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The epistemology of enculturation

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THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF ENCULTURATION

A Dissertation

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of

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by

Joshua D. White

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For my parents.

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ABSTRACT

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Is it irrational to believe something when that belief reflects the influence of one's culture or community? Some have argued that it is, especially when it comes to beliefs about controversial matters like religion, morality, and politics. I begin by situating the problem of cultural influence within the broader discussion surrounding irrelevant influences on our beliefs. After clarifying the way in which our beliefs are influenced by our cultures, I argue that neither the fact nor the recognition that one's belief has been influenced by one's culture is sufficient to render that belief unjustified or irrational.

1. FROM IRRELEVANT INFLUENCE TO CULTURAL INFLUENCE

Is it irrational to believe something when that belief reflects the influence of a seemingly irrelevant factor? A number of analytic epistemologists have recently turned their attention to this question, adopting several labels to identify the alleged problem that arises in cases of this sort: the problem of irrelevant influences (Elga 2008; White 2010; Schoenfield 2014, Vavova ms), the problem of contingency (Bogardus 2013), and the problem of historical variability (Ballantyne 2012). Motivating the problem addressed under these labels is the observation that some of our most important beliefs appear to be linked to causal factors that are irrelevant to the truth of those beliefs. Our religious and political beliefs, for example, are sometimes said to be the product of the community or culture in which we grew up.

Philosophers have offered different diagnoses of the epistemic problem that arises in these cases. According to some, the problem reduces to a more general epistemological worry, such as skepticism or disagreement. Others claim that the problem stems from the unreliability of the belief-forming method employed in these cases. Still others argue that the beliefs in question suffer from a kind of knowledge-precluding epistemic luck or are formed in a way that is unsafe.

My aim in this chapter is to begin the process of shedding some light on a question that has received significantly less attention: the question of *how* the beliefs in these cases arise in the first place. Despite the work that has been done on the nature of the problem these cases present, there has been no extended analysis of the way in which irrelevant factors exert their influence on the allegedly problematic beliefs. This is a significant lacuna, since it is plausible to think that there will be an important relationship

between the way in which these beliefs arise and the epistemological problems they pose. After all, the problem of irrelevant influences is chiefly one about the etiology of a belief. It would thus seem that until that etiology is better understood, efforts to diagnose the problem it poses will be significantly handicapped.

However, before we can explore how the beliefs in irrelevant influence cases arise, we need to know which cases to look at. Thus, my central aim in this chapter is to come up with some way of identifying cases involving irrelevant influences. To do that, I examine the paradigmatic cases of irrelevant belief influence in an attempt to locate some feature of those cases that can be used as part of a general criterion for identifying irrelevant influence cases. A number of philosophers have noted the difficulty of identifying what exactly makes something an epistemically irrelevant factor or, relatedly, what kind of case constitutes an irrelevant influence case. Yet, there has been no clear demonstration of where the difficulty lies. With this in mind, I formulate several proposals that, if successful, would make it possible to identify all and only those cases involving irrelevant influences.

Unfortunately, none of these proposals ultimately proves successful. Those that rely on the power of a causal factor either to make us unreliable or to easily have made us unreliable fail because there are cases in which an irrelevant influence neither makes us unreliable nor easily could have made us unreliable. A proposal that requires that the causal factor involved fail to appropriately cause the belief in question also fails, but for the opposite reason: it picks out far too many beliefs to plausibly be thought to present a unique challenge. Likewise, an account that shifts the focus from the causal factors involved to the belief-forming processes involved also picks out too many beliefs to illuminate the unique kind problem that irrelevant influences are supposed to cause.

Given the dim prospects of finding any feature of the paradigmatic cases of irrelevant influence that can be used as a general criterion for capturing all and only those problematic cases of irrelevant influence, coupled with the fact that the central examples are those in which one forms a belief because of the influence of one's community

or culture, I argue that the most promising avenue for identifying a unique problem of irrelevant influences is to focus specifically on those beliefs that are the product of one's community or culture.

Put a bit less precisely but a bit more succinctly, the argument of this chapter is as follows:

1. To provide a fully satisfying account of the problem posed by epistemically irrelevant influences, we must first understand how the beliefs in irrelevant influence cases arise.
2. To understand how the beliefs in irrelevant influence cases arise, we need a principled way of identifying irrelevant influence cases.
3. We lack a principled way of identifying irrelevant influence cases.
4. Therefore, we cannot provide a fully satisfying account of the problem posed by epistemically interesting irrelevant influences.
5. Thus, the most promising way forward is to focus on a particular kind of irrelevant influence—namely, one's community or culture.

Let us begin by examining some of the central cases that have been thought to give rise to the problem of irrelevant influences.

1.1 Some Problematic Cases

As previously mentioned, there is no univocal label for the problem or set of problems that arise from the kinds of causal considerations that have been discussed in the existing literature. Fortunately, there is significant agreement over the kinds of cases that are intuitively thought to give rise to the problem. For this reason, the best place to begin to gain some insight into both the problem and the nature of the cases at issue is by noting some of the most widely discussed examples.

It is common to note that religious, moral, and political beliefs seem to be especially susceptible to the influence of irrelevant or contingent causal factors. Miriam Schoenfield writes, "Many of the beliefs that have been caused by irrelevant influences are religious, moral, political and philosophical beliefs. These are the kinds of beliefs that

are very central to who we are, and to important decisions that we make about how to structure our lives” (2014, 194). Similarly, Katia Vavova writes, “The problem of irrelevant influences is particularly troubling for our moral and political beliefs” (ms, 4). Nathan Ballantyne claims that one of the “salient features of worries about variability” is that “the beliefs challenged by variability typically concern *controversial topics* like politics, morals, religion, and philosophy, not ordinary or commonplace topics” (2012, 241).

In light of this, it is no surprise that religious belief has been the primary focus of the majority of the relevant literature, with such beliefs being central to many cases that are supposed to give rise to the purported problem. As Tómas Bogardus (2013, 372) points out, as far back as the pre-Socratics we find “an embryonic statement” of the problem when Xenophanes writes, “Ethiopians say that their gods are flat-nosed and dark, Thracians that theirs are blue-eyed and red-haired” (Quoted in Reeve and Miller 2006, 8). The implication, of course, is that religious beliefs are a result of one’s culture or community. John Stuart Mill (2003, 88) expands on this theme:

And the world, to each individual, means the part of it with which he comes in contact; his party, his sect, his church, his class of society. . . . It never troubles him that mere accident has decided which of these numerous worlds is the object of his reliance, and that the same causes which make him a Churchman in London, would have made him a Buddhist or a Confucian in Peking.

More recently, John Hick (1997, 281) has argued that the correspondence between one’s religious beliefs and the dominant religious beliefs of one’s culture is cause for concern:

Religious allegiance depends in the great majority of cases on the accident of birth: someone born into a devout Muslim family in Pakistan is very likely to be a Muslim, someone born into a devout Hindu family in India to be a Hindu, someone born into a devout Christian family in Spain or Mexico to be a Catholic Christian; and so on. The conclusion I have drawn is that a “hermeneutic of suspicion” is appropriate in relation to beliefs that have been instilled into one by the surrounding religious culture.

Philip Kitcher (2011, 26) draws a similar conclusion:

Most Christians have adopted their doctrines much as polytheists and the ancestor-worshippers have acquired theirs: through early teaching and socialization. Had the Christians been born among aboriginal Australians, they would believe, in just the same ways, on just the same bases, and with just the same convictions, doctrines about Dreamtime instead of about the Resurrection. The symmetry is complete. . . . Given that they are all on a par, we should trust none of them.

As these examples make clear, religious belief has been at the center of concerns about the problematic kinds of causal stories.¹

One notable nonreligious case comes from G. A. Cohen.² Cohen (2000, 18) worries that he believes in the analytic/synthetic distinction because he attended graduate school at Oxford, where the distinction was widely accepted:

Now people of my generation who studied philosophy at Harvard rather than at Oxford for the most part *reject* the analytic/synthetic distinction. And I can't believe that this is an accident. That is, I can't believe that Harvard just *happened* to be a place where both its leading thinker rejected that distinction and its graduate students, for independent reasons—merely, for example, in the independent light of reason itself—also came to reject it. And vice versa, of course, for Oxford. . . . So, in some sense of “because,” and in some sense of “Oxford,” I think I can say that I believe in the analytic/synthetic distinction because I studied at Oxford.

Cohen goes on to note that this is “disturbing” since “the fact that I studied at Oxford is no reason for thinking the distinction is sound” (2000, 18).

1.2 Analyses of the Problem

With these example cases in mind, it will be helpful to briefly consider some of the ways in which philosophers have diagnosed the alleged problems that arise for the beliefs in

1. The quote from Mill is discussed in (Ballantyne 2012) and (Bogardus 2013), the latter of which also includes discussion of the examples from Hick and Kitcher. Religious belief is also the central case discussed in (Schoenfield 2014) and is the topic of the discussion in (Baker-Hytch 2014). Though not the central focus, religious belief is also considered in connection with the alleged problem in (Elga 2008) and (White 2010).

2. Cohen's case is discussed in (Elga 2008), (White 2010), (Schoenfield 2014), and (Vavova ms).

these cases. My aim is not to provide an exhaustive account of all of the ways in which the problem has been handled, nor is it to evaluate these particular treatments of the problem. Rather, my goal is simply to provide some additional insight into the nature of the cases that have been thought to give rise to the problem, and to help orient the discussion to follow.

1.2.1 A Sampling of Analyses

Adam Elga (2008) sets out to diagnose the “unsettling feeling” that arises from reflection on the fact that “one’s way of evaluating evidence reflects various accidents of fate: accidents in one’s early development, in one’s later schooling, and even perhaps in the evolutionary history of one’s capacities” (6). According to Elga, this feeling arises because such reflections make salient the possibility of the sort of global error that is the province of general skepticism. Specifically, Elga thinks global skepticism is motivated by the recognition that some unjustified states of belief are both coherent and stable, together with the recognition that one has no independent reason to think one isn’t in such a state. Likewise, when one’s coherent noetic structure includes the belief that p (where that belief is the result of irrelevant influences), one may recognize that other irrelevant factors could have led to an equally coherent noetic structure that includes the belief that $\neg p$ (e.g., one’s graduate school may affect which stance on the analytic/synthetic dichotomy one adopts). Yet, one has no reason, independent of those factors, to think that one’s belief that p is true. Thus, according to Elga, the irrelevant influence case “presents no *additional* worry over and above the very general skeptical problem” posed by global skeptical scenarios.³ Learning of irrelevant influences “may make salient the possibility

3. Elga also considers a way of putting the problem according to which learning that one’s belief was influenced by irrelevant factors can provide evidence that one has violated one’s own standards for reasoning. For example, perhaps one gave too much weight to the opinions of one’s buddies. In these cases, learning of the influence of an irrelevant factor is not unlike other ways of learning that one has used an unreliable process. As Elga writes, in these cases, “The bottom line is that when one finds out that an irrelevant factor has influenced one’s belief, that *can* be evidence that the belief in question was formed by a process that violated one’s own standards” (5). I think the case discussed in the main text accords more closely with the spirit of the problematic sorts of cases discussed in the previous section, since the suggestion in those cases does not seem to be that one *learns* that one has used an unreliable belief-forming process.

of global error, and hence make salient a general skeptical worry. But such news never adds to the force of the skeptical worry, only to its prominence” (7).

Like Elga, Roger White (2010) also thinks the problem posed by irrelevant influences can be reduced to other (presumably more fundamental) epistemological problems, including general skepticism. White argues that some cases of irrelevant influence simply highlight the fact that it is possible for one to have believed otherwise and, had one believed otherwise, to think one was right in so believing. “But of course that is just our predicament any time we believe anything,” White writes. “Whatever I believe, there is always the possibility of my having believed otherwise. And had I done so I would no doubt think that I was right. This point alone can hardly lead to a *limited* skepticism” (604).

Despite this, White resists the “jump to the conclusion that we should be no more worried about such cases than we are about whether there is an external world or if the sun will rise tomorrow” (605). The reason for this, however, is not because irrelevant influences pose a unique challenge. Rather, it is because irrelevant influence cases indicate potential problems stemming from disagreement. To motivate this claim, White asks us to imagine that Oxford is the only university with a philosophy graduate school in the world. In this case, White says, Cohen would have no reason to doubt his belief in the analytic/synthetic distinction. White takes this to show that Cohen’s worries must stem from his awareness of the fact

that students . . . graduate from Harvard believing $\neg p$ most likely has to do with the views of the faculty and how they teach. Cohen knows that graduate programs are taught by professors that are typically smart, well-informed, and so forth. It is likely that they believe $\neg p$ and can present a strong case for it. And this is a reason to suppose it might be true.

Thus understood, Cohen’s problem derives not from the etiology of his belief, but rather from “the fact that he has evidence that there are apparently very smart, well informed philosophers who differ in their opinions” (608).

Nathan Ballantyne (2012) casts the problem in terms of arbitrariness, asking whether one has reason to think one’s actual background puts one in a better position to get to

the truth of p than an alternative background.⁴ According to Ballantyne, if one lacks some reason to think one's actual background put one in a better position to get to the truth of p than some alternative background, one's belief that p is epistemically problematic. Ballantyne argues that since the beliefs in irrelevant influence cases concern "controversial topics," we often do lack such a reason. Why? Because other people who do in fact have different backgrounds have different attitudes toward p . "What lies in their past that holds them back from attaining your position with respect to getting p right? Ruminating in this way, it appears doubtful that you have reason to think your position is better than theirs" (254). Thus, here again, we see that disagreement does much of the work that motivates the problem posed by irrelevant influences.

Tómas Bogardus considers several ways of capturing the alleged problem that arises in irrelevant influence cases (specifically those involving religious belief). One potential problem for these beliefs is that they are unsafe, since "if you had been born and raised elsewhere, else when, and formed religious beliefs using the same method you actually used, then, by your own lights, you easily might have believed falsely" (380). Bogardus argues that this fact (if it is a fact) does not threaten reflective religious belief. For "the fact that something nearly happened in the past that would have made your method unsafe doesn't entail that the method was unsafe when you actually used it" (381). However, Bogardus argues that safety is not required for knowledge in the first place. Thus, even if these beliefs should fail to meet the safety condition, they do not thereby fail to constitute knowledge.

Like Bogardus, Max Baker-Hyatt (2014) focuses on cases involving religious belief and asks whether the beliefs in these cases are unsafe. He contends that while there is an argument to be made that such beliefs are unsafe, it comes at the cost of claiming that many ordinary cases of testimonial belief are also unsafe, a claim "that seems implausi-

4. Ballantyne also considers what he calls the "Symmetry Argument," according to which the problem turns on a supposed epistemic symmetry between you and your counterfactual self (who was exposed to different irrelevant influences). I do not focus on this argument since, as Ballantyne notes, this results in a weaker statement of the problem. For it is plausible to think there will also be epistemically relevant differences between one's actual self and one's counterfactual self (e.g., differences in evidence or in intellectual skill).

bly skeptical” (179). For this reason, the problem gains more traction when considered in connection with the reliability of the belief-forming process types involved. But such process types must be specified either narrowly or widely, and neither way of construing the process types involved is satisfying. For, if specified narrowly (involving reference to particular individuals, texts, or traditions), then it is less likely that the type is such that it would deliver very many beliefs that differ from one’s actual religious beliefs (and are thereby incompatible with one’s actual religious beliefs), and so not plausible to think “that the relevant process type has an insufficiently high truth-ratio” (182). On the other hand, if the problem is cast in a way that references process types that are specified more widely (so as to involve no mention of a particular religious text or tradition), then it does appear to afflict a large number of religious beliefs. However, in doing so, it also has unpalatable consequences for our moral, philosophical, and scientific beliefs.

Miriam Schoenfield (2014) takes a different approach, connecting her discussion of the problem with the question of whether rationality is permissive. Schoenfield argues that permissivism is true, and so, for at least some propositions and bodies of evidence, there is no uniquely rational attitude to have toward that proposition on that body of evidence. Specifically, it may be that on some ways of weighing the evidence, one attitude toward *p* is rational, while on a different way of weighing the same evidence, a different attitude toward *p* is rational. Since irrelevant factors determine which rational standards we end up with, the beliefs in irrelevant influence cases are problematic only when they fail to accord with our own epistemic standards. We need not worry that different influences would have caused us to have different beliefs, since in those circumstances, our rational standards would also be different, and thereby rationally license those different beliefs (rather than the beliefs we actually hold).

1.2.2 A Neglected Question

While there are a number of interesting and important insights to be gleaned from these treatments of the problematic cases of irrelevant influence, it is noteworthy that rela-

tively little has been said about *how* the beliefs in these cases arise in the first place. While we see some general suggestions in the claims that such beliefs are the result of testimony or the particular epistemic standards we acquire, we find no extended treatment of the way in which the beliefs in these cases come about. Since the problem of irrelevant influences is supposed to be one that arises in connection with a belief's etiology, it is somewhat surprising that the question of how the beliefs in these cases arise hasn't been given more attention.

In order to address this question, it is necessary to know when a belief is susceptible to the charge that it reflects the influence of an irrelevant factor. In other words, we need some way to identify cases of irrelevant influence. This presents a bit of a challenge. For, on one hand, since we are delaying any diagnosis of the problem, we cannot say that irrelevant influence cases are those in which a belief is formed in an unreliable way, or is at best accidentally true, or is unsafe. On the other hand, it would be helpful to have a principled way to identify irrelevant influence cases, so that we do not have to rely only on intuitions about which beliefs exhibit the problematic kind of irrelevant influence and which do not.

One strategy for identifying irrelevant influence cases (and thereby the kinds of beliefs that are susceptible to the alleged problem) is to analyze the concept of an irrelevant factor. Such an analysis would allow us to identify irrelevant influence cases with those that involve irrelevant factors. However, it has been widely noted just how difficult it is to say precisely what makes some factor irrelevant in the germane sort of way.⁵ Yet, despite this widespread recognition of the difficulty, no one has yet demonstrated *why* this project is so challenging. There is thus some reason to hope that, with enough digging, there is a satisfying analysis of irrelevant factors waiting to be uncovered.

5. For example, after briefly considering an unsatisfactory account of irrelevant influences, White writes, "Rather than try to characterize the nature of the factors I have in mind straight off, I'll assume you get the general idea from examples" (2010, 574). Similarly, Miriam Schoenfield notes the "difficulty in explaining exactly what sorts of causal stories make for what I am calling 'an irrelevant influence case'" (2014, 215n24) and begins her exploration of the problem with the "hope you have an intuitive sense for which sorts of causes of beliefs are the worrisome ones" (2014, 194).

1.3 Irrelevance and Reliability

In this section, I explain the need to narrow our focus to those irrelevant factors or influences that are epistemologically interesting. I then develop and evaluate two accounts of irrelevant factors that focus on the power of a causal factor to make us unreliable. Ultimately, neither of these proposals proves adequate, since each fails to correctly identify some cases that intuitively appear to involve irrelevant factors.

