sides with Job. From the arguments from

[41] See Stump, *ibid.*, for discussion.

love and trust, this should not surprise us: God is more pleased with a faith born of evidence-proportioned belief than one born of self-deceit or partiality.

To this interpretation one might object: why, if not because of his desire for an evidence-providing explanation, does God reprove Job so emphatically ('Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me', 38:2-3), and what does Job so thoroughly repent of ('therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes', 42:6)? Stump addresses this puzzle (*ibid*.) by suggesting that God's aggressive reproof of Job is intended to shake Job into perceiving God's care for him in a way that tenderness might not, and hence that Job, when seeing this, repents of not seeing it. What he does not repent of, I suggest, is taking the evidence of his suffering to disconfirm God's justice; rather, he repents in acknowledgement of the new evidence he has received from his dramatic encounter with God himself. Not only is the book of Job no counterexample to Religious Evidentialism, at least on this reading it supports it.

I have not addressed all of the potential biblical counterexamples to Religious Evidentialism, but I hope that what I have said provides a flavour of the way in which they might be answered.

V. CONCLUSION

Religious Evidentialism shoulders what some might fear is a heavy burden, saying that faithful religious believers need not merely believe religious propositions, but that they must do so in proportion to their evidence. Surely this is too hard a requirement for many; is not belief enough, evidence-proportioned or otherwise? As for Job, the problem of suffering alone may seem insurmountable. It is not for me to say what non-evidence-proportioned belief would be enough *for*. Perhaps, in a world in which this epistemic 'ought' is hard to fulfil, other 'oughts' overrule it – I don't know. I have argued only that evidence-proportioned religious belief is a feature of ideal faith.

What is clear from Religious Evidentialism is that it is the believer's business to provide herself with enough evidence to sustain evidence-proportioned belief about the object of her faith. She may busy herself with arguments for and against the existence of God, but she may also do her best to gain evidence-providing personal acquaintance of him. This

will likely involve confronting, among other hard issues, the problem of suffering. What she arguably may *not* do is fill her evidential arsenal with 'pro' evidence and avoid any sources which she has reason to believe provide 'contra' evidence. For evidence of 'contra' evidence is, itself, evidence. If she comes out the other side of evidential questions about God's existence and character, her faith, like Job's, will be the best it can be. If she does not, she has at least refused to imitate Job's companions – whom God rebukes – in their self-deceptive epistemic partiality.[42]

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THE REAL CONFLICT BETWEEN SCIENCE AND RELIGION: ALVIN PLANTINGA'S *IGNORATIO ELENCHI*

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Abstract. By focussing on the logical relations between scientific theories and religious beliefs in his book *Where the Conflict Really Lies* (2011), Alvin Plantinga overlooks the real conflict between science and religion. This conflict exists whenever religious believers endorse positive factual claims to truth concerning the supernatural. They thereby violate an important rule (R) of scientific method and of common sense, according to which (seriously disputed) factual claims should be endorsed as (approximately, probably, etc.) true only if they result from validated epistemic methods or sources.

I. INTRODUCTION

The question as to how science and religion are related should be of interest to all of us. Well-educated people living in the twenty-first century will endorse a world-view that is deeply influenced by the results of scientific and scholarly investigations. Can a religious creed be integrated properly into such a *Weltanschauung*, or, *vice versa*, can one incorporate all scientific results into a religious world-view? For instance, are Jewish, Christian, Muslim, or Mormon monotheistic beliefs about God and the world still intellectually acceptable in our age of science? There is no consensus concerning this issue, and the various possible answers have implications for many aspects of society and human life.

Consequently, a definitive analysis of the interrelations between science and religion developed by a major Christian philosopher deserves serious attention. In his book *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, published in 2011 (referred to as WCRL), Alvin Plantinga defends two complementary and thought-provoking claims, to wit: (a) '*there is*

superficial conflict but deep concord between science and theistic religion', whereas (b) there is '*superficial concord and deep conflict between science and naturalism*'.[1] In this article, I shall contest the first conjunct of (a), that is, the thesis that there is (merely) a superficial conflict between science and theistic religion.

As I shall argue, the conflict between science and religion is profound indeed, and it is only by his narrow focus on logical conflicts that Plantinga might be able to seduce his readers into thinking otherwise. Of course, if I am right that there is a deep conflict between science and religion, that is, at least between science and theistic religion as Plantinga conceives of it, the second conjunct of Plantinga's first thesis (a) must be false as well. I also think that the second conjunct of (b), the idea that there is a deep conflict between science and naturalism, is completely mistaken, as has been argued by many critics of Plantinga, but I shall not dive into the deep waters of this brainteaser here.[2]

Let me start (§2) by commenting on one of Plantinga's arguments for the first conjunct of (a). In §3, I develop the view that there is a deep conflict between science and traditional religion, and I explicate the term 'science' for the present context. This deep conflict raises the question as to how educated and intelligent people living in the twenty-first century can still reasonably endorse the tenets of a religion such as Christianity or Islam (§4).[3] Contemporary religious believers have four options with regard to this issue, which I schematize as the end-nodes of a decision tree. One of these options has been developed by Alvin Plantinga as a conditional A/C (Aquinas-Calvin) model of a *sensus divinitatis* supplemented by an 'Internal Instigation of the Holy Spirit'. If this model were adequate, 'the full panoply of Christian belief' *might* amount to *knowledge* for (some?) Christians even in the absence of any supporting arguments, since this panoply would probably consist of warranted properly basic beliefs, at least if the Christian god exists.[4] I shall argue, however, that there also is a deep conflict between this model and science in the sense in which science is properly characterized (§5).

[1] Plantinga (2011: ix) (Plantinga's italics).

[2] Cf., for example, Fales (1996), Beilby (2002), Plantinga & Tooley (2008), Childers (2011), and Law (2012).

[3] The central question of Plantinga was whether Christian belief is still intellectually acceptable for 'educated and intelligent people living in the twenty-first century' (2000: viii).

[4] The quote is from Plantinga (2000: 241, 357, 499).

II. LOGICAL CONFLICTS

In Parts I and II of WCRL, Alvin Plantinga argues that either there is no conflict at all between science and religion, or, if there is a conflict, it is only 'weak' or 'superficial' in the sense that scientific results do not (tend to) provide religious (Christian) believers with defeaters for their beliefs.[5] The notion of *conflict* he employs is a logical one in a broad sense: there is a 'conflict' between *p* and *q* if and only if *p* contradicts *q*, or if *q* is 'massively improbable' given *p* and background beliefs.[6] Since such logical conflicts can only obtain between (sets of) propositions, Plantinga focuses on relations between religious *beliefs* and scientific *theories* in his discussion of possible conflicts between science and religion.

More specifically, he argues that Darwinism is logically compatible with the idea of a divinely guided evolution (Ch. 1-2), that a belief in miracles is consistent both with Newtonian mechanics or classical science (Ch. 3) and with quantum mechanics (Ch. 4), and that even though there may be logical incompatibilities between Christian beliefs on the one hand and some results of Historical Biblical Criticism or explanations of religion by evolutionary psychologists on the other hand (Ch. 5), the latter do not defeat the former (Ch. 6). Let me comment on the issue of Darwinism only, in order to show that Plantinga's preoccupation with logical relations between articles of faith and scientific theories conceals from view the profound conflict between science and religion (cf. §3).

Chapters 1 and 2 of WCRL are devoted to the question of whether there is a logical conflict between on the one hand evolutionary theory, specifically the Darwinist doctrine that the process of descent with modification is driven by the natural mechanism of (mostly) natural selection operating on heritable random genetic mutations, and on the other hand the Christian doctrine that God has created human beings in his image.[7] Of course (neo-) Darwinism clearly contradicts many

[5] Cf. Plantinga (2011: xiii and 180) for these (slightly diverging) definitions of a *weak* or *superficial* conflict.

[6] Plantinga (2011: 143-4). More may be needed to make such a conflict 'interesting' (ibidem).

[7] Plantinga (2011: 9ff., 34ff.). Of course, chance plays a large role in the selection process as well. As Ernst Mayr (2001: 156) stresses, 'potentially favorable gene combinations are undoubtedly often eliminated by indiscriminate environmental forces such as floods, earthquakes, or volcanic eruptions before natural selection has had the opportunity to favor specific genotypes' . Furthermore, in sexual species, the major source of variation is the process of sexual reproduction.

details of the creation stories told in *Genesis*, if interpreted *literatim*. But scientifically informed Christians have been quick to point out that the (mutually inconsistent) creation stories should not be taken literally, as theologians had argued earlier on other grounds. Plantinga approvingly quotes the Princeton theologian Charles Hodge, who wrote in 1871 that if God created plants, animals, and men, 'it makes no difference how He made them, as far as the question of design is concerned, whether at once or by a process of evolution'.[8] Could God not have 'guided' evolution, Plantinga suggests, by causing 'the right mutations to arise at the right time', by preserving 'populations from perils of various sorts, and so on'?[9] Of course one might add less pleasant speculations in a similar vein. Could God not have caused the Cretaceous-Paleogene extinction event some 65.5 million years ago, which killed off the non-avian dinosaurs, by steering a giant asteroid towards Earth? If He wanted to create man in his image, as Plantinga avers, God had good reasons for guiding the lethal asteroid towards our planet, because given the actual course of evolution, the extinction of these dinosaurs was a necessary condition for the possibility of human's evolving.[10]

Plantinga stresses repeatedly that there is no logical conflict whatsoever between neo-Darwinism and the thesis that God guided the evolution of life on Earth, because the thesis that evolution is undirected, unguided, non-teleological, or unorchestrated by God (or anyone else) allegedly is 'a philosophical gloss or add-on to the scientific doctrine of evolution', which does not belong to the theory itself.[11] In order to evaluate this surprising claim, one should distinguish more clearly than Plantinga does between three different questions: (a) is the unguidedness-thesis part of the standard theory of neo-Darwinism (the Modern Evolutionary Synthesis)? (b) Does the existing evidence support the unguidedness-thesis? And (c): is it logically possible that given the available evidence, evolution is nevertheless directed by someone?

Concerning (a) it is surprising that Plantinga in 2011 still quotes Hodges' book of 1871. As is well known, after the publication of Darwin's

[8] Plantinga (2011: 11); with reference to Hodge (1871, no page number indicated).

[9] Plantinga (2011: 11; cf. pp. 16, 39-40, 46, 56, 116 &c).

[10] Cf. on the thesis that God created man in his image, Plantinga (2011), *passim*, see under *Imago dei* in his index. And cf. for similar objections by Darwin to Asa Gray: Beatty (2006: 639).

[11] Plantinga (2011: xii, 39, 46, 55, 63, 308-9).

The Origin of Species in 1859, there were many attempts to defend Darwinism from the charge that it promoted atheism. The American botanist Asa Gray argued in his *Darwiniana* of 1876, like Plantinga, that the theory of evolution is neutral on the question whether evolution is ultimately designed. Might the Creator not direct mutations in ways that are beneficial to a species? But in letters to Gray and in the Conclusion to his *Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication* of 1868, Darwin stressed that this hypothesis is antagonistic to his evolutionary theory.[12] If genetic variation could be guided in a beneficial direction, natural selection would be superfluous, so that the internal logic or economy of the theory excludes the idea that mutations are somehow orchestrated.[13] By the end of the 19th century, most professional biologists were convinced on many grounds that theistic evolutionism is a non-starter.[14] Accordingly, it is a central tenet of the Modern Evolutionary Synthesis that genetic mutations occur 'by chance' or 'at random' in the sense of not being directed toward the adaptive needs of the organisms concerned or of the populations to which they belong, and that natural selection is not goal-directed either, as is stressed in contemporary textbooks.[15]

If this is the case, how can Plantinga seriously claim that the unguidedness-thesis is *not* part of neo-Darwinism but rather a 'philosophical gloss or add-on'? How can he drive a wedge between 'random' and 'unguided'?[16] He does so in two steps, which he buttresses by quotes from Ernst Mayr and Elliott Sober, respectively. The quote from Mayr shows that the 'randomness' of mutations does not mean that they are *uncaused* or 'just a matter of chance':

> When it is said that mutation or variation is random, the statement simply means that there is no correlation between the production of new genotypes and the adaptational needs of an organism in a given environment.[17]

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[12] Darwin (1868: 236).

[13] Cf. also Bowler (1989: 224): 'Darwin doubted that any theologian would want to attribute such horrors to a process directly supervised by God.' Cf. for Darwin's discussion with Gray: Beatty (2006).

[14] Cf. Bowler (1989: 222-226).

[15] Cf. Ridley (2004: 88-89); Mayr (2001: 133-4); Simpson (1984 [1944]: 55-56); Dobzhansky et al. (1977: 66). Cf. Merlin (2010: 2ff.) for a conceptual analysis of various formulations. Plantinga (2011) quotes mainly Dawkins (p. 14) and Dennett (p. 34).

[16] Cf. Boudry (2012: 1).

[17] Plantinga (2011: 11), and Mayr (1988: 98).

According to Plantinga, Sober 'puts the point a bit more carefully' because he stresses that there is no *natural* mechanism that directs mutations in adaptive directions:

> There is no *physical mechanism* (either inside organisms or outside of them) that detects which mutations would be beneficial and causes those mutations to occur.[18]

From these quotes Plantinga concludes correctly that the mutations being 'random in *that* sense is clearly compatible with being *caused* by God'.[19] However, it does not follow, and is in fact contradicted by the quote from Mayr (unless one restricts the meaning of this quote *à la* Sober to the absence of *physical* guiding mechanisms), that randomness in the evolutionary sense is also logically compatible with being *guided* by God, if at least 'guided' means that mutations are somehow directed towards new adaptations, or to the development of new species. And what else should it mean?

Clearly, then, the thesis that evolution is unguided is an integral part of the Modern Evolutionary Synthesis, and Plantinga's argument to the effect that the thesis is 'a philosophical gloss or add-on' to this theory is a *non-sequitur*.[20] As Mark Ridley stresses in his textbook on evolution, '[i]t is one of the most fundamental claims in the Darwinian theory of evolution that natural selection is the *only* explanation for adaptation'.[21]

Concerning (b), the issue as to whether the existing *evidence* supports the thesis that mutations are random, not in the sense of 'uncaused' but in the sense of 'unguided to future adaptation', one should admit that the empirical evidence supporting this claim is overwhelming, and that it is sensible to generalize from such consistent findings.[22] Yet this randomness thesis cannot mean that, for example, specific types of mutations all have the same probability of being beneficial, deleterious,

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[18] Plantinga (2011: 12), with reference to Sober, 'Evolution Without Metaphysics?', probably the draft of 'Evolution without Naturalism', in Jonathan L. Kvanvig, ed. (2011: 187-221) (no date or page indicated by Plantinga).

[19] Plantinga (2011: 12) (last italics mine).

[20] This is the consensus view, as Plantinga (2011: 12) admits; cf. Merlin (2010) for a defence of this view against scientific critics. Cf. Monton & Gage (2012) for another criticism of Plantinga's argument. One should diagnose Plantinga's fallacy as a fallacy of ambiguity, because he confuses 'uncaused' with 'unguided'.

[21] Ridley (2004: 256) (my italics). Ridley explicitly excludes theistic explanations.

[22] Cf. Merlin (2010) for an overview and answers to criticisms based on the discovery of mutator mechanisms.

or neutral. For example, small genetic mutations have a greater chance of being adaptive than larger ones, which tend to be deleterious or lethal, as Sir Ronald Fisher showed mathematically.[23] Furthermore, new adverse environmental conditions, such as temperature change, might cause a global increase of mutation rate, thereby also increasing the probability that beneficial mutations occur within a given period. And the probability of mutations of different types is unequal both across the genome and at a particular genomic site. No genetic mutation is random in the mathematical sense that it is equally probable as any other genetic mutation or no mutation. What the randomness thesis does mean is that 'there is no specific causal connection between the probability of a mutation being beneficial (in a given environment) and the probability of it occurring (in this environment)'.[24]

As regards (c), it is trivially true that because our evidence is limited in principle, it is always logically possible that there are hidden variables, which are still undetected or even undetectable. For example, our available evidence concerning the Cretaceous-Paleogene extinction event does not contradict the hypothesis that God caused it by steering an asteroid towards Earth. But why should we accept such a gratuitous speculation? A mere logical possibility does not warrant a factual assertion, and if someone claims that he knows this by means of an 'Internal Instigation of the Holy Spirit', we should respond with a shrug. This appropriate reaction directs our attention to the really profound conflict between science and religion, which is not (primarily) a conflict in the narrow logical sense of a contradiction or a low likelihood, as I shall argue in section 3.

Finally, combining issues (a) and (c) one might even show that in a sense there is no contradiction between neo-Darwinism and the theistic doctrine of guided evolution, in spite of the fact that Plantinga's own argument to this effect is a *non sequitur*.[25] Even though mathematical models of evolutionary processes concerning changes in trait frequency may look deterministic if one assumes that they are applied to infinite populations, all real populations are finite. As a consequence, neo-Darwinism, if conceived of *merely as a set of such mathematical models or equations*, becomes a probabilistic theory *when*

[23] Fisher 1999 [1930], referred to by Merlin (2010: 4).

[24] Merlin (2010: 6).

[25] The argument that follows in the main text has been developed in detail by Sober (forthcoming). Cf. also Sober (2010) and (2011), Chapter 4.

applied to real populations. Instead of predicting what will happen in the future given a description of the present state of a population, the models assign probabilities to different scenarios. And since these probability statements (likelihoods) may be true even though their antecedents do not provide causally complete descriptions of populations and their ecological niches, they do not logically exclude the presence of causally relevant factors that are 'hidden' in the sense that they are not mentioned in the applied mathematical models of evolutionary theory. Of course, this argument holds for any probabilistic theory, and Plantinga uses a similar argument for the conclusion that there is no contradiction between quantum mechanics and the thesis that miracles have occurred.[26] In other words, Plantinga might correctly claim that *in a sense* there is no contradiction between neo-Darwinism (that is: between the mathematical evolutionary models as applied to finite populations) and the thesis of guided evolution, even though in the ordinary sense of neo-Darwinism his claim is clearly false.[27]

This result leads us to the central question of this paper. Would the thesis that there is *no contradiction* between neo-Darwinism (in the sense just explained) and the doctrine of divinely guided evolution imply that at this point there is *no profound conflict* between science and religion? Let us generalize our query. Suppose that there is no contradiction or other logical conflict between *any* scientific theory that we now endorse on the basis of the existing evidence on the one hand, and the central doctrines of a specific religion such as Christianity, provided that the latter are interpreted properly, on the other hand. Does this really show that there is no profound conflict between science and Christianity? In other words, are *logical* relations of incompatibility (contradiction, or improbability of p given q and background beliefs) the only or even the main kinds of conflict that are relevant here? As I shall argue in the next section, the deep conflict between science and religion lies elsewhere, so that Plantinga's nearly exclusive preoccupation with logical conflicts amounts to an *ignoratio elenchi*.

[26] Plantinga (2011: 92ff.).

[27] I would argue, however, that neo-Darwinism is more than a set of equations. Sober's motive for developing the argument I just summarized is that he wants 'to take the heat off evolutionary theory'. As he says, 'The more evolutionary theory gets called an atheistic theory, the greater the risk that it will lose its place in public school biology courses in the United States' (Sober, forthcoming: p. 15 of the manuscript).

III. THE REAL CONFLICT

In order to detect where the profound conflict between science and religion really lies, an historical perspective on their interrelations from the scientific revolution in the 17th century onwards is instructive. One arbitrarily selected example will show what I mean.[28]

During the 16th and 17th centuries, numerous European scholars attempted to calculate on the basis of biblical chronologies when exactly the 'beginning' had been in which God created 'the heavens and the earth'.[29] The challenging textual and mathematical complexities of this endeavour explain the fact that the results they published diverged considerably. Some 200 or more substantial publications appeared, and their estimates of the year of the Earth's (or the world's) divine creation varied between 6000 BC and 2700 BC. For example, whereas Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) concluded that the Earth started to exist in 3004 BC, Thomas Allen (1608-1673) argued in his 1659 book *A Chain of Scripture Chronology* that its creation took place in 3934 BC. As William Nisbit observed in *A Scripture Chronology* of 1655, there was 'great disagreement among chronologues in counting the years from the Creation of the World to the death of our Saviour'. Nevertheless, the scientific community of biblical chronologists agreed that 'The Sacred Writ is the best Register' for calculating the age of the Earth or the world, as Allen wrote in his preface.[30]

Today the age of the Earth is estimated to be 4.45 ± 0.05 billion years on the basis of evidence from radiometric age dating of meteorite material, which matches the ages of the oldest-known terrestrial and lunar samples. A more precise estimate is difficult to obtain, because the accretion time of planet Earth is unknown. Furthermore, the age of our universe, defined as the time elapsed since the postulated Big Bang event, is estimated 13.798 ± 0.037 billion years within the Lambda-CDM concordance model on the basis of various types of measurements, such as measurements of the microwave background radiation and measurements of the expansion rate of the universe.[31] For at least two reasons no well-informed intellectual will resort nowadays to biblical chronology in order to determine the age of the Earth or of our universe.

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[28] Plantinga (2011: 10) discusses this example briefly.

[29] *Genesis* 1:1-19.

[30] Cf. for these data and quotes: Jackson (2006: 13-29).

[31] Estimate of 22 March 2013.

First, in and after the 17th century Western scholars discovered other alleged religious revelations, on the basis of which very different ages of the Earth or the universe might be calculated. For example, according to calculations informed by the Vedas, the current age of our universe would be in the order of magnitude of 155.5 trillion years. But if allegedly revealed religious texts contradict each other on specific topics, and if there are no good epistemic reasons to prefer one to the others, we should conclude that they aren't reliable sources of knowledge concerning these topics, such as the time of divine creation, or the existence of specific gods.

Secondly, a great many empirical discoveries and theoretical developments in scientific disciplines such as geology, physics, biology, archaeology, and astronomy produced a consilience of inductions to the effect that both the Earth and our universe are much older than biblical calculations suggested. The discovery of radioactivity by Bequerel and others around 1900 enabled scientists to resolve the well-known contradiction between the calculation of the age of the solar system and the Earth on the basis of thermal gradients by Lord Kelvin on the one hand, and estimates of the time-span of the biological evolution on the other hand.[32] Moreover, this discovery enabled physicists to develop reliable methods for calculating the age of rocks on the basis of knowledge concerning the radioactive decay of radioactive isotopes.

Reflecting on the history of the sciences from the 17th century onwards, taking this and myriad other examples into account, philosophers of science have attempted to characterize science in contradistinction to other cultural phenomena such as religion. Clearly, we should not define science in terms of specific scientific theories, because theories are fallible and may be superseded by better ones in the course of scientific progress. Rather, science (in the broad sense of the German *Wissenschaft*, including historical research and other areas of scholarship) should be defined in methodological terms, as *the search for factual truth by utilizing the best validated truth-conducive methods available at a time*.[33]

[32] Cf. Jackson (2006), Chapters 11, 13. Plantinga raises the temporal constraint problem for the evolution of the eye (2011: 23), but he mentions neither the interesting history of the problem nor relevant contemporary literature, such as Nilsson & Pelger (1994).

[33] Whether science can be defined as a search for true general *theories* is another matter. Cf. Rowbottom (2010). Cf. also the extensive debate on Van Fraassen's Constructive Empiricism. Furthermore, if normative statements are truth-apt, we should exclude ultimate moral norms etc. from this definition.

