

Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God

**ALVIN PLANTINGA AND NICHOLAS WOLTERSTORFF,
EDITORS**

Copyright © 1983 by University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, Indiana 46556

All Rights Reserved

Manufactured in the United States of America

Reprinted in 1986, 1990, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2004

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Main entry under title: Faith and rationality.

1. Faith and reason—Addresses, essays, lectures.
2. Religion—Philosophy—Addresses, essays, lectures.

I. Plantinga, Alvin. II. Wolterstorff, Nicholas.

ISBN 0-268-00964-3 (cloth) ISBN 0-268-00965-1 (paper)

BT50F34 1983 2001 1 83-14843

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Introduction

Nicholas Wolterstorff

This book is a series of essays on the topic of faith and reason. But there are many such essays, and many such books. What, if anything, makes this one significantly different? From near the beginning of Christianity there have been reflections on this topic. It could hardly have been otherwise, given that the culture with which Christianity first interacted, once it had emerged from Judaism, was the heavily philosophical culture of Hellenism. What, after all these years of discussion, merits anybody's attention in these additional essays on this ancient topic?

I judge that what is significant and unique about these essays is the weaving in and out of four fundamental themes. They are essays around these four themes.

(1) Perhaps the most basic theme is that of the collapse of classical foundationalism. Those words, for most readers, will require a bit of explanation.

The last decade or so has seen radically new developments in the field of philosophical epistemology. Among the most significant of these developments is the rise of metaepistemology. Rather than just plunging ahead and developing epistemological theories, philosophers have stood back and reflected seriously on the structural options available to them in their construction of such theories. This has had a most illuminating effect. We have come to see the structure of various epistemological debates more clearly than ever before. We have come to see more clearly than before the assumptions behind various positions staked out in these debates. We have been able to formulate with more clarity traditional positions on various issues.

After immersing themselves in metaepistemology, thereby acquiring a clearer picture of the structure of epistemological options, philosophers have naturally looked about to find out which of these various options have actually been developed in the West. What caught their attention is the extraordinarily long dominance of one structural option – that option which has come to be known as classical foundationalism.

[...]

One thing more must be said here. Some philosophers have concluded from the collapse of the classical foundationalist theory of knowledge that the concept of knowledge itself must be discarded. (Cf. Richard Rorty.) And some have concluded from the collapse of the classical foundationalist theory of rationality that the distinction between rational and nonrational beliefs must be discarded. They have affirmed that "anything goes." (Cf. Paul K.

Feyerabend.) Most emphatically these essays do not draw any such conclusions.

[...]

(2) A second theme weaving in and out of these essays, intimately related to the first, is the failure of evidentialism. [...] The evidentialist challenge can be seen as consisting of two contentions. It was insisted, in the first place, that it would be wrong for a person to accept Christianity, or any other form of theism, unless it was rational for him to do so. And it was insisted, secondly, that it is not rational for a person to do so unless he holds his religious convictions on the basis of other beliefs of his which give to those convictions adequate evidential support. No religion is acceptable unless rational, and no religion is rational unless supported by evidence. That is the evidentialist challenge.

[...]

(3) The third theme is the antievidentialist impulse in the Reformed tradition. The Reformed tradition has characteristically been antievidentialist. Well before the evidentialist challenge was issued clearly and forcefully by Locke and his ilk, it was characteristic of those in the Reformed tradition to have taken up a position in opposition to the challenge.

[...]

(4) The fourth theme is the inevitable pluralism of the academy. The dominant tradition in the West has seen consensus as the appropriate goal and expectation of scientific inquiry. This alternative tradition has seen the pluralism of the academy as the well-nigh inevitable outcome even of fully competent theorizing.

[...]

In these introductory comments I have made clear that this book is more than a mere assortment of essays on the topic of faith and

reason. The essays are bound together by virtue of being essays around those four themes which I singled out.

[...]

Reason and Belief in God

Alvin Plantinga

Belief in God is the heart and center of the Christian religion—as it is of Judaism and Islam. Of course Christians may disagree, at least in emphasis, as to how to think of God; for example, some may emphasize his hatred of sin, others, his love of his creatures. Furthermore, one may find, even among professedly Christian theologians, superphilosophicals who proclaim the liberation of Christianity from belief in God, seeking to replace it by trust in “Being itself” or the “Ground of Being” or some such thing. It remains true, however, that belief in God is the foundation of Christianity.

In this essay I want to discuss a connected constellation of questions: Does the believer-in-God accept the existence of God by faith? Is belief in God contrary to reason, unreasonable, irrational? Must one have evidence to be rational or reasonable in believing in God? Suppose belief in God is not rational; does that matter? And what about proofs of God's existence? Many Reformed or Calvinist thinkers and theologians have taken a jaundiced view of natural theology, thought of as the attempt to give proofs or arguments for the existence of God; are they right? What underlies this hostility to an undertaking that, on the surface, at least, looks perfectly harmless and possibly useful? These are some of the questions I propose to discuss. They fall under the general rubric, faith and reason, if a general rubric is required. I believe Reformed or Calvinist thinkers have had important things to say on these topics and that their fundamental insights here are correct. What they say, however, has been for the most part unclear, ill-focused, and unduly inexplicit. I shall try to remedy these ills; I shall try to state and clearly develop their insight; and I shall try to connect these insights with more general epistemological considerations.

[...]

Part I

A. How Shall We Construe "Theistic Belief"?

But how shall we construe "theistic belief" here? I have been speaking of "belief in God"; but this is not entirely accurate. For the subject under discussion is not really the rational acceptability of belief in God, but the rationality of belief that God exists — that there is such a person as God. And belief in God is not at all the same thing as belief that there is such a person as God. To believe that God exists is simply to accept as true a certain proposition: perhaps the proposition that there is a personal being who has created the world, who has no beginning, and who is perfect in wisdom, justice, knowledge, and power. According to the book of James, the devils do that, and they tremble. The devils do not believe in God, however; for belief in God is quite another matter. One who repeats the words of the Apostles' Creed "I believe in God the Father Almighty..." and means what he says is not simply announcing the fact that he accepts a certain proposition as true; much more is involved than that. Belief in God means trusting God, accepting God, accepting his purposes, committing one's life to him and living in his presence. [...] So believing in God is indeed more than accepting the proposition that God exists. But if it is more than that, it is also at least that. One cannot sensibly believe in God and thank him for the mountains without believing that there is such a person to be thanked and that he is in some way responsible for the mountains. Nor can one trust in God and commit oneself to him without believing that he exists; as the author of Hebrews says, "He who would come to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him." (Heb. 11:6)

So belief in God must be distinguished from the belief that God exists. Having made this distinction, however, I shall ignore it for the most part, using "belief in God" as a synonym for "belief that there is such a person as God." The question I want to address, therefore, is the question whether belief in God — belief in the existence of God — is rationally acceptable. But what is it to believe

or assert that God exists? Which God do I mean to speak of? The answer, in brief, is: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the God of Jewish and Christian revelation: the God of the Bible.

[...]

B. Objections to Theistic Belief

Now many objections have been put forward to belief in God. First, there is the claim that as a matter of fact there is no such thing as belief in God, because the sentence "God exists" is, strictly speaking, nonsense. This is the positivist's contention that such sentences as "God exists" are unverifiable and hence "cognitively meaningless" (to use their charming phrase), in which case they altogether fail to express propositions. On this view those who claim to believe in God are in the pitiable position of believing something that is not even a proposition. [...]

A second, and much more popular, objection is that the existence of evil is incompatible with the existence of God. [...] I have argued elsewhere that it is not possible to show that the existence of evil is incompatible with the existence of God; the free-will defense shows that it is possible that God and evil both exist. [...]