1.3.1 *Isolating Epistemologically Interesting Irrelevant Factors*

Bearing the example cases in mind, we may ask what makes a factor irrelevant, contingent, or historically variable in the germane sort of way? As previously mentioned, this has proven to be a very difficult question to answer, and, as a result, much of the discussion has relied on the hope that there is a widely-shared intuitive sense of the sorts of factors involved. To elicit this intuition, various examples of the kinds of factors at issue are offered. As we've seen, one popular example of such a factor is the community or culture in which one is raised. Indeed, this seems to be the go-to example of an irrelevant, contingent, or historically variable sort of factor. Ballantyne, for example, writes, "These beliefs are often connected to factors that are non-epistemic. Growing up in one culture rather than another, for instance, is not usually what we would regard as good evidence or grounds for a belief" (2012, 241). White writes, "What sort of causal information might be thought to be relevant here? Let's start with some examples. It has occurred to most of us that had we been brought up in a very different environment—a different religious/political/moral upbringing, say—we would have very different convictions" (2010, 574).⁶

Some add a few more items to the list. Schoenfield, for example, writes, "It can seem very worrying that many of our deeply held convictions were caused by seem-

6. Similarly, Vavova writes, "One explanation for these clusters is that both our empirical and our normative beliefs about moral and political matters reflect the influence of our upbringing and political leanings. But we do not think that these sorts of factors should influence our beliefs: we think our beliefs should be influenced by evidence and arguments" (ms, 5).

ingly irrelevant influences, like the community we grew up in, the school we went to, or the friends we hang out with” (2014, 193). Bogardus draws the ‘irrelevance’ and ‘contingency’ labels together when he writes, “‘But you only believe that because . . . ’ begins a common objection to a belief’s rationality, and it ends by pointing out a factor that is irrelevant to the truth of the belief. Typically, this is an origin story that highlights the historical contingency of the belief: ‘you were raised Catholic,’ or ‘you studied at Oxford,’ or ‘you read only the Daily Worker’” (2013, 371).⁷

These examples provide some intuitive sense of the sorts of factors involved in the cases under consideration. We might wonder, though, whether a more satisfying account of the pertinent kinds of factors is available, so that we can move beyond a reliance on intuitions that may or may not be shared. Toward this end, Roger White offers the following suggestion:

It is harder than we might expect to say what is distinctive about the kind of causal information that raises these epistemological worries. A first stab would be something like this: a factor F is thought to have made a causal contribution to my believing that p, but F appears to be irrelevant to the question of whether p.

Yet, White immediately adds that “this is clearly too broad” since “any causal factor that I don’t list as part of my justification to believe p is one that I take to be irrelevant to the question of whether p (otherwise I would mention them in my defense of p). But only a fraction of the myriad of such factors even appear to raise a challenge to the status of my belief” (2010, 574).

As White suggests, the challenge of providing a fully satisfying account of what constitutes an irrelevant factor stems from the difficulty of isolating all and only the

7. It is worth noting that while the authors of the quotations in the previous two paragraphs use different labels for the problem they are addressing, the kinds of factors that they think give rise to this problem are strikingly similar. This suggests that the various labels for the problem—irrelevance, contingency, and historical variability—all involve the same kind of causal factor. For this reason, there is no reason to think that these labels pick out any substantive differences in the apposite kinds of factors. In fact, among those who explicitly label the problem, Bogardus (2013) and Ballantyne (2012) are the only ones who do not call it the problem of irrelevant influences. Yet, as the quotations in the previous paragraph indicate, they think that the factors involved are irrelevant factors. Bogardus states this explicitly, and it is plausible to think that ‘irrelevant’ is synonymous with Ballantyne’s ‘non-epistemic.’ For these reasons, in what follows I will speak of irrelevant factors, rather than contingent or historically variable factors.

epistemologically interesting kinds of such factors. For it is obvious that while all of our beliefs are influenced by sundry factors that are irrelevant to the truth of those beliefs, very few of those are of any epistemological interest. Vavova (ms, 3-4) provides a nice illustration of this:

For instance, the complete causal story for your belief that prosimians have opposable thumbs would cite all manner of facts about the origins and evolution of the human race, the socioeconomic and personal circumstances that made choosing and attending college possible for you, the formation and success of the educational theory that allowed you to fulfill humanities requirements with a class primarily on primates, the firing of various neurons (yours as well as others'), and the circumstances of concept formation as a result of which you are able to grasp the thought that prosimians have opposable thumbs, and so on. Plausibly, your belief about prosimians is not special in this respect. Similar causal stories could be told for many of our beliefs. We typically omit such factors when asked to justify our beliefs, and we are typically right to do so. Any such factor that we wouldn't cite as justifying a belief is one we deem to be irrelevant.

As this story makes clear, very few of the causal factors that are irrelevant to the truth of a belief are epistemically threatening.

In light of this, Vavova suggests that we distinguish between benign and distorting irrelevant influences. Since not all irrelevant factors exert a distorting or detrimental influence, we need not be concerned about irrelevant factors in general, but only about those that push our beliefs away from the truth. We can thus narrow our focus to those irrelevant factors that exert a distorting influence on our beliefs.

1.3.2 A Reliability Account

But now we must ask: What makes an irrelevant influence distorting? According to Vavova, a distorting irrelevant influence on one's belief that *p* is one that makes one unreliable with respect to *p*. She writes, "We can thus extract the following general principle for distinguishing between the innocuous and detrimental instances of irrelevant belief influence: To the extent that your independent evaluation gives you good

reason to think that you are unreliable with respect to matters like p, you must reduce your confidence in p.” She adds that to be unreliable about matters like p is “to tend toward inaccurate beliefs about such matters” (ms, 14).

While Vavova is primarily concerned with how we *respond* when we have reason to think that a belief is the result of a distorting irrelevant influence (rather than with what constitutes a distorting irrelevant influence), her comments suggest that one way in which an irrelevant influence can be distorting is by making us less reliable with respect to the kind of belief in question. Put a bit more precisely, an irrelevant factor F is a distorting influence on one’s belief that p when F makes one less reliable with respect to p (i.e., makes one less likely to be right about whether or not p).⁸ This suggests the following account of epistemologically interesting irrelevant factors:

EIIF F is an epistemologically interesting irrelevant factor on S’s belief that p if (1) F played a causal role in S’s belief that p, (2) F is irrelevant to the truth of S’s belief that p, and (3) F has a negative effect on S’s reliability with respect to p.

Before considering the merits of EIIF, it will be helpful to say a bit about its constituent conditions.

Condition (1) requires only that F play *a* causal role in S’s belief that p. This allows for cases in which an irrelevant factor is involved in the formation of one’s belief that p without being the sole cause of that belief. This raises the question of how significant F’s influence must be in order to cause problems. Suppose an irrelevant factor (e.g., my community) played a causal role in my belief that p, but that its influence was quite minimal when compared to that of the other causal factors that led to that belief (e.g., arguments and evidence for p). Perhaps this is little cause for concern. However, even if that should be the case, one’s epistemic situation would be improved if that factor hadn’t exerted an influence (supposing conditions (2) and (3) are also met in the case in question). For this reason, even when an irrelevant factor plays a comparatively small role in one’s belief that p, it is still of epistemological interest

8. This is not to say that Vavova would endorse this claim. As I say in the main text, this claim is *suggested* by what Vavova says.

Condition (2) requires that F be irrelevant to the truth of S's belief that p. The sort of irrelevance involved here is best thought of as evidential irrelevance. A full account of evidential irrelevance would depend on a full account of evidence, which is itself a vexed topic.⁹ However, we can gain an adequate grasp of this sort of irrelevance by noting that to say that F is evidentially irrelevant to p is to say at least the following: (i) F does not indicate that p is true, (ii) F does not make it probable that p is true, (iii) the truth of p cannot be deduced from F, (iv) F does not make it the case that p, and (v) F does not raise the probability of p being true.¹⁰ For example, studying at Oxford does not indicate that the analytic/synthetic distinction is sound; studying at Oxford does not make it probable that the analytic/synthetic distinction is sound; one cannot logically deduce that the analytic/synthetic distinction is sound from the fact that one studied at Oxford; studying at Oxford does not make the analytic/synthetic distinction sound; and studying at Oxford does not raise the probability that the analytic/synthetic distinction is sound.¹¹

9. As a testament to the enduring nature of this challenge, the epigraph to Thomas Kelly's (2014) entry on evidence in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* comes from R.G. Collingwood's 1956 *The Idea of History*: "And when we try to define 'evidence' . . . we find it very difficult."

10. On these functions of evidence, see (Williamson 2000, ch. 9).

11. It might be thought that if a factor, F, makes it probable that one will get good evidence about whether or not p is true, then F is evidentially relevant. Correspondingly, the following condition would need to be added to the characterization of evidential irrelevance: F does not make it likely that one will have good evidence about whether or not p is true.

I'm inclined to think that this condition is not necessary since I think that F making it probable that one will get good evidence about whether or not p is true is not sufficient to make F evidentially relevant (note that this is not to deny that F can be *epistemically* relevant). For F may make it likely that I will get good evidence about whether or not p without actually providing me with that evidence. In such a case, we would be committed to saying that F is evidentially relevant to p even though F did not have any actual influence on my belief that p.

A more important point, I think, is that while F may put me in a position to get good evidence, that by itself is not enough to make F itself evidentially relevant to p. Being born in North Carolina makes it likely that I'll get good evidence about whether or not Mt. Mitchell is North Carolina's highest point. Does this mean that *being born in North Carolina* (F) is evidentially relevant to *Mt. Mitchell is the highest point in North Carolina* (P)? It seems to me that the answer to this question is no.

Note, too, that Cohen seems to think attending Oxford made it likely that he got good evidence about whether or not the analytic/synthetic distinction is sound, for he recognizes that he was presented with "the reasons respectively for and against believing in the distinction" at Oxford. Despite this, he writes, "I think I can say that I believe in the analytic/synthetic distinction because I studied at Oxford. And that is disturbing. For the fact that I studied at Oxford is no reason for thinking the distinction is sound" (2000, 18). Cohen thus appears to think attending Oxford made it likely he would have good evidence about whether or not the analytic/synthetic distinction is sound, yet he still thinks attending Oxford is evidentially irrelevant to his belief in the distinction.

Note that conditions (1) and (2) provide an account of a “merely” irrelevant factor as opposed to an epistemologically interesting irrelevant factor (conditions (1) and (2) would thus capture the unsatisfactory account White considered in the quotation above). It is the third condition that does the work of distinguishing epistemologically interesting irrelevant factors from merely irrelevant factors. It does this by requiring that F have a negative effect on S’s reliability with respect to p. To say that F has a negative effect on S’s reliability with respect to p is to say that, all else being equal, S would be more reliable had F not played a role in her belief that p. Importantly, this means that S may still be reliable *overall* with respect to p even given the influence of F on her belief that p.¹² She will not, however, be as reliable as she would have been had F had no influence on her belief.

Does EIIIF provide a satisfactory account of epistemologically interesting irrelevant influences? Consider Cohen’s belief in the analytic/synthetic distinction, which he claims is the product of his having studied at Oxford. Conditions (1) and (2) are clearly satisfied in Cohen’s case, since his studying at Oxford played some role in his coming to believe the analytic/synthetic distinction and since the soundness of the distinction is independent of the graduate school one attends. What, then, of condition (3)? Does studying at Oxford have a negative effect on one’s reliability with respect to the analytic/synthetic distinction?

The answer to that question is an empirical matter, but we can imagine some reasons that might lead us to think that studying at Oxford would have a negative effect on one’s reliability with respect to the analytic/synthetic distinction. Indeed, Cohen himself offers some reasons for thinking this: “I believe, rather, that in each case students were especially impressed by the reasons respectively for and against believing in the distinction, because in each case *the reasons came with all the added persuasiveness of personal presentation, personal relationship, and so forth*” (2000, 18; emphasis added).

12. I should also make explicit that my concern in this chapter is not on the question of whether or not the beliefs in cases involving irrelevant influences are justified, rational, or constitute knowledge. Thus, when I speak of reliability and unreliability, I am not making any claims about the epistemic status of these beliefs with respect to a reliabilist framework of justification or knowledge (or any other framework, for that matter).

As the emphasized portion of this quotation makes clear, Cohen thinks that part of the reason he accepts the analytic/synthetic distinction (and part of the reason why Harvard grads reject that distinction) is because certain factors that are irrelevant to the truth of the distinction led him to assess the arguments for it more favorably than he would have in the absence of those factors.¹³ Since those factors are a result of his studying at Oxford and presumably shouldn't affect his assessment of the reasons offered in favor of the distinction, this provides some reason for thinking that studying at Oxford made Cohen less reliable with respect to the analytic/synthetic distinction.

Thus far, EIIIF appears to provide a satisfactory account of epistemologically interesting irrelevant factors. Not all is well, however, since there are some instances in which an intuitively epistemologically interesting irrelevant influence fails to meet the third condition of EIIIF. To see this, note that according to EIIIF, a factor that makes one *more* reliable with respect to *p* cannot be an epistemologically interesting irrelevant influence. Yet, we can imagine a case in which one's community or culture (which, as we've seen, is the prototypical example of the pertinent kind of irrelevant influence) makes one more reliable with respect to *p*, while nevertheless intuitively appearing to be an irrelevant influence. Suppose, for example, that theism is true and *S* was born into a community whose founding members just happened to guess that there is a being like the God of western monotheism. As a result, *S* receives testimony from the community (the members of which she has no reason to distrust) that God exists, is exposed to arguments that have been developed and defended to support God's existence, and participates in various rituals that were developed in light of the community's belief that

13. Something similar to Cohen's claim is supported by psychological research that has found that a number of judgments are significantly influenced by the perceived confidence of a speaker. As Sah, Moore, and McCoun (2013, 254) write:

Even when participants acknowledged that accuracy should drive credibility and were cautious in rewarding high credibility to high confidence advisors with unknown accuracy, they were still more persuaded by these confident advisors (seen in no-feedback and costly feedback conditions) and did not check on their accuracy as readily (seen in costly feedback condition). These studies shed some light on how our society rewards the expression of confidence, particularly if people do not bother to check on accuracy when they have the opportunity to do so.

It is tempting to think that the confidence with which an argument is presented (or, perhaps similarly, how much one likes the person presenting the argument) is irrelevant to the soundness of the argument.

God exists (we can suppose that these rituals provide S with various kinds of experiential and observational evidence that S takes to support p). It thus appears that S's belief that God exists is both true and is the product of reliable processes.

In this case, if we suppose that S's community is an irrelevant influence on her belief that God exists, then conditions (1) and (2) will be satisfied. However, thanks to an ancestral lucky guess, S's community in this case appears to make her more reliable with respect to God's existence than she would otherwise be (at the very least, it doesn't make her any less reliable than she would otherwise be), and so fails to satisfy condition (3).¹⁴ That is, in this case, one's community does not have a negative effect on one's reliability with respect p—quite the opposite. However, despite this, it is still tempting to think that the community in this case is an irrelevant influence.

These considerations suggest that condition (3) of EIIF is problematic. There are some factors that, despite intuitively seeming to qualify as epistemologically interesting irrelevant factor, fail to meet condition (3). Specifically, some irrelevant factors appear to have a positive, rather than a negative, effect on our our reliability. It is implausible, however, to think that they are thereby rendered *relevant* factors.

1.3.3 Modalizing the Reliability Condition

Can EIIF be modified to avoid this untoward consequence? One possibility is to add a modal disjunct to condition (3):

EIIF* F is an epistemologically interesting irrelevant factor on S's belief that p if (1) F played a causal role in S's belief that p, (2) F is irrelevant to the truth of p, and (3) F does or easily could have had a negative effect on S's reliability with respect to p.

14. To make explicit what is implicit in the text, I am distinguishing between the reliability of the way in which the original members of the community arrived at the belief that p and the way in which a later member of the community arrives at the belief that p. In the kind of case I have in mind, one who is part of the community after the belief that p has "taken root" is exposed to various typical kinds of evidence for p, such as testimony that p. However, the community only testifies that p rather than $\neg p$ because of the much earlier lucky guess. Thus, while the initial belief that p was formed in an unreliable way, the later belief, formed by the member of the community, may be formed in a reliable way. Most importantly, the community does not negatively affect one's reliability, but appears to enhance it (since, had the community incorrectly guessed that $\neg p$, one would have been less reliable with respect to p).

According to EIIF*, even if a factor F does in fact make S more reliable with respect to p, F is still irrelevant if it easily could have made S less reliable with respect p. This nicely handles the case in which one's communal ancestors made a lucky guess with respect to p and happened to get it right. There are close possible worlds in which S's ancestors guessed differently, thereby making S less reliable with respect to p in those worlds. Because of this, condition (3) of EIIF* is satisfied, and so it delivers the correct verdict in this case, reporting that the lucky community is an irrelevant influence. And, clearly, EIIF* handles Cohen's case just as well as EIIF.

Despite this apparent improvement over EIIF, however, EIIF* is not immune to counterexample. For we can imagine a case in which rather than making a lucky guess, one's ancestors were affected by a kind of radiation that was all but determined (by the Big Bang and laws of nature) to affect humans when it did, and to cause them to believe that God exists, whether or not God does, in fact, exist. This seems just as bad as the case in which one's community makes a lucky guess.¹⁵ However, since the community was determined to believe that God exists, there is no close possible world in which it fails to believe that God exists. Additionally, assuming a concept of God according to which God exists necessarily, there is no close possible world in which the community is wrong about God's existence, and thereby no close possible world in which the community makes one less reliable with respect to God's existence.¹⁶ As a result, the community in this case fails to satisfy condition (3) of EIIF*, and so fails to count as an irrelevant influence despite intuitions to the contrary.

15. It should also be added that that it is false that God intended to use this background radiation as a means to get people to have accurate beliefs about whether God exists (even if God permitted this result and knew that this result would occur). For if it were true that God intended this result, then it becomes less clear that the radiation is irrelevant factor.

16. It might be thought that the problem of irrelevant influences is better construed in terms of epistemic rather than metaphysical modality, in which case what I say in the sentence to which this note is attached is not necessarily true. I have restricted the discussion to metaphysical modality since my aim here is to better understand the nature of the factors involved in these cases. I discuss the problem in terms of epistemic modality at various places in the chapters that follow.

1.3.4 A General Problem for Reliability Accounts

We have considered two proposals that attempt to capture what is unique about epistemologically interesting irrelevant factors by focusing on the power of those factors to make one unreliable with respect to the proposition believed. Neither proposal has proven adequate, since each has failed to identify some cases that appear to involve epistemologically interesting irrelevant influences. Rather than pursue further refinements of these proposals, it is worth asking whether any account that depends on a reliability condition can illuminate the allegedly problematic cases of irrelevant belief influence. There is reason to think that this isn't the case, and that the problem is not one that stems from the tendency of the causal factors involved to make one less reliable.

In the cases that served as counterexamples to EIIF and EIIF*, one is reliable with respect to *p* because one's community happened to guess correctly about *p* or to be hit by a blast of radiation that caused it to form a true belief that *p*.¹⁷ To attribute the community's belief to a lucky guess or blast of radiation makes it easier to see why one might think that *S*'s belief that *p* is the result of an irrelevant influence. However, since it is the *community* that is supposed to be the irrelevant influence (not the lucky guess or radiation), one might think that the way in which the community arrived at its belief is independent of the question of whether one's community is an irrelevant influence (note that none of the representative quotations presented earlier make any reference to the way in which the community's belief was formed or the reliability of one's community). On this way of thinking, believing that *p* because one's community caused one to believe that *p* either is a case of irrelevant influence or it isn't. Neither the content of the belief nor the way in which the community came to adopt that belief is pertinent to the question of whether or not *S*'s belief is the product of an irrelevant influence.

17. Note that the claim here is not that *S* is reliable because *S* happened to guess correctly that *p*. Rather, the claim is that *S* is reliable because she's part of a community which, in times past, happened to guess correctly that *p* (see note 14 and the discussion that precedes it above).

To motivate this thought, suppose again that theism is true. S1 is born into a Christian community and S2 is born into a secular community. As a result, S1 believes that God exists (p) and S2 believes that God does not exist ($\neg p$). Moreover, S1's belief that p is as dependent on the influence of her community as S2's belief is dependent on the influence of *her* community. Whatever one makes of the epistemic status of S1's and S2's beliefs in this case, it is tempting to think that if one serves as an example of a belief that reflects the influence of an irrelevant factor, then so does the other. If believing something because one's community believes it is indeed a case in which a belief is influenced by an irrelevant factor, then it should be so whether or not one's community is right about p .