Scientific method can be specified at various levels of abstraction in terms of sets of norms for correct epistemic procedures. At the highest level of abstraction, philosophers have attempted to specify rules of method that hold for all scientific and scholarly disciplines, while at the lowest level of particular topics of research, scientists will specify norms for the proper application of specific instruments or techniques, which typically are theory-laden. The general definition of science as the search for factual truth by utilizing the best validated truth-conducive methods available, might be elaborated by specifying rules at the highest level of abstraction.

In the context of this article, it will suffice to formulate one of these epistemic rules only, which, I propose, should be part of an elaborated characterization of science:

> R(ule): Claims concerning specific disputed facts should be endorsed as (approximately, probably, etc.) true only if they are sufficiently supported by the application of validated methods of research or discovery.

Furthermore, one might specify in part what may be called a 'scientific attitude' (in the broad sense) by the following necessary condition:

> S(cientific attitude): An individual has acquired a scientific attitude only if (s)he applies rule R to factual claims that are of importance for her/him, or relies on testimonies of experts who applied rule R.

A few observations on validation will be useful in order to elucidate rule R. In some cases, the validation of methods of the search for truth is relatively easy, but in other cases, such as the validation of methods for calculating the age of rocks on the basis of knowledge concerning the radioactive decay of radioactive isotopes, validation is complex: it may take years and require the cooperation of many experts. But in general, there are at least three maxims to be applied in the validation of particular methods of research.

First (maxim 1), repeated and mutually independent applications of one and the same method should yield consistent and informative results. Second (maxim 2), one should test whether various detection methods or instruments using different techniques yield the same result if applied to the same issue. This validation test is based upon an argument from coincidence. If very different processes of research, which have not much in common, produce identical results, it would be an unlikely coincidence if these results were artefacts of the methods or instruments rather than containing information about the item under

investigation. Finally (maxim 3), in the case of theory-laden methods and techniques, theoretical understanding of these methods and techniques may contribute decisively to (de-) validation, and of course the relevant theories should be well confirmed by various types of evidence.[34]

We may now define the profound conflict between science and religion as follows:

> C(onflict): Adherents of religions, to the extent that they endorse positive factual claims to truth concerning supernatural entities such as gods, hell, heaven, angels, ghosts, immortal souls, etc., violate rule R, because typically these claims are not sufficiently supported by the application of validated methods of research or discovery.

Thesis C explains why most of us who really have acquired a scientific attitude, so that they satisfy S, will not endorse any positive assertion concerning the supernatural. They will feel strongly that such endorsements would violate their ethics of belief. Of course, there are many aspects of religions apart from creeds or clusters of beliefs, such as rituals, architecture, forms of art, social organizations, dietary prescriptions, and moral norms, which may be valuable even if their creeds do not satisfy rule R. However, while the profound conflict C is primarily concerned with the doctrinal aspect of religions and its epistemic sources, it will also undermine these other aspects to the extent that the former underpin the latter.

Religious apologists often claim that we should not compare the ways of acquiring their truths with scientific methods of research, because these ways are unique and differ essentially from scientific method.[35] But at the lowest level of abstraction, epistemic methods of discovery are essentially different in each scientific or scholarly sub-discipline as well. For example, physical methods for measuring the temperature in the centre of the Sun are completely different from scholarly methods for detecting interpolations in ancient texts. So it will not help religious believers to stress that the ways of acquiring their truths are completely different from methods in scientific sub-disciplines. From the point of view of rule R, the crucial question is whether these religious ways of acquiring truths can be validated.

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[34] Cf. Philipse (2012), §6.2, and Hacking (1983), Chapter 11.

[35] Cf. Plantinga (2011: 123-4): there would be a conflict 'only if *science* tells us that beliefs in all the areas of our epistemic life ought to be formed and held in the same way as scientific beliefs typically are. But of course that isn't a scientific claim at all; it is rather a normative epistemological claim, and a quixotic one at that'.

What are the particular ways of acquiring (allegedly) true insights in the case of specific religions? The list is open-ended, but on the basis of scriptural analysis and anthropological research we should at least mention alleged revelations, such as the Bible, the Vedas, or the Book of Mormon, the variety of religious experiences, alleged graces of gods, the interpretation of signs or signals or sacrifices, the averred effects of prayer, various kinds of ascetism such as fasting forty days in a desert, which may produce particular experiences, hearing voices in the absence of other human beings, a plethora of rituals, and humbly engaging in religious communities or practices.[36]

My contention is that none of these religious ways of discovering or receiving the truth has been validated, so that those who still endorse positive religious factual claims to truth on their basis violate rule R. Even worse, it has been shown conclusively with regard to all of these ways that in general they are unreliable. For example, the various revelations that people pretend to have received from their god(s) contradict each other at many points (cf. maxim 1, above). Beliefs that once were accepted on the basis of a revelation, such as the conviction that God created the Earth between 6000 and 2700 B.C., have been refuted by scientific research (cf. maxim 2). And the phenomenon of hearing voices in the absence of others, which occurred to important founders of religion such as Paul or Mohammed, and which at the time could perhaps not be interpreted otherwise than as being due to the activity of invisible spirits or gods, is now accounted for within a different and more scientific framework as typically being a symptom of temporal lobe epilepsy, psychosis, schizophrenia, and other mental illnesses (cf. maxim 3), so that its religious importance has been disconfirmed.[37]

The example of biblical chronology shows well why the logical relations between scientific theories and articles of faith cannot be the main locus of the conflict (if any) between science and religion, although this is Plantinga's focus in WCRL. Admittedly, many religious convictions based upon biblical texts, such as the doctrine of special creation still defended by William Paley in his *Natural Theology* of 1802, have been refuted by later scientific research. In all these cases, contradictions play a role, because the religious conviction is contradicted (or rendered

[36] Cf. for a recent defence of this last option: Moser (2010).

[37] Cf. Philipse (2012), chapters 1 and 6.3 for a more extended argument with references to scientific and scholarly literature. Incidentally: this is not a genetic fallacy; the underlying structure of the argument is Bayesian.

improbable) by the relevant scientific theory or result. But the majority of those who want to retain their religion will remove the contradiction by re-interpreting the relevant religious source, so that in many cases scientific progress has set the agenda for Biblical re-interpretation.[38] Although fundamentalist creationists may stick to biblical chronology, more sophisticated Christians re-interpret the relevant biblical passages as figurative or as myths.[39]

Let me round off this section by three comments. The first is concerned with the issue of defeaters. How can one defend the view that well-confirmed results of scientific research will not amount to defeaters for elements of 'the full panoply of Christian belief in all its particularity', if one also acknowledges that scientific progress has set the agenda for biblical reinterpretation? An enlightened Christian such as Alvin Plantinga seems to be confronted by a tension or even a contradiction at this point. I shall come back to the issue in section 5.

Second, one might object to rule R that we all accept many factual beliefs which do not result from using validated methods of research or discovery, and that this is not only perfectly reasonable but also unavoidable. For example, what about the factual beliefs that we endorse on the basis of perception or testimony? Can we avoid assuming certain principles of credulity as fundamental principles of rationality, such as the rule that one is justified in believing what one takes oneself to perceive or have perceived unless there are defeating considerations?[40] Surely, if all of us violate rule R continuously in daily life, it cannot be a valid objection to religious believers that they do so in endorsing their religious beliefs.

I would argue, however, that although it is true that we cannot but start with a weak trust in our elementary epistemic sources, we are

[38] As is well known, re-interpretation may take some time. Heliocentrism contradicted many biblical texts in a literalist interpretation, such as 1 *Chronicles* 16:30, *Psalm* 93:1, *Psalm* 96:10, *Psalm* 104:5, *Ecclesiastes* 1:5, and, notably, *Joshua* 10:13. However, Copernicus's *De Revolutionibus* and Galileo's *Dialogues* did not disappear from the Catholic Index before 1835. And it was only in 1992 that a pope (John Paul II) finally vindicated Galileo (*L'Osservatore Romano* N. 44 (1264) – November 4, 1992).

[39] One might justify this necessity of continuous Biblical re-interpretation by stressing that a divine message is very difficult to interpret. Cf. Plantinga (2000: 383): '[g]iven that the Bible is a communication from God to humankind, a divine revelation, there is much about it that requires deep and perceptive reflection, much that taxes our best scholarly and spiritual resources to the utmost.'

[40] Cf. Swinburne (2004: 303 ff.), and Philipse (2012: 317, note 23).

validating them continually by applying implicitly the three maxims for validation mentioned above, so that usually our initial trust increases and is legitimized. For example, consecutive visual perceptions of the same thing confirm each other (maxim 1). When we move around in the world, our tactile perceptions typically corroborate the visual ones, and if they do not, we test our eyes (maxim 2). Finally, scientific understanding of light and sound explains that we hear a distant collision later than we see it, for instance (maxim 3). We also continually and implicitly test our sense modalities by comparing what we perceive with what others observe, and the same holds for testimony, memory, and so on. Whenever our particular factual claims about the world are seriously disputed, we validate our sources explicitly. In short, our legitimate use of our senses, and our proper reliance on testimony or memory, is not an exception to rule R.[41]

Finally, it is often claimed that scientific methodology, including rule R, only applies to the natural universe, and not to the supernatural. The idea is that apart from the usual rules of method at the highest level of generality, there is yet another self-imposed *constituting principle* of science in a broad sense, which is called methodological naturalism. According to the doctrine of methodological naturalism, a theory can be called 'scientific' only if it does not postulate supernatural entities, and by definition neither the data set nor the background knowledge used in testing scientific theories can include references to the supernatural.[42] If this conception of science were correct, one might aver that rule R does not apply to factual religious beliefs, because it is part of scientific methodology, which is naturalistic by definition.

However, as has been pointed out by many critics of this doctrine, naturalism is not an intrinsic constitutive principle of science, but rather a generalized result of many ages of scientific research, which is supported by an overwhelming consilience of inductions.[43] Again and again, explanatory hypotheses that postulated supernatural entities or effects of supernatural agents have been superseded by superior natural

[41] Cf. Philipse (2012: 319). Incidentally, I would not consider the philosophical view of direct realism concerning sense perception (which I endorse) as such a 'particular factual claim', whereas a hypothesis of a deceiving demon (or brain surgeon) would be one. Hence, philosophical realists concerning sense perception do not violate rule R, whereas radical sceptics would do so.

[42] Cf. Plantinga (2011: 168-174).

[43] Cf. Boudry et al. (2010); Coyne (2009); Sober (2011), Ch. 4.

explanations. To mention just one notorious example, the Newtonian assumption that the so-called Jupiter/Saturn problem of the stability of the solar system had to be solved by postulating divine interventions was brilliantly refuted by Laplace in 1786, when he solved the problem by subtle gravitational calculations.[44] Given this consilience of inductions, scientists rightly concluded that it would be a waste of time to try out supernatural explanations again. To the extent that methodological naturalism is a norm of scientific method at all, it is a rule justified by empirical lessons of the past.

I have argued in this section that by focussing on (alleged) logical conflicts between scientific theories or results and Christian doctrines, Plantinga overlooks the deep conflict between science and religion, which is concerned with the issue as to whether ways of discovering factual truths can be validated.[45] This deep conflict consists in the fact that religious believers, to the extent that they endorse positive factual claims to truth concerning the supernatural, violate rule R. Can they avoid this conflict, or somehow resolve it?

IV. A DECISION TREE FOR THE FAITHFUL: PLANTINGA'S OPTION

The spectacular scientific and scholarly progress during the last four centuries confronts religious believers with a crucial problem. Because of its superior methods in the search for truth, science has displaced religion in most domains of modern life, such as medicine and psychiatry. Furthermore, the domain-specific alleged sources of truth of religions could not be validated, and their reliability has been contested on many grounds. How, then, can 'educated and intelligent people living in the twenty-first century' still reasonably endorse a religious creed?[46]

In their attempts to answer this question, contemporary philosophers of religion have developed an impressive variety of apologetic strategies, which may be classified under four main options. By schematizing these

[44] Cf. Hahn (2005), Chapter 5.

[45] At the end of his fourth chapter, Plantinga mentions 'a couple of other allegations of conflict between science and religion', admitting that he doesn't 'have the space to do them justice', although he indicates how his 'reply to them might go' (2000: 122). He briefly discusses John Worrall (2000), whose analysis of the 'irreconcilable' conflict between science and religion resembles mine to some extent. Plantinga's brief criticisms of Worrall are either inadequate or do not apply to my account.

[46] Plantinga (2000: viii).

options as the end-nodes (**b**, **d**, **e**, and **f**) of a decision tree, which consists of three interlocked dilemmas, we see that they exhaust all logical possibilities. First, a religious believer might either (a) endorse a cognitive interpretation of (at least some parts of) a religious creed, and hold that religious statements such as 'God created us in his image' are factual truths, or (**b**) prefer a non-cognitive interpretation, according to which the relevant religious creed does not contain *any* positive factual claim to truth concerning the supernatural. Second, the religious believer who opts for (a) in the first dilemma might endorse either (c) evidentialism, the view that convincing evidence and arguments are needed in order to endorse reasonably a religious claim to truth, or (**d**) the negation of evidentialism, according to which such evidence or arguments may not be necessary. Finally, those who accept (c) might hold that from a (methodo-) logical point of view the evidence and arguments that may justify a religious claim to truth are either (**e**) completely different from scientific arguments, or (**f**) similar to scientific arguments, for example because they can be formulated in terms of Bayes' theorem.[47]

Those who opt for end-node (**b**), whether developed as Stephen Jay Gould's NOMA thesis or by (re-) interpreting the 'deep grammar' of the religious language game *à la* D. Z. Phillips, will not violate rule R, because they do not endorse any religious claim to factual truth.[48] However, they pay a high price for this advantage of instant immunization against factual criticisms. By eliminating all factual claims concerning the supernatural from their creed, they will be at a loss to explain what can legitimize their 'magisterium' of religious meaning and values. One may sympathize with religious apologists such as Plantinga, then, who prefer (a) because they want to be religious believers in a substantial sense.

By opting for (a), Plantinga is landed in the second dilemma between evidentialism (c) and its denial (d). As is well known, Plantinga not only criticized incisively various versions of evidentialism in his works from his 1982 paper 'The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology' onwards, an endeavour that culminated in his summa *Warranted Christian Belief* of 2000. He also holds that (argumentative) evidentialism as an apologetic strategy is bound to fail. As he says, 'I don't know of an argument for Christian belief that seems very likely to convince one who doesn't

[47] Cf. Philipse (2012) for a critical analysis of the most promising philosophical elaborations of each of these options.

[48] Cf. Gould (1999) and Phillips (2005).

already accept its conclusion'.[49] I presume that he would say the same thing with regard to cumulative case strategies of arguing for theism, such as Richard Swinburne's. Consequently, Plantinga chose to develop end-node (**d**) of the decision tree for religious apologists.

According to Plantinga's version of (**d**), 'the full panoply of Christian belief, including trinity, incarnation, atonement, resurrection' can, 'if true, have warrant, can indeed have sufficient warrant for knowledge' without being supported by any evidence or arguments, because it might consist of properly basic beliefs.[50] In order to show that this can be the case, Plantinga developed his 'Aquinas/Calvin' or A/C model of religious knowledge, according to which God, if he exists, probably has implanted in all human beings a specific epistemic module, the *sensus divinitatis*, which, if functioning properly, gives us the relevant religious knowledge in the basic way, that is, without the need for evidence or arguments.

Since Plantinga's model is '*epistemically* possible' only if its description is consistent with everything we know, he has to extend the model in such a way that it accounts for the fact that most humans have not been, and are not, believing Christians.[51] In his (2000), Plantinga does so by incorporating some Christian dogmas into the model, such as original sin, which has 'ruinous *cognitive* consequences', and salvation by Christ.[52] Indeed, Plantinga avers that by an 'Internal Instigation' the Holy Spirit might seal the gift of faith upon the hearts of (some?) Christians, while nonbelievers suffer from the cognitive consequences of original sin.[53] Let us now wonder whether Plantinga's theory of religious knowledge enables him to avoid, or resolve, the various conflicts between science and religion.

V. THE CONFLICT IS NEITHER AVOIDED NOR RESOLVED

In order to investigate whether Plantinga succeeds in resolving the conflict between science and religion, two sub-questions should be addressed, on the assumption that Plantinga's externalist model of religious knowledge is an adequate one. First (1), can religious believers legitimately neutralize scientific defeaters of their beliefs, so that *logical* conflicts between

[49] Plantinga (2000: 201).
[50] Plantinga (2000: 357).
[51] Plantinga (2000: 168-9) (Plantinga's italics).
[52] Plantinga (2000: 205) (Plantinga's italics).
[53] Plantinga (2000: 206 and passim).

science and religion are only 'weak' in the sense defined in §2? Second (2), can religious believers avoid violating rule R, so that the *deep* conflict between science and religion as defined in §3 is removed?

Concerning sub-question (1), it will be obvious to most of us that religious believers cannot, and indeed have not, neutralized well-established scientific defeaters of their beliefs. Take, for example, the traditional Christian belief that God created all species as they are now (special creation). From the 17th century onwards, the accumulating data of the fossil record, combined with geological knowledge and much later with various scientific dating methods, showed convincingly that evolution is a fact, and that species developed over time by descent with modification. Accordingly, this immense reservoir of evidence contradicts the traditional Christian view, and constitutes a *rebutting defeater* for an element of the 'full panoply of Christian belief'. Christians may, and indeed have, removed this defeater by reinterpreting their creed (cf. §2). But this merely shows that even in their eyes scientific methods are more reliable than, for instance, a divine revelation as interpreted by theologians. How can one still trust one's belief that, for example, God created humans in his image, or that Christ was resurrected, if such beliefs are produced by a source, a revelation as interpreted by theologians, that proved to be unreliable so many times?

Given these considerations, the reader will be interested to learn how Plantinga argues for the opposite view. As he says, 'science that produces theories incompatible with Christian belief [...] would certainly not constitute a defeater for Christian belief'.[54] His argument goes as follows. First, using an allusion that may escape secular readers, Plantinga calls scientific theories incompatible with Christian belief 'Simonian science'.[55] Second, he argues that Simonian science is based upon methodological naturalism, at least in typical cases. This means not only that properly scientific *explananda*, or the *data* set to be explained, cannot contain

[54] Plantinga (2011: 174, cf. 177).

[55] Plantinga (2011: 164, 173-5, 186-9, and passim). Officially, the expression 'Simonian science' alludes to Herbert Simon, who explained the altruistic behaviour of Mother Teresa and other Christian saints with reference to the hypothetical mental mechanisms of 'docility' and 'bounded rationality' (cf. Plantinga 2011: 134-6). But I suspect that the adjective 'Simonian' also refers to Simon the magician of *Acts* 8:1-24, who converted to Christianity although his heart was 'not right before God', as Peter said (vs. 21), or perhaps to Simon the Leper (*Matthew* 26:6-13 and *Mark* 14:3-9), who according to some was healed from his leprosy by Jesus.

supernatural entities, and that the *explanans*, or the explaining theory, should not postulate such entities either, but also that the set of relevant background beliefs with reference to which we determine the prior probability of our explanations, cannot contain religious beliefs.[56] Plantinga calls the set of these background beliefs the 'evidence base' of an explanation.[57] He then argues that in cases of Simonian science, the scientific theories that contradict Christian beliefs may have a very high prior probability given the scientific evidence base, but that this prior probability might be very low given the evidence base of the Christian, which incorporates the full panoply of Christian belief. And if the prior probability of Simonian theories will be very low given the evidence base of Christians, such theories cannot constitute defeaters for Christian beliefs. As Plantinga says:

> I submit that the same goes for Simonian science and Christian belief. The evidence base for Simonian science (...) is part of the Christian's evidence base, but only part of it. Hence, the fact that Simonian science comes to conclusions incompatible with Christian belief doesn't provide the believer with a defeater for her belief.[58]

Of course, it would be absurd to argue that scientific discoveries could *never* defeat any of the supernatural beliefs held by Christians. For example, Plantinga admits that scientific results and methods have refuted the view that God created the Earth a few thousand years BCE. He avers, however, that this view is 'not part of Christian belief as such'.[59] Attempting to develop a 'nontrivial test for determining when we get a defeater' for Christian beliefs, he suggests on the basis of his A/C model of faith that, first, if this model applies, faith has a warrant at least as strong as perceptual beliefs, which often function as intrinsic neutralizers of defeaters, and, second, that biblical beliefs can only be defeated by Simonian science if 'there are other perfectly plausible ways of construing' the relevant biblical passage.[60] For clearly, if God is the ultimate author of the Bible, as Plantinga holds, everything contained in it must be true, if properly interpreted.

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[56] Plantinga (2011: 171-173).

[57] Plantinga (2011: 167-8).

[58] Plantinga (2011: 177). Cf. p. 189: 'The mere existence of Simonian science – science that comes to conclusions incompatible with tenets of the Christian faith – has no tendency to produce a defeater for those tenets.'

[59] Plantinga (2011: 144, note 23, cf. 10).

[60] Plantinga (2011: 186, 188).

One should admit to Plantinga that *if* the Christian god exists, He might have infused Christian believers with the full panoply of Christian belief, and one might admit for the sake of argument that *if* believers really acquired their beliefs by such an Internal Instigation of the Holy Spirit (IIHS), this alleged source of knowledge might be – like sense perception is – an intrinsic neutralizer of many defeaters.[61] But these two 'ifs' are crucial. By calling the background beliefs with reference to which we assess the prior probability of theories, the 'evidence base', and by claiming that the evidence base of the Simonian scientist is simply a sub-set of the evidence base of Christians, because the former is restricted by methodological naturalism, Plantinga suggests that all these background beliefs have the same legitimate status, and that the two 'ifs' are satisfied.

However, as I argued above (§3), naturalism is not an arbitrary methodological restriction of our scientific evidence base. Rather, it is supported by a convincing consilience of inductions drawn from science in the past. Furthermore, disputed factual background beliefs can legitimately belong to our evidence base only if they result from validated sources of knowledge, as rule R says. Hence, Plantinga's view that Simonian science 'has no tendency to produce a defeater' for tenets of Christian faith would be correct only if these tenets are really produced by divine grace, or by an IIHS, that is, if at least these two 'ifs' are satisfied.[62] In order to know that the view *is* correct, one would have to show that such basic beliefs are *properly* basic by validating their source of knowledge. Only if this can be done will religious believers not violate rule R (cf. question 2).[63]

But how might one validate an alleged divine grace or IIHS? Let me consider three possible methods of validation. First, if the Christian god exists, he might have infused with the full panoply of Christian belief tribes of which one can show that they were never influenced, directly or indirectly, by intercultural contacts with Christianity. If anthropologists found such a tribe, and if this tribe endorsed the full panoply of Christian belief, a secular explanation of their beliefs would have a much lower likelihood than the Christian explanation, and this might validate Plantinga's model to some extent. But the immense

[61] Cf. for an argument against this latter claim: Philipse (2012), §4.3.

[62] Cf. Plantinga (2011: 189).

[63] The validation requirement of rule R is internalistic in the epistemological sense, whereas Plantinga's model of religious knowledge is externalistic.

amount of anthropological research, done during the last four centuries, has not yielded such a result. Second, one might test whether alleged divine grace infuses people of different cultures with the same messages, such as polytheistic Hindus and Mormons. Clearly, this is not the case, and the messages often contradict each other, unless one relativizes them drastically à la John Harwood Hick.[64] Third, one might validate an alleged IIHS by showing on the basis of public evidence that, probably, the Christian god exists, so that, probably, the A/C model applies. However, Plantinga correctly holds that this cannot be done, even though he avers that the argument from fine-tuning may 'offer non-negligible evidence for theistic belief'.[65] It follows that Plantinga's model of religious knowledge acquisition has not been, and probably cannot be, validated.