C. The Evidentialist Objection Stated

Now suppose we turn explicit attention to the evidentialist objection. Many philosophers have endorsed the idea that the strength of one's belief ought always to be proportional to the strength of the evidence for that belief. Thus, according to John Locke a mark of the rational person is "the not entertaining any proposition with greater assurance than the proofs it is built upon will warrant." According to David Hume "A wise man... proportions his belief to the evidence." In the nineteenth century we have W. K. Clifford, that "delicious enfant terrible" as William James calls him, insisting that it is wicked, immoral, monstrous, and maybe even impolite to accept a belief for which you do not have sufficient evidence:

Whoso would deserve well of his fellows in this matter will guard the purity of his belief with a very fanaticism of jealous care, lest at any time it should rest on an unworthy object, and catch a stain which can never be wiped away.

He adds that if a belief has been accepted on insufficient evidence, the pleasure is a stolen one. [...] And finally: "To sum up: it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence."

Clifford, of course, held that one who accepts belief in God does accept that belief on insufficient evidence and has therefore defied his duty to mankind. More recently, Bertrand Russell has endorsed the same idea: "Give to any hypothesis which is worth your while to consider," he says, "just that degree of credence which the evidence warrants"; and in his view the evidence warrants no credence in the existence of God.

1. A. Flew: The Presumption of Atheism

Still more recently Anthony Flew has commended what he calls Clifford's "luminous and compulsive essay," and Flew goes on to claim that there is, in his words, a "presumption of atheism." [...] The word 'atheism,' however, has in this contention to be construed unusually. Whereas nowadays the usual meaning of 'atheist' in English is 'someone who asserts there is no such being as God,' I want the word to be understood not positively but negatively. I want the original Greek prefix 'a' to be read in the same way in 'atheist' as it is customarily read in such other Greco-English words as 'amoral,' 'atypical,' and 'asymmetrical.' In this interpretation an atheist becomes: not someone who positively asserts the non-existence of God; but someone who is simply not a theist.

What the protagonist of my presumption of atheism wants to show is that the debate about the existence of God ought to be conducted in a particular way, and that the issue should be seen in a certain perspective. His thesis about the onus of proof involves that it is up to the theist: first to introduce and to defend his proposed concept of God; and second, to provide sufficient reason for believing that this concept of his does in fact have an application.

2. M. Scriven: Atheism Is Obligatory in the Absence of Evidence.

According to Michael Scriven, if the arguments for God's existence fail, then the only rational posture is not merely not believing in God; it is atheism, the belief that there is no God. [...] "Atheism is obligatory in the absence of any evidence for God's existence." But Scriven's claim seems totally arbitrary. He holds that if the arguments for God's existence fail and the arguments against God's existence also fail, then atheism is rationally obligatory. If you have no evidence for the existence of God, then you are rationally obliged to believe there is no God — whether or not you have any evidence against the existence of God.

[...]

Part II: Aquinas and Foundationalism

In this section I shall give what I take to be the evidentialist objector's answer to these questions; I shall argue that his answer is not in the least compelling and that the prospects for his project are not bright. But it is not only evidentialist objectors that have thought theists need evidence if their belief is to be rational; many Christians have thought so too. In particular, many Christian thinkers in the tradition of natural theology have thought so. Thomas Aquinas, of course, is the natural theologian par excellence. [...]

A. Aquinas and Evidentialism

1. Aquinas on Knowledge

According to Aquinas it is possible for us to have scientific knowledge — *scientia* — of the existence and immateriality, unity, simplicity, and perfection of God. As Aquinas sees it, *scientia* is knowledge that is inferred from what is seen to be true. [...] The principles of a science must be self-evident. [...] By understanding we grasp first principles, self-evident truths; from these we infer or deduce further truths. What we know consists in what we find self-evident together with what we can infer from it by logical means.

2. Aquinas on Knowledge of God

Now Aquinas believes that human beings (even in our earthly condition here below) can have knowledge, scientific knowledge, of God's existence, as well as knowledge that he has such attributes as simplicity, eternity, immateriality, immutability and the like. In *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas sets out his famous "Five Ways," or five proofs of God's existence. [...] But the vast majority of those who believe in God, he thinks, do not have knowledge of God's existence but must instead take it on faith. Only a few of us have the time, inclination, and ability to follow the theistic proofs; the rest of us take this truth on faith.

What about those who believe in God on faith even though they do not know that God exists? How can that be a rational procedure? So far as I know, Aquinas does not explicitly address this question. He does discuss a closely related question, however; the question whether those who believe (take on faith) what is "above reason" are irrational or foolish, or in his terms, "believe with undue levity." [...] He means to argue that it is not foolish or irrational to take it that God has proposed for our belief just those items Christians suppose that he has—the articles of faith. What he means to say, I think, is that to believe in the mysteries of the faith is not to be foolish or to believe with undue levity, because we have evidence for the conclusion that God has proposed them for our belief. This evidence consists in the fulfillment of prophecy and in the signs and wonders accompanying the proclamation of these mysteries.

What is important to see here is the following. Aquinas clearly believes that there are some propositions we are rationally justified in accepting, even though we do not have evidence for them, or reason to them from other propositions, or accept them on the basis of other propositions. Let us say that a proposition is basic for me if I believe it and do not believe it on the basis of other propositions. Some of my beliefs, however, I accept but do not accept on the basis of any other beliefs. Call these beliefs basic. I believe that $2+1=3$, for example, and do not believe it on the basis of other propositions. I also believe that I am seated at my desk, and that

there is a mild pain in my right knee. These too are basic for me; I do not believe them on the basis of others. Now the propositions we are rationally justified in accepting as basic, thinks Aquinas, are the ones we see to be true: those that are self-evident or evident to the senses. As for the rest of the propositions we believe, we are rational in accepting them only if they stand in a certain relationship to those that are properly basic. [...] And hence on his view, as on the evidentialist objector's, belief in God is rational for us only if we have evidence for it.

B. Foundationalism

Aquinas and the evidentialist objector concur, then, in holding that belief in God is rationally acceptable only if there is evidence for it—only if it is probable with respect to some body of propositions that constitutes the evidence. And here we can get a better understanding of Aquinas and the evidentialist objector if we see them as accepting some version of classical foundationalism. This is a picture or total way of looking at faith, knowledge, justified belief, rationality, and allied topics. This picture has been enormously popular in Western thought; and despite a substantial opposing groundwork, I think it remains the dominant way of thinking about these topics. According to the foundationalist some propositions are properly basic and some are not; those that are not are rationally accepted only on the basis of evidence, where the evidence must trace back, ultimately, to what is properly basic. The existence of God, furthermore, is not among the propositions that are properly basic; hence a person is rational in accepting theistic belief only if he has evidence for it.

[...]

C. The Collapse of Foundationalism

Now suppose we return to the main question. Why should not belief in God be among the foundations of my noetic structure? The answer, on the part of the classical foundationalist, was that even if this belief is true, it does not have the characteristics a proposition must have to deserve a place in the foundations. The only properly

basic propositions are those that are self-evident or incorrigible or evident to the senses. Since the proposition that God exists is none of the above, it is not properly basic for anyone. But now we must take a closer look at this fundamental principle of classical foundationalism:

A proposition *p* is properly basic for a person *S* if and only if *p* is either self-evident to *S* or incorrigible for *S* or evident to the senses for *S*.

This thesis contains two claims: first, a proposition is properly basic if it is self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses, and, second, a proposition is properly basic only if it meets this condition. The first seems true enough; suppose we concede it. But what is to be said for the second? Is there any reason to accept it?

[...]