If this is correct, then if S believes that p because her community believes it, she isn't immune to the problems that arise in connection with irrelevant influences if her community happens to be right about p . Jonathan Edwards (2009, 295) makes this point in connection with Christian belief:

Men may have a strong persuasion that the Christian religion is true, when their persuasion is not at all built on evidence, but altogether on education, and the opinion of others; as many Mahometans are strongly persuaded of the truth of the Mahometan religion, because their fathers, and neighbors, and nation believe it. That belief of the truth of the Christian religion which is built on the very same grounds, with Mahometans' belief of the Mahometan religion, is the same sort of belief. And though the thing believed happens to be better; yet that don't make the belief itself, to be of a better sort: for though the thing believed happens to be true; yet the belief of it is not owing to this truth, but to education.

According to Edwards, the truth of Christianity is not sufficient to ameliorate the negative epistemic consequences that arise from that belief being the result of an irrelevant influence. This suggests that the question of whether or not one's belief that p is the result of an irrelevant influence is distinct both from the question of whether or not p is true and from the question of whether or not the influence at issue is reliable.

Despite this, it is tempting to think that truth and reliability must count for something.¹⁸ Consider a scenario in which the belief instilled by one's community is the product of years of careful reflection over a number of generations rather than the result of a lucky guess or blast of radiation.¹⁹ We can assume that this belief is true and, because it is the result of sustained reflection, we can also assume that one whose belief is caused by this community could not easily have been wrong about that belief.²⁰ Contrary to the case in which the community's belief is the result of a lucky guess or radiation, in this case there are no close possible worlds in which one's community is wrong about *p*, and so no close possible worlds in which *S*'s belief is both caused by that community and is unreliably formed. For this reason, it is difficult to see how any analysis that emphasizes the connection between a factor and reliability will deem the community in this kind of case an irrelevant influence.

18. There are some similarities between these considerations and those that lead Goldman (1988) to distinguish between strong and weak justification. Goldman asks us to consider a scientifically benighted culture that employs improper or inadequate methods to form beliefs about the future and the unobserved. He then asks whether or not a member of this culture who uses one of these methods (*M*) is justified. In response, he writes:

One feels a definite tension, a tug in opposite directions. There is a strong temptation to say, no, this belief is not justified or warranted. Yet from a different perspective one feels inclined to say, yes, the belief is justified. . . . The attraction of the negative answer is easily explained. It is natural to regard a belief as justified only if it is generated by proper, or adequate, methods. But method *M* certainly looks improper and inadequate. . . . Why, then, is some attraction felt toward a positive answer? This seems to stem from the cultural plight of our believer. He is situated in a certain spatio-historical environment. Everyone else in this environment uses and trusts method *M*. Moreover, our believer has good reasons to trust his cultural peers on many matters, and lacks decisive reason for distrusting their confidence in astrology. . . . Thus, we can hardly fault him for using *M*, nor fault him therefore for believing what he does. (51-52)

While what Goldman says here might be taken as a reason to think that one's culture isn't an irrelevant influence, the point is that just as there are opposing intuitions when asking whether reliability is relevant to the question of whether or not a belief is justified, so too are there opposing intuitions when asking whether reliability is relevant to the question of whether or not an influence is irrelevant.

19. This is not to say that the beliefs of all religions are the product of careful reflection and careful reflection only. It is not implausible to think, however, that something significantly more reliable than things like lucky guesses and cosmic radiation have played a significant role in the formation of at some religious beliefs. My point here is that this possibility adds an additional layer of complexity to at least some cases of cultural influence.

20. Again, this is an assumption of the case, and does not depend on the stronger claim that rational reflection is necessarily reliable. The main point is simply that, when a community arrives at its beliefs in a reliable way, reliability focused accounts will not identify the influence of one's community as an irrelevant influence. This stands in contrast the widespread view that the influence of one's community is the prototypical irrelevant influence.

This may strike some as the correct result. That is, it may be that when one's community has arrived at its belief in a reliable way (e.g., through careful thought and reflection), that community is not an irrelevant influence, and when the community arrives at its belief in an unreliable way (e.g., by a lucky guess or fortuitous blast of radiation), it is an irrelevant influence. On this view, it is not communities and cultures in general that are irrelevant influences, but communities and cultures that employ unreliable cognitive processes that are irrelevant influences.

However, what's important to see here is that if this is correct, then the sorts of cases that many have taken to be examples of cases in which a belief is the product of an irrelevant influence turn out not to be such cases after all. Consider, for example, that the majority of religious believers are members of a community that has developed its religious views over centuries of careful thought.²¹ They are thus far removed from the hypothetical case in which a community arrives at its belief by guessing. The same could be said of many moral and political beliefs, which similarly appear to be the result of sustained reflection (and are perhaps oftentimes extensions of the community's religious beliefs). Moreover, on the assumption that one of these religions is true, then the community that gets it right about religious matters will not make one less reliable with respect to religious questions. So, at the very least, the community that doesn't make one less reliable doesn't seem to be an irrelevant influence.

It is also worth noting that one of the primary ways in which one's community influences one's beliefs is through testimony. The testimony of one's community is not only the direct source of many of one's beliefs, but also influences one's beliefs less directly, as when the presuppositions of the community are reflected in its speech.²²

21. This is not to say that the beliefs of every individual within a religious tradition are the product of careful reflection or that things other than careful reflection (e.g., social pressure or rationalization) do not produce religious beliefs. It is not implausible to think, however, that something significantly more reliable than a lucky guess or blast of cosmic radiation has played an important role in the formation of many religious beliefs.

22. For example, one may come to form the belief that germs exists not because one is explicitly told this, but rather because one encounters testimony that takes for granted the existence of germs (such as, "Don't eat that, it has germs on it!"). Similarly, one may rarely encounter explicit testimony that supernatural beings exists, but be regularly exposed to speech that takes for granted the existence of such beings.

Thus, if one's community is indeed the sort of irrelevant influence that is supposed to generate epistemological problems (as is widely assumed), then a reliability based account of epistemologically interesting irrelevant factors must explain why testimony is unreliable in these cases, but not (it seems) in many others. Unless this seemingly daunting challenge can be met, then a reliability-based account appears to generate the unwelcome and implausible result that our testimonially based beliefs suffer from the problem of irrelevant influences.

These considerations suggest that any account of epistemologically interesting irrelevant factors that depends on the power of the factors involved to make one less reliable will evacuate the problem of its force by showing that there are no irrelevant factors involved in the cases that are purported to give rise to the problem of irrelevant influences in the first place. Thus, if we are to locate the problem in these cases, we will have to shift our focus away from the tendency of the factors involved to make one less reliable.

1.4 Irrelevance and the Truth Connection

The counterexamples to the reliability focused proposals considered thus far suggest that the reason those proposals fail is that in each case the cause of the belief is something other than the fact that makes that belief true. To believe that God exists because of a lucky guess or blast of radiation is to believe it for some reason other than the fact that God exists. More generally, these counterexamples suggest that a factor is irrelevant if it causes one to believe that *p* but not because *p* is true.²³

Perhaps, then, what makes a factor irrelevant is the absence of a connection between the factor in question and the truth of the proposition believed:

EIIF** F is an epistemologically interesting irrelevant factor on S's belief that *p* if (1) F played a causal role in S's belief that *p* and (2) F did not cause S to believe that *p* because *p* is true.

23. This is intended to capture, in a general way, one way of stating what's wrong in the earlier cases. For a discussion of a more nuanced way to capture the problem in terms of the lack of an appropriate causal connection between the belief and the truth of the proposition believed, see note 25 below.

The ‘because’ in condition (2) should be understood in a noncausal sense. Condition (2) is intended to capture the idea that we should hold beliefs because they’re true, even if they aren’t caused by what makes them true (mathematical beliefs, for example, cannot be caused by what makes them true, but they should be held because they’re true).²⁴

So understood, EIFF** handles the cases that served as counterexamples to EIFF and EIFF*. For, as already noted, to believe that God exists because of a lucky guess or blast of radiation is to believe it for some reason other than because it is true that God exists. Thus, EIFF** correctly says that those causes constitute an irrelevant influence on that belief. Moreover, EIFF** is able to explain what’s problematic about Cohen’s case and, on a plausible interpretation, the religious cases from Mill, Hick, and Kitcher (since it is the community, rather than the religious facts, that causes one to adopt the religious beliefs one does). And, of course, Edwards is explicit that the problem he has in mind is one that arises when the Christian’s belief in the truth of the Christian religion is “not owing to this truth, but to education.”

Nevertheless, there are two reasons for thinking that EIFF** ultimately fails as an analysis of epistemologically interesting irrelevant factors. First, EIFF** is not immune to counterexample. Consider Plantinga’s case of the “epistemically serendipitous brain lesion:” S has a brain lesion that causes her to form the belief that she has a brain lesion but not on the basis of any evidence that she has a brain lesion—the belief simply arises in S seemingly out of the blue (1993, 195). In this case, there is clearly a sense in which S believes she has a brain lesion because she does, in fact, have a brain lesion. As a result, condition (2) of EIFF** is not satisfied and so the brain lesion is not deemed an irrelevant influence. However, despite this, it is still tempting to think that the brain lesion is an irrelevant influence since it exerts its influence in a nonstandard way.²⁵

24. However, as White (2010, 582–83) points out, there are some beliefs that we cannot hold because they’re true, and yet they are no less rational for that reason. For example, my belief that the sun will rise tomorrow isn’t held because it is true that the sun will rise tomorrow, but is rational. In general, nondeductive inference seems to involve beliefs that are rationally held but are not held because they’re true.

25. One strategy for avoiding this counterexample would be to change condition (2) of EIFF** as follows: F did not cause S’s belief that p to be explained in the right way by the truth of p. Thus modified, EIFF** appears to handle the brain lesion case correctly, delivering the verdict that the brain lesion is an irrelevant influence since it fails to explain S’s belief that she has a brain lesion in the right way. (*cont.*)

EIIF** is problematic for another reason. Specifically, it is too permissive, allowing far too much to count as an epistemologically interesting irrelevant factor. To see this, consider one of the epistemologically *uninteresting* factors that Vavova lists as an influence on the belief that prosimians have opposable thumbs—for example, “the socioeconomic and personal circumstances that made choosing and attending college possible for you.” This factor, though partly responsible for one’s belief that prosimians have opposable thumbs, has nothing to do with the fact that prosimians have opposable thumbs, and so is (according to EIIF**) an epistemologically interesting irrelevant influence. This, however, seems to be the wrong result, since the socioeconomic circumstances that partly led to one’s belief is not the sort of thing in view when discussing the problem posed by irrelevant influences.

Thus, EIIF** doesn’t earn the “EI” part of its name since it picks out every irrelevant influence without isolating those that are epistemologically interesting. More generally, EIIF** seems to amount to the claim that an irrelevant factor on S’s belief that p is anything that doesn’t justify S’s belief that p. This is because whatever it is that justifies S’s belief that p is something that should be connected to the truth of p. As Sosa (1985, 13) writes:

This change, however, would require having some way to determine when the truth of p explains S’s belief that p in the right way and when it does not. In the brain lesion case, it seems relatively clear that the explanation is inappropriate. Other cases, however, are more challenging. Consider David Lewis’s (1988, 85) example of a prosthetic eye:

A prosthetic eye consists of a miniature television camera mounted in, or on, the front of the head; a computer; and an array of electrodes in the brain. The computer receives input from the camera and sends signals to the electrodes in such a way as to produce visual experience that matches the scene before the eyes. When prosthetic eyes are perfected, the blind will see.

As Lewis points out, this is a nonstandard process of seeing. This is made especially apparent when we note the different ways in which the device can be implemented, each with varying degrees of veracity: “It seems better if the computer is surgically implanted rather than carried in a knapsack, but better if it is carried in a knapsack rather than stationary and linked by radio to the camera.” For this reason, “Some prosthetic eyes are more convincing than others as a genuine way of seeing” (85).

Do the beliefs produced by prosthetic eyes fail to be explained in the right way by the truth of what’s believed? If so, is this true of every implementation or only some? (To make the case more challenging, we could stipulate that the prosthetic eye was implanted without the subject’s knowledge, so that [much like in the brain lesion case], she finds herself with these beliefs out of the blue.) These are difficult questions with no clear answer, and they demonstrate the significant hurdles that the modified second condition of EIIF** would have to overcome in order to serve as an illuminating account of epistemologically interesting irrelevant factors.

Cognitive justification is the sort of justification which distinguishes true belief that is knowledge from true belief that is little more than a lucky guess. This being so, such justification could not possibly turn out to be a property that a belief might possess in complete independence of the truth of its object.

While it is true that one of the primary concerns in irrelevant influence cases is that the beliefs in question are unjustified, this by itself does not seem to capture what is unique about the kinds of irrelevant influences involved. Recall White's remark that an account like EIIF** is too broad because "any causal factor that I don't list as part of my justification to believe *p* is one that I take to be irrelevant to the question of whether *p* (otherwise I would mention them in my defense of *p*). But only a fraction of the myriad of such factors even appear to raise a challenge to the status of my belief" (2010, 574). Thus, where EIIF and EIIF* were too strong because they failed to identify some intuitively problematic cases of irrelevant influence, EIIF** is too weak because it identifies some intuitively unproblematic cases as ones in which epistemologically interesting irrelevant factors are operative. And so, as an analysis of epistemologically interesting irrelevant factors, EIIF** fails.

1.5 An Evidential Account

Another possibility is to attempt to capture epistemologically interesting irrelevant factors in terms of their effect on one's ability to assess evidence:

EIIF*** F is an epistemologically interesting irrelevant influence on S's belief that *p* if (1) F played a causal role in S's belief that *p* and (2) F made S less capable of identifying or properly assessing the strength of the evidence for and against *p*.

Consider the case in which one's culture influences one's belief that God exists. According to EIIF***, one's culture will be an epistemologically interesting irrelevant factor if that culture has a detrimental effect on one's ability to properly assess the evidence for God's existence. It might be thought that by eliminating talk of reliability and focusing

instead on evidence, this account is able to avoid the problems that plague the accounts considered thus far. There are, however, several reasons to think that this account is not wholly satisfactory.

First, just as we can imagine cases in which an irrelevant factor makes us more reliable, we can imagine cases in which an irrelevant factor makes us more capable of identifying and properly assessing the strength of the evidence for and against p . Think again of the community that happens to guess correctly that God exists. Members of that community may be more capable of assessing the evidence for God's existence than they would otherwise be despite the fact that the origin of the community's belief was a lucky guess. It seems that, in such a situation, the community is an irrelevant influence, despite the fact that it fails to satisfy condition (2) of EIIF***.

Another problem with trying to capture irrelevant factors by appealing to evidential considerations lies in the nature of the evidential support relation itself. A number of epistemologists have argued that evidential support should be understood as a three-place relation between a body of evidence, a proposition, and the agent's background (Kelly 2013; Meacham 2013). This stands in contrast to views that treat evidential support as a two-place relation between a body of evidence and a proposition.

Importantly, the sorts of factors that have been central to existing discussions of irrelevant belief influence are plausibly thought to be part of the background that serves as the third relatum in the evidential support relation. Recall that the paradigmatic example of an irrelevant influence is one's culture or community. If the evidential support relation is indeed a three-place relation, then one's culture will determine, at least in part, the degree to which a body of evidence supports a proposition. In arguing that evidential support is a four-place relation, Titelbaum (2010, 498) writes:

The crux of this view, which I call "subjectivism," is to deny that there is objective, three-place evidential favoring in cases without entailment and admit that in those cases evidential favoring is relative to a fourth relatum: a subjective factor beyond the agent's evidence that plays a role in favoring some properties over others. That subjective factor may be a subject's theory of natural properties, it may be the predicates contained in the subject's

native language, or it may be something else. It may depend on the subject's society, his upbringing, his biology, or any of a number of contingent factors. It might work by bringing certain pragmatic interests to bear, by highlighting certain questions as more important than others, or by prioritizing the ruling out of certain alternatives.

If this view of the evidential support relation is correct, then EIIF*** appears to say that one of the determinants of the strength of one's evidence for a proposition is epistemologically irrelevant. That verdict, however, is unintuitive, since it would seem that something that played a role in determining the strength of one's evidence is not epistemologically irrelevant.²⁶

1.6 From Causal Factors to Belief-Forming Processes

Thus far, we have been attempting to locate problematic cases of irrelevant influences by analyzing epistemologically interesting irrelevant factors. The hope has been that, if such factors can be analyzed, then we can simply identify irrelevant influence cases with those involving the germane kinds of causal factors. Unfortunately, each of the analyses considered has failed, vindicating the widespread (but heretofore undemonstrated) claim that such factors are difficult to analyze. In light of this, if we are to locate the problematic kinds of cases, we will have to expand our view to include more than just the causal factors involved. Thus, let us consider whether attending to the belief-forming process involved may allow us to identify cases of irrelevant belief influence.²⁷

26. It may be that one's background causes one to evaluate evidence differently than one would if one had a different background, and perhaps that is cause for concern. I explore this possibility in the third chapter.

27. Given that all beliefs are produced through belief-forming processes, it might be thought that an account that focuses explicitly on the properties of belief-forming processes is not a genuine alternative to the kind of account (considered earlier) that focuses explicitly on the properties of causal factors.

By way of response, in the kind of account considered earlier (those represented by the various formulations of EIIF), the process one uses to arrive at one's belief is independent of the fact of whether or not an irrelevant influence was involved in the causal chain leading to that belief. According to those accounts, C is an irrelevant influence case if a causal factor that makes one less reliable was involved in the causal chain leading to that belief. The properties of the belief-forming process involved in the formation of that belief do not matter *insofar as* our concern is simply with identifying cases of irrelevant influence, since even a reliable belief-forming process could be made less reliable. Indeed, according to these accounts, C could be an irrelevant influence case even if the process used to arrive at that belief reliably (but not infallibly) distinguishes between relevant and irrelevant factors. (*cont.*)

1.6.1 A Belief-Forming Process Account

There is some precedent for taking the problem posed by irrelevant influences to stem from the belief-forming process involved. Many of the quotations encountered earlier suggest this: Kitcher is skeptical of beliefs acquired “through early teaching and socialization” and Hick is suspicious of beliefs “that have been instilled into one by the surrounding religious culture.” Indeed, it is precisely in the *way* religious beliefs are formed that Hick thinks sets his pluralist beliefs apart from those of the religious exclusivist. As Hick (1997, 281) writes, “One is not usually a religious pluralist as a result of having been raised from childhood to be one, as (in most cases) one is raised from childhood to be a Christian or a Muslim or a Hindu, etc.” The implication here is that religious beliefs are problematic because of the way in which they’re formed, a problem that doesn’t afflict beliefs formed in other ways.²⁸

One consequence of shifting the focus from causal factors to belief-forming processes is that it makes it less clear in what sense the problem in the cases that have been central to the literature is in fact a problem that stems from irrelevant influences themselves. Perhaps, then, a better label for the alleged problem in these cases is the problem of *potentially* irrelevant influences. The problem of potentially irrelevant influences arises when one’s belief that *p* is the result of a belief-forming process that does not reliably discriminate between relevant and irrelevant factors. For this reason, there is always the potential that a belief resulting from such a process is the product of an irrelevant influence.

It may be thought objectionable that this account appeals to relevant and irrelevant factors to identify the problematic kinds of belief-forming processes. Insofar as the concept of an irrelevant factor is unclear, so too is the present account that appeals

By contrast, in the belief-forming process account to be considered in this section, the properties of the belief-forming process *do* matter for determining whether or not *C* is an irrelevant influence case. Specifically, if the belief-forming process has the property of *unreliably distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant factors*, then using that process is sufficient to constitute an irrelevant influence case, whether or not there are *in fact* any irrelevant factors involved.

28. Bogardus (2013, 374–76) highlights this feature of Hick’s account and explains its application to an objection voiced by Plantinga (1996) that Hick’s pluralism is self-defeating.

to belief-forming processes. However, this isn't as damaging as it may initially seem. For while it is true that we lack a satisfying account of epistemologically interesting irrelevant factors, the problem of potentially irrelevant influences does not depend on having such an account. This is because the problem gets traction simply with an appeal to what were earlier called "mere" irrelevant influences. Since what gives rise to the problem on this view is the belief-forming process employed and not the causal factor involved, we needn't rely on anything intrinsic to those causal factors to generate the problem. For this reason, we can simply understand irrelevant influences to be those causal factors that do not reliably indicate the truth of the proposition believed.

