

CHAPTER 8

Bi-Level Evidentialist Theistic Foundationalism

In chapters 4 and 5 I developed a case for modest evidentialism. This version of evidentialism was strengthened by the addition of a strong higher-level evidentialist requirement articulated and defended in chapters 6 and 7. The conjunction of modest evidentialism and strong higher-level evidentialism is what I will call **Bi-Level Evidentialism** - a two level scheme of evidentialist requirements. Throughout these chapters my main focus has been the formulation of the bi-level evidentialist scheme within the context of Plantinga's religious epistemology and to argue for their compatibility. That task I take to be complete. In this final chapter I want to give a more general exposition and elucidation of bi-level evidentialism within the framework of theistic foundationalism, thereby establishing the broader relevance of some of the arguments of the previous chapters. I will first summarize the evidentialist requirements of chapters 4 through 7 and the case for their conjunctive epistemic adequacy. I will then probe the various ways in which immediate and mediate sources provide reciprocal (causal and evidential) support for each other and thereby provide additional confirmation for the conclusions I reached earlier with respect to partly basic/nonbasic theistic belief. The final part of the chapter will spell out bi-level evidentialism within the framework of a version of modest theistic foundationalism. The account will further

vindicate foundationalism, especially theistic foundationalism, against the objections encountered in chapters 1 and 2.

I. Bi-Level Evidentialism

A. Lower- and Higher-Level Evidentialist Requirements

The evidentialist requirements for theistic belief articulated in chapters 4 through 7 may be conveniently divided into lower- and higher-level evidentialist requirements. Roughly speaking, there are evidentialist requirements appropriate at the (lower) level of putative beliefs that Pt and those appropriate at the (higher) level of beliefs involving the attribution of (doxastic or propositional) justification/rationality to putative beliefs that Pt.

In chapter 2 I stated the simple evidentialist requirement as:

- [E] Given any person S, S is rational in believing some theistic proposition Pt only if S's belief that Pt is based on evidence e in the form of adequate reasons, where these reasons are not theologically biased or loaded.

Chapters 4 and 5 presented the material out of which [E] has been chiselled to yield a set of requirements that constitute modest evidentialism. The key (overlapping) concepts for articulating and exploiting a range of plausible evidentialist requirements are (1) cognitive malfunction of immediate sources, (2) defeating conditions (construed internalistically), (3) overdetermining reasons, and the distinction between (4) belief-acquisition and belief-maintenance, (5) complete vs. partial (causal and epistemic) support, and (6) diachronic and synchronic epistemic or justificatory status. Crucial to my entire modest evidentialist account has been exploiting the variable nature of

justificational status (e.g., the time and person relative nature of justification). In particular, my main angle on modifying [E] has been to introduce the relevance of *cognitive circumstance*.

- [II] There are some circumstances C_1, \dots, C_n such that, given any person S, if S is in any C_i of the set $\langle C_1, \dots, C_n \rangle$ at some time t_n , then S is justified in believing that P_t at t_n or t_{n+1} only if S (at least) has the appropriate propositional evidence.

Let's begin with the *circumstances*. The arguments in chapter 5 delineated the importance of propositional evidence in relation to the externalist condition of cognitive malfunction (of the SD-module). For the sake of focusing on the broader relevance and application of my theory I will understand by "circumstances" here situations in which S *has a defeater* for his theistic belief and where "having a defeater" is construed in the internalist sense articulated in chapter 4.¹ If one is a pure externalist and denies the justificatory or epistemic relevance of internalist defeating conditions and/or internalist defeater-defeater requirements, then one will not be inclined to accept this rather significant facet of bi-level evidentialism. But as should now be evident, the attempt to argue for the compatibility of evidentialism and Reformed epistemology depends heavily on the prospects for a case for the compatibility of externalism and some set of internalist requirements for theistic belief. In chapter 1 I stated clearly my preference for some

¹ On Plantinga's theory, cognitive malfunction constitutes a *warrant* defeating circumstance, but not a *rationality* defeating situation. The latter (as explained in chapter 4) is taken in an internalist sense. The "circumstances" as I will understand them in [II] will be defeating circumstances taken in an internalist sense. By this I understand that a defeater will be either an experience or belief (and so internally accessible upon reflection) and where "having a defeater" entails having a belief about some experience e or belief b constituting a (good) reason for believing that a belief B* is likely to be false or that the grounds of B* are inadequate. Since I am interested here in the broader applicability of my theory under the rubric of justification, the defeatee will be *justification* (obviously excluding purely externalist understandings of that property). See below for further discussion.

internalist constraints on justification. The suggestions at that point have been developed in the course of the thesis. My earlier discussion of defeaters, though, was in the context of Plantinga's notion of warrant and proper function. I was mainly concerned about conditions under which a *belief* gets defeated. These were conditions under which a person acquires a reason to modify her noetic structure in a particular fashion (in order to remain rational, in the sense of proper function). But I think we can transfer talk about belief and rationality defeat to *justification* defeat. A person may acquire a reason for regarding a belief as false (rebutting defeater) or for regarding the ground of the belief as inadequate or - for externalists - a process of belief formation as unreliable (undercutting defeater). A belief will be unqualifiedly justified just if there are no undercutting or rebutting defeaters within S's noetic structure. Moreover, depending on the evidential force of such defeaters, they may defeat justification to a greater or lesser extent. Hence, the notion of partial and complete defeat seems to have an analogical extension when it is justification that gets defeated (presumably this is owing to the fact that justification, like belief, comes in degrees).

The second-half of the formulation has been intentionally stated in general terms so as to allow for the multiplicity of distinctions covered in chapters 4 and 5. What is appropriate propositional evidence? That will depend in part on what constitutes the specific defeating condition. Recall that an initial defeater is either (a) rebutting or (b) undercutting. A defeater-defeater will either be a rebutting defeater-defeater for either (a) or (b) or an undercutter for either (a) or (b). So where S's belief that God exists is based on the experiential awareness of God, defeaters could be reasons for believing that (a) God does not exist or (b) the experiential grounds are inadequate or lack efficacy (e.g., an argument claiming as its conclusion that the experiential phenomena were the product of a mental disorder). To rebut (b) would be (i) to have reasons for regarding the grounds of

one's theistic belief as adequate (hence satisfying a higher-level evidentialist requirement). To undercut (b) would be (ii) to have reasons for regarding the atheological argument as unsound or invalid. Similarly, if the defeater had been a reason for believing that God does not exist, an undercutter would involve (iii) reasons for regarding the argument with <God does not exist> as its conclusion as unsound or invalid. To rebut a rebutting defeater to theistic belief would be (iv) to have reasons for the existence of God. It is clear that only (iv) (and possibly (i) indirectly) provides evidential support for the proposition <God exists>. But what the arguments of the previous chapters have drawn attention to is that not all evidentialist-relevant evidence amounts to evidence *for* the existence of God. Given a *prima facie* defeater for some theistic belief that Pt, S will remain justified in holding the belief that Pt only if has a defeater-defeater for this defeater, but not all defeaters will involve evidence for the existence of God. As I explained earlier, evidence for the existence of God would most likely be required where the negative evidential force of the initial defeater was quite high (given S's own inductive standards, etc.).²

So the "appropriate evidence" slot may be filled by evidence which provides "adequate evidential support for the target theistic proposition" or which merely provides "adequate defeater-defeater evidence" (evidence which defeats a defeater to theistic belief). Here I have left open the matter of the causal relevance of (i)-(iv), the focus of discussion in chapters 4 and 5. I am of the opinion, supported earlier, that (i)-(iv) are all

² If S's own inductive standards seem too liberal for remaining justified, we can easily distinguish between objective and subjective justification. As S is objectively justified in believing that Pt only if it is in fact rendered probable by evidence e given correct inductive standards, S will be objectively justified in continuing to believe that Pt only if S has (objectively?) adequate evidence for the existence of God, given a rebutting defeater whose negative evidential force is fairly high given correct inductive standards. Clearly, though, the reality is somewhere in between, as people's inductive and logical beliefs are frequently a mixture of false and true.

potentially causally relevant for a person's continuing to hold theistic belief. Presumably this is because they are all potentially evidentially relevant for S's continuing to hold theistic belief (given defeaters), even if only some of what is evidentially relevant here is evidence for the existence of God. If one holds to a source-relevant view of justification, then (i)-(iv) will be factored into what confers justification. I leave that possibility open.