We should note first that if this thesis, and the correlative foundationalist thesis that a proposition is rationally acceptable only if it follows from or is probable with respect to what is properly basic – if these claims are true, then enormous quantities of what we all in fact believe are irrational. One crucial lesson to be learned from the development of modern philosophy – Descartes through Hume, roughly – is just this: relative to propositions that are self-evident and incorrigible, most of the beliefs that form the stock in trade of ordinary everyday life are not probable – at any rate there is no reason to think they are probable. Consider all those propositions that entail, say, that there are enduring physical objects, or that there are persons distinct from myself, or that the world has existed for more than five minutes: none of these propositions, I think, is more probable than not with respect to what is self-evident or incorrigible for me; at any rate no one has given good reason to think any of them is.

[...]

And does not this show that the thesis in question is false? The contention is that a proposition is properly basic for me only if it is

self-evident or incorrigible or evident to the senses for me. But many propositions that do not meet these conditions are properly basic for me. I believe, for example, that I had lunch this noon. I do not believe this proposition on the basis of other propositions; I take it as basic; it is in the foundations of my noetic structure.

Furthermore, I am entirely rational in so taking it, even though this proposition is neither self-evident nor evident to the senses nor incorrigible for me.

[...]

It is evident, however, that classical foundationalism is bankrupt, and insofar as the evidentialist objection is rooted in classical foundationalism, it is poorly rooted indeed.

Part III: The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology

Suppose we think of natural theology as the attempt to prove or demonstrate the existence of God. This enterprise has a long and impressive history—a history stretching back to the dawn of Christendom and boasting among its adherents many of the truly great thinkers of the Western world. One thinks, for example, of Anselm, Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham, of Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz.

Many Christians, however, have been less than totally impressed. In particular Reformed or Calvinist theologians have for the most part taken a dim view of this enterprise. A few Reformed thinkers — B. B. Warfield, for example — endorse the theistic proofs, but for the most part the Reformed attitude has ranged from tepid endorsement, through indifference, to suspicion, hostility, and outright accusations of blasphemy.

A. The Objection Initially Stated

By way of answering this question, I want to consider three representative Reformed thinkers. Let us begin with the nineteenth-century Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck:

A distinct natural theology, obtained apart from any revelation, merely through observation and study of the universe in which man lives, does not exist. Scripture urges us to behold heaven and earth, birds and ants, flowers and lilies, in order that we may see and recognize God in them. "Lift up your eyes on high, and see who hath created these." Is 40:26. Scripture does not reason in the abstract. It does not make God the conclusion of a syllogism, leaving it to us whether we think the argument holds or not. But it speaks with authority. Both theologically and religiously it proceeds from God as the starting point.

According to Bavinck, then, belief in the existence of God is not based upon proofs or arguments. [...] The believer does not need natural theology in order to achieve rationality or epistemic propriety in believing; his belief in God can be perfectly rational even if he knows of no cogent argument, deductive or inductive, for the existence of God—indeed, even if there is no such argument.

Suppose we turn next to John Calvin. According to Calvin God has implanted in us all an innate tendency, or *nisus*, or disposition to believe in him: "There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity." This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty. [...] Calvin's claim is that one who accedes to this tendency and in these circumstances accepts the belief that God has created the world - perhaps upon beholding the starry heavens, or the splendid majesty of the mountains, or the intricate, articulate beauty of a tiny flower - is entirely within his epistemic rights in so doing. It is not that such a person is justified or rational in so believing by virtue of having an implicit argument - some version of the teleological argument, say. No; he does not need any argument for justification or rationality. His belief need not be based on any other propositions at all; under these conditions he is perfectly rational in accepting belief in God in the utter absence of any argument, deductive or inductive. Indeed, a person in these conditions, says Calvin, knows that God exists.

[...]

C. Rejecting Classical Foundationalism

What is most interesting here is not Barth's claim that the natural theologian faces this dilemma, here he is probably wrong, or at any rate not clearly right. More interesting is his view that belief in God need not be based on argument. Barth joins Calvin and Bavinck in holding that the believer in God is entirely within his rights in believing as he does even if he does not know of any good theistic argument (deductive or inductive), even if he does not believe there is any such argument, and even if in fact no such argument exists. Like Calvin, Kuyper, and Bavinck, Barth holds that belief in God is properly basic—that is, such that it is rational to accept it without accepting it on the basis of any other propositions or beliefs at all. In fact, they think the Christian ought not to accept belief in God on the basis of argument; to do so is to run the risk of a faith that is unstable and wavering, subject to all the wayward whim and fancy of the latest academic fashion. What the Reformers held was that a believer is entirely rational, entirely within his epistemic rights, in starting with belief in God, in accepting it as basic, and in taking it as premise for argument to other conclusions.

[...] These Reformed thinkers should be understood as rejecting classical foundationalism. They may have been inclined to accept (1) [that in every rational noetic structure there is a set of beliefs taken as basic]; they show no objection to (2) [that nonbasic belief is proportional to support from the foundations]; but they were utterly at odds with the idea that the foundations of a rational noetic structure can at most include propositions that are self-evident or evident to the senses or incorrigible. In particular, they were prepared to insist that a rational noetic structure can include belief in God as basic.

Part IV: Is Belief in God Properly Basic?

According to the Reformed thinkers discussed in the last section the answer is "Yes indeed." I enthusiastically concur in this contention, and in this section I shall try to clarify and develop this view and defend it against some objections. I shall argue first that one who holds that belief in God is properly basic is not thereby committed to

the view that just about anything is. I shall argue secondly that even if belief in God is accepted as basic, it is not groundless; I shall argue thirdly that one who accepts belief in God as basic may nonetheless be open to arguments against that belief, and finally I shall argue that the view I am defending is not plausibly thought of as a species of fideism.

A. The Great Pumpkin Objection

It is tempting to raise the following sort of question. If belief in God is properly basic, why cannot just any belief be properly basic? Could we not say the same for any bizarre aberration we can think of? What about voodoo or astrology? What about the belief that the Great Pumpkin returns every Halloween? Could I properly take that as basic? Suppose I believe that if I flap my arms with sufficient vigor, I can take off and fly about the room; could I defend myself against the charge of irrationality by claiming this belief is basic? If we say that belief in God is properly basic, will we not be committed to holding that just anything, or nearly anything, can properly be taken as basic, thus throwing wide the gates to irrationalism and superstition?

Certainly not. According to the Reformed epistemologist certain beliefs are properly basic in certain circumstances; those same beliefs may not be properly basic in other circumstances. Consider the belief that I see a tree: this belief is properly basic in circumstances that are hard to describe in detail, but include my being appeared to in a certain characteristic way; that same belief is not properly basic in circumstances including, say, my knowledge that I am sitting in the living room listening to music with my eyes closed. What the Reformed epistemologist holds is that there are widely realized circumstances in which belief in God is properly basic; but why should that be thought to commit him to the idea that just about any belief is properly basic in any circumstances, or even to the vastly weaker claim that for any belief there are circumstances in which it is properly basic?

[...]

B. The Ground of Belief in God

My claim is that belief in God is properly basic. It does not follow, however, that it is groundless. Let me explain. Suppose we consider perceptual beliefs, memory beliefs, and beliefs ascribing mental states to other persons, such beliefs as: I see a tree, I had breakfast this morning, That person is in pain. Although beliefs of this sort are typically taken as basic, it would be a mistake to describe them as groundless. Upon having experience of a certain sort, I believe that I am perceiving a tree. In the typical case I do not hold this belief on the basis of other beliefs; it is nonetheless not groundless. My having that characteristic sort of experience plays a crucial role in the formation of that belief. It also plays a crucial role in its justification. [...] In each of these cases a belief is taken as basic, and in each case properly taken as basic. In each case there is some circumstance or condition that confers justification; there is a circumstance that serves as the ground of justification.