With this in mind, we can say that the problem of potentially irrelevant influences arises in those cases in which S's belief that p is the product of a belief-forming process, M, that does not reliably distinguish between relevant and irrelevant factors (i.e., factors that do and do not reliably indicate the truth of p). A notable feature of this account is that it allows that the problem of potentially irrelevant influences can arise even if the causal factor involved is in fact a *relevant* factor. This is because even if the germane causal factor is relevant, the relevance of that factor does not explain why one believes as one does. For example, if one believes that p because one's community believes that p, but one would also believe that $\neg p$ if one's community believed that $\neg p$, then one's belief exhibits the problematic kind of influence (since, in at least one of these scenarios, one's community does not reliably indicate the truth about p).

This account is able to capture what is problematic in the religious cases from Mill, Hick, and Kitcher. Recall that Mill writes that "the same causes which make him a Churchman in London, would have made him a Buddhist or a Confucian in Peking," where the causes at issue are "his party, his sect, his church, his class of society." Let us say that these causes are simply one's culture. So understood, Mill's claim is that one's culture is a determining factor of one's religious beliefs. As a result, a change in one's culture would result in a change in one's religious beliefs. However, on the assumption that Christianity and Buddhism are mutually exclusive, only one of these

cultures would provide one with true religious beliefs. But since one is determined to adopt the beliefs of the culture one is born into (whether those beliefs are true or not), one's belief-forming process does not discriminate between relevant and irrelevant factors—it simply takes the locally available factors as input and issues a corresponding belief as output, regardless of the content of that belief. The same thought applies to the examples from Kitcher and Hick, both of whom indicate that the belief-forming process involved in the formation of religious beliefs (“early teaching and socialization” for Kitcher and instillation “by the surrounding religious culture” for Hick) does not discriminate between relevant and irrelevant influences.

What about Cohen's case? Cohen says he believes in the analytic/synthetic distinction because he went to Oxford, but adds that “the fact that I studied at Oxford is no reason for thinking the distinction is sound.” As we've seen, Cohen thinks that what ultimately explains his belief that the analytic/synthetic distinction is sound is “the added persuasiveness of personal presentation, personal relationship, and so forth” (2000, 18). So understood, the present account explains why Cohen worries about his belief in the soundness of the distinction. The belief-forming process that led to Cohen's belief in that distinction does not distinguish between relevant and irrelevant factors, since had he been at Harvard and formed different personal relationships, his attitude toward the soundness of the distinction would change. Of course, one's personal relationships aren't reliable indicators of the soundness of the analytic/synthetic distinction, and so the belief-forming process that led to Cohen's belief does not reliably discriminate between relevant and irrelevant factors.

1.6.2 Problems for the Belief-Forming Process Account

Thus far, the belief-forming process account under consideration seems well-suited to account for the problem in the cases that have motivated concerns over irrelevant influences. Unfortunately, it fails to capture what is distinctive about irrelevant influence cases. To see this, consider the New Evil Demon Problem. The intuition that motivates

the New Evil Demon Problem is that while one's demon-deceived counterpart lacks knowledge, she does not lack justification, despite all of her beliefs being the product of wholly unreliable processes. A similar intuition motivates the present concern for the belief-forming process account. Intuitively, it doesn't seem that the beliefs of one's demon-deceived counterpart are plagued by the problem of irrelevant influences. However, since the belief-forming process used by one's demon-deceived counterpart is by stipulation not one that reliably distinguishes between relevant and irrelevant factors, this account says that all of her beliefs exhibit the epistemically problematic kind of irrelevant influence.

This shows that irrelevant influence cases cannot be identified with those that merely involve unreliable belief-forming processes. There are some cases in which a belief is the result of an unreliable belief-forming process that do not appear to raise the same kind of problem that arises in prototypical cases of irrelevant influence. Like EIIF**, the belief-forming process account identifies far too many cases as ones in which irrelevant factors are involved. This is not to deny that the reliability (or lack thereof) of the belief-forming process involved in irrelevant influence cases is an important part of what motivates the concern in these cases. It is, however, to deny that this is the *only* feature of the cases that motivates the problem.

1.7 Focusing on the Influence of Community

Recall that the central aim of this chapter is to identify a general criterion that can be used to identify those cases that give rise to the problem of irrelevant influences. We want a principled way to do this so that we can identify the kinds of beliefs that are involved in irrelevant influence cases. Once these beliefs have been identified, we can then turn to the question of how they arise, which will allow us to better understand the epistemological problems they pose. In an effort to do this, we've considered several features of the paradigmatic example cases in hopes of finding some criterion that can be used to identify all and only those cases that involve irrelevant influences. Unfortu-

nately, these efforts have not been successful. Accounts that include a reliability condition fail to identify some cases that intuitively seem to be irrelevant influence cases. An account that requires the absence of an appropriate connection between the belief and the truth of the proposition believed identifies too many cases as irrelevant influence cases. Similarly, an account that appeals to the unreliability of the belief-forming process involved also identifies too many cases as irrelevant influence cases.

Without a principled way to identify all and only those cases that involve irrelevant influences, it seems the most promising way forward is to focus on a particular kind of irrelevant influence case and the beliefs involved in those cases. Thus, rather than trying to say something about how the beliefs in *every* irrelevant influence case are formed and then going on to identify a general problem of irrelevant influences, we can explore the way in which the beliefs in a *particular* kind of irrelevant influence case are formed, and then ask what, if anything, is problematic about those beliefs.

On which particular irrelevant influence should we focus? Given that the paradigmatic example of an irrelevant influence is one's culture or community, this seems the most plausible candidate. As already indicated, the majority of the existing discussion surrounding the problem has focused on cases in which one's belief that *p* is the result of one's having been born into a particular culture or community. Thus, while limiting our focus in this way may hinder our ability to make progress on a general problem of irrelevant influences, it will not prevent us from addressing what has been the central kind of case.

One significant concern that arises in connection with this focus on communities or cultures as irrelevant influences stems from the connection between the influence of one's community and testimony. For it seems plausible to think that the primary means by which one's community or culture influences one's belief is through testimony. It also seems quite reasonable to treat testimony as a reliable source of belief. After all, a huge proportion of our beliefs that we take to be rational rely in some way or other on testimony. Why, then, think that one's community or culture is an irrelevant influence?

In the next chapter, I'll address this issue in greater depth, but because it is such a significant concern, it warrants some brief remarks now. First, note that while it may be true that one's community exerts its influence primarily through testimony, this is not the only way in which one can be influenced by one's community. As Cohen's remarks about his own case indicate, one's personal relationships can also impact what one believes, and the personal relationships one forms are determined by the community of which one is a part.²⁹ Similarly, Sosa argues that some beliefs are the product of an intellectual attraction where "the causal source is a kind of social pressure that bypasses cognitive mechanisms of proper inference, testimony, or perception" (2014, 44).

As has already been noted, some have taken one's community to exert its influence by imparting a particular set of epistemic standards. As Schoenfield (2014, 206) writes of one of the example cases she considers,

In the case we are imagining . . . the community not only caused you to believe in God, but instilled in you rational standards of reasoning that warrant belief in God (this is why you find the arguments for theism plausible). If you had grown up in a different community, you would have been instilled with a different set of rational standards which would have warranted atheism.

As these remarks indicate, one may adopt a belief on the basis of arguments, and accept those arguments because they accord with one's epistemic standards. However, because those epistemic standards are the product of one's community, there is a clearly a sense in which one's community determines what one believes even in this case. Here, the influence is less direct than through typical cases of testimony, though no less significant for that reason.³⁰ As I said, this issue will receive extended treatment in the following

29. Recall that Cohen thinks that even if the content of the testimony the students at Harvard and Oxford received was the same, their reaction to that testimony would not be the same in virtue of the effects of personal presentation, personal relationships, and so forth.

30. Elga makes similar remarks about Cohen's case (or one way of interpreting that case). Elga asks us to imagine that "at Harvard and Oxford, students come to adopt different fundamental epistemic standards. Harvard students adopt the Harvard standards, and perfectly apply them. Oxford students do the same for the Oxford standards" (2008, 5). Elga then goes on to say, "Even under these conditions, if I were in the scholar's position, I would find it unsettling to think that if I'd gone to Oxford, I'd have come to the opposite conclusion about the analytic/synthetic distinction" (6). As in Schoenfield's case, we see here that one's community (in this case, one's graduate school) can influence what one believes in a way that is distinct from typical cases of testimonially based belief.

chapter. For now, I hope to have at least given some plausibility to the idea that the influence of one's culture is not always exerted solely through testimony.

Despite their brevity, these remarks suggest yet another question: If these are all constituents of a community's influence, then how are we to understand the manner in which this influence is exerted? Put a bit more precisely: If we suppose that a belief can reflect the influence of testimony, social pressure, and one's epistemic standards (perhaps among others), then how do we account for this diversity of influences? On what are beliefs that reflect this kind of influence based?

The answers to these questions will be the central focus of the next chapter, where we will turn to an examination of the way in which the beliefs that are influenced by one's community are formed.

1.8 Conclusion

After a brief overview of some of the central cases that have been thought to give rise the problem of irrelevant influences and a sampling of the way the problem in those cases has been characterized, I noted the surprising absence of any extended discussions of the way in which the beliefs in these cases arise. This absence is surprising, I claimed, because the problem of irrelevant influences is supposed to be one that stems from a belief's etiology, and also because it is plausible to think that we will be able to develop a better account of the epistemological problems these cases present once we understand how the beliefs in these cases arise in the first place.

Of course, understanding how the beliefs in irrelevant influence cases arise requires that we be able to identify those cases. In an effort to develop a principled way of identifying those cases, I considered several proposals that would allow us to identify such cases. My strategy was to distill some feature from the paradigmatic example cases of irrelevant influences that could be used a general criterion for identifying all and only those cases in which a belief reflects the influence of an irrelevant factor.

The first proposal relied on a condition that required that one of the causal factors that led to one's belief that *p* be such that it would tend to make one unreliable with respect to *p*. This succumbed to a counterexample in which an intuitively irrelevant influence happened to make one more reliable with respect to *p*. In an effort to rule out this kind of case, the second proposal added a modal disjunct to the reliability condition that allowed a factor that easily could have made one unreliable to count as an epistemologically interesting irrelevant factor. This, too, succumbed to counterexample.

Noting some problems that appear to plague any reliability-based account, I turned next to an account that identified irrelevant influence cases as those that involve a factor that exerts a causal influence on one's belief that *p* but that is not appropriately connected to the truth of *p*. This, however, proved unilluminating, since it picked out far too many beliefs to be of any use in identifying a unique epistemological problem. The same was true of the final proposal, which claimed that an irrelevant influence case is one in which a belief is the product of a belief-forming process that does not reliably discriminate between relevant and irrelevant factors. Given the operative construal of irrelevant factors as those that do not indicate the truth of the proposition believed, this account also picked out too many beliefs to identify any unique epistemological problem.

Lacking a principled way to identify irrelevant influence cases, I argued that the most promising way forward is to focus on a specific irrelevant influence: one's community or culture. This has been the paradigmatic example of an irrelevant influence in the existing literature, and so while narrowing the focus in this way will not allow for a general treatment of the problem of irrelevant influences, it will allow for a treatment of what has been the most important case.

It might be thought that the claim that one's community is an irrelevant influence is tantamount to the claim that testimony is an irrelevant influence, since it is plausible to think that the primary way in which one's community influences what one believes is through testimony. While most of the discussion surrounding this issue will take place

in the second chapter, I offered some considerations to motivate the idea that one's community or culture can influence one's belief in other ways that are not plausibly construed as testimonial.

A number of important questions remain. Given that the problem is one that arises in connection with the influence of our culture on our beliefs, how should we understand this influence? What does it mean to say one's belief was influenced by one's culture? Are cultures and communities even the right *kinds* of things to influence our beliefs? These questions will be taken up in the following chapter, where I present an account of the way in which our cultures and communities influence our beliefs, and examine some of the epistemological consequences of that account.

2. CULTURAL INFLUENCE, SEEMINGS, AND JUSTIFICATION

Having established that the problem of irrelevant influences is best understood as a problem for beliefs that are influenced specifically by one's culture, I turn in this chapter to the question of how culturally influenced beliefs arise and explore some the epistemological implications of the answer to that question. The question of how our cultures affect what we believe has received surprisingly little attention, despite being the central kind of case in the literature on irrelevant influences. I argue that culturally influenced beliefs—especially those about controversial topics like religion, morality, and politics—reflect multiple strands of influence. These influences include testimony, the epistemic standards employed, and the social pressure to which we're exposed. Each of these is closely tied to our cultural background, and each has a significant impact on our beliefs.

What draws these multiple strands of influence together so that they give rise to a particular belief? I argue that the beliefs that arise from these various influences are best understood as what Robert Audi calls *conclusions of reflection*. Conclusions of reflection are noninferential beliefs that arise “after one has obtained a view of the whole and broadly characterized it” (Audi 1999, 281). I defend the plausibility of this view by augmenting Audi's account with the claim that conclusions of reflection are based on seemings. The “view of the whole” from which conclusions of reflection emerge is best construed as a seeming that reflects the multiple factors that are involved when one's culture influences one's belief. Thus, one's culture affects what one believes by affecting how things seem, and the beliefs influenced by one's culture are based on those seemings.

In light of this, the question of whether or not culturally influenced beliefs are justified depends on the requirements that a seeming must meet in order to confer justification on a corresponding belief. Phenomenal conservativists say there are no such requirements—a seeming that *p* always confers justification on a belief that *p* in the absence of defeaters. Importantly, this means that the cause of a seeming is irrelevant to its power to confer justification. If this view is correct, then the fact that one's seeming was caused by one's culture cannot preclude the possibility of that belief's being justified.¹

Those who think seemings play a role in justification but who are not phenomenal conservativists impose restrictions that preclude some seemings from having the power to confer justification. Typically, these restrictions are intended to prevent beliefs that are inappropriately caused from conferring justification on a corresponding belief. Thus, if culturally influenced seemings are inappropriately caused, then the beliefs based on those seemings are not justified.

Should we think that culturally influenced seemings are inappropriately caused? To answer this question, I consider two ways in which one's culture can influence one's seemings. The first way is relatively direct, in that there is no rational mediation between the culture and the seeming. I argue that while this account may show that culturally influenced seemings are problematic, it does so only by building epistemic inappropriateness into the characterization of a culturally influenced seeming. For this reason, it fails to capture the more substantive and interesting problem that arises when we do not assume that culturally influenced seemings are always inappropriate.

The second way in which one's culture can influence one's seeming allows for the mediation of proper cognitive mechanisms. On this account, one is exposed to various influences in virtue of the culture one is a part of, and these influences, in turn, cause certain seemings. I argue that while this account accords better with the problematic kinds of cases, it suffers from significant problems. Specifically, it either fails to iden-

1. As will become clear later, my focus is not on whether one's *beliefs* about the epistemic propriety of cultural influence are problematic (e.g., by giving one a defeater for those beliefs) according to phenomenal conservatism (PC), but rather on the question of whether the *fact* of that influence (whether recognized or not) is a problem according to PC.

tify a genuine problem for culturally influenced beliefs by imposing a more general skepticism than is intended (calling into question much more than our controversial religious, moral, and political beliefs), or else shifts the problem from one that stems from cultural influence to one that stems from disagreement.

I thus conclude the fact that one's belief was influenced by one's culture poses no unique threat to the justification of that belief. However, before turning to the arguments for that conclusion, it will be helpful to complete two preliminary tasks. The first is to situate the argument of this chapter within the existing literature on the problem posed by cultural influence. The second is to offer an account of seemings. These are the respective tasks of the first two sections.

2.1 Understanding the Problematic Cases

In the previous chapter, I offered some examples of the kinds of cases that have been thought to give rise to the problem of irrelevant influences. Because the goal of that chapter was to get a general sense of the kinds of considerations that have been thought to generate the problem of irrelevant influences, it was not necessary to examine those cases very closely. In this chapter, the aim is to locate the problem posed by the influence of one's culture on one's beliefs, so it will be helpful to attend to some of the unique features of those cases now. Here, again, are the cases:

And the world, to each individual, means the part of it with which he comes in contact; his party, his sect, his church, his class of society. . . . It never troubles him that mere accident has decided which of these numerous worlds is the object of his reliance, and that the same causes which make him a Churchman in London, would have made him a Buddhist or a Confucian in Peking. (Mill 2003, 88)

Religious allegiance depends in the great majority of cases on the accident of birth: someone born into a devout Muslim family in Pakistan is very likely to be a Muslim, someone born into a devout Hindu family in India to be a Hindu, someone born into a devout Christian family in Spain or Mexico to be a Catholic Christian; and so on. The conclusion I have drawn

is that a “hermeneutic of suspicion” is appropriate in relation to beliefs that have been instilled into one by the surrounding religious culture. (Hick 1997, 281)

Most Christians have adopted their doctrines much as polytheists and the ancestor-worshippers have acquired theirs: through early teaching and socialization. Had the Christians been born among aboriginal Australians, they would believe, in just the same ways, on just the same bases, and with just the same convictions, doctrines about Dreamtime instead of about the Resurrection. The symmetry is complete. . . . Given that they are all on a par, we should trust none of them. (Kitcher 2011, 26)

How should we understand what’s going on in these cases?

It is initially tempting to dismiss these concerns, since it is obvious that those born in different cultures have markedly different evidence for their religious beliefs. Think, for example, of the epistemic differences between the churchman in London and Buddhist in Peking of whom Mill speaks. The testimony, observations, experiences, and perhaps even the rational standards of the two believers will differ in significant ways. These are just some of the many epistemically relevant differences between those born in different cultures and communities. Given these differences, it is no surprise that those born in different cultures form different beliefs. More importantly, it is not clear why the fact that one’s beliefs depend on one’s culture in this way is problematic. For it is no part of the story that the evidence in these cases is defective, or that the subjects are not responding appropriately to that evidence.

What seems to be motivating the concern in these cases is not what is epistemically different, but rather what’s similar. Mill says “*the same causes* which make him a Churchman in London, would have made him a Buddhist or a Confucian in Peking;” Hick claims that the religious beliefs he considers are similar in that they have all “been instilled into one by the surrounding religious culture;” and Kitcher writes that “had the Christians been born among aboriginal Australians, they would believe, *in just the same ways, on just the same bases, and with just the same convictions*, doctrines about Dreamtime instead of about the Resurrection.” The problem in these cases thus seems

to be that despite whatever epistemically relevant differences might exist among religious believers in different cultures, there is some epistemically relevant *similarity* that is problematic.

What, then, is this similarity? One plausible response is that it is the belief-forming process involved. While those in different cultures may have different evidence relevant to *p*, they use the same belief-forming process in arriving at some judgment about *p*. For example, perhaps in each case the process involved is that of *forming a belief by accepting whatever the cultural majority believes*. Even if the epistemic inputs and outputs differ, the process that takes those inputs and delivers those outputs is the same. Thus, if there is reason to think that that process is defective—perhaps because it is unreliable or unsafe—then any belief that results from that process is epistemically problematic.

A number of analyses of the alleged problem posed by cultural influence locates the source of problem in the belief-forming method involved. What has emerged from these discussions is that there is in fact little reason to think that there is a problem in these cases at all. While Bogardus (2013) is skeptical of the safety condition on knowledge, he thinks that even if there were such a condition, most religious beliefs would meet that condition. Similarly, Baker-Hytch (2014) argues that casting the problem in terms of safety either restricts its scope or gives rise to unintended skeptical consequences. He then goes on to argue that casting the problem in terms of the reliability of the belief-forming process involved either fails to threaten monotheistic religious beliefs (if the process is specified narrowly) or requires commitment to a number of very controversial theses with respect to our moral, epistemological, and scientific beliefs (if the process is specific broadly). Thus, if the problem for culturally influenced beliefs is one that depends on what is similar among the various instances of such beliefs, and if the only thing that is similar is the belief-forming process involved, then there is reason to think that there is no compelling objection to those beliefs.

