# THE RATIONALITY OF THEISM

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# PREFACE

The papers comprising this book were read at an international conference held over four days in Munich – May 27-30, 1998. Organization was arranged through the Institute for the Philosophy of Religion at Munich's Hochschule für Philosophie, which served as host.

Simply as such the conference made an important contribution to philosophical discourse. Recent years have witnessed little (if any) dialogue between philosophers of religion in the Anglo-Saxon and Continental traditions. There are many reasons why. For one thing, continental philosophy is still very much carried on under the imposing shadow of Kant, and so it is rare to find any serious grappling with traditional metaphysical questions such as the existence and nature of God; one finds instead a properly post-Kantian emphasis on the epistemology and phenomenology of religious experience. The renewed interest in classical philosophical theology in America and the U.K. is thus understandably viewed by many European philosophers as a return to pre-critical dogmatism.

But any form of philosophical apartheid, however understandable, deserves to be opposed, and ultimately overcome. This conference – the first such gathering of German- and English-speaking philosophers of religion – was a step in that direction. Since epistemology is of special interest both in Europe and in the Anglo-Saxon world, it seemed most promising to take an epistemological topic as a starting point for dialogue. The notion of "rationality" seemed an ideal bridge-concept.

As a further step toward unifying these two philosophical communities, we had originally thought to have the participants focus exclusively on the rationality of Christian theism. But it seemed unfair to limit *ab initio* those who might wish to cast their vision beyond the boundaries of Christianity, and so the organizing topic became simply the rationality of theism. Most of the speakers did, however, focus on Christian theistic belief.

Prof. Wolfhart *Pannenberg* opened the conference with a stirring address delivered in German to about 400 people, including a number of political dignitaries, in the elegant surroundings of Kardinal Wendel Haus.

'The Rationality of Christian Theism', traces the complex relationship between philosophy and Christian faith. Pannenberg arguers that the concept of God in Christianity should not be seen as a mere developmental appendage to a more (religiously or intellectually) fundamental monotheism, but as having foundational integrity of its own, rooted in the revelation of the Triune God in history.

The other papers followed over the next three days.

Prof. Richard *Swinburne's* 'Many Kinds of Rational Theistic Belief' focuses on the epistemology of justified belief, where justification in some way indicates truth. He concludes that there are many diverse ways in which a belief can be justified, and goes on to ask about their respective value – especially as this applies to the case of theistic belief.

Prof. Lorenz B. *Puntel's* paper, 'The Rationality of Theistic Belief and the Concept of Truth,' claims that the notion of truth is of central importance in determining the rationality of religious belief. Puntel argues that a coherentist-holistic conception of truth is most congruent with the nature of Christian religious claims.

Prof. Philip *Clayton* spoke on 'Belief and the Logic of Religious Committment', and explored a "possibilist" strategy for reconciling doubt about the truth of Christian claims within one who is nonetheless strongly committed to them. This paper, co-authored by Steven Knapp, seeks also to delineate an epistemology of Christian acceptance.

Prof. Richard *Gale's* 'A New Argument for the Existence of God: One That Works, Well, Sort of' is precisely that. It is not an argument for the "super-deluxe" God of traditional theism, but a modal proof for a limited God – one who nevertheless, according to Gale, is worthy of worship.

Prof. Gerard J. *Hughes* argued that there is much life yet in Aquinas's philosophical theology. 'Toward a Rehabilitation of Aquinas's "Third Way"' attempts to show the irrelevance or misguidedness of several classical objections; it also seeks to locate precisely the most promising lines of future philosophical exploration.

Prof. Alvin *Plantinga's* 'Warranted Christian Belief' argues that the atheist cannot hold Christian faith to be irrational in abstraction from the question whether or not God exists. For if the God of revelation does exist, then Christian faith is true. If true, then the cognitive processes producing such beliefs will be functioning according to God's plan, and will therefore be warranted.

Prof. Peter *van Inwagen* spoke on the theme of 'Christian Belief and Platonic Rationality.' He maintains that critics of Christian belief regularly assume a conception of rationality which, if applied less selectively, would call into question more – much, much more – than religious faith.

Prof. Friedo *Ricken's* '"Perspicuous Representation" and the Analogy of Experience' turns to Wittgenstein for a key to illuminating the peculiar rationality of theism. He also sketches a way of mediating the concepts of religious language through experiences and emotions familiar to us all.

Prof. Linda *Zagzebski*, in her '*Phronesis* and Christian Belief,' attempts to develop a concept of religious rationality which, though necessarily embedded in a cultural and linguistic setting, has general application nonetheless. To this end, she argues, the notion of *phronesis* can be exploited to great advantage.

Prof. Reiner *Wimmer's* 'The Negative and Positive Task of Reason in Relation to Religious Attitudes' pours cold water on what it takes to be the overreaching pretensions of much classical and contemporary philosophy of religion. This fulfills, in Wimmer's eyes, the chief negative task of reason. The positive task he sees as protecting the integrity of genuine religious faith from the boundary-encroachments of various secular hostilities.

Prof. Michael *Czapkay Sudduth* spoke on 'Proper Basicality and the Evidential Significance of Internalist Defeat: A Proposal for Reviving Classical Evidentialism.' His paper attempts to steer a middle course between evidentialist and Reformed epistemologies. It proposes a *defeater-based evidentialism* as doing full justice to the legitimate claims of each tradition.

Prof. William *Alston*, in 'The Distinctiveness of the Epistemology of Religious Belief,' brings out both the diversity and complexity of epistemic factors involved in religious (and specifically Christian) faith. Along the way, he gently chides both religious and non-religious epistemologists for not always facing the full range and depth of this diversity; since without it they can never do justice to the thing they seek to study. His programmatic conclusion: Let a thousand flowers bloom!

Prof. Franz *von Kutschera's* 'Rationality and Reason' was the final paper of the conference. Like the first, it was delivered in German before a large public audience (though this time in the great aula of Munich's Hochschule für Philosophie). Given a contemporary understanding of rationality, von Kutschera argues, religious faith cannot be considered "rational." But if our religious beliefs are true, then in some sense they must be reasonable. He therefore sees a need for faith to recover a view of reason, familiar to the ancients, as essentially open to the Absolute.

Even this bare listing of papers and participants can give readers some idea of the difficulties that might stand in the way of fruitful dialogue. Only with effort could such a linguistically and philosophically diverse group talk with each other to any real purpose. But that effort was made, and the

discussions, though sometimes heated and always forceful, never failed to
shed light, and never devolved into mere polemics.