In chapter 2 I also claimed that the classical evidentialist package has given us at least two ways to think about the evidential grounding and requirements for theistic belief which involve some kind of second-order internalist requirement.

- [E1] Given any human person S, S's belief that Pt is rational only if (a) the belief that Pt is based on propositional evidence e that renders Pt probable relative to *correct* inductive standards and (b) S rationally believes (or is capable of believing just on reflection) that <e provides adequate evidential support for Pt>.
- [E2] Given any human person S, S's belief that Pt is rational only if (a) S's belief that Pt is based on propositional evidence e that renders Pt probable relative to S's *own* inductive standards and (b) S rationally believes (or is capable of believing just on reflection) that <e provides adequate evidential support for Pt>.

My response, fully developed in chapters 6 and 7, was that the kinds of internalist requirements stipulated in (a) and (b) above are only necessary in an unqualified sense for justification where the belief that Pt is replaced by a belief about the epistemic or justificatory status of the proposition (or belief that) Pt. Combining the propositional and doxastic theses:

- [II] S exhibits *reflective rationality* with respect to the belief/proposition Pt just if S has adequate reasons for supposing that the grounds (or evidence) for the belief/proposition Pt provide adequate support for the belief/proposition Pt.

Propositional evidence, and especially evidence involving second-order internalist conditions, is unqualifiedly necessary for reflective justification. As explained in chapter 1 (section III.A), reflective rationality as I have been thinking of it is closely related to procedural epistemic rationality, and [II] could be expanded further to elaborate this relationship and its epistemic consequences. Briefly, when one satisfies conditions of procedural epistemic rationality with respect to some belief that *p*, one is pursuing epistemic policies or seeking to ensure that one's belief that *p* is likely to be true. This (voluntary) activity is what leads one to a consideration of evidence about whether one's belief is likely to be true and thus to what extent it is a rational or justified belief. This is what I referred to as the diachronic dimension to reflective rationality. There is a process here of investigation and critical reflection on the evidence for one's belief that *p*, in contrast to the synchronic dimension to reflective rationality which is one's judgement about the justificatory status of one's belief (the culmination of diachronic aspect). Procedural epistemic rationality vis-à-vis some belief that *p* entails diachronic reflective rationality toward the belief that *p*, and the latter culminates in a state of synchronic reflective rationality toward the belief that *p*. It is synchronic reflective rationality which is stipulated in [III].

Higher-level requirements will be necessary for being justified in the belief that *Pt* only where reflective rationality is necessary for lower-level justification, and the necessity of (diachronic and synchronic) reflective rationality will in turn be determined primarily by matters such as the presence of the relevant defeating conditions. Typically, where a person acquires a rebutting defeater for theistic belief, *S*'s possessing a rebutting defeater-defeater (against the initial defeater) will require either mere evidence for the existence of God (weak thesis) or internalist reflective rationality (strong thesis). Usually

such propositional evidence will contribute toward the (at least partial) causal sustenance of a person's theistic belief. Where a person acquires an undercutting defeater for theistic belief, some version of doxastic reflective rationality will sometimes be required. In other words, where doubts arise about the adequacy of one's grounds for believing in God (e.g., whether religious experience is an adequate ground), the doubts may be assuaged by S's having either an undercutting defeater-defeater (a reason to believe that the grounds for the original defeater are inadequate or the argument unsound) or a rebutting defeater-defeater, the latter being reasons for supposing that one's ground is adequate *contra* the objection that it is inadequate. Depending on the view of adequacy, this could (on an internalist account for instance) amount to evidence for the existence of God.³ So we end up with a third general principle:

- [III] Given any person S, S's belief that Pt is justified only if S satisfies the conditions of reflective rationality just if S is in some restricted defeating circumstance C* such that in C* S needs reasons for believing that the grounds of his theistic belief are adequate.

B. The Epistemic Adequacy of Bi-Level Evidentialism

Does the conjunction of strong higher-level evidentialism and modest lower-level evidentialism constitute an epistemically adequate form of evidentialism? Whether we take "epistemic" here in the broad sense inclusive of justification or more narrowly in the

³ Recall that on an internalist account, where one's grounds for theistic belief involve reasons such as found in natural theology, evidence for the adequacy of these grounds will equal the adequacy of evidence for the existence of God. By contrast, on an externalist view, evidence for the adequacy of an immediate (or mediate) ground is (minimally at any rate) evidence for the reliability of such grounds or processes which gave rise to the belief. How this is evidence for the existence of God is, as noted in the last chapter, indirect at best.

sense of “knowledge”, I think the answer is yes.

In “Alstonian Foundationalism and Higher-Level Theistic Evidentialism” (1995a), I claimed that the higher-level evidentialist requirement, inasmuch as it is necessary for reflective justification, is an epistemically adequate form of evidentialism. I now see that my earlier account was mistaken for at least two reasons. Although reasons are necessary for reflective rationality I imposed nothing in the way of conditions or circumstances under which reflective justification was necessary. So the evidentialism was slightly truncated. An epistemically adequate form of evidentialism, as I now see it, must impose evidentialist requirements on the lower level. The present account, though, specifies the kinds of defeating conditions that would require reflective rationality. More specifically, by stating the sorts of defeating conditions that would call for various (justified) beliefs about the adequacy of grounds at the lower level, it has provided a case for the necessity of the higher-level evidentialist requirement. My intuition was correct I think with respect to the internalist demands of classical evidentialism being more appropriate as a general requirement at the higher-level. The classical tradition had simply failed to distinguish between the sort of rationality which goes with critical reflection on our beliefs and the kind of rationality appropriate to being in a favourable state vis-à-vis the epistemic point of view. What I have done in chapters 6 and 7 is to further develop these considerations by explicitly relating second-order internalism, reflective rationality, and defeating conditions. Moreover, this has enabled me to address more explicitly the ways in which reflective justification can contribute to the justification of theistic beliefs (e.g., overdetermination, partial support, etc.). My earlier account simply failed to exploit ways in which there could be a range of plausible evidentialist requirements *at the lower level*. The development of modest evidentialism has I trusted answered the evidential lacuna in my earlier case.