Now similar things may be said about belief in God. When the Reformers claim that this belief is properly basic, they do not mean to say, of course, that there are no justifying circumstances for it, or that it is in that sense groundless or gratuitous. Quite the contrary. Calvin holds that God "reveals and daily discloses himself in the whole workmanship of the universe," and the divine art "reveals itself in the innumerable and yet distinct and well ordered variety of the heavenly host." God has so created us that we have a tendency or disposition to see his hand in the world about us. More precisely, there is in us a disposition to believe propositions of the sort that this flower was created by God or this vast and intricate universe was created by God when we contemplate the flower or behold the starry heavens or think about the vast reaches of the universe. Calvin recognizes, at least implicitly, that other sorts of conditions may trigger this disposition. Upon reading the Bible, one may be impressed with a deep sense that God is speaking to him. Upon having done what I know is cheap, or wrong, or wicked, I may feel guilty in God's sight and form the belief God disapproves of what I have done. Upon confession and repentance I may feel forgiven, forming the belief God forgives me for what I have done. A person

in grave danger may turn to God, asking for his protection and help; and of course he or she then has the belief that God is indeed able to hear and help if he sees fit. When life is sweet and satisfying, a spontaneous sense of gratitude may well up within the soul; someone in this condition may thank and praise the Lord for his goodness, and will of course have the accompanying belief that indeed the Lord is to be thanked and praised.

There are therefore many conditions and circumstances that call forth belief in God: guilt, gratitude, danger, a sense of God's presence, a sense that he speaks, perception of various parts of the universe. [...] The main point, here, is this: belief in God, or such propositions as "God is speaking to me," "God has created all this," are properly basic; to say so, however, is not to deny that there are justifying conditions for these beliefs, or conditions that confer justification on one who accepts them as basic. They are therefore not groundless or gratuitous.

C. Is Argument Irrelevant to Basic Belief in God?

Suppose someone accepts belief in God as basic. Does it not follow that he will hold this belief in such a way that no argument could move him or cause him to give it up? Will he not hold it come what may, in the teeth of any evidence or argument with which he could be presented? Does he not thereby adopt a posture in which argument and other rational methods of settling disagreement are implicitly declared irrelevant? Surely not. Suppose someone accepts "There is such a person as God" as basic. It does not for a moment follow that he will regard argument irrelevant to this belief of his; nor is he committed in advance to rejecting every argument against it. It could be, for example, that he accepts (19) as basic but also accepts as basic some propositions from which, by arguments whose corresponding conditionals he accepts as basic, it follows that (19) is false. What happens if he is apprised of this fact, perhaps by being presented with an argument from those propositions to the denial of (19)? Presumably some change is called for. If he accepts these propositions more strongly than (19), presumably he will give the latter up.

[...]

D. Is Reformed Epistemology a Fideism?

I take up one final question. In *Reflection on Christian Philosophy* Ralph McInerny suggests that what I have been calling Reformed epistemology is fideist. Is he right? Is the Reformed epistemologist perforce a fideist? That depends: it depends, obviously enough, on how we propose to use the term "fideism." According to my dictionary fideism is "exclusive or basic reliance upon faith alone, accompanied by a consequent disparagement of reason and utilized especially in the pursuit of philosophical or religious truth." A fideist therefore urges reliance on faith rather than reason, in matters philosophical and religious; and he may go on to disparage and denigrate reason.

[...] It is clear, I suppose, that the Reformed epistemologist need not be an extreme fideist. His views on the proper basicity of belief in God surely do not commit him to thinking that faith and reason conflict. [...] From this vantage point we can see, therefore, that the Reformed epistemologist is not a fideist at all with respect to belief in God. He does not hold that there is any conflict between faith and reason here, and he does not even hold that we cannot attain this fundamental truth by reason; he holds, instead, that it is among the deliverances of reason.

By way of summary: I have argued that the evidentialist objection to theistic belief is rooted in classical foundationalism; the same can be said for the Thomistic conception of faith and reason. Classical foundationalism is attractive and seductive; in the final analysis, however, it turns out to be both false and self-referentially incoherent. Furthermore, the Reformed objection to natural theology, unformed and inchoate as it is, may best be seen as a rejection of classical foundationalism. As the Reformed thinker sees things, being self-evident, or incorrigible, or evident to the senses is not a necessary condition of proper basicity. He goes on to add that belief in God is properly basic. He is not thereby committed to the idea that just any or nearly any belief is properly basic, even if he cannot give a complete criterion for proper basicity. The fact is

that the Reformed epistemologist is not obliged to produce a general criterion of proper basicity; criteria are to be arrived at from below rather than above.

[...]

The Stranger

George I. Mavrodes

Carol Ten Boom's conscience still troubled her as she settled herself into the airliner seat and looked over the wing toward Chicago's O'Hare terminal.

I really should have witnessed to her, she thought to herself. At least I could have said that I was a Christian ... or something.

She was thinking of the girl with the long skirt, braided hair, and gigantic handbag who had offered her a flower in the terminal. A Moonie, she supposed, or maybe Hare Krishna. But she had simply mumbled, "No, thank you," and hurried on, unwilling to be trapped into the persevering conversation which she knew would follow. But now she wondered, as she often did these days, whether she should have gathered her courage to say something about Christ. Had she really denied him, after all, by saying nothing?

These reflections about the past, however, were soon swallowed up by a more current problem. For as the passengers came down the aisle, looking from their ticket envelopes to the seat numbers, one man caught her attention. And no wonder. His dark face was made even darker by his billowing white shirt, and the pleated, folded, white cotton trousers. A fringe of black hair showed beneath his turban, a convoluted knot of fabric, maroon and gray. And as his eyes scanned the numbers on the overhead baggage racks a premonition seized Carol's heart.

Her premonition was true. As she had somehow known he would, the dark man took the seat beside her. He pushed his brief case

under the seat in front and awkwardly pulled the belt buckle from beneath him. Maybe he smiled at her. But Carol did not turn to see.

A voice was coming over the intercom now, while the stewardess stood in front, dangling a yellow mask from her hand. Carol heard the voice in snatches: "extinguish all smoking materials and pull the mask toward you, placing it over the nose and ..." But though she was only a college senior, Carol had already heard that message many times. [...]

"Oh, I do." Carol brightened up. She really was enthusiastic about philosophy, and not at all reluctant in discussion. "I'm majoring in it at Calvin, and next year I hope to begin graduate work. I've applied at Yale, the University of Michigan, Cornell, and UCLA."

"I say, that's really good! I'm awfully keen on philosophy myself. I read Greats at Oxford, mostly philosophy. And I ... But I haven't introduced myself. I'm Ravi Gupta. Just call me Ravi."

"I'm Carol," she said. "Carol Ten Boom. It's a Dutch name. My grandparents came from the old country. I'm glad to meet you."

"What are you most interested in in philosophy?" he asked her.

"Oh, almost everything, but epistemology especially, and philosophy of religion."

"Really?" he said. "I'm most interested in philosophy of religion, too. I suppose it's because of the way I myself came to believe in Jesus."

"Oh? How was that?"

"It was because of an argument," he went on. "I understand that not many people come that way anymore. And maybe even stranger, it was an argument that I myself constructed."

"Really?"

"I was only twenty at the time, and I hadn't studied much philosophy yet, so it was really crude and rough in spots. But it was on the right track—I'm sure of that. I became convinced that the religion of Jesus Christ is the true way of salvation. So I found some Christians in Madras and was baptized. And I have worshipped God in the Christian way since then."

"That's really strange," Carol said. "I don't think I've ever heard of anyone being converted by an argument. I thought it wasn't even possible. I thought only the Holy Spirit could lead someone to Christ."