We had decided from the beginning that the basic language of the con-
ference would be English. Since some of the speakers read their remarks
in German, it was important that both printed translations and interpret-
ers be available in order to ensure the flow of discussion. Most of the
translations were made by the American editor; but special gratitude is
due to Ms. Catherine L. *Bradford*, who provided the lucid and elegant
translation of Prof. von Kutschera's paper, and to Prof. Philip *Clayton* and
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Many persons and institutions assisted in this project. We wish here to
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Finally, we wish specially to thank Mr. Oliver *Sensen*, assistant to the
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*Godehard Brüntrup* and *Ronald K. Tacelli*

# THE RATIONALITY OF CHRISTIAN THEISM

## I

Since its inception, Christianity has been marked by a close, but also
frequently tense, relationship to philosophy. Tertullian's rhetorical cry –
What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What has the academy in common
with the Church? – did not keep him from letting his stoic philosophical
convictions profoundly inflect his theology. Clement of Alexandria, on the
other hand, in describing Christianity as the true philosophy, had no inten-
tion of passing it off as merely illustrative of a conception of God attainable
by philosophy quite apart from the Christian faith. What he had rather in
mind was the transformation and elevation of philosophy into Christian
theology; for philosophers, according to their own admission, merely seek
after the wisdom they love, whereas in Jesus Christ the divine wisdom it-
self became visible (*Strom*, VIII, 1f.). But even to identify Christianity with
true philosophy involves a conflict with philosophy – insofar as philosophy
resists or rejects any such identification and consequent transformation
into theology.

Why this peculiar relationship of Christian thought to philosophy? We
should not see in it the expression of an external conformity to hellenistic
culture. Mere conformity would have worn an altogether different appear-
ance; that is to say, the religious ideas of Christians would have been
treated as the mythological raiment worn by philosophical truth. But in
the theology of the Church Fathers that is precisely what did not happen.
Instead, philosophical ideas were adopted in such a way that they were im-
mediately transformed – with the claim that this transformation was just
bringing out their deeper truth. Such was the case with anthropology, with
the prospect of hope beyond death, and above all with the philosophical
doctrine of God.

The motivation for all this can most likely be found in the missionary
character of Christianity. Ever since St Paul, the Christian proclamation of
Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection, and of his divine mission for
the salvation of the world, was directed to non-Jews. But why would

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# PROPER BASICALITY AND THE EVIDENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF INTERNALIST DEFEAT: A PROPOSAL FOR REVISING CLASSICAL EVIDENTIALISM

Several recent contributions in Anglo-American philosophy of religion continue to address questions in the ongoing dialogue between evidentialist and Reformed epistemologies of religious belief. These questions typically focus on the claim of the Reformed epistemologist that theistic belief is, at least for some people under some circumstances, properly basic (i.e., rational, justified, or warranted in the absence of propositional evidence). In this paper I propose an argument for the compatibility of these *prima facie* opposed stances on the positive epistemic status of theistic and Christian belief.[1] My argument focuses on the evidential significance and implications of defeating conditions construed in an internalist sense. I argue that internalist defeaters provide a framework for revising classical evidentialism and fine-tuning the Reformed epistemologist's account of the conditions under which theistic belief is properly basic. My *defeater-based evidentialism* involves an evidentialist requirement that avoids several of the shortcomings of the classical evidentialist requirement, and it is logically consistent with the idea of properly basic theistic belief, even where the proper basicality thesis is developed along externalist lines.

## 1 Defeaters and the Internalist No-Defeat Condition

Contemporary accounts of positive epistemic status (e.g., knowledge, justification, warrant) often include a qualifying clause to the effect that there be no overriding, undermining, or defeating conditions. Many such accounts construe these defeating conditions in a distinctly *internalist* sense, as constituted by cognitive items to which a person has (in some sense) special epistemic access, such that a person could come know them just upon introspection or reflection. This is true even in the case of sev-

eral prominent externalists who otherwise maintain that the conditions that confer positive epistemic status need not be items to which a person has special cognitive access (see Goldman: 1986; Nozick: 1981; Plantinga: 1994; Bergmann: 1997a).

Three paradigmatic cases of defeat can illustrate the general character of internalist type defeaters (hereafter ITDs).

(i) Mary sees in the distance what appears to be a sheep in the field and forms the belief that there is a sheep in the field. The owner of the field then comes by and tells her that there are no sheep in the field. She has acquired what John Pollock (Pollock: 1986, 38) has labeled a *rebutting defeater* for her belief that there is a sheep in the field (i.e., a reason for supposing that there is no sheep in the field). Alternatively, she might have walked up to the object and discovered that it was actually a papier-mache facsimile. We might say that a rebutting defeater for some belief B provides one with a reason for holding the negation of B (or a belief incompatible with B).

(ii) A person enters a factory and sees an assembly line on which there are a number of widgets that appear red. Being appeared to red-widgetly, the person believes that there are red widgets on the assembly line. The shop superintendent then informs the person that the widgets are being irradiated by an intricate set of red lights, which allows the detection of hairline cracks otherwise invisible to the naked eye. Here the person loses his reason for supposing that the widgets are red, rather than acquires a reason for supposing that they are not red. He acquires what Pollock (Pollock: 1986, 39) has called an *undercutting defeater* for his belief that the widgets are red. Here it is the connection between a belief and its ground that is attacked (the latter failing to be indicative of the truth of the former).

(iii) Mark believes that his computer has a hardware problem that is causing several operation errors. He believes this because his wife tells him that Peter told her this and Mark knows that Peter is an expert on computers. Later, though, Mark discovers that it was not Peter but John who told his wife this, but Mark believes that John has little knowledge about computers. Here it is not that the grounds fail to be indicative of the truth of Mark's original belief, but he comes to believe that one of his original grounds for holding this belief is false. Call this a *reason-defeating defeater*. Like undercutting defeaters, reason-defeating defeaters defeat a belief B by defeating the reasons for B, but they do this by providing grounds for supposing that at least one of the reasons for B is false, as opposed to failing to be indicative of the truth of B.[2]

What exactly is going on in (i)-(iii)? As a first approximation we can say that in each case a person acquires reasons (in the broad sense, including introspective and extrospective experience) for modifying or revising his noetic structure in a particular way. The relevant range of modification includes holding the negation of the original belief B, withholding B, or holding B less firmly. But what exactly would be wrong with a person who continued holding his original belief (with the same degree of firmness) in these circumstances? A natural response is to say that the person would be *irrational* or *unreasonable*. In (i) if Mary continues to believe firmly that there is a sheep in the field given she is told by a man whom she regards as reliable that there are no sheep there (and she has no other relevant source of information bearing on the matter), Mary would be unreasonable. In (ii) additional information neutralizes the rationality conferring power of the person's grounds for supposing that the widgets are red, thereby rendering this belief unreasonable. In (iii) additional information defeats the rationality of two beliefs: (a) Mark's belief that his computer has a hardware problem and (b) his belief that Peter told his wife this (where (b) constituted one of Mark's reasons for holding (a)).