Despite the value of these treatments of the alleged problem, none of them account for the role that seemings play in the formation of many culturally influenced beliefs, especially those about controversial matters like religion, morality, and politics. In many cases, the subject holds the religious, moral, or political beliefs she does because those beliefs seem true to him—to the Christian, Christianity seems true, while to the Buddhist, Buddhism seems true. These seemings serve as the basis for the corresponding beliefs. Thus, if there are problems that arise from the fact that these beliefs are all based on seemings, then there is another potential way of capturing what is problematic about culturally influenced beliefs that respects the idea that the source of the problem stems from some feature that the relevant cases share.

Admittedly, it is not obvious that culturally influenced beliefs are based on seemings. Before arguing for that claim, however, it will be helpful to first explain what seemings are and how they are involved in the formation of our beliefs.

2.2 Seemings

Some equate seemings with beliefs, others equate them with inclinations to believe, and still others treat them as *sui generis* propositional attitudes or mental states.² The third view has emerged as the most popular, thanks in large part to arguments against the belief and inclination views developed by Michael Huemer. Against the belief view, Huemer (2007, 30-31) points out that it can seem to one that *p* even if one doesn't believe that *p*. Indeed, it can seem to one that *p* even if one knows that *p* is false (e.g., it can seem to one that the half-submerged stick is bent, even if knows that the stick is not bent). Against the inclination view, Huemer (2007, 31) notes that it can seem to one that *p* even when one isn't inclined to believe that *p* (e.g., to someone familiar with the Müller-Lyer illusion, the lines may seem different lengths even if she isn't inclined to believe they are different lengths). Additionally, seemings provide a nontrivial ex-

2. The most notable proponent of the belief view is Swinburne (2001, 141-42). Sosa endorses the inclination view in some earlier work (e.g., 2007). Tolhurst (1998), Huemer (2007), Tucker (2010), and Bergmann (2013a; 2013b) endorse the view that seemings constitute a unique kind of mental state.

planation of inclinations to believe, and so cannot be identical with those inclinations. Finally, one can be inclined to believe something that doesn't seem true. To borrow an example from Tolhurst (1998, 298), a parent may be inclined (perhaps because of a felt moral obligation) to believe in his child's innocence even if it doesn't seem to him that the child is innocent.

There are thus good reasons to think of seemings as a special kind of mental state. One of the distinguishing characteristics of these mental states is their phenomenal character. Specifically, seemings exhibit what Tolhurst calls "felt veridicality" because they "have the feel of a state whose content reveals how things really are" (1998, 298). Similarly, Huemer claims that seemings are "assertive" because a seeming that *p* "represents that state of affairs 'as actual'" (2001, 53).

Because seemings have this felt veridicality, they typically incline one to form a belief with the same content. As we've seen, there are good reasons not to identify seemings with inclinations to believe. Nevertheless, it is true that a seeming that *p* typically causes one to be inclined to believe that *p* (Huemer 2007, 39). Indeed, Bergmann characterizes seemings as "a particular kind of belief-inclination-causing mental state" (2013b, 157). In this way, seemings are like other mental states that can cause inclinations to believe, such as desires and feelings of moral obligation. However, unlike desires and feelings of moral obligation, seemings have the sort of felt veridicality discussed above (Bergmann 2013b, 157; Tolhurst 1998, 298). While a desire or feeling of moral obligation may incline one to believe something, that inclination is not caused by a mental state that has "the feel of a state whose content reveals how things really are."

This felt veridicality is something that all seemings have in common. It would be a mistake, however, to maintain that all seemings are alike. One reason for this is that seemings can have varying degrees of strength, where the strength of a seeming corresponds to its felt veridicality. For example, the seeming that $2+2=4$ may be much stronger than the seeming that one's first bicycle was blue. This example suggests a second way in which seemings differ, and that is in virtue of being seemings of differ-

ent types. There are intellectual seemings about necessary truths (like the seeming that $2+2=4$) as well as memorial seemings about the past (like the seeming that my first bike was blue). There are also perceptual seemings, testimonial seemings, and, according to some, moral seemings (Huemer 2008) and religious seemings (Tucker 2013; Bergmann 2015). These different types of seemings are distinguished by their causes and their content (Bergmann 2013b, 159).

What are the causes of seemings? The answer, for at least many seemings, is experiences (Bergmann 2013a). This is clearest in the case of perception. When I look at the sky on a clear day, the visual sensations I experience cause it to seem to me that I am looking at a vast, blue expanse.³ In this way, the visual sensations that constitute my perceptual experience of the sky give rise to the seeming that I'm looking at the sky. It is less clear how some other kinds of seemings are caused by experiences. We might wonder, for example, what kind of experience could cause an intellectual seeming. Yet, there is reason to think that even intellectual seemings arise in response to an experiential ground. As Earl Conee notes, when we “see” the truth of an intrinsically obvious proposition, “we are conscious of the proposition and of some relation among concepts in it. This somehow shows us that it is true. The cognitive event is strikingly similar to what getting a clear close look at a visible object naively seems to accomplish” (1998, 851). Elijah Chudnoff, who compares intuition experiences with perceptual experiences, endorses a similar view, illustrated by the following example: “When the proposition that diameters determine lines of symmetry intuitively appears to you to be true, it does so in a way that seems grounded in your awareness of what circles, diameter, and lines of symmetry are—that is, in a felt presence to mind of the properties of being a circle, being a diameter, and being a line of symmetry” (Chudnoff

3. There is some debate over whether the seemings involved in perception are best thought of as “thin” or “thick.” Thin perceptual seemings are distinct from perceptual experience, while thick perceptual seemings are a part of perceptual experience. Bergmann (2013b) and Tucker (2010) defend the view that perceptual seemings are thin, while Steup (2004) and Pryor (2000) defend the view that perceptual seemings are thick. I note this debate, but will ignore it since it doesn't have any significant implications for the central project of this chapter.

2011, 637).⁴ According to these accounts, it is the experience of cognitive apprehension or awareness that gives rise to a seeming. So here, too, the seeming is caused by an experiential ground.

Bergmann (2013a, 168) provides a succinct summary of the causal process that leads to a belief via a seeming: “Putting all this together, the picture of belief formation that emerges (for at least some of our justified noninferential beliefs) is the following: an experiential ground causes a seeming that *p* and the seeming that *p* causes the noninferential belief that *p*.”⁵ We can represent this picture of belief formation as follows:

Experience → Seeming → Belief

According to this picture, an experiential ground causes a seeming, which, in turn, causes a belief with the same propositional content.

With this account of seemings in hand, I turn now to a defense of the claim that culturally influenced beliefs are held on the basis of seemings.

2.3 Seemings and Cultural Influence

In arguing that culturally influenced beliefs are held on the basis of seemings, I will restrict my focus to beliefs about “controversial” topics like religion, morality, and politics. This is in keeping with the existing discussions about culturally influenced beliefs, which have focused on just these sorts of beliefs. My claim is that the influence of one’s culture on one’s controversial beliefs does not consist of a single source or factor working alone (such as testimony or the instillation of epistemic standards), but rather of numerous sources working across time. Beliefs that arise in this way are best construed as conclusions of reflection, which are, I shall argue, based on seemings.

4. Put a bit more formally, Chudnoff’s view is this: “Whenever it seems to you that *p*, there is some *q* (maybe = *p*) such that—in the same experience—it seems to you that *q*, and you seem to be aware of an item that makes *q* true. For perception, the seeming is perceptual and the awareness sensory. For intuition, the seeming is intuitive and the awareness intellectual” (2011, 641).

5. Bergmann limits this to only some of our noninferential beliefs because he thinks “that some of our justified noninferential beliefs may be based on seemings that aren’t based on any other mental states. (Perhaps our memory beliefs are like this)” (168). Thus, some seemings may not be caused by experiences.

2.3.1 *The Strands of Influence*

What is involved when a belief is “instilled into one by the surrounding religious culture” or arises “through early teaching and socialization?” *How* does one’s culture affect what one believes? This question has received little attention in the literature, yet, as I shall go on to argue, it has important implications for the way we assess the beliefs that are caused by one’s culture.⁶

The most obvious way in which our cultures affect our beliefs is through testimony. Jennifer Lackey nicely captures the extent to which our epistemic lives depend on testimony:

Virtually everything we know depends in some way or other on the testimony of others—what we eat, how things work, where we go, even who we are. We do not, after all, perceive firsthand the preparation of the ingredients in many of our meals, or the construction of the devices we use to get around the world, or the layout of our planet, or our own births and familial histories. These are all things we are told. Indeed, subtracting from our lives the information that we possess via testimony leaves them barely recognizable. Scientific discoveries, battles won and lost, geographical developments, customs and traditions of distant lands—all of these facts would be completely lost to us. (2011, 71)

Clearly, much of what we believe depends on testimony.

Moreover, the testimony we receive and the testifiers we trust are dependent on the culture in which we find ourselves. John Greco argues that knowledge and reasonable belief can be transmitted and distributed through testimony because various social institutions and relations underwrite the reliable transfer of information. He writes, “Testimonial evidence distributes information through the system only by means of relevant social mechanisms. Just as we exploit regularities in nature so as to effect the reliable

6. One may think that the reason this question has received little attention in the philosophical literature is because it is an empirical question to be answered by psychologists and social scientists. I grant that empirical work would be necessary in order to confirm the account of cultural influence I present in this section. Despite this, however, I think that philosophical reflection on this question can still be valuable. One reason for this is that the problem can be understood counterfactually: If there is cultural influence of this sort, then can it be explained in epistemic terms and, if so, what are the epistemic consequences? This is similar to how some philosophers (e.g., Siegel (2012)) have approached epistemological issues surrounding cognitive penetration.

uptake of information, we sometimes exploit social regularities so as to effect the reliable distribution of information” (2012, 40). Sometimes these social institutions are formal and explicit (as when one learns from a parent or teacher), but other times they are less formal and implicit (as when one learns directions from a stranger). In either case, however, the key point is that one’s social context plays in an indispensable role in the acquisition of beliefs through testimony.⁷

Despite the extent to which our beliefs are the product of testimony, it would be a mistake to conclude that testimony is the only way in which our cultures influence our beliefs. Another way our cultures affect our beliefs is through the provision of a set of epistemic standards, which we then to bring to bear on various considerations that eventually lead us to adopt certain beliefs. Elga (2008) and Schoenfield (2014) have both offered analyses of the problem of irrelevant influences that appeal to the role of epistemic standards in the formation of the affected beliefs. Schoenfield considers a case of religious belief in which “the community not only caused you to believe in God, but instilled in you rational standards of reasoning that warrant belief in God (this is why you find the arguments for theism plausible). If you had grown up in a different community, you would have been instilled with a different set of rational standards which would have warranted atheism” (2014, 206). Similarly, Elga notes that Cohen’s story could be filled out so that “at Harvard and Oxford, students come to adopt different fundamental epistemic standards” (2008, 5). In this case, “The irrelevant factor influences one’s belief . . . by influencing which standards one comes to accept” (2008, 9).⁸

What are rational standards? Elga doesn’t say explicitly, but he does indicate that our rational standards are what we use when evaluating evidence. He characterizes irrelevant influence cases as ones in which “a subject comes to realize that an irrelevant factor made a crucial difference to how he evaluates evidence” (2008, 2). And he says

7. This is true of testimony in its distributing or transmitting function.

8. The role of epistemic standards is especially important in the formation (and maintenance) of religious beliefs. As John Pittard (2014, 85) points out, “Significant consensus regarding the relevant [epistemic] qualifications is not to be found in religious contexts. This is because many systems of religious belief include controversial claims about what qualifies one to reliably assess religious propositions, and these claims often downplay or deny the relevance of the specific criteria that, in the context of non-religious disagreements, one would typically rely upon in order to evaluate epistemic credentials.”

that whether or not Cohen should reduce his confidence in the analytic/synthetic distinction depends on whether or not he thinks his graduate school caused him to “mis-apply [his] own philosophical standards when evaluating Strawson’s defense of the analytic/synthetic distinction” (ms, 3). Schoenfield is more explicit, noting that rational standards are ways of weighing evidence. She argues that while two people could conform to the same general principles of rationality, “their standards may differ with regard to how exactly they weigh the different considerations” (2014, 202).

There is thus precedent for thinking that our cultures can affect our beliefs by providing us with the epistemic standards we use. Given that our evidence affects our beliefs, and given that the way we respond to evidence is determined by our epistemic standards, then by providing us with epistemic standards, our cultures affect what we believe. While this sort of influence is perhaps less direct than testimony, it is nonetheless a plausible way in which one’s culture affects one’s beliefs.

Related to this is Michael Huemer’s claim that some inferential beliefs are instances of “inference against a background.” In a case of inference against a background, “S infers P from E, where some complex mass of background information, B, is required to explain why S is justified in making the inference” (2016, 157). One consequence of this view is that it requires that we “relativize such things as ‘support’ and ‘likelihood’ to one’s background information” (157). In order for that background information to affect our probability judgments, it must be the case that “our probability thoughts are generated by brain processes that in fact are shaped by all (or almost all) of the relevant background information, including information that we are not conscious of at the moment” (158). Insofar as our culture provides us with at least some of the background information relevant to our probability judgments, then what we deem probable and improbable is influenced by our culture.

Finally, Sosa notes that sometimes we adopt beliefs on the basis of intellectual attractions that arise through “a kind of social pressure that bypasses cognitive mechanisms of proper inference, testimony, or perception” (2014, 44). While Sosa takes

brainwashing and biases to be the central examples of this kind of social pressure, it can be subtler. Consider, for example, the phenomenon of *groupthink*, which refers to the “deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment that results from in-group pressures” (Janis 1982, 9). Irving Janis, who coined the term, describes the groupthink dynamic as follows:

In studies of social clubs and other small groups, conformity pressures have frequently been observed. Whenever a member says something that sounds out of line with the group’s norms, the other members at first increase their communication with the deviant. Attempts to influence the nonconformist member to revise or tone down his dissident ideas continue as long as most members of the group feel hopeful about talking him into changing his mind. But if they fail after repeated attempts, the amount of communication they direct toward the deviant decreases markedly. The members begin to exclude him, often quite subtly at first and later more obviously, in order to restore the unity of the group. . . . The more cohesive the group and the more relevant the issues to the goals of the group, the greater is the inclination of the members to reject a nonconformist. Just as members insulate themselves from outside critics who threaten to disrupt the unity and *esprit de corps* of their group, they take steps, often without being aware of it, to counteract the disruptive influence of inside critics who are attacking the group’s norms. (Janis 1982, 5)

It is worth emphasizing Janis’s claim that those who engage in groupthink are unaware that they are doing so.

Also relevant is the mass communication theory known as the *spiral of silence*. People are more willing to speak out when their attitudes and opinions conform with the perceived majority opinion, and less willing to do so when that conformity is perceived to be lacking. As a result, “The tendency of the one to speak up and the other to be silent starts off a spiraling process which increasingly establishes one opinion as the prevailing one” (Noelle-Neumann 1974, 44). As one opinion becomes socially entrenched, with fear of isolation causing those who dissent to remain silent, “public opinion is

transformed from a morally-loaded question or from the ‘liquid’ state to a ‘solid’ norm of dogma” (Scheufele and Moy 2000, 10).⁹

Consider, too, the argument from Paul Draper and Ryan Nichols (2013) that group influence is prevalent among philosophers of religion. Part of the reason for this lies in the fact that “the philosophical work of many philosophers of religion fits almost seamlessly into a larger ‘life of faith.’” They explain:

This life includes, not just a set of religious beliefs, but also a number of social features, such as attendance at weekly religious events, feeling a sense of special belonging to one’s church or mosque or temple (as opposed to other groups), communal affirmation of creedal statements, and self-identification as a member of an in-group of religious individuals. The defense of religious beliefs in the classroom, at conferences, or in professional writings is, for many Christian philosophers of religion, a small part of their religious life. They also attend weekly services; sing, pray, and testify to their faith regularly; are embedded in a social network of like-minded Christians; raise Christian children with a Christian spouse; and have Christian parents and in-laws. (431)

This is problematic, they argue, because a substantial body of empirical research suggests that religious adherents are particularly susceptible to group influence. Moreover, religious adherents are blind to the influence of such social factors. Draper and Nichols thus conclude, “If religious philosophers of religion have social and psychological tendencies at all similar to those found in religious people in general, then symptoms like excessive partisanship and narrowness of focus, and perhaps even the blurring of religious and philosophical criteria of evaluation, are to be expected” (432).

9. This sort of social pressure is most directly concerned with how communities affect what people *say*, rather than how they affect what people believe. However, by filtering which opinions are allowed to propagate through the community, there is a less direct sense in which the community exerts pressure on what one believes. Given the reliance that members of a community have on the testimony of that community, the spiral of silence may make it so that the amount of testimonial evidence for *p* will be significantly greater than the amount of testimonial evidence for $\neg p$, even when *p* is epistemically suspect (e.g., when *p* is the result of groupthink).

It is also worth noting that the spiral of silence only applies to issues with a normative component, because it is dissent with respect to those kinds of issues “by which the individual isolates or may isolate himself in public” (Noelle-Neumann 1993, 231). This corresponds with the sorts of beliefs that have been central to concerns over cultural influence.

These considerations show that it is plausible to think that there are a number of factors that constitute the influence of one's culture on one's beliefs. Cultural influence is not, for example, solely a matter of believing what one is told, or solely a matter of adopting the prevailing epistemic standards of one's culture. Rather, cultural influence is a multifaceted epistemic phenomenon that involves a number of factors. Some of these factors we are consciously aware of, others we are not consciously aware of. In his discussion of disagreement over the "controversial topics of politics, religion, philosophy, history, morality, and so forth" (just the kinds of beliefs that have been central to concerns over culturally influenced beliefs), Sosa writes:

Our basis for believing as we do on such questions generally fails to be fully formed and operative in one fell swoop. Light dawns gradually over such questions. A belief forms in us over time through the subtle influence of diverse sources. Some are testimonial, others perceptual, others inferential, and so on. The belief might owe importantly to the believer's upbringing, or to later influence by his community. (2010, 290)

Here, Sosa makes it clear that things like our upbringing and community play an important role in the formation of these kinds of beliefs, and that the factors that influence those beliefs are both subtle and diverse. As a result, it is often impossible to locate and pin down the specific cause of one's belief: "We have reasons . . . that, acting in concert, across time, have motivated our present beliefs, but we are in no position to detail these reasons fully" (2010, 291).¹⁰

2.3.2 *Conclusions of Reflection*

According to this picture, it is not the case that, when a controversial belief is a product of cultural influence, the belief is caused solely by testimony, or solely by observa-

10. Matheson (2009, 273) makes a similar observation: "An individual needn't be able to identify something as evidence in order for it to be part of his evidence. It is quite plausible that we are rather poor at identifying all of our evidence regarding a given proposition." Oppy (2010, 195), too, notes that "the reasons why we believe as we do are often not transparent to us, and cannot be rendered fully transparent to us by any amount of further inquiry; the evidence that supports the formation of our beliefs is progressively discarded or otherwise forgotten." While Matheson and Oppy do not make mention of the sources that might be thought to lead to this opacity, it is reasonable to think that one of its primary causes is variation in the kinds factors that lead to our beliefs.

tion, or solely by inference. Rather, these kinds of beliefs are produced by several such sources working together. Can we say any more about the way in which these beliefs are formed? Specifically, given the variety of sources that lead to these beliefs, what draws these various strands of influence together?