Clearly the concept of defeaters has played a large role in the bi-level evidentialist scheme. Another mistake of the classical evidentialist tradition was its failure to make evidentialist requirements relative to individual subjects and their cognitive situation, rather than relative to certain kinds of beliefs. Perhaps it was the idea that there are defeaters to theistic belief which led philosophers to impose the kinds of evidentialist requirements we have looked at. In any event, the point was - if operational - wholly obscured by the ahistorical, nonperspectival, and unqualified nature of classical theistic evidentialism. By introducing evidentially-relevant features of a person's cognitive situation (primarily defeaters), my account avoids the apparent arbitrariness of the sort of evidentialist requirements introduced by classical evidentialism. At the same time, this move alleviates the worry of arbitrariness in the other direction - "just anything goes." Modest evidentialism has exploited and employed the contemporary emphasis of justification's being person and time relative, and has from that drawn out the notion of cognitive circumstances as a major determinant for when evidentialist requirements for justification should be imposed and of what sort such requirements are. In this way my account is sympathetic to some of the features of communal evidentialism (Wykstra 1989 and Kenny 1992) according to which the justification or rationality of theistic belief depends on whether there are arguments for theistic belief in one's community. My own spin on this would provide a more fundamental explanation of this in terms of defeating conditions. This also shows my evidentialist position to have much affinity with the kind sketched by John Greco 1993, according to which natural theology is necessary for theistic knowledge in epistemically hostile conditions (where these conditions include the kinds of defeating conditions I have included in my account).

Another aspect to my account that diverges from the classical tradition is that not all reasons for belief in God will be evidence for the existence of God. In many instances,

the sort of propositional evidence which is required for a person's remaining justified in believing in God consists of reasons for supposing that certain defeater-defeaters hold. But these will not always come in the form of propositions that entail or make probable the content of traditional natural theology. Secondly, the preceding observations suggest my account is interested in highlighting both synchronic and diachronic aspects to rationality - a matter overlooked by classical evidentialism with its static view of rationality. Hence, I am able to combine a rather liberal view on the sorts of beliefs which are properly basic for a person at the time of belief acquisition with a more conservative position on what is properly basic for a person at any time during a belief's maintenance. Here I am also able to utilize multiple sources of theistic belief and to exploit a broad range of distinctions between partial and complete support, causal and evidential support, overdetermination, etc. Secondly, the diachronic dimension to rationality allows a framework for discussing evidential requirements in relation to dispositional aspects of a noetic structure, as well as articulating the processes of critical reflection which culminate in justified higher-order beliefs.

It seems to me that, for reasons canvassed in chapters 4 through 7, all the aforementioned conditions are crucial to justification and knowledge (on both internalist and non-pure externalist accounts). Consequently, an epistemically adequate form of evidentialism must integrate them into the epistemological picture. Bi-level evidentialism does just that, and is therefore an epistemically adequate form of evidentialism. There is certainly room for further discussion as to spelling out some of the particular details of the general theory. How will things turn out on an Alstonian externalist reading vs on a Plantingian externalist account (some of this we have already seen)? How will some of the details turn out on a more internalist perspective of justification? Once we see, though, that a very thoroughgoing externalism as to what justification *is* is compatible

with internalist requirements as to what conditions are necessary for the justification of beliefs of such and such sort on such and such an occasion, we will have clarified an important way in which there can be an epistemically adequate form of evidentialism within an externalist framework. And if it is true for externalism, *a fortiori* it will be true for pure internalist epistemologies. The flexibility of bi-level evidentialism at this juncture, its ability to accommodate multiple foundationalist epistemological frameworks is not only evidence for the broader relevance of the sort of requirements it lays down but an indication of its explanatory power and so evidence of its epistemic adequacy.

II. A Variety of Mutual Support Relations

One of the important aspects to the arguments of earlier chapters was the idea of partial (causal and epistemic) support from multiple sources. As a prelude to explicating my general modest theistic foundationalism, I offer a more detailed account of the interaction between immediate and mediate sources.

A. Sources of Theistic Belief(s): Immediate and Mediate

One of the popular models for immediately justified theistic belief is *religious experience*. One sense of religious experience that is relevant here is when God is perceived in the perceiving of ordinary non-religious public phenomena. Two men may both have the same sensations while gazing into the starry night sky, but one may see it as the work of God, created and sustained by His wisdom and power while the other does not see it as such. The latter, though, having the same sensations, does not have an experience in which it seems (epistemically) to him to be an experience of God. This is

the kind of religious experience that figures prominently in Plantinga, though Plantinga unpacks this in terms of a design plan. Of our two men the former exemplifies proper function but the latter cognitive malfunction, for our cognitive system has been designed to see God or experience his presence in the perceiving of a wide range of publicly observable phenomena. This kind of experiential basis for theistic belief is to be contrasted with the model we find in Alston's *Perceiving God* (1991c). Alston (1991c, p. 14-20) takes it that there is (what some people take to be) an awareness of God which is distinct from thinking about God, calling up mental images, reasoning, remembering, and the like. Such cases constitute an experiential awareness of God that is analogous to the awareness we (apparently) have of objects in the physical environment through sense experience. God (or what is taken by the subject to be God) is *presented* to one's consciousness. This nonsensory experiential awareness is direct, and as such it contrasts with cases in which a person is aware of some X by being aware of something else Y. The experience is of God by virtue of the (logical) object of perception being taken to possess characteristics such as the source of existence, goodness, justice, moral lawgiver, and the author of salvation. Alston takes it that many cases in which people are aware of such a being as forgiving or guiding or as present involve the direct experiential awareness of God. What we have here are cases in which the perception of God is not mediated through either public or private sensations (or in which, if anything like sensation is involved, it is private and not describable by the use of words in normal vocabulary, except by virtue of an analogical extension of such words).

Other models of immediate justification are not as clearly experiential models. The prospects here can be developed in terms of *externalism* or, more specifically, *reliabilism*. Plantinga and Alston both countenance the possibility of theistic belief formation in which there is nothing in the way of grounds (or at least recognizable as

such) which function as a basis for the belief. Plantinga (1991, p. 310; 1992, p. 56) suggests that theistic belief may also resemble memory and *a priori* beliefs (which Plantinga takes to have nothing in the way of grounds, despite the phenomenal qualities which accompany them). Just as $2 + 2 = 4$ just strikes some people as true, so $\langle \text{God exists} \rangle$ just strikes some people as obviously true. For Plantinga, as long as such scenarios constitute proper function the beliefs are rational and (given the satisfaction of the other warrant conditions) knowledge. Alston (1991c, p. 285) notes cases in which people simply find themselves believing the doctrines of a particular religion, and where such people have actually been moved to form such beliefs by the grace of God. Such beliefs would be immediate beliefs. And if we suppose that the process here, not accessible to the subject, is in fact a highly reliable mode of belief formation, then such instances could satisfy the conditions of a reliabilist theory. If reliability is sufficient for knowledge, then we would have cases of immediate knowledge (Alston 1991b); in the case of justification, immediate justification. On either scenario, though, there does not appear to be any grounds for the belief. Such cases *might* be thought to represent a kind of religious experience. Otherwise, we have here cases of the nonexperiential immediate justification of theistic belief.

Mediate sources turn out to be at least as diverse as our putative immediate sources. Within Christianity, *the Bible* is a source for much of what individuals believe about God. From the Bible we learn about the nature and activity of God, especially God's redemptive plan centered in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We also gain putative knowledge of matters relating to the Christian life and the church. Equally, it would seem that *tradition* is a source for a lot of what people will understand about God's nature and activities, especially where tradition is necessary for the acquisition of a framework for interpreting Scripture. Here it is important also to mention

the role of *testimony* in the acquisition (and sustenance) of theistic beliefs. Children (at least in religious families) learn much of their basic data about God and his relations to the world and have it reinforced from what they are told and taught by their parents. It would also appear that tradition and testimony provide the context within which people approach and read the text of Scripture. Tradition and testimony may also each be a source for a variety of beliefs about the status and role of Scripture, where these do not follow from Scripture itself. A third source for beliefs about God is *natural theology*, what I have understood to mean what can be known (or justifiably believed) about God (his existence and nature) by natural reason alone. In other terms, assuming only the data of experience (i.e., very general empirical phenomena described nontheologically - see chapter 6, section III.A) and what we derive (probabilistically and deductively) from experience, as well as matters which are determined *a priori*, what is it that can be known about the existence and nature of God? Those arguments that take as their starting-points the existence of a complex physical system, or just certain facets within it, such as motion or causation, or regularities of succession and/or co-presence represent just two paradigm cases of natural theology. It is these last sorts of reasons that have traditionally been viewed as required from the evidentialist perspective because such reasons are (so it has been thought) accessible to most rational people or at least are not obviously theologically biased so as to beg the question for the theistic case.