There are at least two aspects to the rationality/irrationality in view here. It is both *epistemic* and *subjective*: related to the truth goal of believing, but from the believer's perspective. When a person acquires a defeater, she comes to see, in a way appropriate to her level of conceptual development, that something counts against the truth of a belief B, or outweighs considerations in favor of its truth, to such a degree that holding B (at least with the same degree of firmness) is no longer appropriate given the truth goal of believing. We might say that when a person acquires a defeater, she acquires an overriding reason for supposing that holding B is no longer *epistemically* rational, no longer rational given the epistemic goal of believing. What is defeated is, at least in the first instance, what we might call the internal or subjective epistemic rationality of a belief, which should be distinguished from the practical or prudential rationality of holding a belief (if, for instance, holding a belief is conducive to survival or psychological comfort). Moreover, taking one's belief to be epistemically irrational need not require much in the way of conceptual sophistication. The concept of epistemic defeat is a widely shared one, even if most people do not employ concepts that they refer to as "defeat" or "epistemic irrationality." As long as a person understands what it is for something to count against the truth of a belief, then a person can take his belief to be epistemically irrational or defeated (so even little children could conceivably satisfy this condition).[3]

But the defeaters under consideration here are internalist type defeaters (ITDs). What does the defeating in (i)-(iii) are not mere external facts about the subject's environment or cognitive situation that adversely affect positive epistemic status in some way. For instance, defeasibility accounts of knowledge typically require that there *be* no true *proposition* such that if a person believed it, she would (or should) believe that her belief is defeated. The mere fact that there are hidden red lights shining on widgets giving most of them the mere appearance of being red could be a defeater (even if some of the widgets are red), but it would not be an internalist one. The fact that I suffer from sheep hallucinations could be a defeater (even if there is a sheep present), but it is not an internalist one, since I do not have any special cognitive access to whether or not my sensory perceptual experiences are being produced by cognitive malfunction of some sort. Nor do (i)-(iii) involve reasons (or beliefs) that a person *ought* to have and would have if certain counterfactual conditions involving epistemic dutifulness were satisfied. This highlights in a general way the distinction between ITDs and externalist type defeaters.

What does the defeating in (i)-(iii) are distinctly *internal* conditions, cognitive items that either make up the believer's perspective of the world or items that the subject could come to know just upon reflection. The subject's beliefs and experiences (or both) constitute the defeater and generate internalist defeat. I will be thinking of defeaters for the most part as conscious cognitive states that involve reasons for supposing that some belief B is epistemically irrational (i.e., sufficiently rebutted, undercut, or inadequately grounded). As such they are reasons for revising one's noetic structure in a particular way: reasons for holding a belief B less firmly, withholding B, or holding the denial of B (depending on the nature and strength of the defeater). Moreover, whether one gets a defeater depends on the relevant rest of one's noetic structure (i.e., one's other current experiences and beliefs). Why? Simply because what sits in the noetic neighborhood – so to speak – partly determines whether any set of reasons is *sufficient* for revising one's noetic structure in some way, or for S to take it that his belief is irrational. If Mary's background knowledge in (i) includes knowing that the owner of the field is a chronic liar, then she would probably not have a defeater. The less sure she is of this, perhaps she gets a defeater, though not a strong one. So we can say that S acquires a defeater D against some belief B just if S acquires reasons R (of which S is conscious) that are such that, given the relevant rest of S's noetic structure, R is an appropriate ground for S's revising his noetic structure in a particular way.

It is possible of course to understand the defeating efficacy of ITDs in different ways. The clause "given the relevant rest of S's noetic structure,

R is an appropriate ground for...." is susceptible of various interpretations. One way of taking it is that R is an efficacious defeater only if R has significant epistemic credentials (or at least is not irrational or the product of cognitive malfunction). Of course, what counts as "significant epistemic credentials" could cover a broad range of epistemically significant properties: degrees of internal rationality, truth-conducive justification, reliability of belief formation, cognitive proper function, etc. Moreover, there is the nature of the *connection* between R and the defeatee. For instance, one might think that the sufficiency of reasons for supposing that some belief B is epistemically irrational derive from certain objective, *logical* relations between propositions, where this is the sort of thing that a person could come to see upon reflection.[4] Alternatively, it may be that R constitutes a defeater for B just if the subject sees (or takes there to be) the appropriate negative relation between R and the defeatee, such that it would not be rational to continue holding B with the same degree of firmness.[5] The view I will be adopting in this paper is:

[ITD] S has an internalist type defeater just if S acquires reasons (of which S is conscious) which typically ground S's consciously taking it that holding B (at least with the same degree of firmness) is now epistemically irrational.

There are really two internalist elements here: first, the defeat*er* is constituted by beliefs and/or experiences of the person. Secondly, *defeat* is generated by S's taking it that his belief is epistemically irrational (for reasons $R_1, ..., R_n$), but S can tell upon reflection whether he takes his belief to be epistemically irrational.[6] So he has mental access to this as well. This is a form of strong internalism. Internal rationality, as already explained, concerns how things appear from the subject's perspective as a knowing subject. And it is precisely this that determines whether S's belief is defeated or not. As several philosophers have argued, what is essential to defeat are epistemic connections the subject sees (or at least takes himself to see) (for instance, see Pollock: 1984, 112-114; Pollock: 1974, 44; Nozick: 1981, 196). So I will be adopting a very latitudinarian view of what can count as an efficacious defeater. So we can say that:

[1] S's belief B (to degree N) is internally defeated just if (a) S has an undefeated ITD against B *or* (b) S consciously takes it that B is epistemically irrational.[7]

[2] S's belief B (held to degree N) is internally irrational just if B is internally defeated.

Up to this point I have only spoken about "internal rationality," but ITDs and internal defeat can also be related to warrant or knowledge.[8] Some epistemologists connect what I'm labeling subjective irrationality with the defeat of warrant and knowledge. More precisely, some require for S's belief B being warranted (to a degree sufficient, along with true belief, for knowledge) that S not have an undefeated ITD for B or not believe that his belief is defeated or epistemically irrational.[9] In other words, the negative epistemic evaluation of a belief, or the reasons for such evaluations, are regarded as efficacious for the defeat of knowledge.[10] We have then what can be called the **internalist no-defeat condition**.

[ND] S's belief B is warranted (to a degree sufficient, along with true belief, for knowledge) only if S's belief B is not internally defeated.