"Of course, I don't mean that the Holy Spirit wasn't in it," Ravi replied. "I'm sure that God did lead me by his Spirit. I've often heard Christians say that the Spirit works through sermons, through the Bible, and so on. In my case he worked through an argument."

"But the theistic arguments actually aren't any good, are they?" said Carol. "I mean, they're not sound. Was your argument like the standard arguments in the textbooks?"

"Well, not exactly. It has a part that is rather like Thomas' argument from causality, and a part that is pretty clearly a version of the teleological argument. But overall I haven't seen anything very close to it in the history of philosophy."

"And do you still think that it's sound?"

"Oh, absolutely," he said. "I told you it was pretty crude when I first worked it out. There were some modal mistakes in it, and other mistakes. But I've worked on it a lot since then, and I'm pretty confident that it's sound now. The latest version is in my briefcase. Would you like to see it?"

"Well, maybe," Carol said. "But I'd like to know more about it first. Tell me about the argument."

Ravi reached into the briefcase and took out a thick sheaf of typescript. It looked as if it had been revised many times. "The

proof," he said, "is rather long. But maybe I can summarize it for you."

[...]

"I have two reasons for thinking that it's self-evident to me," Ravi said. "One of them is that I can see what the proposition means, and I just feel compelled to believe it. I know that's not a very good philosophical reason, but it's a description of the actual constitution of my own intellectual life from the inside; my belief in the resurrection seems to be self-evident. It has that feel about it. It seems to me that I simply could not fail to believe it if I knew what was there to be believed. I just seem to recognize that disposition as part of my own intellectual machinery, my cognitive 'set'. The other reason is historical. I actually did believe this doctrine as soon as I heard it. The very first time I heard the resurrection mentioned I didn't know what the word 'resurrection' meant. I asked the teacher to explain it. And as soon as he did, I found myself believing the doctrine! I was really surprised, but there was nothing I could do about it. I was stuck with that belief, and I have been ever since."

"But at least you had the testimony of your teacher to go on," Carol said.

"Not at all. The man who explained the resurrection to me was a lapsed Hindu, teaching comparative religion. He's a Westernized naturalist with no sympathy at all for Christianity. I was a firm believer in the resurrection before I ever met a Christian or read a line of Christian literature."

Carol shook her head. "It's incredible. It's so different from anything I've ever heard. I just can't believe it. How could you possibly have mental machinery like that? Where could you have gotten it?"

"But that's an easy question, isn't it, Carol? At least, so it seems to me. I've got no doubt that God gave me that disposition to believe in the resurrection. It was his way of drawing me to Christ. And why not? Surely that's not beyond God's power? If he can give me a

disposition to believe my senses, he can also give me a disposition to believe that Jesus rose from the dead."

"But there's a difference, Ravi. Practically all of us believe our senses. But almost nobody - not even Christians - believes in the resurrection the way you do. Surely that difference is important?"

"There certainly is that difference," the Indian replied. "But its importance is more obscure. If you're asking about why there is that difference, I don't have any special theory about it. There are lots of differences among people. Some people have good eyesight, some poor, some are colorblind, some are totally blind. Some people are intelligent, some are dull, some can run a mile in four minutes, some in eight minutes. And so on. Why does God give us different gifts, different abilities? I don't know. But I can thank God for what he gave me, and go ahead to use it as well as I can. And other people can use what he gives to them."

[...]

The stewardess was standing beside them in the aisle now, holding two dinner trays. Carol slid the manuscript from the tray table into her lap and picked up the napkin. "Okay," she said. "Okay. Maybe you're right. Anyway, let's eat. Then I'll read the rest of it." And to herself she thought, Maybe it wouldn't have been any stronger, nothing so the girl.

Religious Experience and Religious Belief

William P. Alston

I take as my starting point the conviction that somehow what goes on in the experience of leading the Christian life provides some ground for Christian belief, makes some contribution to the rationality of Christian belief. We sometimes feel the presence of God; we get glimpses, at least, of God's will for us; we feel the Holy Spirit at work in our lives, guiding us, strengthening us, enabling us to love other people in a new way; we hear God speaking to us in

the Bible, in preaching, or in the words and actions of our fellow Christians. Because of all this we are more justified in our Christian beliefs than we would have been otherwise. I am not suggesting that this is the whole ground or that it can do the whole job. I have no aspiration to be a late twentieth-century Schleiermacher, spinning the whole web of Christian doctrine out of the personal experience of the contemporary believer. Nevertheless, if I could not find any confirmation of the Christian message in my own experience, I would be less justified in accepting that message than I am in fact. To generalize the point, suppose that no one had ever experienced communion with God, had ever heard God speaking to him or her, had ever felt the strengthening influence of the Holy Spirit in a difficult situation. In that case Christian belief would be a less rational stance than it is in fact.

But though it seems to me plain that somehow this must be so, it is a task of no small magnitude to show how it is so, maintain the position in the face of numerous difficulties, and integrate it with other things that seem equally undeniable. In short, we are faced with a typical philosophical problem.

In the interest of greater focus let me delimit the topic in certain ways.

First I will confine myself to those stretches of Christian experience open to humble lay Christians like myself, who have not undertaken a major contemplative or ascetic discipline, and who have not sacrificed all else to the attainment of an immediate vision of God. This means that I sacrifice the most obvious continuity with the bulk of the philosophical literature on the epistemology of religious experience, which is concentrated, much too narrowly, on mystical experience. [...]

Second, in order to avoid distracting side issues, I shall not consider experiences that would be termed hallucinatory from a physical standpoint — visions of the saints or of Jesus, literally hearing voices that emanate from no embodied speaker, and the like. [...]

Within these limitations I wish to range as ecumenically as possible over the full range of Christian experience — embracing the evangelical sense of having the burden of sin lifted from one after a commitment to Christ, as well as the Catholic sense of the indwelling of Christ in the reception of the bread and wine, ranging over the experience of the Holy Spirit working through one in glossolalia and other "gifts of the spirit," as well as the sense of trust and confidence in God with which a more sober mainliner will begin his or her day.

[...]

The fruits of the spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. The church is the body of Christ. The Spirit is at work in the church. God speaks to us through the Bible, through the preaching of the gospel, through the lives and actions of those who live in the spirit. God will reveal His will to those who truly seek Him. God will give one the strength to do what He requires of one.

Thus I will be focusing on beliefs as to how God's nature and activities manifest themselves in our lives, rather than bare assertions about the divine in itself. Call these M-beliefs ("M" for "manifestation"). Insofar as I can learn anything from my experience about the existence and nature of God, it is by way of encountering the activity of God in the world. God does not passively sit for His portrait; we cannot just stare at Him, not in this life at any rate. If we come to know God through experience at all, it is through His works, including, pre-eminently, His works in human lives.

So the idea is that beliefs like this tell us what God will do to or for us, how His activity can be expected to impinge on our individual or corporate experience, where His messages for us are to be located, and so on. If we find things turning out in our experience as these principles would lead us to expect, this will lend some confirmation to those principles and hence, indirectly, to the total system in which they are imbedded.

[...]

IV

[...] The first point about the concept of justification is that it is an evaluative concept, in a broad sense in which this is contrasted with "factual" and includes "normative" (of behavior), as well as "evaluative" in a narrower sense in which it contrasts with "normative." To say that S is justified in believing that p is to imply that there is something all right, satisfactory, in accord with the way things should be, about the fact that S believes that p. It is to accord S's believing a positive evaluative status.

Second, there is the point that epistemic justification is a matter of degree. One can be more or less justified in holding a certain belief. [...]

Third, epistemic justification can be either "normative" (having to do with intellectual obligations) or "evaluative" (having to do with reliability). [...] I take it to be obvious that the first version of the question [whether religious experience can justify M-beliefs to some degree] is to be answered in the affirmative. [...] But I am aiming my sights higher than this. I wish to consider the possibility that one's experience can provide justification sufficient for rational acceptance. [...]