The deep conflict between science and religion (§3) amounts to the *de jure* objection against religious believers that, to the extent that they endorse positive factual claims to truth concerning the supernatural, the sources of their beliefs have not been validated, so that they violate rule R. Since this *de jure* objection also applies to Plantinga's hypothetical A/C & IIHS model of religious belief, and does not depend upon the *de facto* objection that the Christian god does not exist, Plantinga's religious epistemology does not resolve the profound conflict between science and religion.[66]

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[64] Cf., for example, Hick (1982). Plantinga disagrees with Hick's relativism: (Plantinga 2000: 438 ff.).

[65] Plantinga (2011: xiii).

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TWO KINDS OF 'CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY'

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Abstract. It is controversial whether 'Christian Philosophy' is a useful or even consistent notion. After providing some historical background to the problem, I will distinguish and explicate two possible understandings of 'Christian Philosophy' which should be kept apart: a 'Thomistic' and an 'Augustinian' one, of which the latter has garnered more attention in the recent literature. A sketch of the most prominent current 'Augustinian' position (Alvin Plantinga's 'Reformed Epistemology') leads to some considerations for why a 'Thomistic' understanding of 'Christian Philosophy' has more to recommend it, if the term is regarded as useful at all.

An obvious touchstone for understanding how a religion relates to the idea of reasoning and giving reasons is its relation to philosophy. Now for various reasons not all religions have an (in any way elaborate) relation to philosophy, but some in fact do: there is frequent talk of 'Christian Philosophy', 'Islamic Philosophy' and/or[1] 'Muslim Philosophy', 'Jewish Philosophy', 'Buddhist Philosophy', and so forth. On the other hand, such terms face constant worry and are often rejected: the very idea of a philosophy with some religious epithet or branding seems to many people philosophically unacceptable, or undesirable for religious reasons, or even both. In the present article I explore the prospects for someone who wants to preserve the term 'Christian Philosophy' (and

[1] I mention both terms here since the question of a difference in meaning between them is non-trivial. Roughly, 'Muslim philosophy' is mostly understood as philosophy that is/was done by Muslims, whereas 'Islamic philosophy' is philosophy with a religious orientation inspired by Islam. This distinction does not correspond to my later distinction; but within Islamic philosophy there are discussions going on which are comparable to the debates between 'Thomistic' and 'Augustinian' Christian philosophy to be discussed here.

there are, I think, certain reasons for preserving it). Presumably, the results of my considerations might, *mutatis mutandis*, also be relevant for Islamic, Jewish and other philosophies. After an exposition of the problem in section I, I will briefly call to mind a historical debate from the 1920s and 30s on the notion of 'Christian Philosophy' (section II). My subsequent analysis requires a certain methodological abstraction concerning religions (section III), on the background of which I will in section IV expose the crucial distinction between 'Augustinian' and 'Thomistic' Christian Philosophy, which revolves around different structures of philosophical reasoning. To illustrate the relevance of the distinction, I will in section V briefly recap what is probably the most prominent current 'Augustinian' position: Alvin Plantinga's 'Reformed Epistemology', a critical assessment of which leads to some general remarks about why the 'Thomistic' approach has, all in all, more to recommend it, if the notion of 'Christian Philosophy' is taken to be fruitful at all (section VI).

I. THE PROBLEM

The worry that 'Christian Philosophy' might be an internally incoherent notion has to do with widespread semantic intuitions about 'philosophy'. Although there is to my knowledge no universally accepted definition of philosophy, I think that many people would explicate it something like this (at least this is the most adequate explication I have found so far):

> Philosophy is the systematic attempt to understand how everything hangs together based on one's own insight. Studying philosophy makes methodical use of the results of others' attempts.[2]

Some swift comments on this explication might be in order. Philosophy is a *systematic* attempt (unlike, e.g., art, which also sometimes tries to understand how everything hangs together); it is an *attempt* (i.e., it is more like an ongoing activity and less like a completed, available stock of knowledge); and its primary target is how everything hangs together, whereas the special sciences investigate to special kinds, aspects, sectors, or parts of reality. Unlike religions, political or other ideologies, it hopes to achieve this goal by relying on the philosopher's own insight, i.e., not on faith or commitment to some tradition, revelation or the like. The last

[2] Otto Muck, *Christliche Philosophie* (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1964), 20, my translation.

clause in the explication makes clear that philosophy does not consist merely in repeating philosophical statements made by others, but that adoptions of others' philosophical views must have some methodical backing. It must be stressed that philosophy is not identical with the *history of* philosophy, even if the knowledge of its own history is more important for philosophy than for other scholarly disciplines.

The problem concerning 'Christian Philosophy' revolves, of course, around the clause 'based on one's own insight'. Religions like Christianity usually claim that they are not accepted on thinkers' own insight, at least not completely, but rather on insight emendated by something else, like reliance on some tradition or revelation, an enhancement of cognition by a supernatural addendum like insight by faith, etc. Hence, 'Christian Philosophy' seems to be a self-contradiction, and this explains some well known verdicts of it. Martin Heidegger, for example, in his 1927 essay *Phänomenologie und Theologie*,[3] criticizes the idea as a 'wooden iron', and the prominent Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth holds that

> ... there never has actually been a *philosophia christiana*, for if it was *philosophia* it was not *christiana*, and if it was *christiana* it was not *philosophia*.[4]

But on the other hand there seem to be good arguments which contradict these statements, from historical as well as systematic standpoints:

(1) Historically, certain epochs in (Western) philosophy are simply not understandable without considering their factual religious background in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic faith. It is a fact that over long centuries, almost everyone whom today's history of philosophy textbooks list as a philosopher was also a theologian, and there was even no clear methodological distinction between philosophy and theology until the 13th century. This distinction was only made by Scholastics like Albert the Great and especially Thomas Aquinas.

Likewise, important philosophical ideas such as 'history', 'person', 'free will', 'human rights', 'law of nature', etc., have either only distant predecessors in Greco-Roman philosophy or none at all, but they were evidently inspired by their Judaeo-Christian-Islamic theological roots. Hence, at least in certain past epochs, one could talk about a 'Christian Philosophy'.

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[3] 'Phänomenologie und Theologie' (1927), in: *Wegmarken* (Gesamtausgabe I/9) (Frankfurt: Klostermann 1976), 66.

[4] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (1932, English tr. 1936), I/1, § 1, 6.

(2) From a rather hermeneutico-epistemological standpoint, one might doubt whether something like the oft-desired 'presupposition-free philosophy' is really within reach. Is it really possible to completely distance oneself as a philosopher from *any* influences of the background tradition(s) within which one was brought up? Notably, Hans-Georg Gadamer in his *Truth and Method* (1960) claimed that it is most probably not possible. As a way out, Gadamer partially rehabilitated traditions from the common suspicion that they inevitably blindfold us. He stated that it is rather the philosopher's task to get into the 'horizon of understanding' of other thinkers and thereby gain awareness of one's own horizon which might otherwise remain unnoticed. The experiences of philosophers who had occasion to become acquainted with distant philosophical cultures seem to support Gadamer's thesis (e.g., for European philosophers, contact with Far-Eastern philosophies is usually fruitful in discovering typical European mindsets which do not go without saying, and vice-versa). If this is correct, it appears that most probably *every* philosopher (consciously or not) does some kind of '*XY*-ian philosophy' (the influences might be from religious, philosophical, political, or other traditions), without thereby disqualifying himself as a philosopher. One could hence conclude that a 'Christian Philosophy' would not per se be less legitimate than other *XY*-ian philosophies, and even that sincerity and perspicuity require laying bare the worldviews within which we operate.

II. THE DEBATE IN THE 1920/30s

In order to find a way out of this problem, it is useful to briefly recall a very similar debate in the 1920s and 30s about the possibility and legitimacy of 'Christian Philosophy' which is widely forgotten today,[5] but which

[5] An exception is Gregory Sadler, whose extensive publications over the last years have brought this debate back into focus. For an overview, see his freely accessible articles: 'The 1930s Christian Philosophy Debates', in *Acta Philosophica*, 21 (2012), 393-406, available at: <http://www.academia.edu/2180852/The_1930s_Christian_Philosophy_Debates_Bibliografica_Tematica> (accessed 04/04/2013), and: 'Christian Philosophy: The 1930s French Debates' (2009), in: *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available at: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/chri1930/> (accessed 04/04/2013). The most important texts of the French discussion were recently republished by him in English: Gregory B. Sadler (ed.), *Reason Fulfilled by Revelation: The 1930s Christian Philosophy Debates in France* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2011). See also Ralph McInerny, 'Reflections on Christian Philosophy', in Linda Zagzebski (ed.), *Rational Faith: Catholic Responses to Reformed Epistemology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre

attracted much attention in those days. In a couple of writings and lectures, the French historian of philosophy Étienne Gilson had claimed that the philosophy of late antiquity and the middle ages could duly be called 'Christian Philosophy', since many philosophical topics had emerged against the backdrop of Christian theology, and on neither a personal nor an institutional level could you distinguish between philosophy and theology in those epochs. Even if the epistemological distinction between philosophical and theological arguments was addressed here and there, revelation was commonly and unproblematically seen as a support of reason. (It might be added that a really clear methodological distinction between philosophy and theology was not available before the mid-13th century, when it appeared in the works of Thomas Aquinas.) Gilson provoked a harsh reaction by the French historian of philosophy Emile Bréhier, who claimed in a 1931 conference paper entitled 'Is there a Christian Philosophy?'[6] that the idea of a 'Christian Philosophy' would be as absurd as 'Christian mathematics'. The debates (which consisted in numerous journal articles and a couple of meetings)[7] climaxed at the 1933 conference of the French Thomist Society at the Dominican convent of Juvisy-sur-Orge near Paris. The texts from this conference were published in a volume entitled *La philosophie chrétienne*.[8]

The main result of the debates was an increasing awareness that two[9] basic conceptions of 'Christian Philosophy' could be distinguished, and that the question 'Is there a Christian Philosophy?' should best be treated on the basis of this distinction. The two types are frequently labelled as an 'Augustinian' versus a 'Thomistic' understanding of Christian Philosophy.

Dame Press, 1992), 256-279, for the bigger historical context the three volumes Emerich Coreth – Georg Pfligersdorffer (eds.), *Christliche Philosophie im katholischen Denken des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Graz etc.: Styria, 1987-1990), and for the German-speaking realm Heinrich M. Schmidinger, 'Die christliche Philosophie des 20. Jahrhunderts im deutschen Sprachraum. Eine philosophiegeschichtliche Skizze', in *Salzburger Jahrbuch für Philosophie*, 35 (1990), 105-123.

[6] Emile Bréhier, 'Y-a-t'il une philosophie chrétienne?', in *Revue de Métaphysique et de la Morale*, 38 (1931), 133-162.

[7] For literature on the historical details, see footnote 2 above.

[8] Société Thomiste (ed.), *La philosophie chrétienne*, Juvisy 11 Septembre 1933 (Journées d'études de la Société Thomiste 2) (Paris: Cerf, 1933). See also the English texts in Sadler 2011 (see footnote 5 above).

[9] At the outset, there were more conceptions proposed than just these two. But the historical details are not the principal concern of this paper; see Sadler 2009 and 2012 (footnote 5 above).

These labels are somewhat anachronistic in that neither Augustine (354-430) nor Thomas Aquinas (1224/25-1274) explicitly elaborated on the notion of a 'Christian Philosophy' (discussions on that issue came up centuries later!). But Augustine's and Thomas's overall approaches to philosophy, especially their ways of relating the deliverances of faith and reason, can be seen as examples for these two conceptions. As a methodological prerequisite for their explication (in section IV), I will in section III introduce an abstraction concerning religions.

III. A METHODOLOGICAL ABSTRACTION: RELIGIONS AS SETS OF PROPOSITIONS

Religions are notably complex phenomena displaying many features: they have a social aspect, i.e., they are practiced in more or less structured groups with 'experts' and 'functionaries' (like priests, prophets, shamans, monks, etc.); they have rituals of various kinds; holy places, times, or objects; they usually have some moral behaviour code influencing private and public behaviour (think of the 10 Commandments in Judaism and Christianity, the Catholic social doctrine, Jewish and Islamic food guidelines, and various forms of taboo); some religions claim a history which is crucial for their self-understanding; they usually offer something like a world-picture answering ultimate questions (about where we come from and will be going to, what life is ultimately good for, etc.), and they have something like a theory-like, cognitive core of propositions. E.g., Christians on the one hand and Jews and Muslims on the other disagree about propositions like 'God is one and unique, but in him there is also some multiplicity' versus 'God is radically one'. The list of features may not be complete, and of course, various religions display these features in varying intensities. For example, there are religions which place great weight on the ritual side and do not emphasize their cognitive core, but the opposite weighting is also possible; the visibility and structure of the group may differ significantly; and likewise the importance of religious morals, taboo-like behaviour, etc., may vary between religions. Nevertheless, a minimum cognitive core seems to be present in any religion.

For my present task, I will concentrate on this cognitive core: religions are considered as if they were sets of propositions (or sets of beliefs in

[10] I owe this idea especially to Joseph M. Bochenski's still underrated but in my view classical book *The Logic of Religion* (New York: New York University Press, 1965).

these propositions).[10] Sets of propositions are the material of which an analytically oriented epistemological approach to religion has best grip. I am of course fully aware that this cognitivist approach has had an at least ambivalent history in the philosophy of religion; the ritual side of religions has especially been neglected by philosophy. Let me thus stress that this methodological move is just an *abstraction* and not a reduction. The existence and relevance of the other facets of religion are hereby not denied, and I definitely do not want to advocate the reductionist error that religions are *nothing but* sets of propositions.

A second constraint is my focus on religions which claim to have an access to sources of religious information beyond the deliverances of common human reason. The most prominent examples are the so-called 'revelation religions', of which the best-known are Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. However, there are many more examples, such as Mormonism or the Baha'i religion. This constraint is being made because the distinction between 'Augustinian' and 'Thomistic' Christian Philosophy has to do with the way in which the deliverances of common human reason and these additional sources relate.

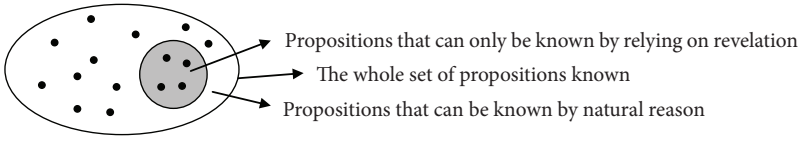
IV. 'AUGUSTINIAN' AND 'THOMISTIC' CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

Bearing these methodological preliminaries in mind, let us think of a religious believer's belief system as a vast set[11] of propositions of which a certain subset can only be known by relying on revelation (i.e., the 'theological beliefs' in a narrower sense), whereas the bigger bulk of his knowledge can be acquired by natural reason alone, and hence in principle by anyone.[12] A common example which is often mentioned

[11] A further simplification in my approach lies in the fact that the whole network of relations between the beliefs (psychological connections and logical support of various kinds) is not considered here and the beliefs are rather taken atomistically. But of course I do not thereby want to suggest that this atomistic picture is psychologically or epistemologically realistic. (I make this abstraction because considering these relations leads to a whole nest of related problems which cannot be addressed here: e.g., the problem of the role which non-revelation-based propositions play in the support of revelation-based beliefs (commonly treated under the label 'analysis fidei') or the nature of conclusions from a 'mixed' set of (non-)revelation-based premises (which was at times discussed under the label 'conclusio theologica').)

[12] Alvin Plantinga repeatedly and rightly remarked that, in philosophy and worldview-related issues, there are hardly any important beliefs which are held by virtually everyone, since matters here are notoriously controversial (see, e.g. his 'Augustinian Christian Philosophy', in *The Monist*, 75 (1992), 293f.). This is right; but the important demarcation

in this context is the doctrine of the Holy Trinity: that God exists is (according to the classical view) a deliverance of natural reason alone, whereas the triune nature of God can only be known[13] on the basis of revelation. In the following graphical model of the belief-system of an idealized believer, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity would be a member of the gray subset, and God's existence a member of the white one:



The central question, which leads to the distinction between the two forms of 'Christian Philosophy', is the following: Where in this belief system can philosophical reasoning start, i.e., from which subsets of propositions may its premises be taken, and what is 'Christian Philosophy' supposed to achieve?

IV.1. The 'Augustinian' Christian philosopher would provide the following answer: Concerning methodology, we may – as philosophers! – also use what we can only know from revelation. The form of question which is typically posed in that style of Christian philosophy is this: 'What would follow for some topic XY *if the Christian doctrines were true?*' That is, the Christian doctrine is used as a source of (at least hypothetically acceptable) *premises* for philosophy.

The task of philosophy, so understood, consists in developing and defending a consistent, coherent and comprehensive Christian worldview. From this perspective, even projects like a 'Christian epistemology', a 'Christian set theory' or a 'Christian probabilistic confirmation theory'[14] could – against Bréhier's verdict – indeed make sense, at least in principle. The Augustinian Christian thinker might even claim to provide some

to be drawn here is the one between propositions which are *notoriously* unaccepted by many people (since they are revealed only) and the rest of our beliefs.

[13] A disclaimer: I speak of 'knowledge' here and in the following passages in a non-technical sense. I use the word mainly for the flat-footed reason that the alternative wording 'can only be believed on the basis of revelation' would sound odd. But I do not intend thereby to claim anything about whether or not beliefs about theological issues may constitute knowledge (in any explication of this word).

[14] See Richard Otte, 'A Theistic Conception of Probability', in *Faith and Philosophy*, 4 (1987), 424-447.

explanatory surplus in these fields in comparison to secular scholars. For example, the notorious process/result-ambiguity concerning the word *Zusammenfassung* ('collection') in Cantor's famous definition of sets (i.e., is this collection something already present or is it made/created by the cognizing mind? And if the latter, how can human minds create enough of them to make set theory work?) might be settled in a certain direction: since the eternal, infinite God's omniscient mind knows all sets, they all – at least from our human perspective – exist already, and they are something we discover rather than create. This endorses a modest realist understanding of sets (from the human perspective) backed by a sort of theistic constructivism.[15] Another example is the notorious problem of how to justify the convergence in probability judgments by different observers within Bayesian confirmation theory: is this convergence a theoretical consequence or an additional (and dubious) synthetic a priori assumption? Christian Bayesian conformation theorists of the Augustinian temperament might provide a solution: since we are 'created in God's image' according to Christian anthropology, God will also have enabled us to participate in his ability to cognize the truth. And hence, it is no wonder that the judgments of rational observers will in the long run converge.

So understood, Christian philosophy is primarily an internal service for the Christian community and its intellectual needs. Since premises from the realm of faith are used, it will be of limited relevance for external dialogue, but this is no problem: the task of philosophy is not so much to make Christian faith attractive to non-believers, but rather to provide an internally attractive vision of it. However, if there are opponents, they are of course invited to raise their objections and discuss them with Christian philosophers.

IV.2. The 'Thomistic' understanding of Christian philosophy follows a different methodology: the philosopher is advised to proceed as far as possible with 'worldview-neutral' premises (i.e., premises which are in principle accessible to anybody), and especially, philosophers must not use premises which are only known from revelation. Only where important questions remain open – and who would deny that this is often the case in philosophy? – may the Thomistic Christian philosopher

[15] So I take Plantinga's position in 'Advice to Christian Philosophers', in *Faith and Philosophy*, 1 (1984), 269f.

propose answers from Christian doctrine. But he does not do this in his competence and authority as a philosopher; he rather switches to a theological solution when philosophical solutions are not to hand. To cash out some rather simple examples, as a proposed answer to the question of the ultimate meaning of life, he might refer to the Christian doctrine of creation out of God's love, which bestows any creature its immanent value and dignity; or as a possible solution to the problem of evil, he might recall that Jesus Christ's non-violent undergoing of violence and death, as well as his resurrection, are hints that evil and death are not the final chapters of the world's story.

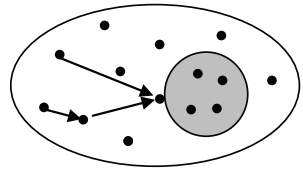
Nevertheless, the Thomistic Christian philosopher is a Christian, and as such, he sometimes has certain preferences in his philosophical interests: he tends toward philosophical opinions which seem compatible with his worldview. But as a philosopher, he would not argue for these opinions with premises from faith – he would pose questions of the following type: 'what good (but worldview-neutral!) arguments could lead to conclusions close to Christian doctrines?' For example, he would have a natural interest in the existence of free will, the universality of human rights, the existence of God, etc., and look for ways to defend them philosophically.

As Franz Brentano, Jacques Maritain and others put it metaphorically, the Christian doctrine is from this viewpoint just a guiding star for the philosopher: it tells the philosopher where his reasoning could possibly go – just like sailors on the open sea use the guiding star to decide on their course.

There is of course a background assumption behind Thomistic Christian Philosophy: The Thomistic Christian philosopher expects that there might be apparent, prima facie contradictions between religious doctrine (rightly understood) and scientific/philosophical knowledge (rightly understood), but that there cannot be an *ultimate*, unresolvable contradiction since God is the source of all truth and has equipped us with reason to grasp it. Admittedly, this background assumption is theological in nature, but this is unproblematic: it is an assumption that is made only by the Christian philosopher himself and does not oblige anybody else (it is, so to speak, an assumption made by Christians and for Christians). Apparent, prima facie contradictions between faith and reason may emerge where methodological and theoretical boundaries are overstepped. The debates about creation and evolution

provide examples for such cases: wherever theologians try to emendate biological theories or biologists feel in a position to answer questions on the ultimate meaning of life, conflicts are to be expected. Hence on closer inspection this background assumption has a critical potential in various directions. It is not only directed against attempts to extrapolate worldview claims from the deliverances of the sciences. The Christian philosopher must also be prepared to discover that he or his community previously misunderstood, at least in part, their own religious tradition. Again, there are historical examples for such (sometimes slow and painful) discoveries: Galileo's case, for example, is an important stage on the way toward discovering that the Biblical tradition is not meant as a scientific account of the structure of the solar system and the universe.[16]

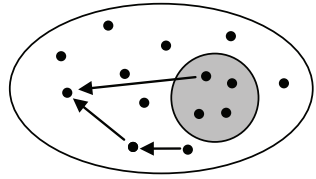
The tasks of philosophy according to the 'Thomistic' approach are to show that Christian faith is compatible with up-to-date (and properly understood) science and philosophy, and – more than the 'Augustinian' Christian philosopher would agree – to make it *externally* plausible. Adapting our graphical model of the structure of belief systems and philosophical arguments within them, one might bring out the difference as follows:



Thomistic pattern of argument

The arrows symbolizing logical support-relations in philosophical arguments depart from non-revealed propositions only. The dot touching the borderline of the revealed subset symbolizes a proposition which is in the vicinity of specifically Christian doctrines (an example could be the (philosophical) proposition that human beings have a particular dignity, which is in the vicinity of the (revealed) doctrine that human beings are God's creatures).

[16] Of course, I do not want thereby to suggest that 'Augustinian' Christian philosophers would not likewise be prepared to discover and correct mistakes in their own understanding of faith. See on this point, e.g., Alvin Plantinga, 'On Method in Christian Philosophy. Reply to Keller', in *Faith and Philosophy*, 5 (1988), 159-164 (especially 161f.).