## 2 Defeated Theistic Belief and the Defeater-Defeater Requirement

[ND] has two important implications for the positive epistemic status of theistic (and Christian) belief. First, if a person acquired an undefeated ITD for theistic belief, or took it that her theistic belief is epistemically irrational, theistic belief would be internally defeated. The person would be subjectively epistemically irrational in continuing to hold her theistic belief (at least with the same degree of firmness). Secondly, given the connection between internal rationality and warrant, even if we suppose that religious belief can be, and sometimes is, warranted in the absence of propositional evidence, it doesn't follow that such a belief would *remain* warranted in just any circumstance. It follows from [ND] that *if* a person acquired an undefeated ITD for theistic belief, then her theistic belief would not be warranted (at least not to a degree sufficient, along with true belief, for knowledge).

Consider the following case.[11] Lisa has been raised in a Christian family. During her youth she holds a firm, basic theistic belief, but in her later teenage years her theistic belief isn't as strong. The cares of college life, sexual indulgence, and late-night parties slowly erode her thoughts of God. While a junior in college, she is exposed to Sigmund Freud's idea of wish fulfillment. She becomes convinced that the belief she had in an invisible friend Merlin while a young girl was one such belief, a defense

mechanism against the hostile forces of her childhood environment. Upon further reflection, though, she becomes convinced that her belief in God is significantly analogous to the belief she once had in Merlin. So she comes to believe that (p) *her belief in God is the product of wish fulfillment*. Moreover, she believes that (q) *the objective probability of a belief being true given that it is produced by wish fulfillment is either low or inscrutable*. (I say "inscrutable" here because she might be agnostic about the probability). Perhaps she holds this because she can't see any logical relationship between beliefs generated by wish fulfillment and truth, except that the one belief she knows of (i.e., the Merlin belief) turned out to be false. She then believes that (r) *the objective probability of her theistic belief being true is either low or inscrutable*. Lisa has acquired an undercutting defeater for her theistic belief, and on the basis of (p), (q) and (r), she consciously takes it that her theistic belief is epistemically irrational.

In this case Lisa holds a theistic belief T at time $t_1$ and then acquires an ITD for T at some later time $t_2$. At $t_2$ there is nothing else in Lisa's noetic structure that can neutralize or defeat the ITD, so it remains undefeated at $t_2$.[12] In that situation, the rational thing for Lisa to do is either withhold T or no longer hold T with the same degree of firmness. She would be subjectively epistemically irrational to do otherwise. Moreover, [ND] entails that Lisa is no longer warranted in holding T (at least not with the same degree of firmness).

But the question that immediately arises is this: given that a person acquires an undefeated ITD for her theistic belief, what is required for her to be subjectively epistemically rational *and* warranted in holding theistic belief at some later time, after the acquisition of the defeater? I think the natural response here is to say that what is needed is a cognitive state in which the defeater no longer carries defeating force, either because other conditions now neutralize its defeating force, undermine it, or eliminate it altogether. In other words, the defeater must be defeated. What is needed is a *defeater-defeater* (to coin Pollockian/Plantingian terminology). I think that this carries a good deal of intuitive plausibility, though it will need some qualifications. Presumably the reasoning here is that (i) internal rationality requires that things be epistemically right from the believer's perspective and (ii) only a defeater-defeater can bring this cognitive state about given that a person gets an undefeated defeater for her belief. So given the acquisition of an undefeated ITD against theistic belief at some particular time, it seems that a person S will be subjectively epistemically rational in holding theistic belief at some later time only if S has an ITD* (defeater-defeater) against the ITD.

Consider, first, the range of ways such a requirement could be satisfied.

One example of a defeater-defeater in Lisa's case would be an undercutter that attacks the connection between [(p) and (q)] and (r). Suppose she comes to believe that (s) wish fulfillment is a natural mechanism that God has implanted in humans to act as a secondary cause in the production of theistic belief. In that case, even if (q) is true for most beliefs, the conjunction of (p), (s), and (q) would fail to be indicative of the truth of (r).[13] In this situation Lisa could retain the original defeating reasons but their defeating force would be neutralized by a relevant addition to her noetic structure. A second option would be having reasons for supposing that either (p) or (q) is false; that is, either it is not the case that theistic belief is produced by wish fulfillment or it is not the case that beliefs produced in that way have an objective probability that is low or inscrutable. For instance, perhaps upon further reflection she discovers important disanalogies between her Merlin belief and theistic belief. Here she acquires a rebutting defeater for (p). A premise of the original defeater is rebutted (what I referred to in section 1 as a *reason-defeating defeater*). Alternatively, Lisa might have a rebutter for (r), a reason for supposing that the objective probability of theism is neither low nor inscrutable. Perhaps Lisa acquires reasons for supposing that she has been created with a reliable mechanism M for forming theistic beliefs (e.g., the *sensus divinitatis*) and that M has a high objective probability of producing true beliefs, at least when it is properly functioning.

At this point something should be said about the important role of natural theology in relation to defeater-defeaters. First, where the defeater against theistic belief is a reason for supposing that theism is false (say by way of an evidential argument from evil), a rebutter against this belief will be a reason for supposing that theism is true. A person who is agnostic about the existence of God at $t_1$ because of an argument from evil may find at $t_2$ that theism carries significant explanatory power for the existence of the Universe, its spatial and temporal regularities, and the degree of fine-tuning it exhibits. Secondly, notice the connection between natural theology and the kinds of defeater-defeaters discussed in the previous paragraph. Recognizing the explanatory power of theism might provide Lisa with a reason for supposing that theistic belief is relevantly disanalogous to her Merlin belief (if, for instance, she sees that the latter does not have explanatory power). Moreover, if a person acquired reasons for supposing that there is a God, she could thereby have grounds for supposing that she has been created with a cognitive design plan that includes the production of theistic beliefs. She might then have reasons for supposing that she has been created with a faculty or mechanism for producing true beliefs about her creator, and perhaps that when her faculties are function-

ing properly such beliefs are reliably produced. So natural theology would be a way to acquire a rebutter to the conclusion of Lisa's original undercutting defeater.

Now it seems to me that one could plausibly argue that there are other conditions, besides acquiring an ITD*, that could cancel internal defeat and restore subjective epistemic rationality to a belief.

First, *what if the ITD ceases to be an occurrent or conscious cognitive state?* An ITD for a belief B will often cease to be a conscious cognitive state at some later time $t_{n+1}$, but this alone would not cancel internal defeat (nor the need for an ITD*). A person S could still consciously take it that her belief B is epistemically irrational at $t_{n+1}$ without the ITD remaining occurrent at that time (though it was occurrent and grounded this taking at $t_1$). And this could be thought sufficient for the diachronic extension of internal defeat to $t_{n+1}$. Moreover, even if one thought that S's consciously taking B to be epistemically irrational must be grounded in some way at $t_{n+1}$, it might be thought that as long as the ITD (once occurrent) is accessible or retrievable fairly easily through memory at $t_{n+1}$, it still grounds S's consciously taking it that his belief B is epistemically irrational at $t_{n+1}$.[14] *But what if the ITD is actually forgotten so that it is not accessible fairly easily through memory?* Well, S might still consciously take it that his belief B is epistemically irrational, even if he forgot his original grounds for doing so. Perhaps he only recalls that he had a good reason at $t_1$ for supposing that B is epistemically irrational.[15] But given proposition [1] (in section 1), internal defeat would be extended to $t_{n+1}$ *merely* if S consciously takes it that B is epistemically irrational, whether or not he recalls that he had overriding reason for supposing this. What is essential to the defeater-defeater requirement for theistic belief, then, is not the actual retention of the original ITD against theistic belief but the diachronic extension of the state of internal defeat (as suggested in proposition [2] of section 1). The conscious or reflective accessibility of the original ITD is not required here, but it is sufficient that S consciously takes his belief to be epistemically irrational (and perhaps he recalls that he had overriding reasons for doing so). This is what bears on whether things are epistemically right for the believer's perspective and so determines the fate of internal rationality.