Doubtless these three sources of religious belief have an interesting and dynamic interaction, in fact one which is crucial to grasping to see how in general reason makes possible certain kinds of religious experience (a matter pursued below). Tradition is frequently an amalgamation (happy or not) of natural theology and biblical theology. Classical theism, for instance, is as indebted to Greek philosophy as it is to the Bible.⁴

⁴ See Christopher Stead 1994 and L.P. Gerson 1990.

The recent trend to modify the classical doctrine of God is in some instances an attempt at (in addition to achieving a greater degree of coherence in the concept of God), to let a biblical view of God speak for itself as it were.⁵ Tradition can place constraints on what is accepted by natural theology, and conversely. And each plays an equally important role in the interpretation of the text of Scripture itself.⁶

B. The Background System and Types of Reciprocal Support

The sort of interaction between immediate and mediate sources for theistic belief alluded to above may be exemplified with reference to the role of a subject's background system of beliefs and the various ways in which immediate and mediate sources may provide reciprocal (causal and epistemic) support for each other.⁷

When discussing an immediate source like Alston's experiential awareness of God, a question arises as to how an individual determines that it is *God* who is presented to their consciousness, as well as what links some particular phenomenal content with objective properties attributed to God on the basis of an experience of such and such kind. In the sensory perceptual realm, how things appear to one (their identification and the attribution of properties) requires as a minimal precondition the possession of the requisite concepts. Depending on the sophistication of the belief in question, the holding of (nonoccurrent) prior beliefs about these objects and their properties may also be required. This will often be true in the case of beliefs about God. But the identification of

⁵ See Nicholas Wolterstorff, "God Everlasting" in 1982 and Swinburne 1977 (pp. 216-17).

⁶ See Swinburne 1992 (pp. 130-145).

⁷ This is developed with considerable detail by Alston in 1991c (pp. 81-101, 286-307). My account draws heavily on Alston's observations and arguments.

God and the attribution of certain properties to Him may not only require the mere possession of a background system of beliefs but it may entail causal and/or epistemic dependence on (at least some portion of) such a background system of beliefs. Sometimes doxastic input does factor into the basis of (otherwise) wholly experientially grounded theistic beliefs. Identifying a perceived object as God and attributing certain properties (e.g., goodness, eternity, omniscience, omnipotence) to the object sometimes involves beliefs which are partly immediately and partly mediately justified. Reliance on a background system of belief about God's nature and activity does not entail that an experiential awareness of God as good or as guiding one is (causally) based, even in part, on such background beliefs, only that sometimes this is the case. As Alston notes (1991c, p. 91-99), what makes it possible for background information in the form of adequacy assumptions and contextual beliefs not to figure as a partial basis for subject identification and predicate attribution in the experiential awareness of God is that the information has been "internalized in the form of perceptual skills, skills of perceptual recognition, and no longer needs to figure as propositional contents of beliefs" (p. 91). At the same time it is recognized that metaphysical and theological beliefs do function as a partial basis in *some* cases (see Alston, 1991c, pp. 94-95, 294-295). Moreover, on a source-relevant view of justification, this causal contribution will normally translate into a justificatory contribution, for on that view what a belief is based on (i.e., its ground or causal source) is (if adequate) what also confers justification on a belief.

There is also the matter of reciprocal support relations between immediate and mediate sources. First, there is the different range of content supplied by different sources. Experience may be a sufficient ground for the formation (and sustenance) of some theistic beliefs, but not others. Revelation and natural theology, though, may be necessary to supply a person with certain theistic beliefs, such as beliefs about God's

essential nature and God's redemptive activity in the past. It may be that the propositional content of some theistic beliefs requires experiential input. Alston, for instance, holds that "In mystical perception one can learn about what God is doing vis-à-vis oneself at the moment, reproofing, forgiving, instructing, guiding, comforting, just being present; and one can learn what God's will is for oneself in particular. We can't get any of this out of natural theology and general revelation" (1991c, p. 293). Although it seems that some of these matters may be arrived at inferentially, there is certainly considerable merit to the general line of reasoning here. I may learn from *testimony* and the church that God is good and what kinds of good actions he does. From *experience* I may learn that God has been good to me (say, by the perception of some divine work of supererogation in my life). From *the Bible* I may learn that God is the sort of person who does such actions. And from *natural theology* I may learn that God is infinitely and essentially good. Secondly, there is the question of the frequency and clarity of our respective sources of theistic belief. In addition to not being universally distributed, the direct experiential awareness of God is not typically a constant goings-on in a person's life, and even when one has it, it is often fleeting and obscure. There is a question as to how theistic beliefs based on such momentary grounds may be sustained over time. Although at time t_1 , I may be aware of God as present, I will not typically have this awareness at every later time. My belief that God *is* present at these later times will have to be held on other grounds (e.g., reasons entailing God's omnipresence), perhaps in conjunction with my memory belief that God appeared to me as present in the past (assuming that my memory is fairly strong). Nor should it be thought that the latter scenario involves beliefs any less vivid or forceful than those formed on experiential grounds.

Thirdly, there is the rather obvious negative justificatory function that the background system plays by supplying a person with the doxastic framework from which

defeaters for theistic beliefs emerge. The fate of *ultima facie* justification will depend on the background system of beliefs. Fourthly, on the positive side, there is the sense in which distinct grounds may lend evidential (or psychological) support to each other. We can think of instances in which a belief has some degree of justification on one ground, and an additional ground may *increase* justification. This will be relevant whether or not one holds that there is some N^{th} degree of justification required by the concept “justification” or at least which will be sufficient (along with true belief) for knowledge. Where there is some required N^{th} degree, typically it will not be maximal, and so will admit of being strengthened by additional sources. This will be important because presumably if justification comes in degrees so does lack of justification, say as caused by defeating conditions. So even where justification on some experiential ground G_1 is to the N^{th} degree, an increase in justification from some other *propositional* ground G_2 may provide some degree of insulation from a certain range of defeaters which would otherwise drop the justification of the belief below the N^{th} degree. What this in turn suggests is that even if at the time of a belief’s formation it is justified to some fairly high degree, the increase of justification during the maintenance of a belief may not be superfluous given the range of putative defeaters that could reduce the degree of justification. And if the N^{th} degree is necessary for knowledge, then multiple (actual or potential) grounds may determine whether a belief retains in status as knowledge under certain conditions. To the extent that one’s noetic structure (or even one’s substructure of religious beliefs) enjoy independent and mutually coherent support, the overall justificatory status of such beliefs, and the structure itself, is increased.