V

With this background let us tackle the question of whether one can be justified in PP [perceptual practice] and in CP [Christian practice]. [...] It would seem that PP is what we might call a "basic practice," one that constitutes our basic access to its subject matter. We can learn about our physical environment only by perceiving it, by receiving reports of the perceptions of others, and by carrying out inferences from what we learn in these first two ways. We cannot know anything a priori about these matters, nor do we have any other sort of experiential access to the physical world. If this is correct, then the attempt to determine the reliability of perceptual practice faces very different problems from those faced by an attempt to determine the reliability of some restricted method or

procedure that is imbedded in some wider practice, the rest of which is taken for granted. [...]

VI

Now back to our initial question about the justifiability of CP. We have seen that Jn [normative justification in the weaker sense] is the most we can have for PP and for our other commonly accepted, basic epistemic practices. How does CP stand in this regard? As for Jn [stronger sense], I shall just assume without argument that we no more have an adequate noncircular reason for supposing CP to be reliable than we have in the case of PP. Here, too, although the practice may well be reliable, and so be Je [evaluatively justified], we have no sufficient reason for judging this to be the case. And so CP is not Jn [stronger sense], and we lack sufficient basis for supposing it to be Je. If, then, CP is Jn [weaker sense], it will be in just the same epistemic position as PP and other commonly accepted, basic epistemic practices; and it will be just as rational to take Christian experience to provide prima facie justification for M-beliefs as it is to take sense experience to provide prima facie justification for perceptual beliefs. [...]

VII

Suppose the points I have made so far are granted. More specifically, suppose it to be granted that a fully reflective, knowledgeable person in our society can be Jn [weaker sense] in engaging in CP and that she cannot be justified in any other sense in engaging in PP and other commonly accepted, basic epistemic practices. Let us suppose it granted, furthermore, that CP yields a picture of its subject matter that is such as to tend to protect it from imputations of unreliability and so, in this way, is self-supporting. Nevertheless, one might still feel the need for some further recommendation of CP. Granted that we cannot reasonably expect to be able to develop a cogent noncircular argument for the reliability of CP, one still might wonder if there is some way in which CP "proves itself" as PP does with its payoffs of prediction and control of the course of events. [...]

Perceptual practice proves itself, insofar as it does, by providing us with a "map" of the physical and social environment that enables us to find our way around in it, to anticipate the course of events, and to adjust our behavior to what we encounter so as to satisfy our needs and achieve our ends. This is the basic function of sense perception in our lives, and it carries out that function with reasonable success, as it itself testifies. To discover the appropriate fruits of the Christian enterprise, we have to ask what its basic purpose or function is. It is clear that it is not primarily a theoretical or speculative function, any more than in the former case, but it is not the same kind of practical function either. It is rather the transformation of the individual into what God intended him to be. This is what, from within the Christian life, its basic goal is revealed to be. It would seem, then, that Christian practice proves itself insofar as it enables the individual to transform himself, or to be transformed, in ways that when they occur will be seen by the individual as supremely fulfilling, as the actualization of his real nature, as what God had planned for him.

[...]

But I fear that the course of the argument has led me into a region that calls for the expertise of a preacher or a spiritual director rather than that of a philosopher, and so I must take my leave.

Can Belief in God Be Rational If It Has No Foundations?

Nicholas Wolterstorff

Central to Christianity, Judaism, and Islam alike is the conviction that we as human beings are called to believe in God—to trust in him, to rely on him, to place our confidence in him. To believe in God is our fundamental human obligation. Central also is the conviction that only by believing in God can the deepest stirrings of the human heart be satisfied. Duty and fulfillment here coalesce.

But is it rational for us to believe in God? Is it rational for us to place our confidence in him? Can a person believe in God without

performing a sacrifice of the intellect? These are questions which arise for any reflective person of the modern Western society. Presumably it is rational for a person to believe in God only if it is rational for him to believe various propositions about God—in particular, that there is such a being as God. The rationality of trusting someone presupposes the rationality of believing that that person exists. And among the objections to Christian belief, as well as to Judaic and Muslim, characteristic of the modern intelligentsia is the objection that it is no longer rational, if ever it was, to believe that God exists. We must choose between trusting our rationality and assenting to God's existence. We cannot have it both ways. The rational person will have to make his way in the world without supposing that there exists any God in whom he could trust. Kafka's castle is empty. The noises we hear are only echoes of our own voices.

Tacit in this characteristically modern objection to theistic conviction is the assumption that if it is not rational to believe some (affirmative) proposition about God, then one ought not believe it. There are a good many theologians in this century who—if I read them correctly—would contest this assumption. They would agree with the objectors that believing that God exists requires throwing overboard the demands of rationality, but they would nonetheless refuse to go along with the conclusion of the objector that we ought then to cease believing that God exists. Divine revelation, they say, has entered our existence, coming as an assault to our rationality. Accordingly, we must now choose by what principle we shall live our lives—reason or revelation. The believer has thrown in his lot with revelation, and rationality no longer has any claim on him. It is a matter of utter indifference to him whether his theistic convictions are rational. Rationality is only a siren tempter.

In my judgment this is a profoundly misguided response to the challenge I have cited, expressing an untenable view of the place of rationality in our human existence—at least when rationality is understood as I shall be understanding it in this discussion. In my judgment the charge that it is irrational to believe that God exists

must be taken seriously by the theist. This is one of the theses I shall be defending.

[...]

I

John Locke was among the first to formulate articulately the evidentialist challenge to theistic belief. [...] Reason, says Locke, "as contradistinguished to faith, I take to be the discovery of the certainty or probability of such propositions or truths, which the mind arrives at by deductions made from such ideas which it has got by the use of its natural faculties, viz., by sensation or reflection." Faith, on the other side, is the assent to any proposition, not thus made out by the deductions of reason, but upon the credit of the proposer, as coming from God in some extraordinary way of communicating. [...]

[Locke argues that] before a person is entitled to believe that such-and-such is a deliverance from God, he must have inferred from adequate evidence that it is that. But what about his prior belief that there is a God? Must it too be supported by adequate reasoning if the person is to be entitled to hold it? Yes indeed, on Locke's view. God, says Locke, "has given us no innate ideas of himself." He "has stamped no original characters on our mind, wherein we may read his being." That God exists is not self-evident to us. Yet, "having furnished us with those faculties our minds are endowed with, he hath not left himself without witness, since we have sense, perception, and reason, and cannot want a clear proof of him as long as we carry ourselves about us." Locke then proceeds to argue that each of us knows intuitively that he himself exists, and that "nothing can no more produce any real being, than it can be equal to two right angles." From these two premises he concludes that there must be an eternal being, and he goes on to argue that that eternal being has the characteristics of God.

[...]

III

What Locke assumes here is that there are duties and responsibilities pertaining to our believing. Just as it is not true that "anything goes" in our actions regarding other human beings, so too it is not true that "anything goes" in our believing.

What must at once be added, however, is that our believing may be subject to duties and responsibilities in a number of different respects. [...] It is clear that at the center of Locke's attention, and at the core of the evidentialist challenge as he issues it, is this last phenomenon: Some beliefs we ought not to have. Some we ought to have. Some we are permitted to have. Some we are permitted not to have. For the sake of convenience we might call these possession obligations with respect to our believing (and correlatively, possession permissions).

[...]

IV

Locke assumes—rightly in my judgment—that we have an obligation to govern our assent with the goal in mind of getting more amply in touch with reality. Likewise he assumes—also rightly, I think—that this goal has the two sides of seeking to increase our stock of true beliefs and of seeking to avoid or eliminate false beliefs. [...]