The defeater-defeater requirement, though, is consistent with a belief ceasing to be internally defeated for reasons other than acquiring an ITD*. With the passing of time a person might simply forget that he had taken his theistic belief to be epistemically irrational. Maybe a person gets local amnesia as the result an accident and thereby forgets about prior defeaters to theistic belief, as well as his stance toward them. Suppose a person wakes

up one morning and due to a cognitive disorder no longer takes it (consciously or reflectively) that his theistic belief is epistemically irrational, and the same disorder leaves the person's memory temporarily or permanently altered so that he doesn't (or can't) recall any reasons for thinking that theistic belief is epistemically irrational. Under conditions like these I think a person would no longer be subjectively epistemically irrational in holding theistic belief again, even if she didn't have an ITD*. Whether such beliefs would be *warranted* is another matter.[16]

So in addition to the internal no-defeat condition, we have a **defeater-defeater requirement** that can be stated as follows:

> [DD] (**a**) A person S who acquires an undefeated defeater ITD against his theistic belief T at some time $t_1$ is subjectively epistemically rational in holding T at some later time $t_{n+1}$ only if S has an undefeated ITD* (defeater-defeater) against the ITD at $t_{n+1}$, and (**a**) just if (**b**) the internal defeat of T is diachronically extended to $t_{n+1}$, and where the internal defeat of T is diachronically extended to $t_{n+1}$ if S consciously takes it at $t_{n+1}$ that T is epistemically irrational.[17]

### 3 Revising Classical Evidentialism

[DD] has some important implications for the prospects of reforming the classical evidentialist requirement for religious belief. Although there has been quite a bit written on the negative role of defeaters,[18] there has been relatively little discussion on the *positive* evidential significance of defeaters and defeater-defeaters.[19] But there is good reason for this neglect. The classical evidentialist position (stated in terms of warrant) affirms:

> [CE] Given any person S, S's theistic belief T is warranted only if S has adequate evidence for T (where this is understood to be adequate reasons for supposing that theism is true).

Embedded in this formulation is an evidential relevancy principle or assumption that restricts the range of relevant "evidential items" to what supports the *truth* of theistic belief. This, of course, suggests a fundamental problem for any attempt to reformulate an evidentialist requirement in terms of defeater-defeaters. In cases where a defeater-defeater is a rebutting defeater against (the conclusion of) some original rebutting defeater against theistic belief, the defeater-defeater will be evidence for the truth

of theism. So if an evidential argument from evil provides reasons for supposing that theism is false, a defeater-defeater that rebuts this defeater will be a reason for supposing that theism is true (since it aims to rebut the claim that theism is false). Natural theology would be important to this task. But herein lies the problem: not all defeater-defeaters constitute evidence for the truth of theism. For instance, in the case of an undercutting defeater-defeater I will have overriding reasons for supposing that the premises of an argument from evil fail to be indicative of the truth of the conclusion "there is no God." Alternatively, in the case of a reason-defeating defeater-defeater, one may have overriding reasons for supposing that one of the premises of the argument is false. In each of these instances I lose my reason for supposing that theism is false, but I do not thereby acquire a reason for supposing that theism is true. My defeater-defeater does not give me evidence for the truth of theism. But this is exactly what classical evidentialism demands by way of evidence.[20]

I think that the resolution to this difficulty lies in drawing a distinction, two distinctions to be exact. First, there is the distinction between first-order beliefs B and second-order beliefs B* of the form <S's belief B is Q>, where Q = some epistemic property (e.g., warrant, rationality, or justification). Secondly, there is a distinction between the kinds of evidence that support the truth of each of these lower- and higher-level beliefs. We can think of defeater-defeaters, including undercutters and reason-defeating defeaters, as providing evidence for the truth of certain higher-level beliefs, and such evidence is epistemically significant for rationality and warrant at the lower level.

ITDs involve internal rationality. Internal rationality, loosely speaking, is a matter of things being epistemically right from the believer's perspective as a knowing subject. A person who gets a defeater comes to see (in a way appropriate to her level of conceptual development) that something counts against the truth of B, or outweighs considerations in favor of its truth, to such a degree that holding B (at least with the same degree of firmness) is no longer appropriate given the truth goal of believing. At any rate, she certainly has reasons for believing this by virtue of having overriding reasons for supposing that a belief is false or inadequately grounded.

But then it seems that a person who acquires a defeater acquires an overriding reason for supposing that holding B is *epistemically* irrational, irrational from the epistemic point of view.[21] If the subject acquires a defeater she has reasons for supposing that things are not epistemically right, that continuing to hold B would run *counter* or *against* the epistemic goal of believing. In other words, when a person acquires a defeater, she

acquires reasons that support a certain negative epistemic evaluation of her belief B.

What happens when the defeater gets defeated? On the internal view of rationality under consideration here, a defeater-defeater provides a person with reasons for supposing that holding B would be epistemically right or appropriate again. Since the defeater-defeater removes the grounds for S's taking B to be epistemically irrational, it would seem that the defeater-defeater provides S with reasons for supposing that B is epistemically rational. We must add of course that S not have additional (defeating) reasons for supposing that B is epistemically irrational at the time. Also, it would seem that the strength of the original defeater, as well as the defeater-defeater, is important here. S might originally acquire fairly strong reasons for supposing that theism is false, such that S takes it on these grounds that holding theism and withholding theism are equally epistemically irrational. In that case, some defeater-defeaters (even rebutters) might only provide S with reasons for merely withholding theism (rather than holding theism or its denial). Stronger defeater-defeaters would provide S with reasons for supposing that holding theistic belief is epistemically rational only if S does not hold that belief very firmly. Moreover, we can add to the informal equation here that the ability of a belief to survive defeat can reasonably be thought to strengthen reasons for supposing that B is epistemically rational. So what we should say then is that defeater-defeaters provide a person with reasons for supposing that holding theistic belief (to some degree) is epistemically rational, provided that the defeater-defeater is strong enough relative to the original defeater and other epistemically relevant items at the time.[22] So, given these qualifications, when a defeater gets defeated, though one doesn't necessarily have evidence for the truth of B, one does have evidence (in varying degrees) for the truth of a higher-level claim about the (restored) epistemic rationality of holding the original belief. As the original defeater provides one with reasons for supposing that there is a true *negative* higher-level epistemic proposition, acquiring a defeater-defeater for that defeater provides one with reasons for supposing there is some true *positive* epistemic proposition of the form <S is (now) epistemically rational in holding B>.