Augustinian pattern of argument

On the Augustinian conception, the logical support-relations in philosophical arguments may also depart from revealed propositions, and such arguments may support propositions not directly pertaining to doctrinal matters.

V. A CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLE: ALVIN PLANTINGA AND 'REFORMED EPISTEMOLOGY'

Perhaps the most prominent and influential contemporary example of an explicitly 'Augustinian' conception of Christian philosophy is Alvin Plantinga and his project of 'Reformed Epistemology'. Presuming that a big part of this journal's readership is familiar with Plantinga's ideas in the philosophy of religion,[17] I constrain myself to some facets of his thought which are directly pertinent to my present topic. As Plantinga repeatedly made clear from the early 1980s onwards,[18] he deliberately understands and develops his project as a form of 'Augustinian Christian Philosophy': 'It is also perfectly proper to start from what we [philosophers, W.L.] know as Christians.'[19] The overall project behind Plantinga's philosophizing might be characterized as: 'Make a proposal from a Christian perspective, wait for objections, and if they come, try to defeat them (i.e., to find 'defeater defeaters').'

[17] Of Plantinga's numerous books on the topic I just mention *Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1983) (the key text of early Reformed Epistemology), *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) (Plantinga's later *opus magnum* where he elaborates on his position in the current epistemological landscape), and recently *Where the Conflict Really Lies. Science, Religion, & Naturalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) (an application to the adjacent problem of the relation between religious and scientific claims).

[18] See, among others, his articles 'Advice to Christian Philosophers', in *Faith and Philosophy*, 1 (1984), 253-271; 'Augustinian Christian Philosophy', in *The Monist*, 75 (1992), 291-320.

[19] 'Advice to Christian Philosophers' (see footnote 18), p. 265.

'Reformed Epistemology' is an application of this overall strategy to current epistemological problems. What would follow for epistemology if the Christian doctrines were true? Or to put it more concretely: Given that we human beings are really created 'in God's own image' (Genesis 1:27), that we are equipped with a (perhaps brittle and obfuscated) in-principle ability to cognize God (the *Sensus Divinitatis*), and that the Holy Spirit enhances our religious cognition (Plantinga further explicates this in his two 'Aquinas/Calvin models'),[20] what would follow for our epistemic abilities? – Among others, two consequences might follow.

First, it is plausible that certain people will have (clear or unclear) religious experiences, since God wants to communicate with us. Plantinga describes the content of such experiences as 'manifestation beliefs': in certain religiously significant situations (e.g., experiences of nature, personal encounter, danger and rescue, but especially the reading of the Scripture and community service), beliefs like 'God has created all that', 'God speaks to me now', or 'God should be praised' might emerge in us, and they might well be epistemologically respectable. Hence, projection theories à la Freud, Marx, etc., are wrong: of course, the Christian will admit that some questionable or even insane religious manifestation beliefs occur, but from the Christian viewpoint not *every single case* of religious manifestation beliefs is just a case of projection, illusion, wishful thinking, group-dynamical fascination, etc. If critics in the Freud /Marx vein would like to justify their 'exceptionless projection' claim, they would have to bear the burden of a proof of the *tout court*

[20] A question that I can merely mention here concerns the *theological* adequacy of these premises: Old Testament scholars are usually reluctant to ascribe to the '*tzelem elohim* / image of God' of Genesis 1:27 any epistemological implications. The same holds for the 'imago Dei' and related passages in the Old and New Testaments; they rather say something about the human being's dignity and vocation and not about our epistemic abilities. Only in medieval scholastic theological anthropology did some authors begin to explore the possible epistemological consequences of the 'imago Dei' doctrine. Likewise, there is doubt whether a *Sensus Divinitatis* (the central notion of the Aquinas/Calvin model) was taught by Aquinas or Calvin: Aquinas mentions such a natural cognition of God as a counterargument to his own position (S.Th. I, 2, 1, obi.1) and sees it as an at most vague, confused and unreliable ability (S.Th. I, 2, 1, ad 1). As the Reformed German theologian Georg Plasger, one of the leading Calvin scholars of our times, has recently shown, Calvin did not in fact consider a *Sensus Divinitatis* as a significant theological factor, either in the *Institutes* (where it appears only peripherally) or elsewhere ('Did Calvin teach a *Sensus Divinitatis*?', forthcoming). – All that, if correct, would of course not preclude the legitimacy of Plantinga's theological premises. It would just imply that it is not *standard* theology what is called for here, but essentially *his peculiar reading of it*.

falsity of theism and Christianity. The Christian may lean back and wait for this proof.

Secondly, the 'Augustinian' Christian thinker will have a preference for epistemological realism: it is much more plausible that we can really find out *truths* about our world and not just evolutionary *useful*, survival-efficient beliefs, as naturalism says. The reason for this is that the omniscient God cognizes truths, and we humans are created 'in his image', i.e., we share his epistemic abilities to a certain extent. (One facet of this God-similar ability is the convergence of our probability judgments in the light of new evidence, mentioned in section IV.1.)

Plantinga openly admits that the ultimate question whether the Aquinas/Calvin models are true (i.e., whether the Christian doctrines about creation, the *Sensus Divinitatis* and the Holy Spirit are true and theistic Christian beliefs are thus warranted) must remain open, at least from a philosophical standpoint. The book title *Warranted Christian Belief* may suggest a bit more here; what Plantinga in fact offers is just a partial answer to this question by providing counter-arguments to six prominent lines of attack to Christian faith. But Plantinga does not overstep the result gained by the early 1980s Reformed Epistemology, which is that it is *possible* for Christian belief to be epistemologically legitimate. The main new achievement of more recent Reformed Epistemology is the design of a (Christian) model explaining this possible legitimacy.

It might also be interesting to ask how Plantinga's actual philosophical practice squares with his official Augustinianism. And here it might be noted that many of his arguments outside the central tenets of Reformed Epistemology are in fact more 'Thomistic' than 'Augustinian' in nature. For example, most of his defeater-defeaters to anti-religious arguments in *Warranted Christian Belief* refer to internal inconsistencies, general implausibilities, etc., in these arguments without invoking any theological premises. (I leave it as an issue for further reflection whether finding a defeater-defeater for a proposition *p* must *necessarily* avoid circularity by not using p among the premises. Hence, the very project of defeater-defeater for Christian faith is perhaps necessarily 'Thomistic' in its argumentative structure.) Plantinga's much-discussed evolutionary argument against naturalism[21] is further evidence in that direction.

[21] J. Beilby (Ed.), *Naturalism Defeated? Essays on Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument Against Evil* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), and Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies* (see footnote 17 above).

Plantinga tries to show that naturalism is *internally* self-undermining – and this is a Thomistic form of argument. It does not rely on theological premises, it supports the Christian viewpoint only indirectly, by eliminating a rival position. And as a third indication one might collect the many passages across Plantinga's works where (traditional as well as new) theistic arguments receive a very positive value, even if they are not seen as necessary for the rationality of faith.[22]

VI. FINAL REFLECTION: WHY 'THOMISTIC' CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY SEEMS PREFERABLE

Observations like those just mentioned may invite consideration of whether a 'Thomistic' standpoint in philosophy has in sum perhaps more to recommend it. In the following final reflections, I want to substantiate this presumption. I do this using Plantinga's 'Augustinian' position as a contrast, but I should begin with two disclaimers: first, I do not intend a critical analysis of Plantinga's position (which would be quite an odd task to attempt in a few lines), and second, I am aware that the issues in question are connected with very fundamental claims concerning the task of philosophy, etc., for which knock-down arguments in any direction are not to be expected. Hence, my remarks do not claim to be more than reasoned declarations of a philosophical preference.

First and very generally, by its very idea philosophy does not address only a certain community, be it a cultural, linguistic, religious, or another community (see section I). Giving, taking, and critically analyzing philosophical reasons are activities that surpass the borders of intellectual communities: they involve stepping back from one's own habitual way of thinking, taking an impartial standpoint (as far as possible), and considering reasons from that perspective. Of course, philosophers (like all people) are entitled to have an opinion on worldview-related issues, and they will be more prepared to give reasons for them than other people will be. But it is only of limited advantage if these reasons are based on sources which many of their dialogue partners will not accept from the outset.

One could, of course, recall a useful distinction between personal and interpersonal arguments:[23] interpersonal arguments rest only on premises

[22] See, e.g., 'Augustinian Christian Philosophy' (see footnote 18), p. 294.

[23] See Otto Muck, *Rationalität und Weltanschauung* (Innsbruck – Wien: Tyrolia, 1999), pp. 113f.

which are expected to be mutually acceptable, whereas personal arguments may also draw from some premises which are not. Personal arguments are by no means idle: they make an interlocutor's thinking and acting understandable and by that help avoid unnecessary misunderstandings and other irritations. In that sense, one might describe 'Augustinian' Christian philosophy as making more liberal use of personal (Christian) argumentation than the 'Thomistic' Christian philosopher. Nevertheless, the fertility of personal arguments in philosophical dialogue is obviously limited. It is hence not by chance when Plantinga himself switches to rather 'Thomistic' and more interpersonal forms of argument in his attempts to defeat forms of anti-religious thought.

Secondly, 'Augustinian' Christian philosophy must at certain points make use of theological concepts and hence inherits the hermeneutical problems of theology. The problem here is not only that not every philosopher is knowledgeable and competent in theology; a deeper problem lurks in the different ways of understanding theological concepts within theology itself. Philosophers invoking theological concepts may produce positions which are as interesting and acceptable as their chosen background theologies are. And there is a certain danger of producing views which are acceptable neither for most philosophers nor even for a bigger percentage of the theological audience. Plantinga's Reformed Epistemology provides an example: It may at first glance seem convincing to reconstruct manifestation beliefs formed from religious experience as being similar to beliefs formed on the basis of perception and memory; nevertheless this presupposes a certain understanding of God, creation, the ways of communication between man and God, such as the *Sensus Divinitatis*, etc. The aforementioned theological discussions (see footnote 20) about the *Sensus Divinitatis* and Plantinga's particular understanding of it may serve as a warning against importing parochial theological views into the philosophical discourse.

Third, one might reverse my first argument and look at it from a theological point of view. From that perspective it seems questionable to what extent an 'Augustinian' Christian philosophy would really be helpful for Christians who have doubts about their faith. Would primarily *internal* 'defeater-defeaters' against attacks from outside be sufficient, in the face of more than 300 years of religious criticism and against the backdrop of a religiously pluralist society? Or should there be more attention to external justifications, as 'Thomistic' Christian philosophy emphasizes? Again, it is interesting to observe that Plantinga's

defeater-defeaters are in many cases rather 'Thomistic' in their overall pattern.

I conclude that there is no in-principle obstacle to the use of 'Christian Philosophy' as a label for philosophical positions. In light of the above considerations, it might even be a matter of transparency and sincerity to lay bare any possible influences from the worldview within which one operates. However, all in all the 'Thomistic' self-understanding of 'philosophizing Christians' (even when they are conscious of their possible worldview-driven preferences) seems to have more to recommend it, whereas an 'Augustinian Christian philosophy' seems to be inherently subject to the dangers of parochialism and of blending philosophy and theology in a questionable way.[24]

[24] This paper was originally presented in Berlin, at a workshop 'Reasoning from different religious perspectives' (14-15 March 2013) for the Analytic Theology Project, which was generously funded by the John Templeton Foundation. I am indebted to the participants of this workshop for their feedback and especially to Katherine Dormandy (née Munn) for her linguistic assistance and numerous helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

AN ANALYTIC THEOLOGIAN'S STANCE ON THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

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Abstract. The existence of God is once again the focus of vivid philosophical discussion. From the point of view of analytic theology, however, people often talk past each other when they debate about the putative existence or non-existence of God. In the worst case, for instance, atheists deny the existence of a God, which no theists ever claimed to exist. In order to avoid confusions like this we need to be clear about the function of the term 'God' in its different contexts of use. In what follows, I distinguish between the functions of 'God' in philosophical contexts on the one hand and in theological contexts on the other in order to provide a schema, which helps to avoid confusion in the debate on the existence or non-existence of God.

INTRODUCTION

A fundamental question of metaphysical speculation concerns the existence of God. In order to answer it philosophers do not hesitate to point to the numerous arguments for and against the existence of God that have been developed and evaluated throughout the history of mankind. Often, however, too little reflection is directed upon what the arguments actually show, and upon how their conclusions or premises logically relate to the deployed concept of God. In what follows, I firstly provide a brief analysis of the argumentative structure of so-called arguments for the existence of God and then argue that the term 'God' is not a genuine philosophical but a theological concept philosophers could entirely dispense with since philosophy is only interested in questions concerning the ultimate ground of reality – in whichever way we have to characterise this ground within the metaphysical paradigm we deploy.[1]

In a second step I argue that it is theology that has a genuine interest to show that *her* concept of God is philosophically confirmed as the adequate concept of the ultimate ground of reality, whereas the adequacy of the theological concept of God originates primarily out of scriptural and *not* out of philosophical considerations. The question of whether God exists, then, according to its *form*, is the question of whether the best philosophical account of the ultimate ground of reality confirms the existence of what the theologians call 'God'. Consequently, in the framework developed, the proper context of use of so-called arguments against the existence of God is not a philosophical but a genuine theological one: arguments against the existence of God are arguments according to which there is a mismatch between philosophical accounts of the ultimate ground of reality and a particular theological conception of the divine that happens to function like an account of the ultimate ground of reality.

I. THE FUNCTION OF 'GOD' IN PHILOSOPHY

As with arguments in other fields of philosophy, arguments for the existence of God can be classified by twice deploying a twofold distinction: they can be classified according to the way their premises are justified and also according to the way in which the alleged truth of the premises transfers truth on the conclusion of the argument. If at least one of the premises is justified by way of our experience of the world, the argument is called a posteriori. If each premise is justified independent from experience, it is an a priori argument. If it is not possible that the premises are true and the conclusion false, then the argument is a deductive one. If the truth of the premises does not entail the truth of the conclusion of the argument but nevertheless bestows a reasonable probability of being true on it, then the argument is an inductive one. In what follows, I focus only on so-called deductive arguments for the existence of God.[2]

The most popular deductive arguments for the existence of God are the 'Five Ways' of Thomas Aquinas and the so-called 'Ontological

[1] I use 'concept', 'notion', and 'conception' interchangeably. For an account that distinguishes between concepts and conceptions of God cf. Herrmann (2008).

[2] The argument to come applies to deductive arguments as well as to inductive arguments for the existence of God. Cf. Swinburne (2004) for an inductive argument for the existence of God.

Arguments' suggested by Anselm from Canterbury. The Five Ways are a posteriori; the Ontological Argument is a priori.

Saint Thomas states his Five Ways as follows, and although knowledge of them is common, it is worth quoting them in length:

> The existence of God can be proved in five ways. The first and more manifest way is the argument from motion. It is certain, and evident to our senses, that in the world some things are in motion. Now whatever is in motion is put in motion by another. (...) If that by which it is put in motion be itself put in motion, then this also must needs be put in motion by another, and that by another again. But this cannot go on to infinity, because then there would be no first mover, and, consequently, no other mover (...) Therefore it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, put in motion by no other; and this everyone understands to be God.
>
> The second way is from the nature of the efficient cause. In the world of sense we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether the intermediate cause be several, or only one. Now to take away the cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate cause. (...) Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God.
>
> The third way is taken from possibility and necessity, and runs thus. We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated, and to corrupt, and consequently, they are possible to be and not to be. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which is possible not to be at some time is not. Therefore, if everything is possible not to be, then at one time there could have been nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist only begins to exist by something already existing. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence – which is absurd. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary. (...) Therefore we cannot but postulate the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity (...) This all men speak of as God.

> The fourth way is taken from the gradation to be found in things. Among beings there are some more and some less good, true, noble and the like. But 'more' and 'less' are predicated of different things, according as they resemble in their different ways something which is the maximum, as a thing is said to be hotter according as it more nearly resembles that which is hottest; so that there is something which is truest, something best, something noblest and, consequently, something which is uttermost being; for those things that are greatest in truth are greatest in being(...) Now the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus; as fire, which is the maximum heat, is the cause of all hot things. Therefore there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God.
>
> The fifth way is taken from the governance of the world. We see that things which lack intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that not fortuitously, but designedly, do they achieve their end. Now whatever lacks intelligence cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is shot to its mark by the archer. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God. (Aquinas: Summa Theologica, Prima Pars Q2A3)

The argumentative structure of these arguments is as follows: firstly, a premise concerning a fundamental phenomenon of the world is stated and justified by way of reliance on our experience of the world, let's call this kind of premise the *experiential base* of the argument.[3] Secondly, further premises provide a conceptual and metaphysical analysis of the phenomenon in question according to which it could not exist unless there is a certain ultimate ground with features sufficient to explain the existence of the phenomenon in question; let us call these premises the *conceptual base*, or the *metaphysical paradigm* of the argument. Thirdly, it is concluded deductively that given the experiential and the conceptual base of the argument it follows that the ultimate ground specified in the conceptual base has to exist. Fourthly, it is announced that we call this

[3] When I speak about the logic of these arguments, what I have in mind is their argumentative structure, and not a particular formalisation of these arguments. For different formalisations of these arguments, and their corresponding problems, cf. Ricken (1998) and Sobel (2004).

ultimate ground 'God', let us call this kind of announcement the *act of baptism* of the argument.

Given the distinction between the experiential base, the conceptual base, and the act of baptism, we can structure the Five Ways roughly as follows. The *experiential base* is: (1) There is motion in the world, (2) there is efficient causation in the world, (3) there is possibility in the world, (4) there is gradation in the world, and (5) there is governance of unintelligent beings in the world. The *conceptual base* is as follows: (1a) whatever is in motion must be put in motion by another and this cannot be an actually infinite series, (2a) whatever is an efficient cause needs another efficient cause and this series cannot be actually infinite, (3a) if each entity possibly does not exist, then there is a time when nothing exists which entails that nothing could exist now, (4a) graduation is possible only if there is maximal realisation of what is graduated, and (5a) governance of unintelligent beings entails that there is something directing these beings. Deductively based upon their experiential and conceptual base, the arguments generate the following conclusions, respectively: (1b) there is an unmoved mover, (2b) there is an uncaused cause, (3b) there is a necessary being, (4b) there is a maximal realisation of every perfection, and (5b) there is a being which directs all unintelligent beings to their end. Each conclusion is followed by a corresponding *act of baptism,* according to which *this* is what everybody calls God, or refers to as 'God' or understands to be God.

There are at least two problems with these so-called arguments for the existence of God. The first problem is intrinsic to each argument if it is understood to be an argument for the existence of God; the second problem emerges once the Five Ways are seen in total.

The *intrinsic* problem of each of the Five Ways is that none of them actually *concludes* by way of asserting the existence of God. Their philosophical conclusions are much more decent. Once the philosophical work is done, they only conclude that there is an unmoved mover, respectively an uncaused cause, respectively a final cause upon which all is directed, etc. The term 'God' comes into play only in the act of baptism, which from a logical point of view is an *arbitrary addendum* to the argument, and not part of the argument itself insofar as its logical structure is concerned.[4]

[4] Cf. also Meixner (2012: 175): 'Nothing in Thomas Aquinas's argument (...) justifies the conclusion that this agent which is a first cause is God or even a god.' Cf. also Meixner (2009: 34).

The *extrinsic* problem comes into focus once we consider the Five Ways in sum. Since Thomas deploys the same act of baptism at the end of each of his ways, he generates the impression that of necessity the unmoved mover has to be the uncaused cause, has to be a necessary being, has to be the final goal of nature, has to be maximal perfection. However, without further philosophical argument one is justified to doubt whether it is really the existence of one and the same entity that all these arguments point to if what is established, if they are sound, is only that there is an unmoved mover *and* an uncaused cause, etc. Thomas would have needed an argument that of necessity the uncaused cause is the unmoved mover, etc., in order to persuade philosophers that there is reference to exactly one entity in the Five Ways.

Let us turn to Anselm's 'ontological arguments' and analyse their argumentative structure. Anselm states them as follows:

> And so, LORD, do thou, who dost give understanding to faith, give me, so far as thou knowest it to be profitable, to understand that thou art as we believe; and that thou art that which we believe. And indeed, we believe that thou art a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. Or is there no such nature, since the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God? (Psalms 14:1). But, at any rate, this very fool, when he hears of this being of which I speak – a being than which nothing greater can be conceived – understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his understanding; although he does not understand it to exist. For, it is one thing for an object to be in the understanding, and another to understand that the object exists. (...) Hence, even the fool is convinced that something exists in the understanding, at least, than which nothing greater can be conceived. For, when he hears of this, he understands it. And whatever is understood, exists in the understanding. And assuredly that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For, suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which is greater. Therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one, than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality.
>
> God cannot be conceived not to exist. God is that, than which nothing greater can be conceived. That which can be conceived not to exist is not

> God. And it assuredly exists so truly, that it cannot be conceived not to exist. For, it is possible to conceive of a being, which cannot be conceived not to exist; and this is greater than one which can be conceived not to exist. Hence, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, can be conceived not to exist, it is not that, than which nothing greater can be conceived. But this is an irreconcilable contradiction. There is, then, so truly a being than which nothing greater can be conceived to exist, that it cannot even be conceived not to exist; and this being thou art, O LORD, our God. (Anselm: Proslogion, Ch. 2 & 3)

The argumentative structure of these arguments is as follows: firstly, a stipulative definition of the term 'God' is provided and specified in terms of a definite description; let us call this the *definition base* of the argument. Secondly, conceptual and metaphysical reflections are spelled out according to which one obtains a contradiction if one assumes that there is no such entity as specified in the definition; let us call this kind of premises again the *conceptual base*, respectively the *metaphysical paradigm* of the argument. Thirdly, it is concluded that given the definition base and the conceptual base, it is true that 'God exists' since the entity specified in the definition base of the argument exists.

Deploying the distinction between the definition base and the conceptual base we can structure both of Anselm's ontological arguments as follows. The definition base of both is this: the term 'God' is synonymous with the definite description 'that than which a greater cannot be imagined'. The conceptual base of the first ontological argument is: (1) that than which a greater cannot be imagined has to exist because otherwise it would not be that than which a greater cannot be imagined. The conceptual base of the second argument is: (2) that than which a greater cannot be imagined has to exist *of necessity* since something that cannot lack existence is greater than something that can lack existence. The conclusion of the first argument is that given the definition base of the argument it is true to assert that 'God exists', and the conclusion of the second is a modal intensification according to which it is true that 'God exists necessarily'.

Ontological arguments suffer from the same *intrinsic* problem as the mentioned a posteriori arguments.[5] The genuine philosophical job is done without need of or reference to the concept of God. The only

[5] Unlike the Five Ways, they are not subject to an extrinsic problem since both ontological arguments are based on the same definition base.

important phrase is 'that, than which a greater cannot be conceived'. However, in contrast to the analysed a posteriori arguments, where from a logical point of view the act of baptism is an arbitrary addition *at the end* of the argument, a priori arguments proceed the other way about and *start* with the definition base, which like the act of baptism of the Five Ways is not a proper part of the philosophical argument as such. The argument, if sound, only shows that there is that than which a greater cannot be conceived – as such it is independent of 'God'.

What we said about the argumentative structure of the most popular a posteriori and a priori arguments for the existence of God mutatis mutandis applies to any so-called philosophical argument for the existence of God.