To answer this question, it will be helpful to make use of Robert Audi's distinction between *conclusions of inference* and *conclusions of reflection*. According to Audi, conclusions of reflection emerge after "one has obtained a view of the whole and broadly characterized it." Such conclusions stand in contrast to conclusions of inference, which are "premised on propositions one has noted as evidence." (1999, 281). Audi (1999, 281) illustrates this distinction by considering how one arrives at the belief that the language of a poem is artificial:

This judgment could be a response to evidential propositions, say that the author has manipulated words to make the lines scan. But the judgment need not so arise: if the artificiality is subtler, there may just be a stilted quality that one can hardly pin down. In this second case, one judges from a global, intuitive sense of the integration of vocabulary, movement, and content. Call the first judgment of artificiality a conclusion of inference: it is premised on propositions one has noted as evidence. Call the second judgment a conclusion of reflection: it emerges from thinking about the poem, but not from one or more evidential premises. It is more like a response to viewing a painting than like an inference from propositionally represented information. You respond to a pattern: you notice a stiff movement in the otherwise flowing meter; you are irritated by an inapt simile; and so on.

As this example illustrates—and as Audi points out elsewhere—conclusions of reflection are "non-linear and in a certain way global" (2004, 198).

It is important to note that the "view of the whole" that serves as the cause of a conclusion of reflection is constituted by a number of experiences and observations. For example, Audi writes that such conclusions are like "a response to *viewing* a painting" and arise when "you *respond* to a pattern: you *notice* a stiff movement in the otherwise flowing meter; you are *irritated* by an inapt simile" (1999, 281). This language suggests a close connection between experiences and one's view of the whole.

Moreover, one's view of the whole consists of both cognitive and emotional elements. In this connection, it is worth noting that Robert Adams's distinction between inferential and noninferential "evaluative doxastic practices" bears a number of resemblances to Audi's distinction between conclusions of inference and conclusions of reflection. Adams writes, "Evaluative doxastic practices rely heavily on tendencies and skills of generalizing, responding to resemblances, and innovating which cannot be reduced to any algorithm." These practices "involve both inferential and noninferential doxastic processes." Adams makes it explicit that "a mature and autonomous evaluative competence is responsive to a wide range of inputs that are not beliefs. These include feelings, emotions, inclinations, and desires" (1999, 357).

We can understand the "view of the whole" of which Audi speaks as the product of those factors that constitute the influence of one's culture. Thus, by thinking of culturally influenced beliefs as conclusions of reflection, we can account for the various influences that lead to those beliefs. This respects the fact that culturally influenced beliefs are not ones for which we can easily locate and pin down a specific cause (as Sosa pointed out). Rather, there are the product of numerous strands of influence working across time. Together, these influences provide us with a "view of the whole" that leads to a specific belief.

2.3.3 Seemings and Conclusions of Reflection

Where do seemings fit into this picture? Seemings serve as the basis for conclusions of reflection. In other words, the view of the whole from which conclusions of reflection emerge is a seeming.¹¹ Consider the way Audi (2004, 46) describes a second case in which one arrives at a conclusion of reflection:

Consider appraising a letter of recommendation described as strong. After a careful reading, we might judge that it is really not strong. One way to arrive at such a judgment is in response to evidential propositions that strike us, say that the writer puts all of the praise in the mouths of others and

¹¹ Audi does not explicitly endorse this view, but it is a natural way to understand what he says about conclusions of reflection.

endorses none of it. But the letter could exhibit a subtler evasion of commitment: a labored description of progress from poor to good performance, an excess of points that balance the praise, an indirectness about the high commendation. One might then simply feel an element of reservation. In this second case, one might judge by a global, intuitive sense of the integration of vocabulary, detail, and tone. The first judgment about the letter, then, is a conclusion of inference, the second a conclusion of reflection: it emerges from taking in the letter as a whole, but not from noting evidential premises.

Of particular interest here is Audi's claim that when we judge that the letter is not strong, we do so because we "simply feel an element of reservation." This accords well with the view of seemings as belief-inclination-causing mental states or, to use Sosa's (2014, 40) terminology, "attractions to assent." Thus understood, when we judge that the letter is weak, we do so because the various elements of the letter give rise to a seeming that inclines us to judge that the letter is weak.

Note, too, that in both of the example cases he presents, Audi claims that the conclusion of reflection is made on the basis of "a global, intuitive sense of the integration of vocabulary, movement, and content" (or, in the second example, of "vocabulary, detail, and tone"). On the assumption that having an intuitive sense of something is akin to having an intuition, this accords well with the view defended here that conclusions of reflection are based on seemings. This is because on many accounts, intuitions are a kind of intellectual seeming. Indeed, as Audi writes elsewhere, "Intuition is . . . of great general interest in epistemology because it is commonly considered, in one form, a kind of seeming" (2013, 197).

Bart Struemer (2005) raises a worry for Audi's distinction that is potentially problematic for the view that conclusions of reflection are based on seemings:

Audi's central idea is clearly that inferential reasoning is based on premises and that non-inferential reasoning is not based on premises, but it does not become very clear what non-inferential reasoning is based on. . . . Audi suggests in various places that something is a premise if it is evidence for a conclusion (see, for example, p. 45) or if it makes a conclusion 'plausible'

(see, for example, p. 110). But if that is all it takes for something to be a premise, then why does the ‘view of the whole’ that non-inferential reasoning is based on not count as a premise? After all, it certainly seems that this ‘view of the whole’ must be evidence for the conclusion of this process of non-inferential reasoning, or must make this conclusion plausible. And if that is so, the difference between inferential and non-inferential reasoning seems to disappear.¹²

Struemer thinks that if the view of the whole from which conclusions of reflection emerge is evidence, then it is a premise. And if it is a premise, then conclusions of reflection turn out to be inferential beliefs after all. This is potentially problematic for the view that I’ve been advancing, since seemings are commonly thought to be evidence.¹³ Thus, if Struemer is right, then the claim that conclusions of reflection are based on seemings threatens to dissolve the distinction between conclusions of inference and conclusions of reflection.

Struemer’s objection can be avoided by attending carefully to the way in which Audi characterizes the distinction between conclusions of inference and conclusions of reflection. It is notable that Audi is careful not to use the term ‘evidence’ when referring to the view of the whole on which conclusions of reflection are based. He claims that conclusions of reflection are not the product of “evidential premises,” but rather are “*globally grounded*: based on an understanding of the proposition seen in the context of the overall grounds for it” (2004, 46). Audi appears to reserve the term ‘evidence’ specifically for premises in an inference.¹⁴ It thus seems that Audi’s use of the term

12. References in the quoted material are to (Audi 2004).

13. Huemer thinks that seemings are the only relevant evidence for our beliefs: “I think that the way things appear [i.e., seem] to one-self is normally the only (proximately) causally relevant factor in one’s belief-formation” (2007, 39). Similarly, Chris Tucker says that “if it seems to S that P, then S thereby has evidence which supports P” (2011, 55). For Huemer and Tucker, the view that seemings are evidence is part of their phenomenal conservatism. But one finds support for the view that seemings are evidence even among those who aren’t phenomenal conservativists. For example, in his “externalist friendly” account of seemings, Bergmann takes sensory experiences and seemings together to “constitute the subject’s evidence for [perceptual] beliefs” (2013a, 168).

14. it is worth noting here the way Audi elsewhere describes evidentialism as a thesis according to which “the kind of evidence intended is not the non-inferential ‘evidence of the senses’ . . . *but the sort ordinarily called evidence*, which one would have in the form of premises from which one may infer . . . conclusions” (2003, 279; emphasis added). It may be that what Audi (but not Struemer) has in mind when he refers to ‘evidence’ is the sort of confirming or disconfirming evidence that plays a prominent role in the philosophy of science than the broader conception of evidence as sense data (broadly understood) that is more commonly employed by epistemologists.

‘evidence’ is restricted so that not everything that might serve as the basis for a belief counts as evidence. This would explain why even though Audi clearly thinks there are grounds for conclusions of reflection, he doesn’t use the term ‘evidence’ to refer to those grounds.

In light of this, it is true that *on Audi’s conception of evidence* something is a premise if it is evidence. Struemer, however, seems to be thinking of evidence in a broader sense, so that anything that serves as the basis for a belief counts as evidence. On this broader construal of evidence, the view of whole would be evidence. However, as we’ve just seen, there is reason to think Audi is not using this broader sense of ‘evidence’. This would explain both why Audi does not consider the view of the whole to be evidence, and also why he would deny that *on this broader conception of evidence* something is a premise if it is evidence.¹⁵

The view that seemings are evidence fits better with the broader conception of evidence that Struemer appears to have in mind, since seemings are not the sorts of things that figure as premises in inferences.¹⁶ It is precisely for this reason that the view that seemings are the bases for conclusions of reflection does not threaten to undermine the distinction between conclusions of inference and conclusions of reflection. This is because seemings are not, on Audi’s view, the sorts of things that can constitute premises for a conclusion. Thus, basing a conclusion of reflection on a seeming does not suffice to make that conclusion inferential, and so does not threaten to dissolve the distinction between conclusions of inference and conclusions of reflection.

15. Elsewhere, Audi distinguishes between a *reasoned belief* and a *belief for a reason*. A belief may be held for a reason even if it is not a reasoned belief: “A reasoned belief is always held for a reason—one expressed by the premise(s) of the reasoning—but a belief (held) for a reason need not be a reasoned belief—one that is also arrived at by reasoning” (2003, 158). Using this terminology, Audi would likely say that a conclusion of reflection is a belief for a reason but not a reasoned belief.

16. Matthew McGrath considers cases in which one transitions from a seeming or belief that P to a seeming that Q instances of “quasi-inference.” Such transitions are “quasi-inferential” because “replacing these seemings with corresponding beliefs that P and Q would count as genuine inference by the person” (2014, 237). Thus, while we can move from one seeming to another, such a move is not an inference (see also Sosa 2015, 230-32).

Related to this is the further point that a conclusion of reflection might be another seeming rather than a belief. When that is the case, it is even clearer that the move from the view of the whole to the conclusion of reflection is noninferential. As I shall argue in a later section, we sometimes move from initial seemings to resultant seemings. This transition, however, is not one in which the resultant seeming is inferred from the initial seemings.

2.3.4 *Tying it All Together*

The upshot of all of this is that our religious, moral, and political beliefs are based on seemings. These beliefs are noninferential conclusions of reflection that arise from the influence of a number of different sources, the confluence of which gives rise to seemings that serve as the basis for those beliefs. Bergmann nicely draws these strands together in his discussion of the theistic seemings that serve as the basis for theistic belief:

These theistic seemings aren't the results of simply considering the proposition *God exists* and finding that it seems true; nor are they conclusions of arguments. They are more like what Audi calls 'conclusions of reflection,' which are not based on inferences from premises but instead emerge non-inferentially from an awareness of a variety of observations, experiences, and considerations. Thus, in a certain sense, the [evidence for theism] I'm thinking of doesn't consist solely of theistic seemings. It also includes the observations, experiences, testimony, and considerations out of which these theistic seemings emerge upon reflection. (2015, 36)

Thus, there is reason to think that the kinds of beliefs that have been central to concerns over cultural influence are held on the basis of seemings.

It might be thought that this picture fails to adequately distinguish between the formation of a belief, on one hand, and the sustaining of that belief, on the other. Perhaps there are not multiple strands of influence involved in the formation of a belief (it may be, for example, that only testimony is involved), but only in sustaining that belief after it has been formed.

The answer to this question is largely an empirical matter, and much will depend on the distinction between forming a belief and maintaining or sustaining a belief. Is the acquisition of additional reasons for a belief a matter of maintaining a belief, or is there something more involved? One might maintain a belief simply because one has not encountered any reason to give it up (consider, for example, one's belief that there are eight planets in the solar system). Alternatively, one might encounter additional reasons for a belief that cause one to believe it more firmly (participating in religious rituals or

studying scripture, for example). I suspect there is a distinction here, but it is difficult to see how it maps onto the distinction between forming and maintaining a belief. In any case, I think that the account of cultural influence presented in this chapter can be applied to cases in which one's culture plays a role (though perhaps to varying degrees or in different ways) in the formation of a belief, the maintenance of a belief, or both.

With this conclusion in place, it is now time to consider whether the fact that culturally influenced beliefs are held on the basis of seemings gives rise to an epistemological problem.¹⁷

2.4 Culturally Influenced Seemings and Phenomenal Conservativism

Given that culturally influenced beliefs are held on the basis of the way things seem, the question of whether or not those beliefs are rational or justified depends on what is required in order for seemings to confer justification. According to phenomenal conservatism, seemings always confer at least some justification in the absence of defeaters. Alternative views maintain that seemings only confer justification when they meet some external constraint, such as being formed in an appropriate way. In this section, I'll argue that if phenomenal conservatism is true, beliefs that are the product of one's culture are not, simply for that reason, unjustified or irrational. Thus, if there is a problem for beliefs that arise in this way, it must be one that depends on a view that requires seemings to meet external conditions.

Before proceeding, I should note that my interest lies in whether or not the *fact* that one's belief is influenced by one's culture precludes the possibility of that belief's being rational or justified. Cultural influence poses two distinct epistemological questions. The first question is: How bad is it, epistemically, for a belief to be influenced by one's

17. I focus on the epistemological implications of the fact of cultural influence here because it has received significantly less attention than questions surrounding the implications of believing that one's belief has been culturally influenced. Moreover, this strategy allows us to draw conclusions that are independent of the question of whether one has a believed defeater, which is plausibly construed as a more generic problem since *any* reason one has to think one's belief is epistemically suspect can give rise to a believed defeater. That said, I do not ignore the questions surrounding cultural influence and believed defeaters, as they are the subject of the fourth chapter.

culture? The second question is: How bad is it, epistemically, for a belief when one *comes to believe* that it was influenced by one's culture? At this point, I am addressing only the first question (the second question will receive extended discussion in a later chapter). To borrow White's terminology, my focus is on the question of whether one's culture is a *blocking debunker*, which is the sort of debunker involved when the "facts about your causal predicament block you from ever being justified, whether you realize it or not" (2010, 575). This accords well with the example cases mentioned earlier since it is not unreasonable to think that the objections from Hick and Kitcher depend on the causal facts themselves, and not on one's having any beliefs about those causal facts (thus, even if one doesn't *recognize* that one's belief was influenced by one's culture, that belief is still problematic in virtue of the fact that it was in fact influenced by one's culture).

Michael Huemer (2007, 30), the chief proponent of phenomenal conservatism, defines the view as follows:

PC If it seems to S that p, then, in the absence of defeaters, S thereby has at least some justification for believing that p.

Chris Tucker defends a similar view under the label of dogmatism, according to which "necessarily, if it seems to S that P, then S thereby has prima facie (non-inferential) justification for P" (2010, 529). Matthew McGrath (2013, 226) nicely captures the PC position as follows:

Suppose it seems to you that P and you have no defeaters (i.e., no good evidence for not-P and no good evidence that this seeming is unreliable as to whether P). Which doxastic attitude would it be reasonable for you to have toward P? Disbelieve P, without good evidence for not-P? Withhold judgment on P? It does seem to you that P, and you lack evidence for not-P and for the unreliability of the seeming with respect to P? The only reasonable attitude to take is belief.¹⁸

18. While McGrath defends some considerations to which the phenomenal conservativist could appeal to avoid several objections to PC, it is not clear that McGrath would situate himself within the PC camp.

Thus, according to PC, all that is required for one's belief that *p* to be justified is that it be held on the basis of a seeming that *p*, and for one to lack defeaters for that belief.

One consequence of PC is that the cause or etiology of a seeming that *p* is irrelevant to the justificatory power of that seeming. Huemer is explicit about this: "When the subject is unaware of an appearance's etiology, that etiology is irrelevant to what it is rational for the subject to believe" (2013, 344). Importantly, this means that even if one's seeming is caused in an inappropriate way, it may still confer justification on a corresponding belief. As Huemer goes on to write, "The ability of an appearance to confer justification is independent of whether, unbeknownst to the subject, the appearance is caused by an unreliable process, an unjustified belief, or even an epistemically blameworthy state" (2013, 445).

In light of this, we can see that if PC is true, then the *mere fact* that one's seeming was caused by one's culture can never prevent a belief based on that seeming from being justified. Moreover, this is so even if one's culture is an unreliable or otherwise inappropriate cause of that seeming. For, according to PC, its seeming to one that *p* is sufficient to confer justification on a belief that *p* (in the absence of defeaters). Thus, even if we grant the claim that one's community or culture is not a reliable or appropriate cause of seemings, we need not grant that the beliefs held on the basis of those seemings are unjustified or irrational. For example, if, as I've already argued, "someone born into a devout Muslim family in Pakistan is very likely to be a Muslim" (Hick 1997, 281) because Islam seems true to that person, then the Muslim's belief is justified. Whether her culture is a reliable cause of the kinds of seemings on which those Islamic beliefs are based is irrelevant to question of whether or not her Islamic beliefs are justified.

Of course, one might be aware of that fact that her belief was caused by her culture. If so, then whether or not that belief is justified depends on whether or not she thinks (or has reason to think) that the influence of her culture on her belief is epistemically problematic. This, however, would be to shift the focus from the question of whether or not one's culture is a blocking debunker to the question of whether or not coming

to believe that one's belief was caused by one's culture gives one an undermining debunker. Because this undermining debunker is a kind of defeater, it would (in contrast to the blocking debunker) be relevant to the justificatory status of the belief according to PC. However, as I indicated earlier, my interest here is only whether the *fact* of causal influence by one's community is a blocking debunker.

So, phenomenal conservatism makes handling cases of culturally influenced belief easy.¹⁹ Because PC says that all that matters for justification is that one's belief that *p* is based on one's seeming that *p* (and that one has no defeaters), the question of whether or not the cause of that seeming (in this case, the culture) is an appropriate source of seemings is irrelevant to the question of whether or not the beliefs based on those seemings are justified. Thus, if PC is true, then the mere fact that one's beliefs are the product of one's culture does not threaten the justification of those beliefs.

2.5 Against the Epistemic Propriety of Culturally Influenced Seemings

Not everyone who thinks seemings play a role in justification is a phenomenal conservativist. A number of philosophers think that there are restrictions on which seemings are able to confer justification. According to these philosophers, it is only a subset of seemings that have the power to confer justification. The way of identifying this subset varies. Some think that only seemings that are appropriately caused can confer justification (Bergmann 2013a; Siegel 2012, Markie 2006). Others think it is only those seemings for which we have reliability-supporting memory data that can confer justification (Steup 2013).

For my purposes, it isn't necessary to adopt any one of these particular ways of specifying the relevant condition. Nor is it necessary to determine the precise nature of

19. Again, these are cases in which the subject has no belief about that cultural influence that would constitute a defeater. In such a case, to borrow Huemer's (2013, 345) words, "the subject is aware that his appearance that *P* is based on the appearance that *E*, but the subject somehow neither doubts nor has justification to doubt that *E* supports *P*. In this case, I think the subject in fact *has* some justification for believing *P*." If one does have a reason to doubt the relevant seeming, then one will have a defeater, and PC will not issue the verdict that the subject's belief is justified. This, however, is not the sort of case on which I am focusing in this chapter.

the problem caused by a failure to meet this condition. I'll simply say that the objector's worry is that cultural influence is likely to render our seemings about controversial matters (i.e., matters about things like religion, morality, and politics) epistemically inappropriate. For this reason, the beliefs based on those seemings are likely to be unjustified. Let us call this the *epistemically inappropriate cultural influence* thesis:

EICI The influence of one's culture is likely to render one's seemings about controversial matters epistemically inappropriate. Consequently, the beliefs based on those culturally influenced seemings are likely to be unjustified.

This section will focus on the plausibility of EICI.