What we have is a kind of diachronic epistemic level ascent, which can be applied to theistic belief and represented as follows:

**2nd LEVEL**

**At $t_{n+2}$ {S is subjectively epistemically rational in holding T}**

*At $t_{n+2}$ {S has reasons for supposing that S's holding T is epistemically rational}*

*At $t_{n+2}$ {S acquires an undefeated ITD\* (defeater-defeater) against the ITD}*

**1st LEVEL**

**At $t_2$ {S is subjectively epistemically irrational in holding T}**

*At $t_2$ {S acquires an undefeated ITD against T}*

**0th LEVEL**

**At $t_1$ {S is subjectively epistemically rational in holding some theistic belief T}**

[The italicized statement at the 1st level indicates a *sufficient* condition for the obtaining of the statement in bold at the 1st level. The italicized statements at the 2nd level indicate *necessary* conditions for the obtaining of the statement in bold at the 2nd level.]

So I am thinking of the defeater-defeater requirement as necessary for a kind of internal or subjective epistemic rationality that is in turn necessary for warrant and knowledge. Warrant (or at least the degree of it necessary for knowledge) is adversely affected by subjective epistemic irrationality, which would be generated by holding a theistic belief (with the same degree of firmness) given the possession of an undefeated ITD. So being warranted in a lower-level theistic belief T will require the possession of an ITD\* (defeater-defeater) as long as T is internally defeated. In other words, given the ascent to the 1st level at $t_2$, a move to the 2nd level is necessary to be warranted in holding T at any time $t_{n+2}$ (as long as internal defeat is diachronically extended to $t_{n+2}$). Since the ITD\* at the 2nd level is a reason for supposing that some (positive) higher-level epistemic proposition is true, reasons for the truth of theism are not the only relevant factors in determining whether theistic belief is subjectively epistemically rational and warranted. Evidence for the truth of certain higher-level beliefs is also relevant and is satisfied by an undefeated ITD\*. Defeater-defeaters, if they do not all provide evidence for the truth of theism, do provide evidence for truth of higher-level beliefs about the epistemic rationality of theistic belief. This kind of evidence is sometimes necessary if a person is to remain warranted in holding her theistic belief.

There is an important internalist intuition that the evidentialist tradition tried to capture. This intuition springs in part from the Enlightenment understanding of the human person as naturally reflective and the opposition to religious beliefs that are either not open to critical inquiry or are immune from rational argumentation or evaluation. The internalism of

classical evidentialism really suggests a more general epistemic desideratum, something like *reflective rationality* – the rationality associated with judgments about the epistemic status of one's beliefs, where such judgments are the product of reflection on the adequacy of the grounds of one's belief. But this is higher-level activity. Evidentialist requirements seem appropriate here, in relation to reflective rationality and beliefs that encapsulate epistemic evaluations of lower-level beliefs.[23] One of the basic mistakes of classical evidentialism was to apply such requirements without restriction at the lower level, rather than specify a limited range of circumstances that would require reflective rationality for warrant at the lower level. I think internalist defeat provides such circumstances. Given the state of cognitive internal defeat, reflective rationality (to some degree) is necessary. The evidence, however, that is required for reflective rationality is not restricted to evidence for the truth of the lower-level belief but includes evidence for the truth of higher-level beliefs about the epistemic rationality of lower-level beliefs. So the primary determinant for a proper evidentialist requirement for theistic belief is internal defeat, and the entire range of defeater-defeaters constitutes the scope of appropriate evidence. We can call this form of evidentialism (that conjoins [ND] and [DD]) **defeater-based evidentialism.**

## 4 Defeater-Based Evidentialism and Reformed Epistemology

But is defeater-based evidentialism logically consistent with the central claim of Reformed epistemology? The central claim of Reformed epistemology is that theistic belief can possess positive epistemic status even in the absence of propositional evidence. More properly, there are circumstances C such that, given any human person S, if S is in C and holds some theistic belief T, then S's theistic belief T has positive epistemic status, and where C need not include propositional evidence in support of the truth of theism.

In *Perceiving God* William Alston presents an externalist version of the proper basicality thesis, what he calls the "immediate justification" of theistic belief. Here the epistemic desideratum is truth-conducive justification: the positive epistemic status a belief acquires if and only if it is based on a reliable ground, one that renders it (objectively) likely that a belief held on such grounds is true. Alston focuses on experiential grounds for belief in God, specifically what he calls the non-sensory perceptual awareness of God, plausible grounds for justified beliefs of the form "God is forgiving me", "God is loving", and "God is merciful" (what Alston calls

"manifestation beliefs"). Since the experiential circumstances here need not include anything like arguments or propositional evidence for the existence of God, manifestation beliefs are (or can be) immediately justified.

In *Warrant and Proper Function* Alvin Plantinga argued that a belief has warrant, roughly, just if it is produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly in a congenial environment according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth. The notion of cognitive proper function, though, rests on the idea of a design plan. And in *Warranted Christian Belief* (forthcoming) Plantinga argues that if theism is true, then it is likely that we have been designed to form belief in God in a wide range of experiential circumstances, such as the sight of the starry night sky, the grandeur of the Vermont mountains, and the aesthetically pleasing sound of a Bach concerto. Plantinga maintains that these sorts of circumstances trigger the formation of various kinds of theistic beliefs: God is present, is powerful, is forgiving, etc. But then it follows that there are circumstances C such that, given any human person S, if S is in C and S's (relevant) truth-aimed, cognitive faculties are functioning properly, then S holds a firm (and warranted) basic theistic belief. The experiential circumstances, of course, are not evidences that are taken as premises from which theistic beliefs are derived by a process of inference. They are simply occasions that trigger the formation of theistic belief, so theistic belief is properly basic, warranted but not held on the evidential basis of other beliefs. And if theistic belief is true, it will also be knowledge in a basic way.

[ND] and [DD] each seems consistent with Alstonian and Plantingian versions of Reformed epistemology.