These considerations are particularly relevant given the real possibility for doubts arising regarding a belief on some particular ground, where these doubts may to some extent be assuaged by a consideration of the belief on some other ground. For instance,

one may have reason to doubt the genuineness of the experiential awareness of God. Perhaps there is some naturalistic explanation of the phenomenon that better explains the experience or even rules out anything beyond natural factors. Independent reason to believe that God exists and is the sort of person who is likely to reveal himself to humans (or at least that this is logically possible) makes the belief (and claim) that one was experientially aware of God more plausible. Equally, doubts may arise about mediate sources. The strength of arguments in natural theology, for instance, not infrequently boil down to disputed questions on the nature of explanation and the relative weight given to matters such as prior probability (and its constituents: simplicity, scope, and background knowledge) and explanatory power. Point being that it is not radically implausible to appeal to the (alleged) direct perception of God to counter doubts which may legitimately arise regarding mediate sources of theistic belief.

Mutual support then can take several forms. It may be that S believes that Pt_1 <God is sustaining me in being> on the basis of some experiential ground G_1 , but some propositional ground G_2 also provides support for the belief that Pt_1 . Let us suppose that G_2 consists of some considerations drawn from natural theology to the effect that there is a sustaining cause of the universe. G_2 provides independent reason for believing that *what* S is aware of exists. A further ground G_3 might support the claim that the object of perception is the sort of being who might very well reveal Himself through religious experience. Now G_2 directly supports the more general theistic belief that Pt_2 <there is a sustaining cause to the universe> (where Pt_2 is entailed by Pt_1). Now G_2 and G_3 together provide evidence for the further belief that < G_1 supports the belief that God is sustaining S in being>. This of course indirectly lends support to the original belief that Pt_1 (for where we have evidence that the experiential perception of God provides *prima facie* justification for perceptual beliefs about God we have indirect evidence for those

perceptual beliefs). Now where the belief that Pt_1 is justified to some N^{th} degree by being based on G_1 , the additional evidential support provided by grounds G_2 and G_3 would result in increasing the degree of justification for the belief that Pt_1 to some extent.⁸ Equally, such additional support might make the difference to a person's *remaining* justified in believing that Pt_1 where G_2 and G_3 may assuage doubts raised by undercutting or rebutting defeaters of the belief that Pt_1 based on G_1 .

III. Modest Theistic Foundationalism

Now we can consider the consequences of the material in Parts I and II for a modest version of theistic foundationalism.

A. Core Theistic Foundationalism

Versions of theistic foundationalism maintain that theistic belief can belong to the foundations of one's noetic structure. My first suggestion here is to point out that since my version of modest theistic foundationalism highlights the person relative nature of the basicity/nonbasicity distinction, it will not maintain that every person has the same foundational theistic beliefs. What is basic for one person may well be nonbasic for another person.

[T1] There are some (classes of) people S^*_1 and S^*_2 , such that S^*_1 believe that Pt in a basic way (at time t_1) and S^*_2 believe that Pt in a nonbasic way (at

⁸ If one does **not** hold to a source-relevant view of justification this could happen solely by virtue of the evidential significance of the support relations between beliefs within S 's noetic structure, for on the non-source-relevant view justification hangs on the evidence one has (potential grounds), not what the belief is actually based on.

time t_1).

This requires some elucidation though. Up to this point we have been speaking rather indiscriminately about various beliefs that Pt, where these are typically something on the order of God is forgiving me, is guiding me, is sustaining me in being, etc - beliefs which self-evidently entail the more general proposition <God exists>. Of course, depending on one's model of immediate justification, other theistic beliefs, such as <God exists>, may very well be susceptible to immediate justification. I don't want to get too bogged down with this technicality. The point here is that a foundationalist account of theistic belief should recognize a variety of theistic beliefs as potentially foundational and nonbasic (and where each entails the generalized proposition "there is a God"). Furthermore, it will recognize how foundational theistic beliefs may play a role in generating or sustaining superstructure theistic beliefs. Theistic foundationalism need not hold that all theistic beliefs are foundational (or even immediately justified). In fact, I see no reason to hold that *any* theistic beliefs will at some time(s) or at all times be foundational for every theist (a point I shall return to shortly). Many religious beliefs will be based on a variety of mediate sources: testimony, scripture, natural theology, etc. Perhaps some of these are ultimately based on immediate sources. What is being claimed by theistic foundationalism is that some theistic beliefs are immediately justified for some people and for these people suffice to hold up a justificatory path that issues in a range of mediately justified beliefs.

Typically, the other beliefs generated or sustained by foundational theistic beliefs will be theistic,⁹ and that raises the question about the interaction between foundational

⁹ I say "typically" because of cases where nontheistic propositions are (purportedly) supported by theistic ones. For instance, Descartes' notorious attempt to ground the reliability of sense perception in the existence of God, who as an essentially good being would not deceive humans in their clear and distinct perceptions.

and superstructure theistic beliefs. An obvious path was considered earlier. S's belief that <God is present> self-evidently entails that <God exists>. The more interesting cases I take it result from inferential relationships that are not self-evident entailments like this. Such inferential relationships will develop as a result of what one takes God to be (e.g., creator, omnipotent, eternal) and what one takes God to will for our lives (e.g., in the way of commandments). Some of these will in turn depend on mediate sources (e.g., the Bible, natural theology). In Part II, I suggested that religious experience (certainly as Alston develops it) grounds very specific sorts of claims about how God is vis-à-vis the believer; whereas the mediate sources, such as natural theology, tend to give us general statements about God's nature. No doubt, though, one may be led to form beliefs about how God *will* act in one's life in the future on the basis of general considerations about God's nature and will (derived from mediate sources) and a belief that God is (now) acting in one's life in a certain way (based on religious experience). A person may at some point in prayer have an experiential awareness of God, and on that basis he may believe that God is present, hears and forgives. The person may be led from considerations of God's omnipotence, goodness, and omniscience to conclude that God will be present, hear, and forgive him at some later time (even if at that time they lack, for whatever reason, an experiential awareness of God as present, etc.).¹⁰ Ultimately, it seems that one's theology is usually built up from both immediate and mediate sources

¹⁰ So, for instance, S is experientially presented with God as sustaining S in being at time t_1 , and so this belief that P_{t_1} is immediately justified. S also justifiably believes that P_{t_2} <God is essentially eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good>, where this conjunctive belief is mediately justified, say by being based on a conjunction of the Bible and natural theology. S's belief that P_{t_1} and belief that P_{t_2} together support S's further belief that P_{t_3} <God will sustain me in being at some later time t_2 >. Alternatively, at time t_2 S may believe that P_{t_1} <God is sustaining me in being> on the basis (a) the memory belief that <God experientially presented himself as sustaining me in being at time t_1 > and (b) the belief that P_{t_2} . In this latter case, the belief that <God is sustaining me in being> is immediately justified on the basis of mystical perception at time t_1 but mediately justified at time t_2 .

which have, as outlined at the beginning of this chapter, integral and varied relationships of mutual support. So as far as content goes, theistic foundationalism may assert theistic beliefs at both the basic and nonbasic level.

[T2] Typically, a noetic structure in which there is a set of theistic beliefs $\{B_{t_1}, \dots, B_{t_n}\}$ at some time t_n will be such that the two proper subsets of $\{B_{t_1}, \dots, B_{t_n}\}$ are (a) a set of basic beliefs $\{B_{t_{b_1}}, \dots, B_{t_{b_n}}\}$ and (b) a set of nonbasic theistic beliefs $\{B_{t_{n_1}}, \dots, B_{t_{n_m}}\}$, and where some basic belief(s) B_{b_i} generates or sustains (partially or fully) some justificatory theistic path leading into the superstructure of one's beliefs and one or more nonbasic theistic beliefs B_{n_i} .