First, however, why should we think cultural influence is problematic? In light of the example cases considered earlier, we can see that the motivation for this claim stems from the observation that one's seemings (or, at least those about controversial topics) tend to vary with respect to one's culture. As Hick points out in connection with religious beliefs, those born in Christian cultures tend to have Christian seemings, those born in Buddhist cultures tend to have Buddhist seemings, and so on. On the assumption that at most one of these cultures is right, only the religious seemings that are caused by a culture that has adopted true religious beliefs are veridical, while the religious seemings caused by other cultures are nonveridical. Yet, the cause of the seeming in each case is the same—namely, one's culture.

Also motivating the concern over the appropriateness of culturally influenced seemings is the observation that for any religion one might choose, there will be more people who have different religious beliefs (and so different religious seemings) than the chosen religion. As of 2010, Christianity was the world's largest religion with 2.2 billion adherents.²⁰ Yet, that's only 31 percent of the world's population, which (if we count "unaffiliated" as a religious category) means that even when we consider the world's largest religion, there are far more people who have beliefs (and seemings corresponding to those beliefs) that differ from those found in that religion. Granting that religious

20. See "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010–2050" from the Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>.

beliefs and seemings are the product of one's culture (as the objector seems to be assuming), there will be more nonveridical than veridical culturally influenced religious seemings. Thus, "a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' is appropriate in relation to beliefs that have been instilled into one by the surrounding religious culture" (Hick 1997, 281).

To determine whether or not we should accept the claim that culturally influenced seemings are likely to be epistemically inappropriate, we need to consider some ways in which our cultures influence our seemings. While a specific seeming and belief that *p* might be influenced by one's culture in any number of ways, I think we can identify two broad ways in which cultures influence seemings. In the first way, one's culture influences one's seeming in an immediate and relatively direct way. In the second way, one's culture influences one's seeming mediately, with the seeming arising more directly from various influencing factors that obtain largely in virtue of the culture to which one belongs. I shall argue that whichever of these views the objector adopts, it gives rise to significant problems for the plausibility of EICI.

Before proceeding, I should note that I am not arguing for the positive claim that the influence of one's culture renders one's seemings and beliefs epistemically appropriate. Nor am I claiming that even if the influence of one's culture is epistemically inappropriate, the seemings and beliefs influenced by that culture nevertheless enjoy some kind of positive epistemic status. Nor is it my aim to offer reasons that can be used to show that there is no way in which cultural influence is epistemically problematic. Rather, my goal is to show that defending the claim that cultural influence renders our controversial seemings inappropriate turns out to be much more challenging than it initially appears, primarily because specifying the range of seemings that are supposed to be suspect is fraught with difficulty. In other words, whatever it is about cultural influence that is problematic, it is not a problem that can be easily limited so that it applies only to our controversial seemings and beliefs.

2.6 Unmediated Cultural Influence

Consider, first, how a culturally influenced seeming might arise in a relatively immediate way. Sosa offers an example of how this might go:

The bare entertaining of a proposition with perfectly fine understanding can attract too much. For example, the attraction might be just a bias or superstition. Here the causal source is a kind of social pressure that bypasses cognitive mechanisms of proper inference, testimony, or perception. This pressure might lead a child to give a proposition the wrong intuitive weight, and this might then linger into adulthood through normal cognitive inertia, even if that proposition should exert no attraction whatsoever absent support by ulterior reasons. Enculturating social pressure might thus anchor an inappropriate attraction, an improper bias. (2014, 44)

In this example, one's culture influences one's seeming that *p* in a relatively direct sort of way, since the seeming is produced in a way that "bypasses cognitive mechanisms of *proper* inference, testimony, or perception." There is no rational mechanism that "stands between" the culture and the seeming.²¹

If this is the way in which communities and cultures influence our seemings, then EICI has some plausibility. Because the seemings in these cases bypass one's cognitive mechanisms of proper inference, testimony, perception, etc., it is reasonable to think that those seemings are likely to be epistemically inappropriate in some way. After all, the motivation for distinguishing proper and improper cognitive mechanisms is to distinguish between those that are likely to get us to the truth and those that are not.²²

21. This is not to say that there is no cognitive mediation involved at all, since one would still have to learn of the community's belief in some way (presumably, through testimony). Audi (2006) distinguishes between beliefs *based on* testimony and beliefs *acquired through* testimony, arguing that while beliefs based on testimony are always acquired through testimony, not all beliefs acquired through testimony are based on testimony. For example, you might tell me you have a cold, but your voice is so nasally that I can't understand what you say. In this case, my belief that you have a cold is acquired through your testimony, but it is not based on that testimony. Perhaps we could say the same of the seemings in these cases: While the seemings are acquired through testimony, they're not based on that testimony.

22. There may also be cases in which one's seeming *does* involve proper cognitive mechanisms, but those mechanisms are aimed at something other than the production of true beliefs. Plantinga (2000, 145–53), for example, interprets Freud as objecting to Christian belief on the grounds that it is the product of wishful thinking. However, wishful thinking may be a functioning properly even when its deliverances are not true, since the goal of wishful thinking isn't true belief, but something else (such as comfort). For this reason, we should understand the claim "bypasses proper cognitive mechanisms" as "bypasses proper cognitive mechanisms that are aimed at the production of true beliefs."

Thus, if one's culture causes it to seem to one that p in a way that bypasses those mechanisms, then we have reason to think those seemings are inappropriate.

Importantly, however, the seemings in these cases are likely to be inappropriate not because they are influenced by one's culture, but rather because they bypass proper cognitive mechanisms. Thus, this doesn't present a problem that is unique to culturally influenced seemings, since *any* seeming that arises in a way that bypasses proper cognitive mechanisms is likely to be inappropriate. The mere fact that one's culture influenced one's seeming is not sufficient to generate a problem. What's needed in addition is the claim that there was no proper cognitive mechanism involved in the production of the seeming.

Perhaps the objector thinks that culturally influenced seemings *always* bypass proper cognitive mechanisms. If so, then it will be true that culturally influenced seemings are thereby likely to be inappropriate. There are reasons to think, however, that this is too narrow an account of what it is for a seeming to be influenced by one's culture. For, in essence, this simply builds epistemic inappropriateness into an account of what it is for a seeming and belief to be influenced by one's culture. This not only severely limits the scope of the problem, but is also a rather uninteresting thesis. The more interesting question is whether a belief that we take to be the product of proper cognitive mechanisms (e.g., a belief held on the basis of apparently proper testimony, perception, inference, etc.) in fact turns out to lack justification. As Roger White writes, "The question is whether having formed a view as to whether p *on the basis of reasons of the usual sort*, information concerning the cause of your belief might constitute a further reason to change your opinion on the matter" (2010, 574; emphasis added). These "reasons of the usual sort" are "*justifying reasons*, the kind of reasons I might cite in justifying my belief" (White 2010, 573). We should thus resist the claim that culturally influenced seemings and beliefs always bypass proper cognitive mechanisms and consider an alternative account that allows for the possibility that proper cognitive mechanisms play a role in the production of those seemings and beliefs.

2.7 Mediated Cultural Influence

Fortunately, we've already encountered a plausible way in which one's culture can influence how things seem in a way that doesn't depend on the claim that culturally influenced seemings always bypass proper cognitive mechanisms. Earlier, I argued that cultural influence consists of a number of strands of influence. Those various strands of influence give rise to seemings, and those seemings, in turn cause beliefs. On this view, the influence of one's culture is mediated through various more specific kinds of influence. These influences are connected to our cultures insofar as it is in virtue of being in a particular culture that one is exposed to the particular influences that cause it to seem to one that p.

For example, according to this picture, it doesn't seem to one that Buddhism is true simply because one is part of a Buddhist culture. Rather, it seems to one that Buddhism is true because one is part of culture in which one encounters various kinds of influences that cause it to seem to one that Buddhism is true. On this account, to say that a seeming is influenced by one's culture is to speak a bit loosely, since, more strictly speaking, it is not one's culture that causes it to seem to one that p, but rather the various influences one encounters in one's culture that cause it to seem to one that p.

2.7.1 *Initial and Resultant Seemings*

We can better understand this way of characterizing the influence of one's culture on one's seemings (and, consequently, beliefs) by making use of Sosa's distinction between *initial* and *resultant* seemings.²³ Resultant seemings are, as their name suggests, seemings that result from reflection or deliberation (whether conscious or not) on all of our initial seemings. Put a bit more simply, resultant seemings are what we find ourselves with after reflecting on all of our initial seemings.

23. Sosa explains this distinction in his (2014, 42–43). While this distinction is Sosa's, I don't mean to suggest that he does or would use it in the way I do in what follows.

One of the motivations for this distinction is that it allows us to make sense of the fact that we often have conflicting seemings. As Sosa (2014, 40) writes,

Something can make the affirmative seem right on a certain question even while something else does the same for the negative (or at least for suspending). Such examples are legion. Suppose you measure the Müller-Lyer lines. Even while this makes it seem to you that they are congruent, the visual attraction to think them incongruent still remains, at least while the lines are in view. Opposing attractions might thus coexist concurrently in a single mind.

If the initial seeming that the lines are congruent is stronger than the initial seeming that the lines are incongruent, then one will acquire a resultant seeming that the lines are congruent.²⁴ This resultant seeming that the lines are congruent may then go on to yield the belief that the lines are congruent. More generally, when one believes that p on the basis of a seeming that p , the seeming that serves as the basis for that belief is a resultant seeming.²⁵

It is important to note that resultant seemings often emerge from a number of initial seemings. Consider a case of testimony in which one is told from a trustworthy advisor that p , which provides one with the seeming that p . One is then told from another advisor that $\neg p$, which provides one with the seeming that $\neg p$. Whatever one ultimately judges with respect to p , that judgment will be based on a resultant seeming that arises from

24. The qualification is important since a resultant seeming that p is not sufficient for a belief that p (even in the absence of defeaters). For, as Sosa (2014, 40) points out, a resultant seeming may not issue in a belief if its intensity fails to rise above a certain threshold.

25. Do initial seemings cause a distinct resultant seeming, or is it simply that the strongest initial seeming is identical to the resultant seeming? I think the former view is preferable, though it may be the case that the content of the strongest initial seeming is always identical to the resultant seeming. If seemings are individuated solely by their content, then the initial seeming would be identical to the resultant seeming. However, I think seemings are differentiated not only by their contents, but also by their strength (perhaps among other things as well, such as their causes).

If correct, then given that a weak initial seeming that $\neg p$ can reduce the strength of a strong initial seeming that p , the resultant seeming that p will not be identical to the initial seeming that p , since it will be weaker. For example, for one familiar with the Müller-Lyer illusion, the perceptual seeming that the lines are incongruent, even though much weaker than the memorial seeming that the lines are congruent, may still slightly reduce the strength of the memorial seeming. Note that in the absence of the perceptual seeming, the memorial seeming would be even stronger than it is. Thus, it isn't that the strong memorial seeming simply prevails unaltered over the weaker perceptual seeming. It is rather that the strong memorial seeming and weak perceptual seeming together give rise to the distinct resultant seeming that the lines are of equal length.

further reflection on the initial testimonial seemings. Note, too, that while in this case both initial seemings are testimonial, as the Müller-Lyer example shows, this needn't be the case. One familiar with the illusion may have a strong memorial seeming that $\neg p$ along with a weaker perceptual seeming that p . In this case, one's resultant seeming will reflect both of these kinds of initial seemings.

2.7.2 *Applying the Distinction*

Let us now see how the distinction between initial and resultant seemings can be of use in understanding mediated cases of cultural influence. Recall Bergmann's claim that theistic seemings emerge "from an awareness of a variety of observations, experiences, and considerations. Thus, in a certain sense, the [evidence for theism] I'm thinking of doesn't consist solely of theistic seemings. It also includes the observations, experiences, testimony, and considerations out of which these theistic seemings emerge upon reflection" (2015, 36). Here, we can think of the theistic seeming as a resultant seeming that arises from the initial seemings that have their source in perception, testimony, and intuition. Thus, the seeming that God exists is not (at least in typical cases) unmediated. Rather, it is a resultant seeming that emerges from initial seemings that arise from sources that issue in other (often mundane) kinds of seemings and beliefs.

To make this a bit more concrete, consider Mill's churchman in London. The churchman may have a strong testimonial seeming for his Christian beliefs, a strong intellectual seeming (arising, say, from the argument from evil) against those beliefs, and a rather weak seeming for those beliefs caused by social pressure. Moreover, these seemings will reflect still other seemings. The strength of the testimonial seeming will reflect how trustworthy the community's religious leaders seem to him. The strength of the intellectual seeming will depend on how he weighs the evidence to which the argument from evil appeals. And, as Sosa (2014, 40) points out, this weighing of the evidence itself proceeds on the basis of how things seem (for that which seems most true will be accorded the most weight in deliberation). From all of these initial seemings arises the

resultant seeming that Christianity is true, and it is on the basis of that resultant seeming that the churchman holds his Christian beliefs.

2.8 Mediated Cultural Influence and Epistemic Propriety

In light of the distinction between initial and resultant seemings and the role of the two kinds of seemings in the formation of our beliefs, we can see that there is an ambiguity in EICI. For, as it stands, EICI fails to specify whether it is our initial or resultant seemings that cultural influence is likely to render inappropriate. Consider, then, a modified version EICI:

EICI* The influence of one's culture is likely to render one's resultant seemings about controversial matters epistemically inappropriate. Consequently, the beliefs based on those culturally influenced resultant seemings are likely to be unjustified.

The key claim here is that influence of one's culture is likely to render one's resultant seemings about controversial matters epistemically inappropriate. Why? Two possibilities suggest themselves. First, one's culture might render one's resultant seemings about controversial matters epistemically inappropriate because it renders the initial seemings from which those resultant seemings emerge inappropriate. Second, it might be that one's culture has an epistemically pernicious effect on the way one *responds* to one's initial seemings. In this section, I'll argue that the first option is implausible.

Before proceeding, it will be useful to get clear on why it would be problematic if cultural influence made our initial seemings inappropriate. Given that our resultant seemings emerge from reflection on our initial seemings, if those initial seemings were inappropriate, then the resultant seeming that emerges from them is also likely to be inappropriate. Think again of the Müller-Lyer example, in which one has an initial perceptual seeming that the lines are not symmetrical, and an initial memorial seeming that the lines are symmetrical. If the perceptual and memorial seemings in this case were inappropriate, then it is difficult to see how they could give rise to an appropriate resultant seeming, and, ultimately, to a justified belief. More generally, a belief based

on a resultant seeming that is the product of inappropriate initial seemings is likely to be inappropriate, and so any belief based on that resultant seeming is likely to be unjustified.

2.8.1 *The Challenge of Identifying Problematic Seemings*

Suppose, then, that the objector's claim is that one's resultant seemings about controversial matters are epistemically inappropriate because one's culture renders the initial seemings from which those resultant seemings emerge inappropriate. While this would secure the conclusion that our culturally influenced beliefs are likely to be unjustified, there are several challenges that threaten the plausibility of this way of capturing what is problematic about cultural influence.

To see why this is so, recall that the initial seemings that give rise to our resultant seemings about controversial matters are often caused by typical sources of beliefs and seemings, such as perception, testimony, and intuition. To use Sosa's terminology, these initial seemings are often (though not always) *foundational*, which is to say that they are "based sufficiently on a regress-stopping reason" (2014, 42). Consider Plantinga's influential account of the way in which theistic belief arises. According to Plantinga, "There are many circumstances, and circumstances of many kinds, that call forth or occasion theistic belief" (2000, 174). Among these are the perception of the glories of nature, such as "the majestic grandeur of the mountains" and "the dainty, articulate beauty of a tiny flower" (174). Theistic seemings can also arise in response to testimony:

We read Scripture, or something presenting scriptural teaching, or hear the gospel preached, or are told of it by parents, or encounter a scriptural teaching as the conclusion of an argument (or conceivably even as an object of ridicule), or in some other way encounter a proclamation of the Word. What is said simply seems right; it seems compelling; one finds oneself saying, "Yes, that's right, that's the truth of the matter; this is indeed the word of the Lord." (Plantinga 2000, 250)

Let us slightly modify Plantinga's account by supposing that these circumstances give rise to theistic belief by causing theistic seemings, which in turn cause theistic beliefs.

Notice that the resultant theistic seemings in these cases emerge from initial perceptual and testimonial seemings. Thus, the same kinds of initial seemings that give rise to the resultant seeming that theism is true also give rise to other resultant seemings that are not controversial. For example, on perceiving the beauty of a flower, the same initial perceptual seeming that gives rise to the resultant seeming that God exists also gives rise to the more mundane resultant seeming that one is looking at a flower.²⁶

The challenge, then, is to explain why the influence of one's culture makes the resultant seeming that God exists problematic but not the resultant seeming that one is looking at a flower. For, in both cases, the resultant seeming emerges from the same initial seeming. If resultant seemings about controversial matters are epistemically inappropriate because one's culture renders the initial seemings from which those resultant seemings emerge inappropriate, then why aren't one's resultant seemings about uncontroversial matters also epistemically inappropriate, given that they both have their source in the same kinds of initial seemings? If the objector cannot provide a principled way to distinguish between those initial seemings that are problematic and those that aren't, then we must conclude either (i) that the influence of our culture has no epistemically pernicious effects on our initial seemings, or else (ii) that the influence of our culture causes problems for all of our initial seemings.

Neither option should be attractive to the objector. If we take the first option, then there is no problem here after all. If we take the second option, then we seem to be faced with a much bigger problem than the objector originally intended, since it is now not only our controversial beliefs that are called into question, but all of those things we believe on the basis of seemings.

26. Tucker writes, "The sensation and admiration of a sunset, whether taken jointly or individually, seem evidentially irrelevant to the claim that God loves one" (2011, 60). Tucker thinks that to mediate between the sensation and the belief, a seeming is needed: "An appreciation of the glories of nature leads to a justified non-inferential belief that God loves one, not because the appreciation itself provides good evidence for that claim, but because it triggers an evidentially relevant seeming" (2011, 62). Of course, along with the evidentially relevant seeming that God loves one, there are also seemings that are evidentially relevant to the belief that one is watching a sunset. Thus, we see here that the same initial seemings (those caused by the experience of a sunset) give rise both to resultant seemings about God as well as more mundane resultant seemings about a sunset.

One strategy for maintaining that there is a problem here that does not give rise to widespread skepticism is to claim that our cultures do not render *all* of our initial seemings inappropriate, but only those that are the product of the testimony of our culture. However, in light of how much we depend on testimony for so much of what we believe, we would still be left with a skepticism that is broader than intended. In this connection, it is interesting to note that psychologists have uncovered that most people tend to form and justify their religious and scientific beliefs in the same way:

Neither as children nor indeed as adults do most people construe religion and science differently. Rather, from early in development and henceforward, they approach the two domains in much the same way: they accept the testimony of other people concerning the functioning of invisible agents. Asked to assess their belief in those agents, they gauge the tenor of pertinent discourse as well as the degree of consensus in the surrounding community and they express more or less confidence accordingly. Asked to justify their beliefs, they cite the properties of the agents in question or they provide deferential justifications by citing a relevant authority. (Harris and Corriveau 2014, 39)

If the initial seemings that lead to the resultant seemings that serve as the basis for our religious beliefs are problematic, then the initial seemings that lead to the resultant seemings that serve as the basis for our scientific beliefs appear to be equally problematic. Thus, even restricting the kinds of inappropriate seemings to those that arise from the testimony of one's culture is unable to stave off worries about a broader skepticism.

Another way in which the objector might try to avoid the skeptical consequences that attend the claim that our cultures render our initial seemings inappropriate (without giving up the claim that these cases are problematic) is to refocus our attention on the claim that it is only those initial seemings that give rise to resultant seemings about *controversial matters* like religion, morality, and politics that are problematic. As we've seen, it is difficult to see how to draw a principled distinction between those initial seemings that give rise to resultant seemings about controversial matters and those that give rise to resultant seemings about uncontroversial matters (again, this is because the

same initial seemings that give rise to our resultant seemings about controversial matters also give rise to our resultant seemings about uncontroversial matters).