Alston is quite clear that the experiential awareness of God grounds a *prima facie* justified belief that God exists, but (strong) ITDs could override this.[24] We must, I think, distinguish between religious experience without ITDs and religious experience with ITDs. These are two very different kinds of circumstances. Moreover, Alston stresses the importance of multiple sources of support for theistic belief (e.g., religious experience, natural theology, scripture, and creeds), especially in relation to assuaging doubts that could arise with respect to certain grounds of belief in God. This fits nicely with [DD]. For instance, defeater-defeater support may be necessary to restore confidence in experiential grounds of religious belief, especially in the face of widespread projective theories of religious belief. Propositional defeater-defeaters need not completely replace religious grounds in the face of ITDs, but S's having such defeater-defeaters may play a necessary role in the sustenance of justified theistic beliefs and theistic knowledge on Alston's model.[25]

On Plantinga's model, even if the design plan specifies firm theistic belief in some set of circumstances C, this is logically consistent with the design plan specifying a withholding of theistic belief in other circumstances C* which include S's having undefeated ITDs against theistic belief. Here, depending on the actual defeater, the appropriate doxastic response for a reasonable person will be holding a less than firm theistic belief T, holding the denial of T, or holding neither T nor its denial. Other aspects of Plantinga's epistemology seem to support this. Plantinga often draws important analogies between basic theistic belief and other paradigmatic basic beliefs such as sensory perceptual, testimonial, and memorial beliefs. Internal defeasibility certainly seems to be one of the important analogies. Although the design plan specifies that we hold these kinds of beliefs firmly given certain kinds of circumstances, it also makes provision for our withholding such beliefs when (even similar) circumstances include ITDs. If a circumstance includes my being appeared to rainly, then I am proper function rational in holding the belief that it is raining outside, unless of course the relevant circumstance also includes my having certain ITDs for such beliefs (e.g., such as the belief that I am hallucinating). This would seem to imply that there are conditions in which holding theistic belief (or at least doing so firmly) would not be proper function rational or warranted.[26]

What is crucial for the compatibility of Reformed epistemology and my defeater-based evidentialism is that the central claim of Reformed epistemology entails the proper basicality of theistic and Christian belief only in *some* but not all circumstances. This point, which is required by the parity often drawn between religious beliefs and other ordinary, everyday beliefs, reveals not only that theistic and Christian belief can be internally defeated, but like other beliefs that are internally defeated subjective epistemic rationality and warrant requires that defeaters be defeated. The crucial component of defeater-based evidentialism, then, is a negative internalist constraint on positive epistemic status in the form of ITDs and internal defeat. Unless one adopts a pure externalist epistemology (according to which ITDs do not defeat positive epistemic status), it would appear that theistic belief, if true, constitutes knowledge only if it is not internally defeated.

## 5 Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that the notion of internalist defeaters provides a basis for revising classical evidentialism in a way that would make evidentialist requirements for theistic belief logically consistent with the central claims of Reformed epistemology. The key principles here have been an *internalist no-defeat condition* and the *internalist defeater-defeater requirement*, each essential to subjective epistemic rationality and warrant. This revision of classical evidentialism broadens the notion of "evidence" to include evidence that supports higher-level (epistemic) beliefs about the epistemic rationality of lower-level beliefs. It also imposes a contextual or situational evidentialist requirement, one that depends on the personal acquisition of internalist type defeaters or the diachronic extension of internal defeat.

Although I have developed this model according to a particular understanding of internalist defeaters and defeat, there are several other ways of developing the general argument here that would provide similar results. Moreover, although I have focused mainly on theistic belief, the argument here has important implications for Christian belief. Among other things, I should think that the defeater-defeater requirement permits a broad range of considerations both external and *internal* to the Christian tradition to count as potential defeater-defeaters. In this way, the positive epistemic status of theistic and Christian belief can plausibly be viewed as often depending on evidential considerations drawn from within the tradition itself. The Christian doctrines of creation, the fall, and redemption provide potentially rich resources for reasons that can defeat putative defeaters against theistic and Christian belief. But sufficient for the moment are the defeater-defeaters thereof.

My primary goal in this paper has been to show that the notion of internalist defeaters and defeat provides a suitably rich epistemological framework for a reflection on and synthesis of two prominent, interesting, and influential perspectives in the epistemology of religious belief.

## Notes

1   Recent literature along these lines includes Evans: 1994; Greco: 1993; Sudduth: 1995; Wykstra: 1995; Zagzebski (ed.): 1993; Zeis: 1993; 1998.
2   Thinking of defeaters as argument forms, Pollock (Pollock: 1986, 38-39) distinguished between reasons that attack a conclusion (rebutters) and reasons that attack the connection between the premises and the conclusion (under-

cutters). But there are also reasons for thinking that a premise in or propositional component of the defeater is *false*. This sort of defeater attacks neither the conclusion nor the connection between the premises and the conclusion. Here one gets a rebutter for one of the reasons R for B, so B is defeated in such a way that it is not rational to continue holding at least one of the reasons R for B. There is a distinction, then, between a reason R (for some belief B) being defeated by R's ceasing to be rational (as in the case of reason-defeating defeaters) and a reason or ground (for some belief B) being defeated by merely losing its power to confer rationality on B (as in the case of undercutting defeaters). I am indebted to Bergmann (Bergmann: 1997a, 99-103) for the distinction between undercutters and reason-defeating defeaters.

3    The present account is similar to, though not identical with, Plantinga's account of rationality defeaters (in Plantinga: 1993; 1994; 1997), which involves the notion of proper function rationality. On his account D is a defeater for a belief B in some person S's noetic structure N just if S, whose cognitive faculties are functioning properly, would withhold B, hold it less firmly, or hold the negation of B (to some degree) given that S acquires D. I discuss this view of defeaters in Sudduth: 1999a and Sudduth: 1999b.

4    On this sort of logical probability relation, in contrast to the objective statistical probability of the externalist, see Richard Swinburne, "Many Kinds of Rationality of Religious Belief" in the present volume.

5    There is also an externalist version of this according to which R defeats the defeatee only if there is some negative objective relation between them that is spelled out in terms of objective, empirical or statistical probabilities of some sort.

6    Of course, a person might just retract the belief immediately upon acquiring a defeater without ever taking it to be epistemically irrational. So, technically, I suppose we can say that when S acquires a defeater for some belief B, *if S were to continue holding B* he would, on the basis of the defeater, consciously take B to be epistemically irrational.

7    I say "undefeated" defeater because it is possible to have defeating reasons that are not efficacious since they have been defeated by other beliefs in a person's noetic structure. See the earlier distinction in text between undercutting and reason-defeating defeaters.

8    I am avoiding any discussion of deontological justification or rationality, but clearly ITDs might defeat this sort of epistemic desideratum too. And if one thought that deontological justification was necessary for warrant, then that would provide an account of why having an undefeated defeater against B is inconsistent with knowing B. One would simply be violating an appropriate intellectual duty in holding B (with the same degree of firmness) when one sees that B is no longer epistemically rational.