I say "typically" above in order to leave open the possibility that a person's theistic beliefs may all be basic or all nonbasic. As for the former, I find this somewhat unusual. That there do not appear to be any logical or conceptual limits to how X can appear to S might lead one to think that the entire system of one's religious beliefs could be basic (as perceptual) without any great sacrifice to the propositional content of one's religious beliefs. However, contingent limits on how X can appear to a person are generally arrived at by experience and induction. As an empirical point, then, immediately justified theistic beliefs (certainly those based on experiential grounds of the Alstonian type) have a restricted range of propositional content. Moreover, even if we allow immediate sources to include beliefs based on religious experience, those that just strike a person as true, and those that are reliably formed, it seems that a whole lot of what people do in fact believe about God and divine activity in the world is significantly shaped by other beliefs derived from the Bible, a particular theological tradition, or natural theology. Moreover, typically people will believe propositions entailed or rendered probable by other things they believe provided that they see such evidential connections hold, and these will usually be cases of nonbasic belief. As stated earlier, since I am regarding testimony as a mediate source, pointing to the bulk of material

accepted on the authority of the church or one's parents does nothing more than support the present claim that a noetic structure with theistic beliefs but no nonbasic theistic beliefs is unusual.

It would seem that a noetic structure in which all theistic beliefs are basic would require that either (I) the propositional objects of a person's set of basic theistic beliefs have no (necessary or probable) theistic entailments or (II) though such entailments hold, the subject either (A) does not see that any of them hold or (B) sees that the entailments hold, but either (i) does not believe the entailments or (ii) believes them in a basic way. (I) is necessarily false, for every theistic proposition will have some theistic entailments just by way of immediate inference (e.g., contraposition, obversion, inversion). There are also the standard cases of self-evident theistic entailments such as if <God is forgiving me> then <God exists>. It is not clear in these cases though whether a person believes the consequent on the basis of the antecedent. This still leaves open cases of (what is more obviously) mediate inference, and of course the more theistic propositions one believes, the greater the number (or at least possibility) of mediate inferences from the conjunction of at least two such propositions. So even if we rephrased (I) so as to allow immediate inference and trivial theistic entailments, we would have to limit the number of basic theistic beliefs to a very small set. The conjunction of (II) and (A) is logically and psychologically possible, but still considerably unusual, especially if we take the development and exercise of a person's logical capacities through their entire life. It would seem most improbable that at no point would some theistic belief be formed on the basis of another theistic belief. Also under (II), the conjunction of (B) and (i) does happen, but is generally not considered to be a rational cognitive state. And it is hard to see that any person will always be in such a state. The conjunction of (B) and (ii) is perhaps the most plausible, though still unlikely for most people given their stock of

theistic beliefs. So I judge that a noetic structure in which all theistic beliefs are basic is a highly unusual situation at any time for a normal adult, much less throughout one's adult life.

The other scenario of a noetic structure with all nonbasic theistic beliefs I do not find as unusual as our first noetic situation. For one, most of the beliefs that are the paradigmatic basic theistic beliefs are susceptible to being based on reasons (perhaps held in conjunction with basic nontheistic beliefs). The belief that <God is sustaining me in being> may well be an inference to the best explanation, given certain beliefs about God's nature and status as creator, as well as perhaps beliefs about my present existence. Beliefs that God will do such and such in my life if I do such and such may be formed by beliefs that these are divine promises and that I have kept his commandments. We are not faced with the same degree of restriction on propositional content when dealing with nonbasic theistic beliefs. Nor need nonbasic theistic belief be held with any less conviction or spontaneity than basic theistic belief. As argued in chapter 3 temporal immediacy and a high degree of belief may characterize nonbasic as well as basic beliefs. So I don't see that a person who has only nonbasic theistic beliefs is even worse off *religiously*, where spontaneity and strength of belief are thought to be essential to religious worship or the religious affections. Of course I qualify my comments here with a suggestion developed in chapter 5, that the holding of certain nonbasic theistic beliefs might dispose some people to have the sorts of experiences which result in (at least partly) immediately justified theistic beliefs. This might suggest that it would be somewhat unusual for a person with a healthy stock of (nonbasic) theistic beliefs never at any point to acquire a basic theistic belief. Some of these instances may of course require only a partly immediately justified theistic belief (a matter to be further considered below). Suffice it to say, even with this concession I still judge that a noetic structure in

which all theistic beliefs are nonbasic is (even if unusual) not as unusual as one in which they are all basic.

Following on this, a word should also be spoken regarding the sorts of conditions that dispose a particular person to form theistic beliefs in a basic or nonbasic way. Some people do not have the sort of experiences that can ground immediately justified theistic beliefs, nor does it just strike them that theistic belief is true. Whether this cognitive situation is the result of a cognitive defect or malfunction of some sort is another matter. Perhaps such experiences are the sort of thing which, much like discerning good wine and good art, are just not universally distributed, or at least require some degree of training to develop. Also, existing beliefs frequently hinder the disposition to form theistic beliefs under certain experiential conditions (e.g., one's belief that such experiences are likely to be unreliable, are hallucinations, and so on), and reasons that one takes to be good evidence against the existence of God (e.g., the problem of evil) may prohibit the acquisition of theistic belief altogether. On the other hand, many people who lack the disposition to form immediate belief(s) in God, do not lack the disposition to form mediate belief(s) in God. These people "see" that certain evidence makes the existence of God probable or that God existence follows as a valid deductive inference from certain premises, and they form theistic beliefs on that basis. Even those who have the disposition to form immediate theistic beliefs also possess, to varying degrees, the capacity to assess certain bodies of evidence and carry out elementary (inductive and deductive) inferences from what they already believe in a basic way. This is why I suggested above that a noetic structure in which all theistic beliefs were basic would be

quite odd indeed for a normal, mature adult. Typically, a person who has a certain amount of evidence that supports some theistic proposition and who sees that the evidence in fact *is* evidence for the theistic proposition, will (*ceteris paribus*) be disposed to believe the proposition. Furthermore, he will be disposed to believe it (at least partly) on the grounds of what makes it evident to them. Here again, a person's experiences, existing beliefs, and logical capacities are determinants of where certain theistic propositions will be located in a noetic structure, and most fundamentally whether they will be found there at all.

My account of theistic foundationalism will also emphasize the time relative nature of the justification of theistic belief and its connection to the distinction between the time of acquisition and the time of belief maintenance or sustenance.

[T3] For some members of S^*_1 and for some belief that Pt, the belief that Pt is basic at time t_1 (the time of its acquisition) and the belief that Pt is nonbasic at later time t_2 (when the belief that Pt is being maintained), and for some members of S^*_2 and some belief that Pt, the belief that Pt is nonbasic at time t_1 (the time of its acquisition) and the belief that Pt is basic at some later time t_2 (when the belief is being maintained).¹¹

B. Extending Core Theistic Foundationalism

The core foundationalist position may be extended by extending the scope of *justificatory modalities*. In addition to some theistic beliefs being wholly immediately

¹¹ The earlier point about belief dispositions applies here as well, for we can distinguish between dispositions merely to acquire or form a belief and dispositions to hold a belief. The distinction is relevant since one may have a disposition to acquire a belief, but not hold it. Again, one's beliefs, experience, and logical capacities are determinants here. See Audi 1994 (p. 423).

justified and some being wholly mediately justified, there will typically be cases in which immediate and mediate sources combine, and where each is necessary and together sufficient for justification. We must recognize basic beliefs, nonbasic beliefs, and *partly* basic/nonbasic beliefs. Not only may the psychological source of belief be both experiential and mediate, but experiential and propositional grounds may combined to yield a degree of justification greater than will be had on either of the two grounds alone. It may be that at some time t_1 the experiential awareness of God as present is very clear and distinct, while at some other time t_2 it is not, or one lacks such an awareness altogether. This could be a case in which other beliefs (considerations in support of God's omnipresence or divine promises in Scripture according to which God will never leave us or forsake us) provide partial support for the belief that God is present.