Firstly, any a posteriori argument of necessity implicitly or explicitly has the following logical form: *(1) Experiential Base, (2) Conceptual Base, (3) Conclusion, (4) Act of Baptism*. For instance, take the argument from fine-tuning. Roughly, the *experiential base* asserts that the universe is fine-tuned, while the *metaphysical paradigm* of the argument firstly states that the fine-tuning of the universe is due to physical necessity, chance, or a designer and then proceeds to argue that neither physical necessity nor chance can reasonably account for the fine-tuning of the universe. The *conclusion* states that, therefore, there is a designer of the universe. Finally, the *act of baptism* stipulates that the designer is what we call 'God'.[6]

Secondly, as regards so-called a priori arguments for the existence of God, the general argumentative structure is as follows: *(1) Definition Base, (2) Conceptual Base, (3) Conclusion*. Take, for instance, a look at Descartes' ontological argument:

> But if the mere fact that I can produce from my thought the idea of something entails that everything which I clearly and distinctly perceive to belong to that thing really does belong to it, is not this a possible basis for another argument to prove the existence of God? Certainly, the idea of God, or a supremely perfect being, is one that I find within me just as surely as the idea of any shape or number. And my understanding that it belongs to his nature that he always exists is no less clear and distinct than is the case when I prove of any shape or number that some property belongs to its nature. (Descartes 1996: 45)[7]

[6] For more on the argument from fine-tuning cf. Monton (2006). In general, any arbitrarily chosen a posteriori argument for the existence of God can be stated in such a way that it exhibits the mentioned argumentative form.

The *definition base* of the argument is that 'God' is an abbreviation for 'a supremely perfect being'. The *conceptual base* firstly asserts that everything, which clearly and distinctively is perceived to belong to the idea of a supremely perfect being, also belongs to it in reality. The conceptual base then goes on to argue that existence is perceived to belong to the idea of a supremely perfect being, which is why the *conclusion* states that since a supremely perfect being exists, it is true to assert 'God exists'.[8]

Therefore, as far as the structure of so-called arguments for the existence of God is concerned, we can conclude the following: firstly, philosophy could entirely dispense with the concept of God without losing any of its genuine argumentative force. The reason, as we have shown, is that in a philosophical context 'God' is either just a name amongst other names of which in an act of baptism we have to decide how to deploy, or else is used as an abbreviation for a particular definite description as specified in the definition base of the corresponding argument.[9] Since philosophy is neither interested in acts of baptism nor in stipulative definitions of particular terms, we could simply dispense with 'God'. Secondly, however, instead of deleting the term 'God' we could also explicitly identify its philosophical function as an unrestricted semantic placeholder for whatever it is that our respective metaphysical paradigm commits us to assume as regards the nature of the ultimate ground of reality.[10]

According to this option, the meaning of the assertion 'God exists' is a function of the metaphysical paradigm in which it is stated and consequently can express different views about the ultimate ground of reality in dependence of the paradigm in which it is expressed. In other words, in a philosophical context, the assertion that 'God exists' means

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[7] Cf. Wee (2012) for further analysis of this argument.

[8] In general, any arbitrarily chosen a priori argument for the existence of God can be stated in such a way that it exhibits the mentioned argumentative form.

[9] This can be nicely observed in the passage quoted from Descartes, where he says: 'the idea of God, *or a supremely perfect being*.' The argument could entirely be stated without reference to the term 'God' since it is concerned only with the existence of a supremely perfect being.

[10] This use of the term 'God' is what I take Fischer to mean when he says, 'I assume that the term "God" is a descriptive expression used to mark a certain *role*, rather than a proper name' (Fischer 1989: 87). It also fits with the observation of Milem, when he states the following: 'Reason finds itself standing before a mystery, the cause of everything that exists, and gives this mystery the name "God"' (Milem 2007: 86).

nothing over and above 'In the metaphysical paradigm X, the ultimate ground of reality is Y'. The assertion 'God exists' thus is always a cypher for a particular *Weltanschauung*.

For instance, without the act of baptism, the Five Ways of Thomas precisely have the function of philosophical arguments that are directed at an illumination of the ultimate ground of reality, an explanation, which is based on our experience of the world and the metaphysical paradigm within which Thomas was operating. Therefore, when Thomas asserts 'God exists', what he expresses is a particular conception of the ultimate ground of reality based on certain metaphysical assumptions like the impossibility of an actual infinitude. In contrast, when, say, Leibniz asserts that 'God exists', then he expresses a different account of the ultimate ground of reality, since he did not assume that an actual infinitude is impossible (cf. Laerke 2011). It is a great source of confusion if one is not aware of the fact that the assertion 'God exists' expresses entirely different accounts of the ultimate ground of reality in different contexts and instead treats the concept of God independent from the philosophical context out of which it once originated.

In sum, our analysis of so-called arguments for the existence of God showed that in reference to their argumentative structure, 'God' is either introduced in an act of baptism for the entity specified in the conclusion of the argument or else is stipulated as an abbreviation for a certain definite description. Arguments for the existence of God could dispense with the term 'God' without losing any of their genuine philosophical force as arguments concerning the ultimate ground of reality. If the term 'God' is nevertheless deployed in philosophical discussions, one has to be aware that it functions like an unrestricted semantic placeholder for whatever it is that the metaphysical paradigm deployed commits us to assume as regards the nature of the ultimate ground of reality.

II. THE FUNCTION OF 'GOD' IN THEOLOGY

We have analysed the function of the term 'God' in so-called philosophical arguments for the existence of God. However, philosophy is only a secondary context in which 'God' figures as a prominent role. Primarily, 'God' is a *theological* notion that originated in the religious life of early human societies, and consequently has its own traditional use and development independent from philosophy.[11]

In Western theological tradition, what we mean by 'God' is closely related to what we understand the Bible to say about God.[12] It would be ideal if the Bible provided a neat and clear-cut definition of God so that we could in principle replace any Biblical mentioning of God with such a definition salva veritate. Unfortunately, this is an idle dream: in the discussion of these matters, we tend to forget the fact that the monotheistic conception of God that the Bible deals with is by no means a monolithic one.[13] Jewish, and therefore Christian monotheism in fact started as a monolatrism that entailed philosophical polytheism and it was not before the time of Deuteroisaiah that an explicit monotheism was established as part of the theological reaction to the Babylonian Exile. Therefore, there is no single complete and unanimous conception of God that is intrinsically and unambiguously based on Scripture. The books of Scripture themselves reflect a process of clarifying what is or could be meant by the term 'God'.[14]

However, although there is no such clear-cut conception to be found, after all, the Bible is no philosophical disputation but a history of salvation, what theologians can positively agree upon is a *minimal consensus* that the God of the Bible has certain features which of necessity belong to any theologically adequate concept of God – regardless its further qualification.

The problem is to decide which elements exactly belong to the minimal consensus of a conception of God based on Scripture. Since there could be an absolutely adequate decision procedure in order to decide which parts of necessity belong to the minimal conception of God if and only if we had a prior and independent grasp on the God of the Bible with which to compare scripture as regards its adequacy concerning the 'proper' use of the term 'God' in a theological context,

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[11] Cf. Puntel (2008: 447): '"God" is originally not a philosophical concept, but a term arising in religions, and one with which many in part quite heterogeneous ideas have been and continue to be connected.'

[12] I bracket other religious traditions like Islamic or Hindu traditions. The same kind of consideration, however, applies to these traditions as well insofar as they base their religious conceptions of God on revealed written or oral treatments of what they call 'God'.

[13] As Craig (2009: 71) says: 'The concept of God is underdetermined by the biblical data.' Apart from this difficulty, we also tend to forget that the phrase 'the Bible' in different Christian Denominations refers to different corpi of revealed books and texts.

[14] For more on the development of monotheism in Ancient Israel cf. Keel (1980), Lang (1981), Wacker (1999), and Becking *et al.* (2001).

it seems that our best means to establish a certain minimal consensus as regards the conception of God to be found in the Bible is by way of exegetical analysis of what the texts actually say.[15]

Although there is no room to develop this fully in the present paper, it seems to be plausible to agree that a minimal consensus at least entails the following: the God of the Bible is supposed to be *worthy of worship*, supposed to be the *creator of all that is*, and supposed to share a *deep and loving relationship with his creation* that *He wants to be saved*.[16] Any theological notion of God, which does not agree upon this minimal consensus, seems to be religiously and exegetically inadequate right from the start as a theological concept of the God of whom the Bible speaks.

The minimal consensus is silent on many features, which we are used to associating with the God of the Bible. For instance, the minimal consensus is silent on the questions of whether the Bible assumes that God is everlasting or eternal, immutable or able to change. It is silent on these matters because there is Scriptural evidence for each of these assumptions, which is to say that the minimal consensus can be extended in different, more fully developed concepts of God that are equally based on Scripture but might contradict each other. In what follows, I deploy the term 'God' in such a way that it only refers to what is specified in the minimal consensus in order to avoid confusion.

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[15] According to Alston 'experiential awareness of God, or as I shall be saying, the perception of God, makes an important contribution to the grounds of religious belief. More specifically, a person can become justified in holding certain kinds of beliefs about God by virtue of perceiving God as being or doing so-and-so' (Alston 1991: 1). One could argue that there is no need for an exegetical account of the concept of God since it is possible to perceive God as being so-and-so. However, this seems to me to be problematic since one could always doubt that what is perceived is really the God of the Bible. As Kaufman says, 'in the monotheistic perspective, human beings do not live simply suspended before their creator, as it were, in direct and continuous face-to-face interaction with God' (Kaufman 1981: 111).

[16] It is unclear whether there can be an adequate clarification of the conditions necessary and sufficient to be an 'object' worthy of worship, which at the same time *grounds* in Scripture *and* philosophical argument about what it means to be worthy of worship. If the God of the Bible could simply be understood to be an object worthy of worship, whereas the analysis of what it is to be an object worthy of worship is achieved purely by philosophical means, then the Bible is simply pointless as regards the qualification of God insofar as he is factually described in Scripture. The problem is that from a philosophical point of view one quickly arrives at the conclusion that an object worthy of worship has to be the perfect being, which has all its qualities essentially and necessarily. Cf. Findlay (1955: 52-3).

As regards the function of 'God' in a purely theological context, we can state the following: Firstly, 'God' functions as a name for the deity which revealed itself firstly to the tribes of Israel and then revealed itself in Jesus Christ to all of mankind, whereas Scripture and the history of the tribes of Israel are taken to be sufficient evidence for the existence of this deity. Although it might be unclear how to specify further exegetically the minimal consensus as regards the concept of God deployed in the Bible, there is no genuine theological discussion about whether this deity exists or not. It is a necessary presumption of theology to assume that the God of whom the Bible speaks exists.

However, secondly, although in a purely theological context, 'God' functions like a name, the minimal consensus which theology spells out in the description of this deity also has the *form* of a genuine philosophical account of the ultimate ground of reality. Now, Tertullian once asked, 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? Or the Academy with the Church?' (Tertullian: De Praescriptione vii). From a systematic point of view, the answer is as follows: as such Athens has nothing to do with Jerusalem. However, Jerusalem happens to possess something that has the form of a philosophical account of the ultimate ground of reality and therefore is eo ipso interesting to the Academy, particularly given that the way Jerusalem obtained this account is based primarily on revelation and *not* on philosophical argument. That is to say, the way the theological concept of 'God' enters philosophical territory is *asymptotic* to the nature of philosophy since whatever is known about the God of the Bible is supposed to be known primarily through divine revelation and *not* through philosophical argument.

In the very moment in which theology enters philosophical discussion, it also constitutes the very intelligibility of atheism. Whenever there is a particular conception of God of which the theologian says that it is an adequate scriptural understanding of the God of the Bible, then it is eo ipso possible that philosophy rejects such a theological notion of God as an adequate notion of the ultimate ground of reality. Based on this understanding, so-called arguments against the existence of God are arguments according to which there is a mismatch between a theological notion of God and the philosophical account of the ultimate ground of reality.

For instance, suppose that the theologian argues that Scripture confirms that the God of the Bible, in addition to what is specified in the minimal consensus, is also omnipotent, omniscient and morally perfect.

Given this understanding of the term 'God', philosophers argue that if 'God' is meant to mean this, then there could be no evil in the world. Since, however, there is evil in this world, the philosopher concludes that 'God' thus understood is not an adequate account of the ultimate ground of reality, and that therefore it is true to assert that 'God does not exist'.[17]

In situations like these, given the soundness of the respective arguments, the *theologian* has two options how to react. Either the theologian argues that the attacked conception of God is in fact adequately based on Scripture and is the only adequate interpretation or he argues that precisely those features of the theological conception of God that lead to a contradiction with a philosophical account of the ultimate ground of reality do not of necessity belong to the theological concept of God.

If the theologian supposes that the conception of God under attack is the only adequate understanding of 'God', then atheism or religious fundamentalism are the reactions to follow. Atheism on side of the philosophers because one is justified to assert that God (as qualified) does not exist. Religious fundamentalism follows on side of the theologian because he assumes to possess an ultimate truth based on Scripture, which contradicts human reason. Neither consequence is desirable. Since we have already seen above that there is no single and unambiguous clear-cut definition of God based on Scripture, the reasonable theologian should opt for the second option.

Choosing the second option, the theologian has to be open minded and accept that any concept of God, which goes beyond the minimal consensus, might always be open to revision. However, given that Scripture itself shows a development and change in the concept of God, this does not seem to be too much of a problem. The only move the theologian cannot make is to reject elements that belong to the minimal consensus of the theological notion of God, which is to say that the only strictly atheistic argument would be an argument that the ultimate ground of reality cannot be a loving creator that wants us to be saved.[18]

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[17] Cf. Mackie: 'In its simplest form the problem is this: God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions: the *theologian*, it seems, at once *must* adhere and *cannot consistently* adhere to all three.' (Mackie 1955: 200)

[18] I have to confess that I have not the slightest idea how such an argument could look like. Certainly, arguments from evil will not do the job since the theological notion of God is, as far as I can see, simply consistent with there being evil in the world.

In sum, the function of 'God' in a purely theological context is to serve as a name that refers to the God of whom the Bible speaks, whereas exegetical analyses of Scripture specify a minimal consensus of the qualities we have to assume to belong to the God of the Bible. The theological concept of God enters philosophical discourse because it happens to be an account of the ultimate ground of reality which is reached at through revelation and not philosophical argument. Arguments against the existence of God are arguments according to which there is a mismatch between theological notions of God and philosophical accounts of the ultimate ground of reality.

III. A SCHEMA TO AVOID CONFUSION

We have reached the following conclusions: Firstly, philosophy can entirely dispense with the term 'God' since it is an *unrestricted semantic placeholder* for the ultimate ground of reality. Secondly, theology specifies particular concepts of God based on an interpretation of Scripture, whereas there is a minimal consensus as regards the meaning of 'God' as a theological term. Arguments for the existence of God are arguments that show that the theological and intrinsically non-philosophical notion of the God of the Bible in fact coheres with the philosophical account of the ultimate ground of reality. Arguments against the existence of God are arguments according to which the theological concept of God does not correspond with our knowledge of the ultimate ground of reality.

In order to avoid confusion in our discussions about the existence or non-existence of God, the following schema is of some help:

(1) If somebody asserts that 'God exists', then it needs to be clarified whether (a) he deploys a philosophical concept of God as a placeholder for the ultimate ground of reality which he calls 'God' or whether (b) he deploys a theological concept of God based on Scripture.

If (a), then 'God exists' can be translated into a proposition, which does not deploy the term 'God' but specifies an account of the ultimate ground of reality. The philosophically interesting questions here are whether the argument proposed to arrive at the suggested conception of the ultimate ground is sound and whether the metaphysical paradigm in which it is stated is plausible itself.

If (b), then the statement 'God exists' can be translated into a proposition, which does not deploy the term 'God' but specifies at least a minimal consensus of what is meant by 'God' given scriptural evidence.

In this case, the first question to be discussed is whether the suggested theological surrogate for the term 'God' is adequately based on Scripture. If it is not, then this particular assertion that 'God exists' is irrelevant from a theological point of view. The second question to be discussed is whether the philosophical account of the ultimate ground confirms the existence of what the theologians call 'God'.

(2) If somebody asserts 'God does not exist', then it needs to be clarified whether (a*) he deploys a philosophical concept of God as a placeholder for the ultimate ground of reality, which he calls 'God' or whether (b*) he deploys a theological concept of God based on Scripture.

If (a*), then 'God does not exist' can be translated into a proposition, which does not deploy the term 'God' but specifies a denial of a particular account of the ultimate ground of reality. The philosophically interesting questions then are whether the argument proposed to arrive at this denial is sound and whether the metaphysical paradigm in which it is stated is plausible itself.

If (b*), then the statement 'God does not exist' can be translated into a proposition, which does not deploy the term 'God' but specifies at least a minimal consensus of what is meant by 'God' given scriptural evidence. In this case, the first question that has to be discussed is whether the suggested theological surrogate for the term 'God' is adequately based on Scripture. If it is not adequately based on Scripture, then the corresponding assertion 'God does not exist' is without any rationale in itself. If, however, it is adequately based on Scripture, then the interesting questions are whether the argument to arrive at the conclusion that the ultimate ground cannot have the features of the God of the Bible is sound and whether the metaphysical paradigm in which it is stated is plausible itself. [19]

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NEW PUZZLES ABOUT DIVINE ATTRIBUTES

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Abstract: According to traditional Western theism, God is maximally great (or perfect). More explicitly, God is said to have the following divine attributes: omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence. In this paper, I present three puzzles about this conception of a maximally great (or perfect) being. The first puzzle about omniscience shows that this divine attribute is incoherent. The second puzzle about omnibenevolence and omnipotence shows that these divine attributes are logically incompatible. The third puzzle about perfect rationality and omnipotence shows that these divine attributes are logically incompatible.

I. INTRODUCTION

According to traditional Western theism, God is maximally great (or perfect). More explicitly, God is said to have the following divine attributes: omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence (Everitt 2010). In other words, God is supposed to be omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnibenevolent (all-good). (See, e.g., Plantinga 1974, 1980; Morris 1987; Wierenga 1989; Adams 1983; MacDonald 1991; Rogers 2000.) The familiar puzzles about omnipotence include the following (Hoffman and Rosenkrantz 2006):

- Could an omnipotent being create a stone so massive that that being could not move it?
- Could an omnipotent being create a spherical cube?

Paradoxically, it appears that however we answer these questions, an omnipotent being turns out not to be all-powerful (Cf. Campbell and Nagasawa 2005).

In what follows, I present three puzzles about the conception of God as a maximally great (or perfect) being. The first puzzle about omniscience shows that this divine attribute is incoherent. The second puzzle about

omnibenevolence and omnipotence shows that these divine attributes are logically incompatible. The third puzzle about perfect rationality and omnipotence shows that these divine attributes are logically incompatible. The puzzles presented in this paper are different from the arguments outlined by Michael Martin (1990) in two important respects. First, these puzzles are presented as puzzles vis-à-vis the conception of God as a maximally great (or perfect) being rather than arguments for atheism. Second, these puzzles are immune to the objections raised by Beyer (2004) (Cf. Nagasawa 2005).

II. A PUZZLE ABOUT OMNISCIENCE

God is said to be omniscient (all-knowing). For present purposes, the divine attribute of omniscience is understood as follows (Wierenga 2010):

> *B* is omniscient $=_{df}$ for any proposition *p*, if *p* is true, then *B* knows that *p*.

Now, omniscience, thus understood, seems incoherent. To see why, consider the following question:

> *Could an omniscient being know what it is like not to know that p?*

On the one hand, if we answer *yes*, then that means that there must be some *p* that an omniscient being does not know, and hence an omniscient being turns out not to be *all-knowing* (Cf. Grim 1983).

It might seem as if the generalization on which this claim rests is not clearly true. For example, can't I know modal logic, say, and know what it is like not to know modal logic? Even if one thinks that this is a rhetorical question, and so the answer is clearly *yes*, this move will not work for the following reason. Presumably, a human person needs to learn modal logic before he or she knows modal logic. So a human person can know what it was like not to know modal logic before he or she has learned it. For an omniscient being, however, that cannot be the case, for, presumably, an omniscient being does not need to learn anything. So, presumably, an omniscient being does not need to learn modal logic. Rather, an omniscient being just knows modal logic (or anything else, for that matter). Surely, if an omniscient being needs to learn anything, then that being is not really omniscient.

On the other hand, if we answer *no*, then there is something that an omniscient being could not know, namely, an omniscient being could

not know what it is like not to know that *p*, and hence an omniscient being turns out not to be *all-knowing*.

It might be objected that 'knowing what it is like' is not propositional knowledge. And since omniscience has been characterized in terms of propositional knowledge, there is no problem with saying that an omniscient being still has maximal propositional knowledge. This objection, however, raises two further problems. First, an omniscient being, presumably, should have perfect knowledge of all sorts, including propositional knowledge, as well as knowledge of skills (e.g., knowing how to write a paper) and knowledge by acquaintance (e.g., knowing the Prime Minister of England). Restricting omniscience to propositional knowledge, then, seems arbitrary. But, in this paper, omniscience has been characterized in terms of propositional knowledge, since this is the common way in which omniscience is characterized in the literature. (See, e.g., Plantinga 1974: 68; Davis 1983: 26; Gale 1991: 57; Zagzebski 2007: 262.)

Second, 'knowing what it is like' can be easily couched in terms of propositional knowledge. For instance, in order to know what it is like not to know that *p*, an omniscient being would have to know the following proposition:

(L) This is what it is like not to know that *p*.

or

(L*) Not knowing that *p* feels like *F*.

For (L) or (L*) to be true, however, there must be some *p* that an omniscient being does not know. That is to say, in order to know that (L) or (L*), there must be some *p* that an omniscient being does not know, and hence an omniscient being turns out not to be *all-knowing*. On the other hand, if an omniscient being does not know that (L) or (L*), then an omniscient being turns out not to be *all-knowing*.

Some might think that the Christian doctrine of Incarnation might provide a way out of this puzzle. According to this doctrine, God took human form in the body of Christ. Accordingly, some might argue, while incarnated in the body of Christ, God could know that (L) or (L*), since Christ *qua* human being is not all-knowing.

However, while incarnated in the body of Christ, God could know what it is like for God to behave like a human being who does not know that *p*, but God could not know what it is like for Christ *qua* human

being not to know that *p*. In other words, the following two propositions could be the object of the Christian God's knowledge in this case:

(L1)This is what it is like *for the Christian God* to behave like a human being who does not know that *p*.

(L2)This is what it is like *for a human being* not to know that *p*.

Arguably, the Christian God could know that (L1) is true, since God is incarnated in the body of Christ, but God could not know that (L2) is true, since, while incarnated in the body of Christ, God has the subjective experience of what it is like for God to behave like a human being, not the subjective experience of what it is like to be a human being who does not know that *p*, just as if one were to have bat sonar, one would be able to know what it is like *for one* to echolocate like a bat does, but not what it is like *for a bat* to echolocate using bat sonar (Nagel 1974).

To this reply to the Incarnation move it might be objected that an underlying, and unwarranted, assumption here is that God assuming human form involves nothing more than engaging in human behaviour (the so-called Apollinarian heresy). However, this objection is also mistaken, since there is another way of putting the puzzle that circumvents this worry. Consider the following question:

Could an omniscient being know what it is like to be finite?