V

The applicability of the concept of rationality that we are in the process of elucidating presupposes that we human beings are capable of governing our assent, in particular, capable of governing it with the goal in mind of getting more amply in touch with reality. The very image of governing suggests, however, that there are various belief-forming processes or "mechanisms" present in us. A ruler's governance of his subjects does not consist of calling them into existence. It will be important for our subsequent purposes to look more closely at these two phenomena of human nature, that of belief-forming "mechanisms" and that of the capacity for governing these.

It has to be said that the main representatives of the epistemological tradition have paid far too little attention to these matters. The great exception is Thomas Reid. [...] Reid thought that human beings come with a variety of innate dispositions to form beliefs. He called these dispositions "principles of common sense." Among them he included a disposition to believe what we are aware of in sensation, a disposition to believe what we are aware of in consciousness (i.e., our own mental states), a disposition to believe what we remember, a disposition to believe that the future will resemble the past, a disposition to believe what we are told, a disposition to believe in the existence of other persons, and a disposition to believe in certain self-evident truths of reason. [...]

VI

I have been elaborating a concept of rationality which is tied, in the first instance, to the governance of our beliefs with the goal of getting more amply in touch with reality. The concept of rationality is the concept of doing as well as can rightly be demanded of one in such governance. The rationally held belief is the belief which, in the way it is held, does not fall short of what can rightly be demanded.

[...]

VII

Up to this point we have been trying to get before us, as clearly as possible, that concept of rational belief which is characteristically used in the evidentialist objection to theistic conviction. It is not at all an idiosyncratic concept. Though no doubt there are other concepts attached to our English word "rational," there can be little doubt that this is one of them. It is time now that we move to the second stage of our project — that of trying to formulate a criterion for the correct application of this concept.

Given our discussion thus far, we can now put somewhat more precisely the contention of the evidentialist. His claim is that theistic conviction, to be rational, must be arrived at, or at least reinforced,

by the process of inference. Each of us has a wide variety of belief dispositions, innate and learned. From this whole array the evidentialist picks out the inference mechanism as that which must evoke or reinforce theistic conviction if it is to be rational. Only that will do. And of course he adds that the premises from which the inference proceeds must in fact provide adequate evidence for the conclusion.

[...]

VIII

The criterion I propose will actually be a criterion for a somewhat narrower concept than that of rationality as thus far delineated. Here I shall not at all attempt to specify conditions for permissible firmness of conviction. I will attempt only to specify conditions for rationally accepting a proposition at all. We are looking simply for the justifying circumstances for the acceptance of propositions.

A criterion which has recently entered the arena of philosophical discussion, after the collapse of classical foundationalism, is that of reliabilism. Reliabilism says, roughly, that a given belief of a person is rationally justified if and only if that belief was produced or is sustained in him by a reliable process or mechanism. [...] For reasons given, I do not find reliabilism acceptable.

As I now propose to offer my own criterion for rationally justified belief, we must keep clearly in mind the project on which we are engaged. Our project is not to give advice to the person who is wondering whether to believe a certain proposition or whether to keep himself from believing it. Rather we are looking at the person who already has an array of beliefs, so as to give him and others a criterion for picking out those which it is rational for him to hold from those which are not. We are after, not rules for the direction of the mind, but a criterion for separating one's rational beliefs from one's nonrational beliefs.

[...]

My central thesis, now, is this: S will have done as well as can rightly be demanded of him in the use of his belief-governing capacities toward the goal of getting more amply in touch with reality if and only if all of his beliefs are innocently produced and none of those is nonrational on this criterion.

IX

The criterion I have offered for rationality in beliefs openly and unabashedly makes use of normative concepts in its formulation. Indeed, it makes use of the very same normative concept for whose application it is a criterion. Accordingly, to understand the criterion one must already grasp the concept, and to apply the criterion one must already know how to apply the concept. These features of our criterion will give some readers pause in accepting it. They will feel that what is wanted out of a criterion has not been achieved.

When one's goal is to introduce a concept to someone, then of course one must avoid using the concept in one's introduction. That has not been my aim here. I have presumed that we already have the concept of being rational, of being rationally justified in one's beliefs. Earlier in my discussion I made some clarifying comments about that concept, pointing out its connection to responsibilities, in that way trying to make as clear as possible which concept I had in mind. My hope was that thereby the reader either would acquire the concept or would acquire a clearer view of a concept which already he had. Here in this section my goal has been to formulate a criterion for the application of this concept that the reader already has in mind. [...]

XII

Our Reidian approach to epistemology downplays the significance of reasoning. Reasoning is but one among many modes of belief formation. And it is not unique in producing rationally held beliefs. Other "mechanisms" of belief formation produce rational beliefs as well.

XIII

After this lengthy detour we now at last come to the evidentialist's challenge. In the light of our analysis, we can see that the evidentialist's challenge is not that the theist must accept his theistic convictions on the basis of inference; his challenge is more radical than that. His challenge is that if one does not accept them on the basis of inference, then one will be unable to meet the conditions for rational belief as laid down by our criterion. Such a person will have beliefs which are rationally unjustified. So the crucial question is this: Could a person's immediate belief that God exists be rational? Could a person who holds that belief, and holds it immediately, also have his belief-holding governed as well as can rightly be demanded of him?

On our analysis, it is not necessary that the belief be grounded in other beliefs. To be rational it is only necessary that the person not have, and not be obliged to have, adequate reason for ceasing from that belief. And not be obliged to believe that he has adequate reason for ceasing from it. Could that be true of the person who believes immediately that God exists? I see no reason at all why it could not be true of many persons. I see no reason why there could not be persons who do not have adequate reason to surrender their belief that God exists and who are not obliged to believe that they have such reason. And I see no reason why some persons could not, even though they have always believed that God exists immediately, have used their belief-governing capacities as well as can rightly be demanded of them.

The evidentialist will here object. He will point out to us that there are all those arguments against the existence of God—the arguments from evil, from the alleged incomprehensibility of the concept of God, from the claim that theistic belief is a case of wishful thinking, and so on. And he will then argue that these arguments, taken together, constitute adequate reason for ceasing from belief in God. Indeed, he will argue that they are so strong that any person who fails to see their force must be a victim of wishful thinking or something of that sort—or else that his conceptual apparatus is inadequate. And if that is so, then no one is rationally justified in holding an immediate belief in God. All such believers

have adequate reason for ceasing from their belief. They are irrational if they do not see it, and irrational if they do.

What are we to say to this? Obviously the whole issue cannot be resolved in a few paragraphs. But I will make three comments.

First, the fact that some argument against theism has been proposed does not, by itself, constitute an adequate reason for ceasing from believing that God exists. It only becomes an adequate reason when the argument is sound and when the believer comes to see that it is sound, or ought to see that it is sound. [...] There is not a single argument against the existence of God that is widely acknowledged to be sound by the philosophical community. [...]

Second, the evidentialist's claim that the arguments against the existence of God are so powerful that any person who fails to see their force must be intellectually deficient is surely an exaggeration. [...] It is simply not true that every reflective person who continues to believe in God has failed to do his intellectual duty.

Third, the evidentialist's challenge is always situation-specific. Whether a given believer is rational in holding his belief that God exists depends on the totality of his beliefs and his epistemic situation. There is no general answer. [...]

XIII [continued]

What our criterion instructs us to consider is whether it is possible that there be a person who believes immediately that God exists, and at the same time has no adequate reason to surrender that belief. Or more precisely, whether there is a person who at the same time neither has nor ought to believe that he has any adequate reason to surrender that belief. Might a person's being in the situation of believing immediately that God exists represent no failure on his part to govern his beliefs as well as can rightly be demanded of him with respect to the goal of getting more amply in touch with reality?