[T4] For some people S^* who hold some justified belief(s) that Pt , the belief(s) that Pt is based on both experiential and propositional grounds, where each contributes evidential (and/or psychological) support severally necessary and jointly sufficient for the justification of the belief that Pt .¹²

Then there is the matter of overdetermination. Such a possibility would be ruled out on certain construals of immediate or mediate justification (and so ruled out on those versions of foundationalism that adopt such a perspective on immediate and mediate justification). One might be tempted to spell out mediate justification so as to rule out overdetermination from the side of immediate sources. Typically, though, one encounters

¹² The conjunction of [T3] and [T4] entails that: A belief that Pt which is basic or nonbasic at the time t_1 of its acquisition may be partly basic/nonbasic at some later time t_2 when it is being sustained.

a logical independence thesis regarding foundational beliefs according to which foundational beliefs are taken not to be susceptible to a mediate justification, and so could not be overdetermined by mediate sources. Some might take it that beliefs are immediately justified just if they are justified *only* by something other than their relation to other justified beliefs. I see no need to take foundationalism to be committed to these sorts of stringent requirements, and for that reason I have been taking immediately justified beliefs to be those which are wholly justified by something other than their relation to other justified beliefs. This is clearly compatible with both (potential) psychological and (actual) epistemic overdetermination.¹³ To be more precise, though, we should note the various modes of overdetermination within one's noetic structure. First, with reference to the (justified) beliefs which are overdetermined, we can say that overdetermination ranges over beliefs which are wholly immediately justified, wholly mediately justified, and partly immediately justified. Secondly, with reference to what is doing the overdetermining, overdeterminers may either be immediate (e.g., experience) or mediate. Thirdly, regarding the efficacy of an overdeterminer, overdeterminers may themselves be either partial or full overdeterminers. And last, we have already noted that overdetermination may be solely psychological or epistemic (or both).

Cases of actual (psychological and justificatory) overdetermination may be expressed by:

[T5] For some people S* who hold some justified belief(s) that Pt, though the belief(s) that Pt is wholly (or partly) justified by being based on some

¹³ Alston explains that: "To say that a belief is immediately justified is just to say that there are conditions which are sufficient for its justification that do not involve any other justified beliefs of the believer. This condition could be satisfied even if the believer has other justified beliefs that could serve as grounds. Overdetermination is an epistemic as well as causal phenomenon. What fits a belief to serve as a foundation is simply that it doesn't need other justified beliefs in order to be justified itself" (1991c, p. 45).

immediate ground G_{1i} or mediate ground G_{2m} , the belief(s) that Pt is (partly or wholly) based on some other ground $G!$ that partly or wholly justifies the belief(s) that Pt, and where $G!$ is either an immediate ground G_i or a mediate ground G_m .¹⁴

But overdetermination will frequently be (psychologically) potential, just by virtue of the evidential support relations holding between beliefs within a person's noetic structure.¹⁵

[T6] For some people S^* who hold some justified belief(s) that Pt which are wholly (or partly) justified by being based on some immediate ground G_{1i} or mediate ground G_{2m} , S^* have some other belief(s) B^* which provides evidential support (adequate or partial) for the belief(s) that Pt.

C. Diachronic Justificatory Status and Structural Flux

To speak of S's being justified in believing that p is to speak of S's being justified in believing that p *at some time t*. Justification is thus time relative. The time relative

¹⁴ The general formulation can be made more rigorous in its application. Where a belief b is wholly justified by being based on G_{1i} , but b is also (wholly) based on $G!_m$ (and where $G!_m$ provides adequate evidential support for b), then S's belief b is wholly immediately justified but wholly mediately overdetermined and so also wholly mediately justified. Where b is partly justified by being based on G_{1i} (and wholly justified by being based on both G_{1i} and G_{2m}), and b is partly (or wholly) based on $G!_m$ (and $G!_m$ provides *partial* evidential support for b), then b is partly immediately justified and partly, mediately epistemically overdetermined. So $G!$ may be a partial or full overdeterminer with respect to b, as well as an immediate or mediate overdeterminer. One may also drop the basis condition in the preceding cases and still regard them as cases of evidential (but not psychological) overdetermination. See footnote no. 15 (below).

¹⁵ Potential overdetermination here is basically a causal or psychological notion, as it distinguishes between those justifying grounds that are causally involved in a belief's formation or sustenance and reasons that a person merely has for some belief but which would suffice to justify the belief if he believed on that basis. One will be led to view this as potential *epistemic* overdetermination to the extent that one holds that the actual psychological source of a belief is essential to its justification. One may just as well regard cases where S has overdetermining evidence for the belief that p, as actual epistemic overdetermination independent of the causal role such evidence plays, what I called *evidential* overdetermination in chapter 4.

nature of justification gives rise to what I will call *diachronic justificatory status*, an account of the structure of justification *through* some time sequence t_1, \dots, t_n . Such an account distinguishes not only between belief formation and belief sustenance (and their relative conditions of justification), but also the conditions which effect modification in one's noetic structure. By modification in one's noetic structure I understand, not only the addition and subtraction of beliefs but the variable nature of their psychological and epistemic properties. All these are closely related.

A noetic structure will undergo change clearly enough by the addition of new beliefs over time. Such additions may have significant epistemic consequences as well. For instance, doxastic additions will frequently create either actual or potential (partial or full) overdetermination. Where I (justifiably) believe that p_1 on the basis of p_2 , but then come to believe that p_3 , and where the belief that p_3 provides good evidence for p_1 , we have such a case of overdetermination. There is something to be said for overdetermination effecting a minimal epistemic modification in a noetic structure. Let us say that S's belief that p_1 at time t_1 was mediately justified by being based on the belief that p_2 . At time t_2 S acquires the belief that p_3 , which provides (adequate) evidential support for the belief that p_1 . S's belief that p_1 at time t_2 now is mediately justified *plus* is (psychologically or epistemically) overdetermined. We can thus distinguish between overdetermined and nonoverdetermined modes of justification. The importance of spelling this out may be further exemplified by points raised in previous chapters. Even where overdetermination is (psychologically) potential, it may be that a certain amount of such overdetermination may eventually lead to (at least) a partial *displacing* of the original grounds of belief, and thereby contribute to altering the noetic structure in an additional, more radical manner. So overdetermined justificatory modes may be related to a shift in the nonoverdetermined modes of justification (immediate, mediate, or partly

immediate). This will especially be the case where the acquisition of new beliefs modifies a noetic structure by *knocking out* certain beliefs, where these beliefs (basic or nonbasic) were the grounds of some belief that *p*. At time t_1 S (justifiably) believes that p_1 on the basis of experience e_1 . At time t_2 , S acquires the belief that p_2 which provides adequate evidential support for the belief that p_1 , but S continues to believe that p_1 on the basis of experience e_1 . At time t_3 , S acquires the further belief that p_3 , where p_3 is an adequate reason to doubt that e_1 provides adequate experiential support for the belief that p_1 . In this situation, S may come to believe that p_1 on the basis of the belief that p_2 (especially if S believes that p_2 supports p_1). This would be another kind of epistemic alteration in the noetic structure, where the (nonoverdetermined) mode of justification switches from immediate (at the time of acquisition) to mediate (at some later time of its maintenance).