As an answer to this question, the Incarnation move does not work because God cannot know what it is like to be finite while being infinite. Furthermore, assuming God could know what it is like for God to be finite, *that* is not the same as knowing what it is like for a finite being to be finite. Indeed, it seems incoherent to say that God could know what it is like for God to be finite because that would require that God be finite, and hence not God in the sense of a maximally great (or perfect) being.

Finally, one might think that it is not the case that, in order to know that (L) or (L*), there must be some *p* that an omniscient being does not know. Rather, one might argue, an omniscient being can simply *imagine* what it is like not to know that *p*. This objection, however, is also mistaken. First, clearly, *imagining* what it is like not to know that *p* is different from *knowing* what it is like not to know that *p*. Second, resorting to imagination simply pushes the puzzle one level up. For then one could ask: Can an omniscient being know that it is like to imagine what it is like not to know that *p*?

The aforementioned puzzle about omniscience can be summed up in the form of a dilemma as follows:

(1) Either God can know what it is like not to know that *p* or God cannot know what it is like not to know that *p*.
(2) If God can know what it is like not to know that *p*, then God is not omniscient (since to know what it is like not to know that *p*, there must be some *p* that God does not know).
(3) If God cannot know what it is like not to know that *p*, then God is not omniscient (since there is some *p* – i.e., (L) or (L*) – that God cannot know).
(4) (Therefore) Either way, God is not omniscient.

Alternatively, the second formulation of the puzzle can be summed up in the form of a dilemma as follows:

(1) Either God can know what it is like to be finite or God cannot know what it is like to be finite.
(2) If God can know what it is like to be finite, then God is not omniscient (since to know what it is like to be finite, God must be finite).
(3) If God cannot know what it is like to be finite, then God is not omniscient (since there is something that God cannot know, namely, what it is like to be finite).
(4) (Therefore) Either way, God is not omniscient.

Like the familiar puzzles about omnipotence, it appears that however we answer the aforementioned question about omniscience, an omniscient being turns out not to be omniscient. This puzzle, then, shows that the divine attribute of omniscience, like the divine attribute of omnipotence, is incoherent.

III. A PUZZLE ABOUT OMNIBENEVOLENCE AND OMNIPOTENCE

God is said to be omnibenevolent (all-good). For present purposes, the divine attribute of benevolence is understood along the following Leibnizian lines (1989, 35):

(1) 'God is an absolutely perfect being.'
(2) '[P]ower and knowledge are perfections, and, insofar as they belong to God, they do not have limits.'
(3) (Therefore) 'God, possessing supreme and infinite wisdom, acts in the most perfect manner, not only metaphysically, but also morally speaking.'

Now, it has already been suggested that the divine attributes of benevolence and omnipotence are logically incompatible. For example, according to Pike (1969), since doing evil is a possible thing to do, if an omnipotent being lacks the power to do evil, then that being lacks the power to do something possible, and hence that being is not omnipotent (Cf. Hoffman 1979). Accordingly, in more recent literature, the concept of omnipotence has been understood in terms of *the power to bring about certain possible states of affairs*, where states of affairs are propositional entities that either obtain or fail to obtain (Hoffman and Rosenkrantz 1980; Wierenga 1989).

Nevertheless, even if omnipotence is construed in terms of the power to bring about certain possible state of affairs, it seems that the divine attributes of benevolence and omnipotence are still logically incompatible. To see why, consider the following question:

> *Could a being that is both omnipotent and omnibenevolent choose the lesser of two evils?*

By 'choose the lesser of two evils', I mean a state of affairs in which there are two options – E1 and E2 – and both are bad but not equally bad (e.g., E2 is worse than E1). Now, on the one hand, if we answer *yes*, then that means that an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being has the power to bring about a state of affairs where that being chooses the lesser of two evils. But then that means that an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being is capable of choosing evil, and hence an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being turns out not to be *all-good*.

One might think that, if one chooses E1 simply because it is not as bad as E2, then one hasn't chosen evil. But this is mistaken, for, by stipulation, E1 and E2 are both evil, just not equally so. If E1 is evil, then by choosing E1, one chooses evil, even if E1 is less evil than E2 ('less evil' is still evil, only less so), just as if one chooses to drink a cup of tea with one sugar cube, then one is still choosing sweet tea, even if a cup of tea with one sugar cube is not as sweet as a cup of tea with two sugar cubes ('less sweet' is still sweet, only less so).

On the other hand, if we answer *no*, then there is a possible state of affairs that an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being cannot bring about, namely, the state of affairs where an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being chooses the lesser of two evils, and thus an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being turns out not to be *all-powerful*.

Some might think that if we distinguish between metaphysical possibility and moral possibility, then we could say that an omnipotent

and omnibenevolent being can bring about the state of affairs where an omnipotent and omnibenevolent chooses the lesser of two evils metaphysically, since this state of affairs is metaphysically possible, but not morally, since this state of affairs is not morally possible. But this is equivalent to saying that there is a state of affairs that an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being is morally prevented from bringing about, which is why this move fails. In other words, it does not make a difference to the puzzle whether an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being lacks the metaphysical power or the moral power (or any kind of power, for that matter) to bring about a possible state of affairs. As long as an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being lacks any kind of power whatsoever to bring about a possible state of affairs, whether that state of affairs is metaphysically possible or morally possible, the problem is to say how this being could still be said to be *all-powerful* in any meaningful sense.

One might also try to respond to this puzzle about omnipotence and omnibenevolence by appealing to the notion of evil as a privation. In other words, if evil is not real, but rather a privation of good, then one could argue that, in choosing the lesser of two evils, an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being may be choosing the lesser good, but it is still choosing something good rather than evil. This response, however, seems to amount to a denial of conclusion (3) in the Leibnizian argument outlined above. Admittedly, it might seem coherent to say that it is not the case that God always acts in the most perfect manner, both metaphysically and morally (Cf. Rowe 2004). But then it is difficult to see how God can be said to be a maximally great (or perfect) being in the moral sense, i.e., an omnibenevolent being, for one would then be admitting that God can choose something that is less than maximally good.

The aforementioned puzzle about omnibenevolence and omnipotence can be summed up in the form of a dilemma as follows:

(1) Either God can choose the lesser of two evils or God cannot choose the lesser of two evils.
(2) If God can choose the lesser of two evils, then God is not omnibenevolent (since God can choose evil).
(3) If God cannot choose the lesser of two evils, then God is not omnipotent (since there is a possible state of affairs that God cannot bring about).
(4) (Therefore) Either God is not omnibenevolent or God is not omnipotent.

Unlike the familiar puzzles about omnipotence, and the aforementioned puzzle about omniscience, this puzzle about omnibenevolence and omnipotence is not intended to show that the divine attribute of benevolence is incoherent. Rather, this puzzle shows that the divine attributes of benevolence and omnipotence are logically incompatible.

IV. A PUZZLE ABOUT DIVINE RATIONALITY AND OMNIPOTENCE

God is also said to be a perfectly rational being. This idea can be traced back to Leibniz, whose Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR) implies that God must have a reason for acting as he does. In *Principles of Nature and Grace* (1714), Leibniz says that PSR means that things happen in such a way that an omniscient being would be able to give a reason (or reasons) why things are so and not otherwise. (See also Torrance 1981.)

Now, divine rationality, thus understood, seems to be incompatible with the divine attribute of omnipotence. This is illustrated by the following puzzling question:

> *Could a being that is both omnipotent and perfectly rational form a belief on the basis of fallacious reasoning?*

On the one hand, if we answer *yes*, then a perfectly rational and omnipotent being is capable of forming a belief on the basis of fallacious reasoning, and hence this being turns out not to be *perfectly rational*.

On the other hand, if we answer *no*, then there is a possible state of affairs that a perfectly rational and omnipotent being cannot bring about, namely, the state of affairs where a perfectly rational and omnipotent being forms a belief on the basis of fallacious reasoning, and thus this being turns out not to be *all-powerful*.

Some might think that if we distinguish between metaphysical possibility and epistemic possibility (i.e., what an epistemic agent can do), then we could say that an omnipotent and perfectly rational being can bring about the state of affairs where an omnipotent and perfectly rational being forms a belief on the basis of fallacious reasoning metaphysically, since this state of affairs is metaphysically possible, but not epistemically, since this state of affairs is not epistemically possible. But this is equivalent to saying that there is a possible state of affairs that an omnipotent and perfectly rational being is epistemically prevented from bringing about, which is why this move fails. In other words, it does not make a difference to the puzzle whether an omnipotent and perfectly rational being lacks the metaphysical power or the epistemic power

(or any kind of power, for that matter) to bring about a possible state of affairs. As long as an omnipotent and perfectly rational being lacks any kind of power whatsoever to bring about a possible state of affairs, whether the state of affairs is metaphysically possible or epistemically possible, the problem is to say how this being could still be said to be *all-powerful* in any meaningful sense.

One might also try to respond to this puzzle about omnipotence and divine rationality by saying that, while God does not possess the maximum of every attribute (because some attributes have no maxima or because God's possession of the maximum of one attribute conflicts with that of another attribute), God may nevertheless be the greatest *possible* being because no set of compossible perfections is as great as the set of perfections God possesses (see, e.g., Schlesinger 1985).

But even if one finds a principled and non-arbitrary way of individuating sets of compossible perfections and then ranking them from best to worst, one would still face the following problem: how could one know that no set of compossible perfections is as great as the set of perfections God possesses unless God is simply a being with maximal perfections? To put it another way, suppose that omnipotence conflicts with omnibenevolence, as I have argued above, how do we decide whether the greatest set of compossible perfections includes omnipotence or omnibenevolence, given that it cannot include both? And then, what are the criteria for determining whether the set of the divine attributes is equivalent to the set that includes omnipotence but not omnibenevolence or the set that includes omnibenevolence but not omnipotence?

Furthermore, even if one manages to solve the aforementioned problems, this move seems to amount to admitting that God is not really a maximally great (or perfect) being after all. For, presumably, a maximally great (or perfect) being is a being that has the maximum of all perfections. But the move outlined above proceeds by admitting that God does not have maximal perfections, since some of them are logically incompatible.

The aforementioned puzzle about divine rationality and omnipotence can be summed up in the form of a dilemma as follows:

(1) Either God can form a belief on the basis of fallacious reasoning or God cannot form a belief on the basis of fallacious reasoning.

(2) If God can form a belief on the basis of fallacious reasoning, then God is not perfectly rational (since God can reason fallaciously).

(3) If God cannot form a belief on the basis of fallacious reasoning, then God is not omnipotent (since there is a possible state of affairs that God cannot bring about).
(4) (Therefore) Either God is not perfectly rational or God is not omnipotent.

Unlike the familiar puzzles about omnipotence, and the aforementioned puzzle about omniscience, this puzzle about divine rationality and omnipotence is not intended to show that the divine attribute of perfect rationality is incoherent. Rather, this puzzle shows that the divine attributes of omnipotence and perfect rationality are logically incompatible.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the aforementioned puzzles point to problems with the conception of God as a maximally great (or perfect) being. The first puzzle about omniscience shows that the divine attribute of omniscience is incoherent. The second puzzle about omnibenevolence and omnipotence shows that these two divine attributes are logically incompatible. The third puzzle about perfect rationality and omnipotence shows that these two divine attributes are logically incompatible. I have also considered several possible replies to these puzzles but found them wanting.

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JEAN-PAUL SARTRE: MYSTICAL ATHEIST OR MYSTICAL ANTIPATHIST?

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Abstract. Jean-Paul Sartre is rarely discussed in the philosophy of religion. In 2009, however, Jerome Gellman broke the silence, publishing an article in this journal in which he argued that the source of Sartre's atheism was neither philosophical nor existential, but mystical. Drawing from several of Sartre's works – including *Being and Nothingness*, *Words*, and a 1943 review entitled 'A New Mystic' – I argue that there are strong biographical and philosophical reasons to disagree with Gellman's conclusion that Sartre was a 'mystical atheist'. Moreover, I question the likelihood of drawing any definitive conclusions regarding the sources of Sartre's ambiguous atheism.

Given his status as one of the best-known atheists of the twentieth century, it is hardly surprising that little research has been dedicated to Sartre and mysticism. It is an area, however, that deserves greater scholarly attention. To date there have only been two brief studies published in English: a chapter in Jacques Salvan's 1967 *The Scandalous Ghost* and a more recent contribution from Jerome Gellman in 2009 – an article in this journal in which he argues that Sartre was a 'mystical atheist'.[1] Though he is not the first to apply this epithet to Sartre,[2] Gellman finds so much evidence in favour of mysticism in Sartre's works as to suggest that the latter's atheism is neither philosophical nor existential, but mystical – that is, rooted in a mystical experience of the non-existence of God.

[1] One might also wish to include Hazel Barnes' introduction to *Being and Nothingness*, which includes a brief comparison of Sartre's ontology and mysticism. Though not explicitly devoted to mysticism, there are notable works on Sartre and the sacred (King 1974) and Christian thinkers such as Aquinas (Wang 2009); and in French, Jeanson's *Sartre devant Dieu* (2005).

[2] Salvan notes that others have christened Sartre as such (1967: 134).

This paper seeks to assess this claim, first by inspecting Gellman's readings of Sartre's texts; and second by assessing those passages where Sartre explicitly treats mysticism. What emerges is neither mystical atheism nor mystical antipathy, but a kind of mystical ambivalence: a question still hanging in the air.

I. GELLMAN'S PORTRAIT: THE MYSTICAL ATHEIST

Gellman bases his claim for Sartre's 'mystical atheism' on two textual foundations:

(1) an account Sartre gives in both his autobiography *Words* and a later conversation with Beauvoir, in which Sartre describes having had a 'momentary intuition' that God does not exist; and

(2) the ostensibly mystical language employed by Sartre in describing the experiences of Roquentin, the protagonist of his first published novel, *Nausea*. Although scholars dispute the extent to which this is the case, Sartre claims in *Words* that he '*was* Roquentin', that he used this character to show 'the texture of [his] life', and Gellman accepts this equation of creator and created.[3]

Constraints of space prohibit considering the second of these at great length. For now suffice it to say that though Sartre's literary works are indeed full of mystic-like language – of moments of 'vision', 'seeing', 'unveiling', and 'revelation' – these metaphors do not necessarily imply mysticism. On Sartre's philosophical view of literature the author is a 'revealer' (WL[4] 27) of everyday existence and every written word a 'disclosure' (WL 14) of meaning. But to conduct a thorough study of this language would distract us from our main project: ascertaining whether Sartre's atheism should properly be called 'mystical'. So instead we shall turn to Sartre's 'momentary intuition' of God's non-existence.

Gellman cites the version of the story given in the conversation with Beauvoir, published posthumously in *Adieux* (rather than the one given in *Words*). In it we read the following:

> When I was about twelve [...] in the morning I used to take the tram with the girls next door [...] One day I was walking up and down outside their house for a few minutes waiting for them to get ready. I don't know where the thought came from or how it struck me, yet all at once I said to myself, 'God doesn't exist.' [...] As I remember very well, it was on that

[3] Gellman 2009: 132–6.

[4] All references to texts by Sartre use the abbreviations listed in the bibliography.

> day and in the form of a momentary intuition that I said to myself, 'God does not exist'. (Beauvoir 1984: 437)

This description might be sufficient for some to justify the conclusion that Sartre was 'a mystical atheist'. Indeed, the philosopher of religion might wish to point out that it does display several of William James' famous four 'marks' which justify calling an experience mystical – perhaps not the ineffability, but the noetic, transience, and passivity criteria seem to be met.[5] On Gellman's own definition – as provided in his article and elsewhere in his entries on mysticism in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and the *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, for example – Sartre's experience qualifies as mystical because it is a '*unitive experience* granting knowledge of realities or states of affairs that are of a kind not accessible by way of sense-perception, somato-sensory modalities, or standard introspection'.[6]

What the Sartre scholar is likely to find problematic is that this account is not the only story Sartre tells about the origins of his unbelief. In fact, in *Words* alone Sartre recounts three – attributing his unbelief, first, not to 'conflicting dogma' but his 'grandparents' indifference' (W 64). A page later we read a second account, a famous passage expressing indignation at being subject to God's *gaze*:

> Once I had the feeling that He existed. I had been playing with matches and had burnt a mat; I was busy covering up my crime when suddenly God saw me. I felt His gaze inside my head and on my hands; I turned round and round in the bathroom, horribly visible, a living target. I was saved by indignation: I grew angry at such a crude lack of tact, and blasphemed, muttering like my grandfather: '*Sacré nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu*.' He never looked at me again. (W 65)

Then there is the third tale, which Gellman considers, of Sartre waiting for his childhood companions. And though it is less explicitly presented as an account of atheist origins, one might also wish to include a fourth genesis myth – where Sartre states outright that in his childhood he 'glimpsed Evil, the absence of God' following the death of a child (W 142). Even a throw-away line in *Being and Nothingness* – which intriguingly refers to a 'mystic crisis in my fifteenth year' – might be a fifth (BN 520). The point of this catalogue is that – leaving aside Sartre's rhetorical tendencies and the debates about the reliability of autobiography in general

[5] James 1929: lectures 16 and 17.

[6] Cited in Gellman 2009: 133.

and *Words* in particular – it paints a rather more ambiguous portrait than Gellman presents. It seems more likely to this reader that, as Anthony Flew writes, 'multiple factors combine in the creation of convictions'.[7]

Though he does not refer to these alternative histories, Gellman does mention the proof Sartre offers for God's non-existence in *Being and Nothingness* and a later discussion of it with Beauvoir, which was published after Sartre's death in *Adieux*.[8] The proof is simple: on Sartre's ontology, nothing can be both in-itself and for-itself, so God is impossible. It is an ontological argument for God's non-existence: *Quod erat demonstrandum*. But in dialogue with Beauvoir Sartre acknowledges that in *Being and Nothingness* he 'set out reasons for [his] denial of God's existence that were not actually the real reasons', saying that the real reasons were 'much more direct and childish' (Beauvoir 1984: 438). It is in this context that he re-tells the tale of the intuitive moment of God's non-existence, elaborating that at the age of twelve he looked on this experience as 'a manifest truth that had come to me without any foregoing thought. *That was obviously untrue*', he continues, 'but it was how I always saw it – a thought that came suddenly, an intuition that rose up and that determined my life'.[9]

It is the dismissive inclusion of 'that was obviously untrue' that piques my curiosity, and may challenge Gellman's interpretation. While Sartre does give prominence to the version Gellman cites in *Adieux*, elsewhere he notes that 'it is not unusual for the memory to condense into a single mythical moment the contingencies and perpetual rebeginnings of an individual history' (G 1). And in *Adieux* itself his momentary intuition was deemed untrue. But why? What about this is 'obviously untrue'? In order to answer this question, we shall now turn to see what we can glean from Sartre's writings on the subject of mysticism.

II. IN SARTRE'S WORDS: MYSTICAL ANTIPATHIST?

First, it is important to remember Sartre's context: in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, France underwent a renaissance of mysticism. Bergson's *Matter and Memory* was published in 1897, and l'abbé Bremond's influential study of mysticism in France – *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France* (published in eleven volumes between

[7] Flew 2007: 11.

[8] Gellman 2009: 132.

[9] Beauvoir 1984: 434, emphasis added.

1916 and 1933), as well as other currents of mysticism – from Péguy, Claudel, and Bernanos, among others – were part of the intellectual soil in which Sartre's ideas took root.[10] We know from Beauvoir that Sartre 'took an interest in the psychology of mysticism' in the 1930s, which prompted Beauvoir herself to read the likes of Catherine Emmerich and Saint Angela of Foligno.[11]

But what does the word 'mysticism' mean when it flows from Sartre's pen? In *Words* he refers to his youthful self as a 'militant and a mystic' (W 154f.), and as 'prey to two opposing mystical theologies' (W 108). Mysticism, he writes, 'suits displaced persons and superfluous children [...]' (W 63); it does not seem to be the purview of the enlightened, autonomous philosopher but rather a naïve state of intellectual minority. When contemporary critic Émile Bouvier applied the word to him Sartre was astonished, writing in his *War Diaries*: 'I'd never have believed that anyone would consign me to mysticism.' (WD 158)

This reading is supported by the work which gives the clearest picture we have of Sartre's view of mysticism. In 1943, the same year in which *Being and Nothingness* appeared, Sartre published a review of Georges Bataille's *Inner Experience*, labelling its author 'a new mystic' whose undertaking was 'an adventure beyond philosophy'. Here Sartre is emphatic that mystical illumination leads, as Kant put it in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, to the 'death of all philosophy'.

As Cardinal Newman wryly observed, mysticism 'begins in mist and ends in schism': and the schism between philosophy and other, mistier 'modes of knowing' has a long and complicated history.[12] Indeed, William James comments that the word 'mysticism' and its cognates are often employed as terms of reproach, rebuttals 'to throw at any opinion which we regard as vague and vast and sentimental, and without a base in either facts or logic'.[13] A case in point – and penned by an author who exerted considerable influence on Sartre – is André Gide's definition of mysticism as 'whatever presupposes and demands the abdication of reason'.[14]

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[10] See Copleston 1974: 210ff. on Bergson; see Connor 2000: 16, 19–20 on the intellectual climate in France. This notion of mysticism as departure from reason was particularly important in the 1930s, when the word 'mysticism' took on connotations of National Socialism. It was the antiphilosophy: where philosophy emphasizes doubt and critical reflection, mysticism was a kind of being carried away, often against reason (Connor 2000: 129).

[11] Beauvoir 1962: 51.

[12] See Connor 2000: 31.

[13] James 1929: 370.

In 'A New Mystic' Sartre's usage stands in this tradition: as Peter Tracey Connor writes, 'When Sartre calls Bataille a mystic in 1943, the meaning of the term is fairly clear, for he is using it in a colloquial (and dismissive) sense, to refer to one who has substituted for reason some form of intuition or revelation.'[15] Though a strong case is made by Amy Hollywood for reading the review as part of a post-War campaign to purge the French literary scene of impurities, on my reading this is not the only dynamic at play. Sartre criticizes Bataille's style and his method. The former, he writes, 'is close to choking or drowning in its efforts to render the gasping suffocations of ecstasy or anguish' (NM 224). And as for the latter, it is a failed attempt at a synthesis of 'rapture' and 'rigorous intellectual method' (NM 223). Bataille believes that conviction 'does not arise from reasoning, but only from the feelings which it defines' (cited in NM 223), but Sartre dismisses Bataille's syllogisms as proofs 'supplied by an orator, jealous lover, barrister or madman' (NM 223). In case there was any possibility that his reader might think it possible to be both 'mystic' and 'philosopher' simultaneously, Sartre puts the final nail in that coffin, writing that Bataille is 'neither a scholar nor a philosopher, [though he] has, unfortunately, a smattering of science and philosophy' (NM 240). No: 'it is for the mystic's apprentice that M. Bataille writes' (NM 232), and his offering is 'a little holocaust of philosophical words. What happens when he uses one of them? Its meaning curdles and turns like milk in the heat' (NM 239).

In addition to his adulterations of words, Sartre takes offence at the idea that Bataille claims some privileged access to knowledge – or rather, non-knowledge. *Inner Experience* is, 'like most mystical writings, the product of a *re-descent*. M. Bataille is returning from an unknown region; he is coming back down among us' (NM 230). 'He is on high, we are down below. He delivers a message and it is for us to receive it if we can.' (NM 233)

Moreover, it is not just the style of the message, nor the means of the delivery that Sartre takes issue with. It is also the content. But by refusing to be reduced to argument, the mystic evades responsibility for any particular position – which is particularly problematic for some of the claims Bataille proceeds to make concerning the absence of God.