I see no reason whatsoever to suppose that by the criterion offered the evidentialist challenge is tenable. I see no reason to suppose that people who hold as one of their immediate beliefs that God exists always have adequate reason to surrender that belief—or ought to believe that they do. I see no reason to suppose that holding the belief that God exists as one of one's immediate beliefs always represents some failure on one's part to govern one's assent as well as one ought.

However, those abstract and highly general theses of evidentialism no longer look very interesting, once we regard them in the light of the criterion offered. One of the burdens of this paper has been that issues of rationality are always situation specific. Once the impact of that sinks in, then no longer is it of much interest to spend time pondering whether evidentialism is false. It seems highly likely that it is. But the interesting and important question has become whether some specific person—I, or you, or whoever—who believes immediately that God exists is rational in that belief. Whether a given person is in fact rational in such belief cannot be answered in general and in the abstract, however. It can only be answered by scrutinizing the belief system of the individual believer, and the ways in which that believer has used his noetic capacities.

Perhaps a theistic believer who is not of any great philosophical sophistication has heard a lecture of Anthony Flew attacking religious belief, and perhaps he finds himself unable to uncover any flaws in the argument. Or perhaps he has heard a powerful lecture by some disciple of Freud arguing that religious belief represents nothing more than a surrogate satisfaction of one's need to feel secure, and perhaps, once again, he can find no flaw in the argument. It would appear that if this believer has puzzled over these arguments for a reasonable length of time, has talked to people who seem to him insightful, and so on, and still sees no flaws in the argument, then he is no longer rationally justified in his belief—provided, of course, he does not have evidence in favor of God's existence which counterbalances these. And it makes no difference now by what "mechanism" his theistic convictions were formed in him! By contrast, the person who has never heard of

these arguments, and the person who justifiably believes them not sound, is in a relevantly different situation.

It is important to keep in mind here our main earlier conclusion, however. From the fact that it is not rational for some person to believe that God exists it does not follow that he ought to give up that belief. Rationality is only *prima facie* justification, lack of rationality, only *prima facie* impermissibility. Perhaps, in spite of its irrationality for him, the person ought to continue believing that God exists. Perhaps it is our duty to believe more firmly that God exists than any proposition which conflicts with this, and/or more firmly than we believe that a certain proposition does conflict with it. Of course, for a believer who is a member of the modern Western intelligentsia to have his theistic convictions prove nonrational is to be put into a deeply troubling situation. There is a biblical category which applies to such a situation. It is a trial, which the believer is called to endure. Sometimes suffering is a trial. May it not also be that sometimes the nonrationality of one's conviction that God exists is a trial, to be endured?

XIV

And what, lastly, about the enthusiasts who so vexed Locke? Locke was persuaded that the enthusiasts claiming private revelations were irrational and, accordingly, irresponsible. They were acting in disobedience to their Creator. But if we do not demand of everyone in the field of religion good evidence for their convictions, said Locke, then we will simply have to acknowledge that anything goes. The concept of rational belief will simply have to be discarded. So Locke undertook to provide good evidence for his Christian convictions, and he challenged the enthusiasts to act likewise.

The evidentialist challenge which Locke laid down to the enthusiasts is untenable. But that does not mean that one is speechless in the face of crackpots. It does not mean that anything goes. Rather than demanding evidence from the enthusiast, one offers him adequate reasons for the falsehood of his beliefs. Sometimes he may concede the point and give up his convictions. In other cases, no doubt, he will continue merrily believing. But in

this respect the approach implied by our criterion is surely no worse than Locke's. Locke's issuance of the evidentialist challenge was not noticeably effective in snuffing out British "enthusiasm"!

Turning

George I. Mavrodes

Huyos settled himself on the stone bench and leaned back against the cool wall. He was in a sort of spacious but secluded pocket formed by the convoluted walls which surrounded the main square of his city. Between two walls he could see a slice of the square, and in the background he could hear the sounds of commerce and movement. The sky was blue and the sunshine bright. As other people came in to take their places on the benches and ledges he reflected on his own good fortune. And he had no intimation of the darkness which would fall upon him before an hour had passed.

The church has had many great doctors, he thought to himself, but perhaps not so many as one in every generation. Many Christians had never sat with a master such as Frisius. But in this alcove Frisius taught publicly two mornings a week. By custom and habit those who came regularly had places to sit. But anyone was welcome to come, and there were always people in back who were curious to see the famed preacher. Huyos had come like that at first, but he had come back, and back, until now he was a regular, and had his place. And he counted himself fortunate in the providence of God.

As the great clock finished striking the hour Frisius arrived, striding immediately to his accustomed place. Conversation ceased, as if cut by a knife. Without preliminaries Frisius spoke an invocation, asking for God's blessing there. And then he spoke to the people.

"Today," he said, "we are to begin to speak about the Decrees of God. But first I must say something else. For last week I mis-spoke myself, and I was rebuked for it by the Elder Sumisian."

He smiled a little then, almost shyly, and added, "But gently though, as is the courtesy of one who has lived long in the love of God."

Almost everyone there knew Sumisian by sight, though few knew him well. He was an old man, white of hair and beard, long a Christian. He came sometimes to hear Frisius, but not always. If he came early, the younger men would make room for him to sit; but if he came late, he would stand in back of the crowd. And he never spoke, even on the rare occasions when Frisius invited questions and discussion.

"You remember," Frisius went on, "that I said that our faith in God must be wholehearted and without reservation, a matter of total commitment. And that must be true of every aspect of our faith in God, including, for example, our belief that God is. That, too, must be something which we do from the bottom of our hearts, holding back no measure of assent. And it was there that I mis-spoke.

"What I said was that the degree of our belief should be total and unconditional. Those words were ill-chosen, though my intent was good."

[...]

"What I had in mind," Frisius went on, "was the doctrine of those who say that the degree of our belief that God exists should be proportional to the weight of the evidence which lies in favor of that belief, or to our assessment of that evidence. Such people study arguments for the existence of God, they collect the evidences for the resurrection of our Lord, they seek to determine the authorship of the biblical books, they trace the derivation of one manuscript from another. And they set that evidence, or their judgments about it, as conditions on the depth of their assent to the reality of God or to other cardinal doctrines of our faith.

"When I said that our belief must be unconditional, I had this doctrine - and this practice - in mind, and I meant to reject it. And in that, I think, I made no error."

"Such people," he continued, "must always be unstable, driven as a wave of the sea. For their faith is at the mercy of opinion about the evidence, and they must always keep before them the possibility that tomorrow's post may bring new evidence and so require some new adjustment in the depth of their commitment."

[...]

"What we are to believe, then, and how much we are to believe it - that is for God to command and for us to obey. This is the condition which governs our intellectual life, and the noetic aspect of the faith. And the great doctrines of the Christian faith are those which God wills for us to believe without reservation, without dependence upon evidence, from the bottom of our hearts."

Frisius paused, and looked around. For a moment his eyes met those of Huyos, and passed on. And still Huyos seemed to himself to see, and not to know what he saw.

"I turn now to the subject of the morning," Frisius said. "It is that of the Decrees of God. ..."

[...]

The story continues with Huyos's growing unease and his eventual realization that Frisius's teaching, despite its appeal, is leading him into a form of intellectual idolatry—making a god out of the mind itself. He comes to see that he has been trusting in his own reasoning and arguments rather than in God alone. In a moment of crisis, he turns away from his intellectual pride and back to simple trust in God's Word.

Einde van de beschikbare tekst.

Deze weergave bevat de volledige leesbare tekst uit de aangeleverde PDF-bestanden. Ontbrekende delen (zoals de essays van Marsden en Holwerda, de volledige notenapparaten, en eventuele indexen) zijn niet opgenomen in de bronbestanden.