Essential to this account of modest theistic foundationalism is what we can call a principle of *noetic structural flux*. Since justification is defeasible (or at least typically so), the foundationalist structure of belief cannot be maximally stable, in either the foundations or superstructure. Modest foundationalism is not committed to requiring of foundational beliefs (or beliefs based on them) that they be infallible or possess any of the other sorts of epistemic immunities, though *some* may. At any time the set of basic beliefs may be altered by one or more of them being knocked out. And to the extent that some nonbasic beliefs depend solely for their justification on such basic beliefs, there will be a corresponding knocking out of these nonbasic beliefs. Although there will at any one time be basic beliefs and nonbasic beliefs, which beliefs fill these slots is variable and does change with time. The same is true in the case of (basic or nonbasic) theistic belief. This is not to suggest that there will be no stability in the structure, or no stability in theistic sectors, only that the stability is less than maximal by virtue of the defeasibility of both basic and nonbasic beliefs. The structure is kept from radical flux just by virtue of

their being foundational beliefs that retain their foundational status over significant periods of time (e.g., by having a significantly high degree of justification). These beliefs being the ground for other beliefs which generate (or sustain) a broad range of justificatory paths in the overall structure.¹⁶ Theistic sectors will be stable to the extent that they are located on such paths (though since theistic beliefs are defeasible, nothing in principle prohibits a noetic structure from coming to lack theistic belief altogether).

There are two points to be made under the category of structural flux. First, there is the relevance of belief dispositions to noetic flux. A person's noetic structure includes not only experiences and occurrent and dispositional beliefs, but also one's disposition to believe. So we may say that the *determinants* of flux are most basically embedded in one's dispositions to form (or maintain) and not form (or maintain) certain beliefs, given the experience, beliefs, and logical capacities one has at any particular time. So a person may acquire beliefs which better dispose him eventually to forming (or sustaining) theistic belief, or dispose him to forming (or sustaining) it on some particular grounds rather than others. I noted in chapter 5 that one's having a mediately justified theistic belief may in the long run dispose one to holding theistic belief in a basic way in certain circumstances. Equally, the acquisition of certain beliefs will dispose one toward not forming certain beliefs as well, or gradually dispose one to no longer holding existing beliefs (or requiring a higher degree of evidence to believe them in the future). So noetic alterations may be quite subtle by relating to our dispositions to believe (or not to

¹⁶ There are several ways in which a foundational belief may have a high degree of justification and so a kind of epistemic security (not immunity!). In addition to the belief's actual ground contributing to a high degree of justification, overdetermination (from independent mediate sources) may positively contribute to the epistemic security of some foundational beliefs. Since defeasibility entails flux, epistemic security may be achieved not only by reasons that defeat defeaters but by a large number of independent and mutually coherent reasons which support a belief. In this sense a modest foundationalist may countenance the epistemic significance of coherence. See Audi 1993 (pp. 136, 150-153).

believe) certain propositions. Secondly, and the point I want to stress, there is the particular dimension to structural flux which is relevant for the basic/nonbasic distinction - the mutability of justificatory modes. Structural flux is exhibited, not only when a person comes to hold a new belief and no longer holds a previous belief, but when a belief takes on a new mode of justification. In a sense there will be some minimal form of alteration in justificatory modes just by virtue of a person's theistic belief becoming overdetermined in some ways.

So a constituent of my version of modest foundationalism is:

[T7] The justificatory modality of a belief that P_t for some person S at any time t_n is dependent on S 's formative and sustaining belief dispositions, where these dispositions are determined by S 's experience (sensory, introspective, and memorial), beliefs, and logical capacities.

The account of foundationalism I am offering will accommodate these observations by stressing the role of *circumstance* as a determinant of when conditions are such as to require for some particular person that the belief is basic or nonbasic. Typically, it is taken that justified belief (or knowledge) requires belief that p to some N^{th} degree. In those theories of justification in which the psychological source of belief plays a role, weakness of belief as well as the inability to form or sustain a belief on some particular ground will adversely affect the justified status of a belief. Defeaters I take it represent a more pervasive bar to justification. Since justification is typically taken to be *prima facie*, the presence of overriding conditions, to the extent that it reduces the evidential force of a ground is going to be relevant, even where psychological factors are marginalized or set aside altogether. Therefore, alterations in the modalities of justification will be a function of some set of circumstances that adversely affect the psychological or epistemic properties of the belief. So the causes of the transition

between different modes of justification (inclusive of both overdetermined and nonoverdetermined justificatory modalities) for theistic belief may be summed up by the assertion that:

[T8] Given any person S, S's belief that Pt undergoes justificatory modal shift just if either the psychological or epistemic properties of a relevant noetic sector undergo change, and where (i) a relevant sector is one that sustains some causal or evidential relation to the belief that Pt and (ii) noetic changes are a function of formative and sustaining belief dispositions, that have as their major determinants the experience, beliefs, and logical capacities of S.

The relevance of overdetermination will be twofold. First it will automatically shift the mode of justification from nonoverdetermined to overdetermined. Secondly, this mode creates what I referred to earlier as shifts in the dispositional aspects of a person's noetic structure. Overdetermination will play a large hand in dispositions to believe some proposition on grounds other than the ones operative at the time of a belief's formation, and so may have an indirect connection to altering a belief's nonoverdetermined status. Suppose S believes that Pt on the sole basis of some experience e, but S also believes that q and r, where q and r render the belief that Pt probable. The beliefs q and r I take it provide a causal basis for the belief that Pt. S will of course need an occasion to hold the belief that Pt on the basis of q and r, but the beliefs that q and r surely provide a disposition to believe that Pt on the basis of q and r. Such an occasion may be realized if S's belief that Pt on the basis of e is defeated (say by reasons for doubting the veridical nature of the experience). Upon reflection, S comes to hold the further belief that s <the belief that q and r provide good evidence for the belief that Pt>, and so ends up believing that Pt on the basis of these reasons, thereby effecting a shift from immediate to mediate justification. One way to understand such a situation is to understand that S had a disposition to form the belief that Pt and retain it for a time (under certain conditions) on

the basis of e, but had a further disposition to continue to hold the belief that Pt on the basis of q and r (and possibly s).

IV. Conclusion

So there is a version of modest theistic evidentialism generated by the conjunction of theistic foundationalism and bi-level evidentialism. The proposed theory seems to answer the common objections to foundationalism and the more specific objection to locating theistic belief in the foundations. As the account has established, theistic foundationalism need not be committed to arbitrary dogmatism with respect to properly basic theistic beliefs, nor need those beliefs enjoy any kind of logical independency from the rest of the structure (foundations and superstructure). It is also not committed to an artificial dichotomy between basic and nonbasic beliefs, leaving open a broad range of beliefs that are causally and epistemically partly basic/nonbasic. Overdetermination and stable noetic sectors allow for coherence to play a justificatory role in such structures. But the structure is responsive to changes in one's experience and the acquisition of new beliefs. Lastly, the structure is not an echo of the ahistorical and nonperspectival view of human rationality so much a part of the Enlightenment and classical foundationalism and evidentialism. The version of modest theistic foundationalism here presented highlights the cognitive situation of particular individuals and traces changes in the psychological and epistemic properties of their noetic structure in the face of new experiences and defeating conditions.

Bi-level theistic evidentialist foundationalism, conducive to adaptation within a broad range of internalist and externalist epistemologies, is my attempt at a synthesis of the intuitions guiding Reformed epistemology and classical evidentialism, along with the

long-standing tradition of natural theology. As I see it, each of these has an important contribution to make to the epistemology of religious belief. What I have argued is that these contributions are most effective when brought together into a single coherent theory.