[14] Gide 1967: 414.

[15] Connor 2000: 26

'Mysticism', as Sartre eventually defines it, 'is ek-stasis or, in other words, a wresting from oneself towards, and intuitive enjoyment of, the transcendent.' But, Sartre asks, 'How can a thinker who has just asserted the absence of any transcendence achieve, in and by that very move, a mystical experience?' That is the question he believes Bataille must – yet fails to – answer (NM 274). On this topic it is worth quoting at length from Sartre's review:

> There are people you might call survivors. Early on, they lost a beloved person – father, friend, or mistress – and their lives are merely the gloomy aftermath of that death. Monsieur Bataille is a survivor of the death of God. And, when one thinks about it, it would seem that our entire age is surviving that death, which he experienced, suffered, and survived. God is dead. We should not understand by that that He does not exist, nor even that he now no longer exists. He is dead: he used to speak to us and he has fallen silent, we now touch only his corpse. Perhaps he has slipped out of this world to some other place, like a dead man's soul. Perhaps all this was merely a dream. (NM 234)
> God is dead, but man has not, for all that, become atheistic. Today, as yesterday, this silence of the transcendent, combined with modern man's enduring religious need, is the great question of the age. (NM 235)

The problem, then, which Sartre poses to Bataille is this (and, indeed, it is a question which might be asked of Gellman): how can one deny the transcendent and yet affirm mysticism?

Lest it be thought that Sartre's view of mysticism in 'A New Mystic' is idiosyncratic amongst his works, it must be pointed out that in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre uses the word 'mystic' to indicate fallacious, misleading experience – for example, of the kind by which humanity (mistakenly) arrives at the idea of God. This notion, God, 'refers to an infinite series of mystic experiences of the presence of the Other, the notion of God as omnipresent, infinite subject for whom I exist' (BN 305). Elsewhere in Sartre's opus mysticism is presented as a human project as impossible as God himself – it is an effort at uniting the in-itself and for-itself.[16] In short, in the few places where Sartre's philosophical writings address mysticism outright, they tend to do so in antipathy; it is the bedfellow of bad faith. But he nonetheless assigned mystics enough credit to read and study them, and even went so far as to say in *What*

[16] See, for example, Sartre's discussion of mysticism in *Saint Genet* (1963), which Gellman cites for part I of his article.

is Literature? that 'God, if he existed, would be as the mystics have seen him, in a *situation* in relationship to man' (WL 14).

In light of this, an objector may wish to dismiss Sartre's rejection of mysticism as a category mistake. The examples given above are theistic; Sartre didn't know, perhaps, that 'atheist mysticism' was a viable alternative. But to suggest this is to assume that he rejects mysticism solely on account of its (supposed) content. For Sartre, as an existentialist, the problem of content is inseparable from the problem of method. Existence comes not only before essence, but before knowledge. Sartre does object to theistic mysticism for content-related reasons: specifically, because it imposes categories on experience which are not present in the experience itself (phenomenologically). But this is also a methodological objection, and one which is no less applicable to 'atheist' mysticism. For a rationalist like Sartre, a mystical experience of the absence of God is inconclusive at best (after all, a theist might interpret the same experience as evidence of the *deus absconditus*). The transcendent is silent, and that, as Sartre puts it in the passage cited above, is 'the great question of the age' (NM 235). When Gellman appeals to Sartre's use of 'intuition', 'seeing' or 'unveiling' as a mystical idiom, one therefore wonders whether the two are using the same words to speak different languages. Gellman takes these to be epistemological, equating Sartre's descriptions of phenomenological awareness with mystical experiences which grant *knowledge*. For Sartre, however, phenomenological awareness should be pure consciousness, prior to epistemology.

There is a further philosophical problem with interpreting Sartre as an 'atheist mystic' in the manner Gellman does: to have a 'defining' experience – a single experience which determines the rest of one's life – is directly at odds with Sartre's doctrine of radical freedom. On Sartre's existentialist account, there can be no foundational experiences, or at least no experiences with such profound dictatorial power as to eclipse freedom. Instead, the Sartrean existentialist begins with free choices, and nothing else.

III. CONCLUSION: MYSTICAL AMBIVALENCE

It is clear from the foregoing that I believe it is problematic to call Sartre 'a mystical atheist' for both biographical and philosophical reasons. But Gellman asks a question – namely 'what was the source, the basis, of

Sartre's atheism?'[17] – which seems not to be satisfactorily answered by either response: neither mysticism nor philosophy can overturn all the stones. Mysticism is a mischief-maker whose wrongs must be righted by philosophy.

And yet, in Sartre's works, philosophy's sovereignty does not seem so absolute: in the conversation with Beauvoir mentioned above Sartre says his real reasons for denying God's existence were 'much more direct and childish' (Beauvoir 1984: 438) than the argument given in *Being and Nothingness*. Is he, therefore, assigning them greater force? Or is he, like Descartes in his *Discourse on Method*, lamenting the fact that 'we have all been children before being men [... making it] almost impossible that our judgments should be so excellent or so solid as they would have been had we had complete use of our reason since our birth, and had we been guided by its means alone'?[18] Given that Sartre later called his intuition 'obviously untrue', and believes mysticism particularly suited to 'displaced children', if he is to be called a mystic he should at least be called a reluctant one.

Having said that, it is unlikely that any answer to Gellman's question can be asserted with certainty. For Sartre's philosophical project does appeal to more than discursive reason. He did not confine himself to writing the treatise and syllogism, but used literature because atmosphere can convey things more powerfully than argument. But does that make him a mystic? In *What is Literature?* Sartre writes that 'thought conceals man', and that on their own, arguments do not interest us. 'But an argument that masks a tear –that is what we're after.'[19] If his conversation with Beauvoir is to be taken at face value, Sartre's ontological disproof in *Being and Nothingness* is such an argument. But who can claim to know what tears it masks?[20]

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[17] Gellman 2009: 132.

[18] Descartes 1969: I, 88.

[19] WL 22. Sartre continues, 'The argument removes the obscenity from the tears; the tears, by revealing their origin in the passions, remove the aggressiveness from the argument.'

[20] This paper was presented and discussed at the annual conference of the Mystical Theology Network – 'Mystical Theology: Eruptions from France' – held at All Hallows College, Dublin, in January 2013. I am grateful for comments from Pamela Sue Anderson, George Pattison, and a reviewer for this journal, and for the support of the AHRC.

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BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

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Alvin Plantinga and Michael Tooley, *Knowledge of God*, Blackwell Publishing, 2008.

In this book, Alvin Plantinga and Michael Tooley debate the epistemic status of theistic belief. And as you might expect from philosophers of their calibre, the arguments laid out by both are robust and cogent. The book begins with opening statements from both philosophers (each being roughly 70 pages long), followed by two sets of two responses.

While those already familiar with Alvin Plantinga's other work will not be terribly surprised by the arguments he makes in his opening statement, they are, nevertheless, still extremely relevant and are presented in perhaps their clearest form. In his opening statement (and after some preliminary comments regarding theism in general), Plantinga offers a three-fold argument against philosophical naturalism (the thought being that naturalism is the only real alternative to theism, such that the defeat of naturalism would lend credence to theism). *First*, Plantinga argues that naturalism cannot rightly account for the notion of proper function, which in turn means that naturalism cannot account for 'malfunction or dysfunction ... health or sickness, sanity or madness'; indeed, by Plantinga's lights, in not being able to account for proper function, naturalism cannot account for knowledge (p. 1). *Secondly*, Plantinga argues that naturalism is self-defeating, that 'the naturalist is committed to the sort of deep and debilitating skepticism according to which he can't trust his cognitive faculties to furnish him with mainly true beliefs; he has a defeater for whatever he believes, including naturalism itself' (p. 1). *Thirdly and finally*, Plantinga argues that naturalism (insofar as it is committed to materialism regarding human beings) cannot account for belief, that materialist forms of naturalism are committed to eliminativism regarding belief, that 'if naturalism is true, no one believes anything' (p. 19).

Michael Tooley, in his opening statement, argues that the belief in the existence of God is not epistemically justified because various 'facts about the evils found in the world' make the existence of God (very) unlikely (p. 70). To this end, Michael Tooley begins by making some preliminary comments regarding (a) the relevant concept of God under consideration, (b) that God's relation to the prevailing, historical religions of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, (c) how identifying the relevant concept of God with the God of any those three religions affects the argument from evil, and (d) the nature of debate at hand, whether it should be framed in terms of *knowledge* or simply *epistemic justification* (Tooley opts for the latter). Once this has been done, Tooley begins to build his case for atheism. He starts by briefly surveying a number of arguments for atheism, which he groups into *a priori* arguments, *a posteriori* arguments that do not involve moral claims, and *a posteriori* arguments that do involve moral claims. And in so doing, Tooley argues (a) that atheism (not theism or agnosticism) is the default position in the debate, (b) that it is unlikely that there are immaterial minds, and finally (c) that the argument from evil is the 'most forceful' argument in favour of atheism (p. 71). As such, the argument from evil becomes Tooley's main focus in the latter half of his opening statement. That said, however, Tooley acquiesces that '[s]etting out the argument [from evil] properly is ... rather more difficult than has generally been appreciated'; as such, the bulk of his work at this point is devoted to surveying various formulations of the argument from evil ('abstract versus concrete formulations ... incompatibility versus evidential formulations; subjective versus objective formulations; and ... axiological versus deontological formulations') and subsequently fully elucidating and defending his favoured model (p. 71).

In Chapter 3, 'Reply to Tooley's Opening Statement', Plantinga's main target is, of course, Tooley's favoured formulation of the argument from evil. (There are, no doubt, several other important arguments that Plantinga makes in his first reply. For example, it seems to me that Plantinga does an excellent job countering Tooley's claim that atheism is the default position. That said, however, such arguments are more ancillary, and I will not consider them here.) According to Plantinga, 'Tooley's statement of the argument gives us believers in God a wonderful target; if we can show that this formulation of the argument doesn't succeed, it seems unlikely, for the moment, at any rate, that any formulation will' (p. 153). Thankfully for 'us believers' Plantinga not only argues that Tooley's probabilistic argument from evil does indeed

fail, but he argues that even if it didn't, theism 'might still be more likely than not on our total evidence' (p. 152). After all, as Plantinga points out, '[m]ost Christian thinkers have held that there are other sources of justification for belief in God; religious experience, for example, or something like [John] Calvin's *Sensus divinitatis*, or Thomas Aquinas's internal instigation of the Holy Spirit' and these other sources of justification might very well trump any justification to the contrary from Tooley's argument from evil (p. 153).

In Chapter 4, 'Reply to Plantinga's Opening Statement', Michael Tooley straightforwardly responds to each of Plantinga's arguments against naturalism. He begins by arguing that health, sickness, or even knowledge cannot, contra Plantinga, be appropriately analyzed in terms of proper function; if this is right, then Plantinga's claim that naturalism cannot account for such concepts because it cannot account for proper function does not get off the ground. Next, Tooley addresses Plantinga's third argument against naturalism, that naturalism (insofar as it is committed to materialism regarding human beings) cannot account for belief. Given a causal theory of propositional content, Tooley argues naturalism (of the relevant sort) can indeed account for belief. And what is more, if such a causal theory of content is indeed true, Tooley argues, it is no longer clear that naturalism is vulnerable to the aforementioned 'deep and debilitating skepticism according to which he can't trust his cognitive faculties to furnish him with mainly true beliefs', the second objection to naturalism in Plantinga's opening statement.

The book concludes with Plantinga and Tooley giving brief (roughly 15 pages), final responses to the initial responses. The main thrust of Plantinga's closing statement (entitled 'Can Robots Think?') argues that 'Tooley merely *assumes* that the content of belief is fixed by causal relations, and, furthermore, so fixed that most beliefs will be true' (p. 232 - emphasis Plantinga's). The main thrust of Tooley's closing statement, in contrast, focuses on (a) shoring up his arguments for atheism being the default position in the debate, (b) defending his argument from evil, (c) questioning the existence (and the epistemic value) of non-inferential justification in favour of the existence of God, and (d) noting that even if all of Plantinga's arguments against naturalism are successful that does not necessarily lead us to theism (e.g. it may lead us to some form of supernaturalism). In the end, neither Plantinga nor Tooley are compelled to yield, both feel as though their arguments remain cogent and sound.

I highly commend *Knowledge of God*. While I am, no doubt, inclined to side with Plantinga in the end, both Plantinga and Tooley do an amazing job. The arguments they both lay out are philosophically rich, robust, and truly seminal. The main shortcoming of the book, as I see it, is a shortcoming of these sorts of debates in general. While the arguments levelled in this book are of a high quality and are extremely useful, the nature of the debate is such that it spans broad, established disciplines with their own worlds of literature. In debating the epistemic status of theistic belief, Plantinga and Tooley occasionally make highly contested claims about morality, theology, the nature of logic, epistemology, the philosophy of mind, etc. – for example, regarding Plantinga's second objection to naturalism in his opening statement, Tooley notes 'If [Plantinga] is right, then virtually all of philosophy of mind of the past half-century or so has been radically off-track.' – and that may be the way it has to be; however, it is, nevertheless, occasionally frustrating and dissatisfying (p. 190). Regardless, *Knowledge of God* is an excellent book, which I would wholeheartedly recommend to anyone with the interest and technical familiarity and certainly to any graduate students studying philosophy of religion.

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Robert A. Hinde. *Why Gods Persist: A Scientific Approach to Religion* 2nd ed., Routledge, 2010.

Across its history, Christianity and other religions have demonstrated a consistent capacity to respond to ongoing criticism. Those critics, whether historical or contemporary, have used various tactics to try to undermine religion. Despite the tenacity and ingenuity of these criticisms, especially those invested in the modern sciences, a once-and-for-all challenge to religion is unforthcoming. Responding to this fact, Robert A. Hinde emphasises that 'something more than a sledgehammer, however skilfully it is wielded, is needed. We need to seek a scientific understanding of religion's extraordinary resilience' (p. viii). The aim of this book is, then, to provide that understanding of religion, thereby enabling, if only in part, the formation of a 'a happier world' (p. ix).

Such programmatic statements are familiar, at least since the early Enlightenment. Identifying the best ways to understanding religion, however, is a more difficult issue. At the heart of many science and religion debates is a methodological problem: what are the most effective and legitimate means of structuring those debates? For some writers, the obvious answer is to appeal to the physical and human sciences. Since those sciences enjoy a considerable cognitive and cultural authority, appealing to them can make good sense.

A problem with such naturalistic approaches is, however, that they can tend to load the dice. *Why Gods Persist* is a good example of the tensions generated by naturalistic approach. Its author, Robert A. Hinde, investigates the ubiquity of religious beliefs by appealing to naturalistic methodologies that, implicitly or not, deny the truth of their transcendental claims. The 'scientific approach to religion' he advocates is, therefore, hardly a neutral or impartial approach: it sets up religion as an ultimately anomalous phenomena, devoid of evidentiary or rational warrant, whose origins and longevity can, then, only be the result of social entrenchment, psychological utility, or other such mundane origins. The result is an interesting and useful survey of contemporary naturalistic theories of religion, but one unlikely to persuade those religious persons whose beliefs it is concerned with.

The title of *Why Gods Persist* indicates the attitude its author takes towards religion. The guiding concern of the book is the origin and ubiquity of religious belief in human societies, focusing especially upon Christianity. Hinde appeals mainly to the biological and human sciences to examine our adherence to, and the distribution and value of, religion. Two particular facts about the opening chapter of the book are worth noting: firstly, the first two authors it cites are Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett, and second, Hinde consistently refers to the value and significance of religion in the past tense. These two facts indicate the partisan approach that Hinde employs and will likely determine its readers' judgement of the persuasiveness of his book.

Why Gods Persist takes as axiomatic the fact that Christianity is intellectually confused, incompatible with both science and common sense. This axiom then provides the motivation for the books titular concern: how has such a manifestly false system of beliefs persisted? Dawkins and Dennett, writes Hinde, 'have pointed out that the basic beliefs of Christian doctrine, taken literally, are simply unacceptable to most twentieth-century minds', due both to 'inconsistencies with

everyday common sense' and, more urgently, with 'modern scientific knowledge' (p. 4). But if Christianity does not have truth on its side, how can we account for its persistence and evident popularity?

Such remarks are, of course, meat and drink to the wide school of contemporary critics of religion. That broad church of naturalists – forgive the pun – includes evolutionary psychologists, humanists, 'new atheists', and more besides. If one shares their conviction that religion is an intellectually and morally bankrupt vestige of earlier, irrational periods of history, Hinde's account will be very satisfying. But if one is not already persuaded that religion simply reflects 'principles of human functioning that operate also in non-religious contexts' (p. 7), then Hinde's account will seem question-begging and presumptive. For many persons, religious beliefs are neither 'simply unacceptable' nor incompatible with their common sense: the quotidian experience of many persons – and not just 'god-intoxicated' figures like Spinoza or William Paley – discloses a world marked by divine providence or transcendental depth.

Hinde's insistence that religion is a naturalistic psychosocial phenomenon obscures the possibility, attested to by many intelligent persons, that one can enjoy religious belief within a deeply human context, one marked by nuanced understandings of the psychological, affective, and social aspects of religious belief (for instance, the work of John Cottingham over the last decade or so). I am therefore sceptical of the claim, made by Dawkins amongst others, that Hinde manifests a more conciliatory approach to religion than many other naturalists. Certainly this book is happily free of the polemic of other books, but its explicit commitment to a naturalistic interpretation of religion means that, in the end, any conciliation is simply a companion to eventual rejection. Indeed, late into the book, Hinde states his anticipation of 'a world that does not involve conflict arising from disparate beliefs in improbable entities' (p. 218). That is not the language of conciliation and Hinde's aetiological approach to the origins and development of religion is, as with David Hume and August Comte, expected to end in the natural dissolution of religion.

Central to Hinde's aetiological approach is a functional conception of religion. A corollary of this is that religion clearly cannot be what religious persons take it to be. Early on in the book, Hinde remarks that there are two possible approaches to an understanding of religion. 'Either religious beliefs ... refer to some transcendental reality', or they are 'products of

human nature in interaction with society and with the world' (p. 7). This duality is, I think, misleading. It is quite intelligible to suggest that religion could be both an engagement, by certain receptive persons, with a transcendental reality, where this engagement is affected by human biology in social and historical context. The fifth-century Christian mystic Denys, for instance, emphasised that religious belief is structured by our perceptual, cognitive, and linguistic capacities, as well as by our wider social and historical context. Hinde's claim that *either* religion is what it claims to be – communion with transcendental realities – *or* that it is a psychosocial phenomenon polarises the discussion. And since he has already rejected the transcendental interpretation, the only interpretation left is the naturalistic approach, one featuring, amongst other things, an 'evolutionary history of gods' (p. 65) and, into the future, 'a cost/benefit analysis of the impact of Christianity' (p. 251).

There is much to learn from this book. It provides a useful survey of contemporary naturalistic approaches to religious belief and practice and the concise length of the chapters, plus the handy summaries, should earn it a place on philosophy of religion reading lists. Its scholarly and pedagogical utility aside, though, Hinde will not succeed in persuading religious persons of the falsity and disutility of their beliefs. Certainly one would not be persuaded of his conclusion that 'ultimately we must face the fact that it is up to us, that we cannot hope for help from above' (p. 262). Anyone seeking an introduction to contemporary naturalistic theories of religion will find this an excellent resource; however, only those already firmly in the naturalistic camp will find it persuasive.

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Aku Visala, *Naturalism, Theism and the Cognitive Study of Religion: Religion Explained?*, Ashgate, 2011.

Theists and atheists continue to debate the cognitive status of religious belief. Is theism justified in the light of theories that explain religious beliefs as the result of natural cognitive capacities? This question has been around at least since William James wrote *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). James believed that religious experiences (especially

mystical experiences) were central to explaining religion. Using medical knowledge available at the time, as well as written sources about mystics, James argued that religious experiences are caused by natural medical conditions, such as epileptic seizures. Nevertheless, he did not think that the psychological origin of religious beliefs debunks these beliefs. Today, the cognitive science of religion (CSR) no longer considers mystical experience (as caused by exceptional medical conditions) to be a central element of religious belief. CSR scholars argue that religion rests on mundane cognitive capacities that are present in all neurotypical humans, and that arise early and spontaneously in development. Despite this shift in how psychologists conceptualize the causes of religious belief, the question of whether or not cognitive approaches to religion undermine the rationality of religious belief remains alive and well. If the religious beliefs we see across cultures are indeed rooted in normal, everyday cognitive capacities (which are not specific to religion), does this undermine their rationality?

Aku Visala's *Naturalism, Theism and the Cognitive Study of Religion: Religion Explained?* (henceforth NTCR) is one of the first monographs to explore this question in depth – other discussions on the philosophical implications of cognitive science for theism can be found in edited volumes, such as *The Believing Primate* (edited by Jeffrey Schloss and Michael Murray, 2009, OUP). Visala, who is a theologian by training, focuses on the implications of CSR for Christian theism. The central aim of NTCR is to approach the rationality of theism in the light of CSR. Visala does not argue for the truth of (Christian) theism in the light of CSR, but rather, aims to 'explore what consequences CSR would have for theism if both were true' (p. 13). He argues that we need to make explicit the metaphysical assumptions (in particular physicalism, or in his terms, *strict naturalism*) that underlie CSR which make it difficult to evaluate the implications of CSR for theism. He outlines an alternative philosophical framework that he terms *broad naturalism*, under which the implications of CSR for theism may be more properly assessed.

The first two chapters of NTCR provide a comprehensive overview of CSR. As Visala acknowledges, it is not a well-developed research program with unifying theories and assumptions, but rather, an emerging interdisciplinary endeavour, with roots in anthropology, cognitive psychology and developmental psychology. Within the field there are several – sometimes mutually incompatible, mostly not integrated – theories about why humans have religious beliefs. Visala devotes most

of his attention to what he calls the standard model of CSR, as developed by Scott Atran, Pascal Boyer, Justin Barrett, and others, and he pits this program against other approaches to religion, such as the hermeneutic approach in anthropology. He notes that CSR has a physicalist ontology: CSR scholars hold that religious ideas, like other thought processes, can ultimately be reduced to brain states.

The standard model of CSR argues that religious beliefs arise and persist because of their fit with the structure of human cognition. Most CSR scholars endorse some form of the modularity of mind thesis, which stipulates that human cognition is guided by specialized inference systems, including an ability to detect agents, intuitive psychology, intuitive biology and intuitive physics. Religious ideas are culturally successful because they latch onto these specialized inference systems. First, they are minimally counterintuitive, i.e., they minimally violate the expectations we have about our physical, psychological and biological surroundings (e.g., a ghost violates intuitive physics by walking through walls). Second, they are mainly about agents, which humans are prone to infer; humans possess a hyperactive agency detection device. We are prone to infer the presence of agents even if there is little evidence for their existence. Moreover, supernatural agents have a rich mental life; we can attribute beliefs, desires and intentions to them, and we can make other inferences about them. Some of the theoretical assumptions in CSR have not been subject to empirical testing. Visala briefly mentions that the hyperactive agency detection origin of religious beliefs, one of the central assumptions of CSR, is currently without substantial empirical support. This is clearly worrisome, for if the central theories of CSR have little empirical support, is the field mature and are its results secure enough to engage in discussions on whether or not CSR is compatible with theism?