9    This seems to be the position of the externalists Goldman (Goldman: 1986, 62-63, 111-112), Nozick (Nozick: 1981, 196), and Plantinga (Plantinga: 1994). See also Bergmann: 1997b.

10    An alternative here would be to argue that the only defeaters that can defeat warrant are reasons that (a) themselves possess some positive epistemic status or have significant epistemic credentials of a certain type and (b) where such reasons are sufficient for defeat only if there is some negative, objective probabilistic relation between them and the targeted defeatee. The externalist will typically take (b) to be a matter of objective statistical probability, whereas the internalist will take (b) to refer to objective logical probability.

11    Plantinga presents a similar case in Plantinga: 1997, prologue to part IV, 7; Plantinga: 1993, 229-231.

12    I'm not suggesting that there *could* not be anything in Lisa's noetic structure that would defeat the ITD, or prohibit it from being efficacious, only that in my example Lisa has no such resources.

13    Of course, Lisa's holding (s) *prior* to encountering (p) and (q) might prohibit (p) and (q) from being efficacious defeater reasons, and thus prohibit Lisa's acquiring an efficacious defeater against her theistic belief in the first place. The general principle here, also alluded to in the previous endnote, is that any reason R acquired at $t_2$ that defeats a defeater D acquired at $t_1$ could also prohibit the acquisition of D (or at least its efficacy) at $t_1$, if R was held at $t_{n-1}$.

14    On this sort of requirement for grounds, see Moser: 1989, 117-125.

15    For a similar account, especially on the function of memory in internal defeat, see Pollock: 1986, 46-58.

16    Of course a lot of this depends on other features of one's epistemology. Some might employ deontological constraints on the diachronic extension of internal defeat. So, for instance, it might be argued that if one ceases to have an ITD due to epistemic negligence or as long as there are reasons that one ought to have for supposing that theistic belief is epistemically irrational, theistic belief remains defeated. For a deontological account of defeat, see Wolterstorff: 1983, 163-69.

17    Any grounding requirement would be satisfied by either the memorial accessibility of the ITD at $t_{n+1}$ or S's recalling at $t_{n+1}$ that he had an ITD (which was occurrent at $t_1$).

18    Several philosophers have drawn attention to the negative evidential significance of ITDs. They (i) remove deontological rationality (Wolterstorff: 1983, 164-66, 171; Plantinga: 1983, 82-87), (ii) override *prima facie* (truth-conducive) justification (Alston: 1988a), (iii) defeat proper function rationality (Plantinga: 1993, 40-42; 1994), and (iv) undermine knowledge (Goldman: 1986, 62-63; Nozick: 1981, 196).

19    Something like a defeater-defeater requirement has been discussed by Philip Quinn in Quinn: 1993 and John Greco in Greco: 1993, but even these articles do not develop the *evidential* significance of such a requirement and thus its implications for revising classical evidentialism.

20    Plantinga himself points this out in Plantinga: 1983, 84-85 and Plantinga: 1993, 185.

21 This doesn't entail that holding not-B would be epistemically rational, as the rational thing might be to take both B and not-B as epistemically irrational and simply withhold B.

22 For this reason we should also add that the degree to which S has reasons for supposing that holding theism (to some degree) is epistemically rational, given that S has acquired a defeater-defeater, also depends on the post-defeat status of the original grounds for holding theistic belief. Restored internal rationality could be a function of both the (strength of the) defeater-defeater and the original grounds (if they are still operative).

23 I developed this sort of argument in Sudduth: 1995. Although in Sudduth: 1995 I laid out the notion of reflective rationality and a strong evidentialist requirement for all higher-level beliefs, I provided no account of conditions under which either reflective rationality or reasons for higher-level beliefs would be necessary for being warranted in lower-level beliefs.

24 Alston's view of defeaters is not purely internalist, but a mix of internalism and externalism. He would require that defeaters consist of other (truth-conducively) justified beliefs, and that the overriding character of the defeater be a function of objective, empirical probabilistic relations between the defeating reasons and the defeatee.

25 Alston does argue (Alston: 1988b, 177-179) for a pure externalist theory of knowledge according to which S can know that p even if S has an undefeated ITD. Applying this to religious knowledge (as Alston does in 1991a) would entail that [ND] is false with respect to theistic knowledge, even if true with respect to justified theistic belief. However, Alston's example supporting this claim in 1988b involves a subject's acquiring an ITD for p at $t_1$ and S's knowing that p at $t_2$ while S is *not conscious* of the ITD at $t_2$. As I am thinking of ITDs, though, they are conscious states and typically involve a person's consciously taking it that his belief is epistemically irrational. Alston has suggested to me by way of correspondence that it is plausible to suppose that conscious defeaters could block knowledge, provided that the defeaters are of sufficient strength.

26 This is suggested by a design plan in which sensory perceptual, memorial, and testimonial beliefs (which can be defeated) are relevant analogs to basic theistic belief, and it is confirmed when the parity includes internalist defeasibility. Plantinga seems to concede defeasibility parity in chapter 11 of his forthcoming *Warranted Christian Belief*. For a detailed account of internalist defeaters and their epistemic implications in Plantinga's proper function epistemology, see Sudduth: 1999a and Sudduth: 1999b.

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# THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF
# THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

## I Introduction

To what extent is the epistemology of religious belief different from the epistemology of other areas of our belief and to what extent is it similar? The use of "to what extent?" is calculated. We cannot expect either exact sameness or complete difference. There will be at least some points of identity, for example terms of epistemic assessment such as "justified," "warranted," "rational."[1] And at some level of generality the same standards may apply for the application of these terms. But there will also be some points of difference. Most obviously, differences in content will pose different epistemological problems. Beliefs about the nature and activities of a supreme spiritual being cannot be assessed in exactly the same way as beliefs about my front yard.

So the only sensible question is as to the degree and character of the similarities and differences. Keeping that in mind, I want to call attention to the fact that recent English-speaking religious epistemology has strongly tended to stress the similarities. General epistemology has been assiduously mined, by both friend and foe, to provide principles and criteria for the epistemic assessment of religious belief. As for unbelievers, it is standard practice to argue that religious beliefs fail to come up to criteria of rationality that apply in other areas – adequate evidence, support by publicly checkable experience, explanatory efficacy, or whatever. On the other side, we find people like Plantinga (forthcoming) applying a general theory of "warrant" in terms of proper functioning of intellectual faculties to the epistemic status of Christian belief, and Swinburne (Swinburne: 1979) making a like application of theories of explanation and probability. In another corner of the forest, both Swinburne (Swinburne: 1979) and I (Alston: 1991) have argued on general epistemological grounds that putative experience of God provides justification for certain beliefs about God, provided the prima facie justification thus engendered is not overridden by strong enough contrary considerations.