Chapter 3 argues that research in CSR is driven by a strict naturalist program. Strict naturalism is understood as a commitment to scientism (scientific enquiry has priority over all other enquiries), physicalism (all entities and processes are physical processes or reducible to physical processes; the physical realm is causally closed; higher-level states like consciousness are ultimately explicable in terms of physical states), and Darwinism as the primary framework for scientific and philosophical enquiry. This strict naturalism places severe constraints on the explanations that CSR scholars can invoke, as they can only accept

physical causes. Visala concludes that strict naturalism, once accepted, necessarily leads to a methodologically atheistic science of religion.

In chapter 4, Visala outlines an alternative framework, *broad naturalism*. Broad naturalism does not subscribe to the causal closure of the physical domain; for instance, broad naturalists believe that mental states can have true causal power. As Visala acknowledges, this position is somewhat awkward, constantly 'in danger of lapsing either into reductive materialism or some form of dualism or ontological pluralism' (p. 114). This problem, however, can to some extent be avoided, if we understand broad naturalism simply as scientific practice that does not have a strong commitment to reductionism and the causal closure of the physical. To flesh this position out in more detail, Visala relies on interventionist models in scientific explanation. Strict naturalism fits well with causal-mechanical models in philosophy of science as it attempts to identify physical mechanisms to explain phenomena. By contrast, the interventionist approach establishes causes through intervention: if, by changing A we produce a change in B, we can posit a causal relationship between A and B. In contrast to causal-mechanistic approaches, the interventionist approach does not require that one provide an account of a chain of physical events to link cause and effect. Interventionism thus allows for non-physical explanations, such as personal-level explanations. For instance, one could explain why someone is a religious believer rather than an atheist in personal terms: 'When we disconnect explanation from physical interaction [...] then in the case of John's belief in God we can simply say that cognitive mechanisms do not give us what we want. Cognitive mechanisms surely are among the causes of John's belief in God but they are not explanatorily relevant for our question (that is, why does John believe, rather than not believe, in God)' (p. 150). Visala thinks that CSR explanations are relevant for explaining religious belief on a population level, e.g., why afterlife beliefs are culturally widespread, but not on a personal level, e.g., why John believes in an afterlife. CSR scholars would probably object to this distinction between personal and scientific explanations. Given that many of them follow Dan Sperber's epidemiology of representations, their aim is precisely to explain how religious beliefs get spread at the population-level by examining how *individual minds* (like John's) understand and transmit religious beliefs – the cognitive mechanisms *are* therefore explanatorily relevant, even if they may not be explanatorily exhaustive.

Visala does not think there is anything wrong with naturalism as a methodological position, but takes issue with the implicit ontological naturalism that underlies CSR. But once this metaphysical baggage is dropped, how should CSR scholars proceed? As most of the discussion in chapter 4 is not specifically centred on religion, but rather on the problem of mental causation, this question remains unanswered. The parallels between mental causation and religion (e.g., personal level explanation) do not warrant that a discussion on physicalism and CSR is entirely couched in terms of the problem of mental causation, as Visala does. There is more to religious belief and naturalism than the problem of mental causation.

Chapter 5 explores the implications of CSR for theism. Do CSR theories affect the rationality of theism negatively, positively, or are they neutral with respect to it? Visala observes that CSR scholars themselves are not in agreement about this, probably as a function of their own religious beliefs (including atheism). He distinguishes three possible relationships between theism and CSR:

(1) The falsity of religion thesis: CSR theories are incompatible with the core worldview propositions of theism, and also negatively affect its auxiliary views.
(2) The religious relevance thesis: CSR theories are compatible with the core worldview propositions of theism, and are either positively or negatively relevant to its auxiliary propositions.
(3) The religious agnosticism thesis: CSR theories are compatible with the core worldview propositions of theism, and are not relevant to its auxiliary propositions.

Visala considers arguments in support of (1), and pays much attention to unreliability arguments, which hold that evolved inference systems do not reliably track objective truth. Such arguments, however, are currently mainly directed against moral realism (see e.g., the anti-realist work of authors like Sharon Street and Richard Joyce). Visala does not made explicit to what extent these debunking arguments against moral realism can be transferred to religious beliefs. Are the worries for moral realism and religious realism analogous? If not, where are the disanalogies? A discussion of these issues would have been welcome. For CSR, there seem to be few authors who explicitly endorse position (1), even among atheist writers. For instance, Daniel Dennett (*Breaking the Spell*, 2006: 25) wrote, 'Notice that it could be true that God exists, that God is indeed the

intelligent, conscious loving creator of us all, and yet still religion itself [...] is a perfectly natural phenomenon.' It seems that (1) remains difficult to maintain, as (at least in a logical sense) there is no incompatibility. For, in order to endorse (1) one would have to interpret the results of CSR in a strictly naturalistic sense, and (since this rules theism out by fiat) this would be question begging.

What of positions (2) and (3)? Visala thinks that (3), the position advocated by William James, goes too far. Most of chapter 5 focuses on position (2) and asks whether CSR, even if compatible with theism, may perhaps lower (or alternatively, increase) the plausibility of theism. NTCR discusses two analogies, both by Peter Van Inwagen, that consider the relationship between theism and CSR, the *bat urine analogy* and the *car heating analogy*. Each of these elicits quite different intuitions about whether or not theism is compatible with CSR. The bat urine analogy considers a weeping Madonna statue in a church. After investigation, it is found that the tears are in fact bat urine, which drips onto the statue from bats that nestle on the church ceiling. A supernatural explanation is not logically incompatible with this observation – perhaps God made the bats nestle in that exact spot so that the statue would appear to be weeping. But this explanation is somehow not very compelling. Van Inwagen's second analogy seems to elicit quite different intuitions. Here, we have a car that produces heat as a by-product of the functioning of its motor. Car designers use this by-product to produce effective car heating systems. In a similar vein, the standard model of CSR, according to which religion is a by-product of cognitive capacities that are not specific to religion, such as agency detection, could in principle be incorporated into a larger theistic framework. God could have, through evolutionary processes, allowed belief in him to result as a by-product of normal cognitive systems. Such positions have been defended, for instance, by Justin Barrett and Kelly James Clark. They have argued that CSR actually offers empirical support for Reformed epistemology, since it indicates that people have an untutored, spontaneous belief in God, similar to other non-self-evident beliefs like our belief in the existence of an external reality or the existence of other minds.

Visala discusses two difficulties for this Reformed interpretation of CSR. He argues that if theistic belief is the result of purely naturalistic processes (even granting an ultimate theistic first cause), our religious experiences are ultimately not experiences of the divine. Moreover, these evolutionary processes, described by CSR, only make it probable

that people acquire religious belief but not inevitable – Reformed epistemologists may not like that God takes such risks. This latter problem does not strike me as a particular problem for the compatibility of CSR and theism, as it does not add anything new to the problem of divine hiddenness. The first worry Visala voices merits closer philosophical scrutiny and is also related to the problem of divine hiddenness: if religious experiences can indeed be explained as the result of natural processes, we are not experiencing God directly, but only think that we are. Under this view, God is a *deceptor Deus*, who fools us into experiencing him directly. I suggest three responses the theist might offer. One would be to say that religious experiences are really experiences of God, albeit brought about through secondary causal processes – a Thomistic framework that regards natural processes as actions of God does not consider natural laws and divine action as competing explanations. Another is to argue that, since one does not need to accept the causal closure of the physical domain, it may be possible that some intense religious experiences are the result of a direct experience of God, even if our more everyday religious feelings (such as the intuition that God exists) are the result of purely secondary causes. Under such a view, God does not deceive theists who, as a result of the structure of their cognitive architecture, believe that God exists; and he can still have more direct interventions on some occasions (e.g., mystical experiences). Thirdly, a theist could invoke overdetermination: natural causes may cause religious beliefs in conjunction with direct divine intervention, so religious experiences are both natural phenomena and supernaturally caused. These suggestions do not exhaust the design space of possible theistic responses. Visala raises, but does not answer, an important question: how can we conceptualize divine action with respect to religious belief and experience in the light of CSR?

NTCR is a valuable addition in the ongoing discussions about the implications for theism of scientific approaches to religion. Visala has successfully demonstrated that the strict naturalism that underlies CSR makes it difficult to properly assess its implications for theism. The exploration of alternative philosophical conceptions of causation in chapter 4 provides an intriguing framework for more theist-friendly interpretations of CSR. However, I would liked to have seen more explicit engagement with the empirical studies of religion, particularly in chapters 4 and 5. Whereas Visala demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the current state of the art in CSR in the first two chapters, there is hardly

any mention of specific CSR theories in the remainder of the book. His remains a high-level approach on the strict naturalistic assumptions of its researchers, which seems to me, given the disunity of the field, too sweeping an approach – a more fine-grained case-by-case examination would have been more appropriate. For one thing, as Visala points out, CSR scholars themselves do not agree on whether agnosticism, theism or atheism are the appropriate conclusions to draw from CSR research.

An unanswered question is, for instance, whether by-product accounts of religion and adaptationist accounts have different implications for the justification of religious beliefs. Adaptationist theories of religiosity are discussed in chapter 2; they are a minority position in CSR but are gaining prominence. Adaptationist theories argue that religion is a cultural or biological adaptation that helps people to cooperate better. Using such theories, one might go one step further than the car heating analogy by Van Inwagen and argue that God may have instilled religious belief in humans through a theistic evolutionary process for a double purpose: to have knowledge of him and to be able to live together more harmoniously. Another concern is that Visala seems to take a causal, reliabilist account of truth for granted in his discussion of the justification of religious beliefs. But there are other models of justification (and indeed of knowledge) that do not depend on the existence of a proper causal link between the external world and beliefs, such as pragmatic or coherentist approaches. For instance, adaptationist theories of religion may provide a pragmatic model of justification. In this view, some people may be justified in believing in God because it confers various (fitness, social) benefits to them.

To conclude, NTCR blends philosophy of science, philosophy of cognitive science, and philosophy of religion in an engaging way. The scope of the book is impressive, and Visala's expertise in these fields is evident. Due to the rather high-level discussion of naturalism, he leaves open the question of how specific theories in CSR can relate to theism. His conclusion that CSR may negatively affect arguments for the rationality of theism provides a new angle for discussions on divine hiddenness.

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Robert K. Garcia and Nathan L. King (ed.), *Is Goodness without God Good Enough? A Debate on Faith, Secularism, and Ethics,* Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009.

The title of this book is maybe a bit misleading or even silly, but its basic meaning and the underlying topic is not: Generally speaking, the question is how to think about the relation of God to morality. One answer would be that there is none because one of the relata is missing; there is no God, therefore there is and can be no relation between God and morality. Another answer would be that there is no morality because there is no God (along the lines of the often quoted Dostoyevsky remark that, if God does not exist, then everything is permitted – except that it wouldn't even be true that everything is permitted because the very idea of permission only makes sense if there are actions that do have the moral quality of being permitted in which case there is morality). According to this answer, God's existence is in one way or another related to morality such that there can be no morality – i.e. there can be no universal, objective, intrinsic rules or goods – unless there is God. One way to understand this is such that God's volition makes actions or states of affairs good; another would be that God himself is goodness. Yet another way to look at these things would be to hold that God does exist, and yet morality (or at least most of it) exists independently of God just as the realm of logic is independent of God (a position defended in our times and in this book by Richard Swinburne). On the other hand, some even claim that if there is morality, then there is God such that the reality of morality is evidence for the existence of God.

The book is structured as follows: After an introduction by the editors, Paul Kurtz and William Lane Craig lay out their answers to the leading question of whether goodness without God is good enough. Though they set the stage for the entire book they don't reflect sufficiently the very meaning of this question; both Hare (p.85) and Murphy (p.117 f.) note this critically. Part II presents "new essays" by C. Stephen Laymen, Louise Antony, John Hare, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, Mark C. Murphy, Donald C. Hubin, and Richard Swinburne. These essays are supposed to react to the arguments put forward by Kurtz and Craig; but they do so only in a very limited way. In turn, part III allows Craig and Kurtz to reply to these essays and to clarify their positions.

Given his previous philosophical and theological works as a Christian apologist, it's no surprise that William Lane Craig lays out a theistic view according to which there can be no objective moral world without God, whereas Paul Kurtz (and later Walter Sinnott-Armstrong), being a secular humanist, pictures morality as something that needs no deeper ontological foundation so that one can and shall be moral without God. Although I ultimately agree with Craig's general position, neither he nor Kurtz wins the debate. Still, Craig's critical position is well taken: Unless we understand goodness as an intrinsic property of goods or actions, there's no way to account for the objectivity of morality. Now Kurtz seems to agree with this by saying that the human life "is intrinsically *good in itself*" (28); but he simply can provide no answer to the question from whence this quality stems (especially in a world described in terms of naturalism). Craig, on the other hand, doesn't reckon with the possibility of what C. Stephen Layman calls "*moral Platonism*" (51), i.e. that belief that goodness is a Platonic quality that is no more (but certainly no less) stunning than any other property there is; it's simply there. Layman sketches a moral argument for the existence of God, claiming that the germane moral quality (the overridingness of moral obligations) is best explained by God (and/or an afterlife). Louise Antony criticizes Divine Command Theory for well known reasons and even thinks that there is reason not to believe in God because perfect contrition could only be possible if there is no God. John Hare sketches what he has developed elsewhere at quite some length. Basically, the (Kantian) idea is that we ought to care for our own and other people's happiness and that we ought to become better, less self-centred human beings; since ought implies can, and these aims cannot be achieved without God, it would be rationally unstable not to believe in God. Sinnott-Armstrong provides no arguments that have not already been articulated in his book with William Lane Craig (*God? A debate between a Christian and an Atheist*). Again, he sharply attacks Craig's theistic approach and tries to defend his own "harm-based morality" (101); still he does not give an argument *why* any harm, that is not my own or that of my beloved, should bother me. (What's wrong with harm anyway? Its wrongness must be intrinsic, and this is something atheists like Sinnott-Armstrong don't buy into.) Maybe the best paper is Murphy's; in any event, he is the one who develops in an intelligible way the basic questions that need to be answered (what is morality, after all, and how can it be grounded?) though his own

answer is based on Robert Adam's social concept of obligation that has difficulties of its own.

The topic of this book is old and has been debated almost ever since there is philosophy (just think about Plato's Euthyphro-problem: Does God command good actions because they are good, or are actions good because God commands them?). The book does not offer any substantial new perspectives or aspects on this topic; this is partly due to the fact that it is very hard to come up with anything new anyway, partly due to the fact that those thoughts that are somewhat fresh (say by Craig, Hare, Murphy, or Swinburne) have been published, and published in much more detail, in similar ways by these and other philosophers elsewhere. Still the book is laudable: It provides a good overview of what the main problems and arguments in this field are, and most papers are written by philosophers who know their stuff and express there thoughts in integrating contemporary moral philosophy and epistemology.

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Anna Marmodoro and Jonathan Hill (eds.), *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation,* Oxford University Press, 2011.

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... and the Word became flesh and lived among us', so writes John the Evangelist in the prologue of his Gospel. But how could the Word become flesh? That is, how could God become human? Answering this question is the primary concern of this anthology.

According to the Gospel of Luke, when the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would bear a son, she replied 'How can this be?' since she was a virgin. The angel replied that it would be by an overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. One can view the papers in this anthology as possible continuations of the angel's answer, for having given an account of how a virgin could conceive and bear a son, the question remains how the son she is to bear could be God the Son. For this anthology aims to provide an account of how it is that God, or more precisely, God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, could become human while remaining divine and a single person. In this anthology, Jonathan Hill provides

an excellent introduction to the range of answers the angel could offer, giving a most helpful summary of the various answers the angel might give, and the subsequent papers develop some of these answers, making considerable advances in how we can understand how Mary's son could be God incarnate.

Very briefly, there are two ways of understanding the metaphysics of the incarnation which have received the most attention since Mary's 'How could this be?', namely, a compositional account and a transformational account, using Hill's terminology. The two approaches differ primarily, in my view, in their answer to this question: is Mary's son God the Son, that is, is Christ identical with the second person of the Trinity? The compositional account says 'No', but the transformational account says 'Yes'. In what follows, I will give a brief summary of these accounts with reference to how the papers in the anthology advance them.

On a compositional account, an account defended by Brian Leftow, Oliver Crisp, and Thomas Flint in this anthology, the baby born of Mary, Christ, is composed of two parts: a divine part, God the Son, and a human part, a body and/or a soul, and the human part is the instrument of the divine part. What happens at the incarnation is that God the Son is joined to a human body (and soul), and Christ, the baby born of Mary, is composed of these two parts. Now, there seem to be two main objections to this account, namely, that it seems to entail that God never really does become human and that Christ is not one person but two.

In his 'The Humanity of God', Brian Leftow defends the compositional account from the charge that God never really does become human. He argues that, even though God the Son never comes to consist of a human body or a soul nor do they ever become parts of God the Son, God the Son nevertheless is fully human since, by being joined to a body and a soul, he comes to have a body and a soul. By making creative use of an analogy to a brain stem being grafted on to a body, Leftow argues that the Word becomes flesh by having flesh grafted on him, and, in this way, God the Son does indeed become fully human.

Oliver D. Crisp takes a similar view of the metaphysics of the incarnation in his 'Compositional Christology without Nestorianism', defending it against a series of objections, in particular, against the objection that Christ is not one person but two, a view known as Nestorianism. Nestorianism seems to be entailed on this account because it does entail that Christ is not identical with God the Son, since God the Son is a proper part of Christ. In response, Crisp maintains that

Nestorianism is not entailed since, though the account is inconsistent with Christ being identical with God the Son, it is consistent with the person who is Christ being identical with God the Son, and this is enough, claims Crisp, for Christ to be one person and not two.

Continuing in this line of thought, Thomas P. Flint argues in 'Should Concretists Part with Mereological Models of the Incarnation?' that those who think that, when God the Son became incarnate, he assumed a concrete, created individual nature, a human body and/or a soul, that would have been a human in and of itself had the incarnation not occurred, should nevertheless maintain a mereological model of the incarnation as that described above. Just how the human part of Christ is related to the divine part, and in particular how the human part of Christ is understood to be an instrument of the divine part of Christ is explored in detail in Richard Cross's 'Vehicle Externalism and the Metaphysics of the Incarnation: a Medieval Contribution'.

On a transformational account, God the Son becomes human by being transformed into a human, that is, God the Son undergoes change, losing some properties and gaining others, in a manner similar to a caterpillar's transformation into a butterfly. Thomas Senor combines elements of the aforementioned compositional approach with this transformational approach in his 'Drawing on Many Traditions: an Ecumenical Kenotic Christology', by maintaining that God the Son, having assumed a human body and mind at the incarnation, acted through this human body and mind on earth, and at the incarnation, God the Son lost some properties he had when he instantiated only the supernatural kind, divinity, and gained some properties associated with the natural kind, humanity.

In contrast to Senor, Stephen T. Davis gives a purely transformational account in 'The Metaphysics of Kenosis', where 'kenosis' is the Greek word for emptying, recalling Philippians 2: 6-7 which states that though Christ 'was in the form of God, [he] . . . emptied himself, . . . being born in human likeness'. The primary challenge of a transformational account is showing that, following the incarnation, God the Son, who is identical with Christ, remains divine despite the changes entailed by the incarnation. Davis aims to do just this, and, furthermore, argues that all orthodox accounts of the incarnation, that is, all accounts which affirm Christ's full humanity and full divinity, must be kenotic accounts, since God the Son must have given up something in the incarnation. Also giving a transformational metaphysics of the incarnation, Michael C. Rea, in 'Hylomorphism and the Incarnation', employs an

Aristotelian metaphysics of material objects on which they are matter-form compounds and builds on his prior work on the metaphysics of the Trinity to argue that, prior to the incarnation, God the Son is identical with the matter-form compound divinity/Sonship and after the incarnation he is identical with the matter-form compound Christ's-physical-matter/divinity and humanity, together with the individuating property, Sonship.

A particularly puzzling aspect of any account of the incarnation is Christ's mental life. Richard Swinburne then gives what might be broadly construed as a transformational account of the incarnation in his contribution, 'The Coherence of the Chalcedonian Definition of the Incarnation', where he focuses on Christ's mental life, in particular, his having a divided mind. Swinburne makes a most valuable contribution to understanding how Christ could be tempted, as the Gospels maintain he was, since, it seems, if he was truly tempted, he was not divine, but if he was not tempted, he was not human. Swinburne's solution is to say that Christ was tempted in so far as he was tempted not to do the best act, that is, something supererogatory. Joseph Jedwab further considers Christ's mental life in his 'The Incarnation and Unity of Consciousness', where he argues that Christ has not two spheres of consciousness, a divine and human sphere, but rather one sphere of consciousness, one part of which is typical of a divine consciousness and one part of which is typical of a human consciousness.

Making use of recent work in the philosophy of mind, Anna Marmodoro, in 'The Metaphysics of the Extended Mind in Ontological Entanglements', argues that just as minds and external objects, such as notebooks functioning like memory, can be 'entangled' in such a way that it is impossible to individuate them, so could God the Son and Jesus be 'entangled'. The final contribution to the anthology is Robin Le Poidevin's 'Multiple Incarnations and Distributed Persons' where he argues that there could be multiple incarnations, a question any account of the metaphysics of the incarnation must address.

This anthology is essential reading for all who are interested in a metaphysically precise understanding of the incarnation. The papers are of uniformly high standard and are rich with new ideas. It seems to me that our understanding of the incarnation might be further advanced, building on the ideas presented here in this anthology, by considering the metaphysics of the incarnation in light of recent advances in the understanding of the metaphysics of the Trinity, of original sin, and

of the Eucharist. By engaging in systematic philosophical theology, we might hope to advance our understanding of all these doctrines together.

For example, as discussed by Flint, the simplest compositional account of the incarnation, one defended by Aquinas, is one on which God the Son gains a part, a human part, such that the pre-incarnate God the Son is identical with Christ. The best objection to this account is that it seems to entail that Christ both is and is not identical with the divine nature since: the pre-incarnate God the Son is identical with the divine nature, and the pre-incarnate God the Son is identical with Christ, it follows, given the symmetry and transitivity of identity that Christ is identical with the divine nature, but the divine nature is only a proper part of Christ, on this account, and so the divine nature is not identical with Christ. This is why the extent compositional accounts answer 'No' to the question, 'Is Mary's Son God the Son?'. However, such an answer is not compulsory. It seems to me that there could be a compositional account of the incarnation on which Mary's Son is indeed God the Son.

As also discussed by Flint, one way to avoid the above contradiction is to deny the transitivity of identity, and one way to deny the transitivity of identity is by maintaining that identity is relative to a sortal. On such an account of identity, of relative identity, the pre-incarnate God the Son is the same nature as the divine nature and the same person as Christ, and it is not possible to derive a contradiction from these claims. Now, this response is not explored much by Flint. But it has been much explored in the metaphysics of the Trinity, particularly in trying to render consistent the Athanasian Creed, on which each of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are God, but none of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are identical with one another. Thus, it seems, there is mutual motivation for understanding identity as relative from an Athanasian approach to the Trinity and a Thomist approach to the incarnation. Perhaps if these were done together, building, perhaps, on the seminal work of Peter van Inwagen, mutual advancement might occur in understanding the problems and prospects of the doctrines of the Trinity and of the incarnation. Nevertheless, this is a first-rate anthology which will be a benchmark for future discussion of the metaphysics of the incarnation.