However, let us suppose that the objector could identify some criterion to distinguish between problematic and unproblematic initial seemings. Whatever that criterion turns out to be, we will need some reason to think that it applies only to those initial seemings that give rise to resultant seemings about controversial matters. Importantly, the relevant criterion cannot depend on the claim that the problematic seemings are about controversial matters. For if our reason for thinking the seemings in question are problematic is the fact that they concern controversial topics, then it seems that what's really driving the worry in these cases is the controversy itself, and not any facts about the causes of the relevant seemings. Thus, this shifts the problem from one that stems from the cause of our seemings and beliefs to one that stems from disagreement. For now the claim is that we have reason to think that seemings about controversial matters are inappropriate because others apparently hold conflicting seemings (and hold conflicting beliefs based on those seemings). Moreover, because disagreement is typically viewed as a problem only when it is *recognized* disagreement with an epistemic peer or superior, this way of putting the problem identifies an undermining debunker rather than a blocking debunker (since the latter focuses on problems that occur whether or not one recognizes them). If, then, the fact that others have seemings that conflict with our own is cause for concern, it is not a concern that arises from facts about the way in which those seemings were caused.

2.8.2 *Objection: What About Racist Beliefs?*

One might grant that while this account is plausible when applied to something like theistic belief, it is not plausible when it comes to other, clearly problematic kinds of beliefs, such as racist or sexist beliefs. If cultural influence is not sufficient to render theistic belief epistemically inappropriate, then is it also not sufficient to render racist or sexist beliefs epistemically inappropriate?

To sketch a defense of a negative answer to this question, note that much will depend on the source of the relevant seemings. It is plausible to think that the seemings that serve as the bases for racist and sexist beliefs arise from a morally deficient emotional or affective state, such as hatred (here I have in mind cases of explicit bias, where the racist and sexist beliefs are consciously endorsed, as opposed to cases involving unconscious and involuntary implicit bias).

One possibility is that seemings that arise from such states are not “based sufficiently on a regress-stopping reason” (Sosa 2014, 42). For this reason, the seemings on which racist and sexist beliefs are based do not parallel the mundane kinds of seemings on which at least some theistic beliefs are based. Thus, one can maintain that such seemings are inappropriate without calling into question our more mundane kinds of seemings and beliefs. This may be problematic, however, if one wants to claim that some epistemically appropriate seemings and beliefs can arise from other affective states, such as love. For example, some moral seemings may arise from a love of one’s neighbor and some theistic seemings may arise from a love for God.

Perhaps, then, the more fundamental problem in cases involving racist and sexist beliefs is that the affective state that causes the seemings on which those beliefs are based is itself inappropriate. One’s failure or inability to respond in a *morally* appropriate way hinders one’s ability to respond in an *epistemically* appropriate way. This can explain why seemings that arise in a proper way from morally appropriate affective states (such as love for God and one’s neighbor) are able to confer justification on corresponding beliefs, while seemings that arise from morally inappropriate affective states (such as hatred toward those of a different skin color or sex) are not able to confer justification on corresponding beliefs.

The idea that epistemic propriety is dependent upon moral propriety is not novel, particularly in the context of religious belief. Aquinas, for instance, makes it clear that faith is product of the will’s assent to the proper object of charity: “It is clear that faith’s act is pointed as to its end towards the will’s object; i.e., the good. This good, the end of

faith's act, is the divine good, the proper object of charity" (*ST* IIa-IIae.4.3). Similarly, Plantinga (2000, 306) writes:

Would it be somehow irrational to form a belief B as a response just to the perception that B is attractive and beautiful, or the fact that you delight in the thought that B, that you have a certain affective response to B? I don't think so. It needn't be the case that wherever there is influence of this sort—that is, from nonintellectual factors—what you have is impedance: perhaps the design plan calls for just this sort of belief formation, and perhaps the relevant part of the design plan is aimed at true belief.

In this way, not all seemings that arise from affective states are on a par, since not all affective states are appropriate (e.g., the hatred that drives racism and sexism).

More would need to be said to adequately treat this issue, but my hope is that this suffices to make it plausible to think that there is a significant difference between the kind of case I discuss involving theistic belief and cases involving racist or sexist beliefs. I focus primarily on the theistic case because, as previously mentioned, it has been the kind of case at the center of concerns over irrelevant and cultural influence. However, there is no reason to think that a similar kind of explanation would not be available for other kinds of beliefs when there is no moral impropriety involved. Moreover, this is not to deny the unfortunate possibility that some theistic seemings may arise in a way similar to those that cause racist and sexist beliefs. Theistic beliefs based on such seemings would not be justified, for the same reason that the beliefs of the racist and sexist are not justified.

I should also add that my aim is to show that a belief's being culturally influenced is compatible with that belief's being justified. I am not trying to show that *all* or even *most* culturally influenced beliefs are justified. My opponent is someone like Kitcher, who thinks that "given that they [i.e., religious beliefs] are *all* on a par" in virtue of being "acquired . . . through early teaching and socialization" the appropriate conclusion to draw is that "we should trust *none* of them" (2011, 26; emphasis added).

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the plausibility of the claim that the influence of our culture renders our seemings (and, consequently, the beliefs based on them) epistemically inappropriate. The question of whether or not we should accept this claim depends on *how* cultures influence seemings. One possibility is that one's culture influences one's seemings in a relatively unmediated or direct kind of way, as when one is brainwashed. In these cases, one's culturally influenced seeming bypasses one's proper cognitive mechanisms. This would be problematic if culturally influenced seemings always bypasses proper cognitive mechanisms. However, we have good reason to think that the most interesting cases involving culturally influenced seemings and beliefs do not typically bypass proper cognitive mechanisms (and even when they do, the problem stems not from the causal facts alone, but from the fact that these seemings do not reflect the influence of any proper cognitive mechanisms).

The alternative is to claim that our cultures influence our seemings and beliefs in a way that does not bypass proper cognitive mechanisms. According to this view, it is in virtue of being part of a particular culture that we are exposed to various influences, and it is those influences that give rise to the seemings on which our controversial beliefs are based. More precisely, those influences cause a variety of initial seemings, and from those initial seemings emerges a resultant seeming that serves as the basis for our controversial beliefs.

The challenge for this view is offering a plausible account of which seemings (and, consequently, which beliefs) are problematic. Clearly, it cannot be that all of our initial seemings are epistemically suspect. If this were so, then much of what we believe on the basis of seemings would be called into question, and that is not the objector's intention. The reason for this is that the same kinds of initial seemings that give rise to the resultant seemings that serve as the basis for our controversial beliefs also give rise to resultant seemings that serve as the basis for many of our most basic and mundane perceptual,

testimonial, and intuitive beliefs. However, if there is indeed a problem here, then there must be some way of identifying which seemings are problematic.

One way to identify a problem is to restrict the problematic seemings to those that serve as the basis for our controversial beliefs. The problem with this, however, is that it shifts the problem from one that stems from the influence of our cultures to one that stems from disagreement. For it seems that the reason we should be skeptical of our seemings about controversial matters is precisely the fact that they are controversial, not because they are influenced by our cultures. As such, focusing only on our controversial seemings is unlikely to reveal a problem for our culturally influenced seemings and beliefs that is both unique and substantive.

We thus have reason to think that it is implausible that one's culture renders one's resultant seemings about controversial matters epistemically inappropriate by rendering the initial seemings from which those resultant seemings emerge inappropriate. The plausibility of the claim that cultural influence renders our seemings and beliefs inappropriate thus depends on the plausibility of the claim that one's culture has an epistemically pernicious effect on the way one *responds* to one's seemings. That will be the topic of the next chapter, which explores the connections between cultural influence and cognitive penetration.

3. CULTURAL INFLUENCE AND COGNITIVE PENETRATION

In the previous chapter, I attempted to uncover a successful formulation of an objection to the rationality of our controversial beliefs that stems from the fact that those beliefs are influenced by our cultures and communities. In this chapter, I continue that pursuit by exploring the connections between cultural influence and cognitive penetration. Two claims are central to the cognitive penetration objection to culturally influenced beliefs: First, our cultures and communities instill beliefs and other cognitive and affective states that penetrate the seemings on which our controversial beliefs are based. Second, there is something problematic about this cognitive penetration that negatively affects the epistemic status of the beliefs based on those seemings. Exactly what this problem is supposed to be will be explored at length.

Before turning to the problem, however, I clarify in section one what I have in mind when I speak of cognitive penetration. Much of the literature on cognitive penetration has focused on the cognitive penetration of perception. My focus is more broad, since I focus on cases in which one's cognitive states influence one's seemings, both perceptual and nonperceptual. The key point here is that the same experience can give rise to different seemings due (at least in part) to the prior cognitive states of the subject. In other words, our background state (beliefs, desires, seemings) affects which seemings arise in response to our experiences.

In the second section, I argue that this account of cognitive penetration can help illuminate the epistemological aspects of cultural influence. To show this, I focus on religious beliefs. I begin by showing that religious experience is cognitively penetrable (more precisely, the religious seemings that arise in response to certain experiences are

cognitively penetrable). I then argue that the beliefs, desires, and seemings bequeathed to us by our communities and cultures often serve as the background cognitive states that penetrate our religious seemings. Thus, given that religious seemings can be penetrated by our background cognitive states, and given that those background states are the product of our culture, one plausible way to understand cultural influence is in terms of cognitive penetration.

By itself, the fact that religious seemings are cognitively penetrable does not generate a problem for the beliefs based on those seemings. Not all cognitive penetration is epistemically problematic, and some is even epistemically beneficial. What's needed to show that cognitively penetrated religious seemings are problematic is both an account of the conditions under which at least some cases of cognitive penetration are epistemically problematic, and an argument that the religious seemings in question satisfy those conditions.

Toward that end, I turn in the third section to the first of two accounts that I will consider of what makes some cases of cognitive penetration epistemically pernicious. This first account is due to Susanna Siegel, who argues that cognitive penetration is problematic when it licenses an intuitively illicit form of epistemic elevation. Roughly, Siegel's claim is that if it seems to me that *p* because I already believe that *p*, then my belief that *p* can't gain any additional justification from my seeming that *p*. So, for example, if I believe that God exists because of the influence of my culture, and that belief then causes it to seem to me that God exists when I have certain experiences, then that seeming cannot provide any justification for my belief that God exists.

Despite some parallels with clearly problematic cases of cognitive penetration, Siegel's account ultimately proves unhelpful in showing that cognitively penetrated religious seemings are problematic. The reason for this is that the clearly problematic cases of cognitive penetration depend on the subject culpably failing to withhold the penetrating belief when she epistemically should, and it is difficult to show that this is true of those whose beliefs arise through the influence of their culture.

In the fourth section, I turn to Jack Lyons's account of what makes cognitive penetration problematic. According to Lyons, cognitive penetration is epistemically pernicious when it makes us less reliable, but benign (and perhaps even beneficial) otherwise. On this account, if one's culturally influenced belief that God exists makes one less reliable when it comes to discerning the religious facts by penetrating one's religious seemings, then those seemings (and the beliefs based on them) are problematic.

If Lyons's account is correct, the objector from cultural influence would have to show that a culturally influenced religious belief makes one less likely to get to the truth about religious matters by causing one to have nonveridical or misleading religious seemings. I argue that in order to show this, the objector would have to show that the relevant religious beliefs are false, since the religious seemings in question make one less likely to get to the truth only if the propositions those seemings are about are false.

A final proposal, also suggested by Lyons, is that cognitive penetration is problematic in virtue of the fact that the penetrated cognitive states are not caused by the relevant facts. This turns out to be the most plausible way to capture what's problematic about culturally influenced beliefs (or, at least, culturally influenced religious beliefs). However, there is reason to think that it is possible that the penetrated religious seemings that correspond to at least some religious beliefs are, in fact, caused by the relevant facts. As a result, some religious beliefs may be immune to the objection from cultural influence.

3.1 Cognitive Penetration

Most of the discussion surrounding cognitive penetration has focused on the cognitive penetration of perception. Lyons, for example, writes, "Cognitive penetration [is] simply the influence upon perception . . . of the 'cognitive' states (beliefs, desires, goals, etc.) of the organism" (2011, 290). Accordingly, one popular example of cognitive penetration concerns Wishful Willy, whose desire to find gold causes the object in his pan to appear gold to him. In this case, Willy's desire cognitively penetrates his perceptual seeming. Another oft-discussed example of the cognitive penetration of perception

comes from Siegel: “Before seeing Jack, Jill fears that Jack is angry at her. When she sees him, her fear causes her to have a visual experience in which he looks angry to her” (2013, 698). Here, Jill’s fear penetrates her perception, causing Jack to appear angry.

Some in the literature on the cognitive penetration of perception focus on the cognitive penetrability of perceptual *experience* (Siegel 2012; Cowan 2015), while others focus on the cognitive penetrability of perceptual *judgment* or *belief* (Lyons 2011; 2015). Typically, those who think that perceptual experience (rather than perceptual judgment or belief) is cognitively penetrable adopt a view of perception according to which the contents of perception are conceptually rich. For these philosophers, perceptual experience includes not only the sorts of properties involved in “early vision” (which includes “spatiotemporal [properties], spatial relations, surface shading, orientation, color, binocular stereopsis, size, shape and movement” [Raftopoulos and Müller 2006, 210]), but also such properties as *being a dog*, *being a cat*, *being an oak tree* and even *being a 2015 Ferrari 458 Italia* (Lyons 2015).

An alternative to both the experience view and belief view of cognitive penetrability is a view according to which the object of cognitive penetration is a seeming. On this account, perceptual experience need not include propositional content or represent high-level concepts, and so one needn’t be committed to the view that perceptual experience represents any more than the kinds of properties associated with early vision. One would simply add that a perceptual experience of this sort causes a perceptual seeming, which may have richer content (so that it is the seeming, as opposed to the experience, that has content such as *being a dog*, *being a cat*, *being an oak tree*, *being a 2015 Ferrari 458 Italia*). This perceptual seeming, in turn, causes a perceptual belief with corresponding propositional content.¹ Thus understood, what is cognitively penetrated is the seeming that is caused by the experience, rather than the experience itself.

1. This is to assume that perceptual seemings are “thin” rather than “thick” (Bergmann 2013, 158). Those who think perceptual seemings are thin distinguish the seeming from the sensory experience that causes it. Those who think perceptual seemings are thick think that perceptual seemings include *both* the sensory experience *and* the seeming. Both views, however, recognize that seemings are involved in the formation of perceptual beliefs.

To get a better sense of how this view works, consider the way Siegel (2012, 205-06) characterizes cognitive penetrability:

If visual experience is cognitively penetrable, then it is nomologically possible for two subjects (or for one subject in different counterfactual circumstances, or at different times) to have visual experiences with different contents while seeing and attending to the same distal stimuli under the same external conditions, as a result of differences in other cognitive (including affective) states.

According to the seemings view, it is not that the subjects have visual experiences with different contents, but rather that the seemings that are caused by “seeing and attending to the same distal stimuli under the same external conditions” are different. The experience consists of the sensations that arise from seeing and attending to the distal stimuli, and so the perceptual experience of each subject is the same. What’s different is the seeming that arises in response to that experience. This difference in seemings would, in typical cases, go on to cause different perceptual beliefs or judgments.

Once we take the objects of cognitive penetration to be seemings, it is easier to see how cognitive penetration can affect more than just perceptual beliefs. This is because seemings are involved in the formation of other kinds of beliefs, as well. In light of this, Chris Tucker’s (2014, 36) broader characterization of cognitive penetration is useful: “Cognitive state C1 cognitively penetrates another C2 when C1 (partially) causes C2 in an internal way. The causal chain from C1 to C2 is internal just in case it is contained entirely within the subject.”² Here, the focus is not limited to perception, but on cognitive states generally.

Lastly, it is worth noting Siegel’s claim that “in most cases of cognitive penetration, the following counterfactual will hold: *If the subject were not in background state B but was seeing and attending to the same distal stimuli, she would not have an experience with content p*” (Siegel 2012, 206). To better accord with the view that seemings are

2. Elsewhere, Tucker characterizes cognitive penetration as follows: “For our purposes, we can say that S’s seeming that P is cognitively penetrated by S’s mental state M just in case M (partly) causes that seeming that P. If my desires, beliefs, experiences, or other seemings (partly) cause me to have a seeming that P, then that seeming is cognitively penetrated” (2013, 12).

the objects of cognitive penetration, the relevant counterfactual would say: If the subject were not in background state B but was having the same experience, she would not have the seeming that p in response to that experience. As Siegel points out, this counterfactual cannot serve as a definition of cognitive penetration since it may be that if the subject weren't in background state B, she would be in background state B*, and B* would cause the seeming that p. Nevertheless, if this counterfactual holds in a particular case, that can serve as a good indication that cognitive penetration has occurred.

With this account of cognitive penetrability on the table, let us now turn to the question of whether the seemings that serve as the bases for the kinds of controversial beliefs (focusing specifically on religious seemings and beliefs) that have been at the center of concerns over cultural influence are cognitively penetrable.

3.2 Religious Experience and Cognitive Penetrability

In this section, I explore several popular accounts of religious experience and argue that, in each case, seemings are well-suited to serve as the link between the experiences and the religious beliefs to which they give rise.

3.2.1 Religious Experience

Religious belief is often held on the basis of seemings that arise in response to certain experiences. These experiences need not be the sort of vivid, perceptual (or quasi-perceptual) experiences sometimes associated with mystical experiences of the divine, but can instead be more mundane kinds of experiences. Here, I'll focus on theistic belief, both to keep the discussion manageable and because there has been a significant amount of work done on the sorts of religious experiences that can give rise to theistic belief in recent years. Let us briefly survey a sampling of this work.

William Alston defends the thesis that theistic belief can be justified on the basis of perceptual experience. Alston (1991, 1) writes:

Experiential awareness of God, or as I shall be saying, the *perception* of God, makes an important contribution to the grounds of religious belief.

More specifically, a person can become justified in holding certain kinds of beliefs about God by virtue of perceiving God as being or doing so-and-so. The kinds of beliefs that can be so justified . . . are beliefs to the effect that God is doing something currently vis-à-vis the subject—comforting, strengthening, guiding, communicating a message, sustaining the subject in being—or to the effect that God has some (allegedly) perceivable property—goodness, power, lovingness. The intuitive idea is that by virtue of my being aware of God as sustaining me in being I can justifiably believe that God is sustaining me in being.

Alston's account is unique in that he is willing to say that theists actually perceive God. This perception or experiential awareness of God both causes and justifies beliefs about God.

Unlike Alston, Plantinga focuses on knowledge rather than justification, and the kinds of religious experiences that he thinks give rise to religious belief are not perceptual experiences. However, like Alston, Plantinga (2000, 337-38) thinks that religious experience is central to the acquisition of religious belief:

We can appropriately think of the *sensus divinitatis* and IHS, on the extended A/C model, as providing knowledge of God that is knowledge by way of experience, but not *perceptual* knowledge. Consider the *sensus divinitatis*: you are in grave danger and form the belief that God is able to help; there needn't be anything here we can sensibly refer to as *perception*. You suddenly realize that what you did was despicable; you form the belief that God disapproves, acknowledging to him that you did it; again, there need be nothing present that is properly called perception. On the model, there is knowledge of God here, and experience plays a crucial role—both doxastic experience and also the experience that goes with feeling afraid or guilty or ashamed.

Plantinga makes it clear that while religious belief need not arise on the basis of perception, it does depend on experience.

David Holley takes a somewhat different approach, arguing that theistic belief arises from and is sustained through the acceptance of a "theistic framing narrative." Framing narratives "function as a cognitive background [and] have their main home in practi-

cal pre-theoretical contexts in which they become starting points for reflection” (2011, 749). Holley (2011, 751-52) explains how this applies to religious beliefs:

The point is that our starting-point is typically the world into which we have been inducted through acquiring skills of integrating particulars into meaningful wholes. Religious belief is not alien in this respect. It arises through being inducted into a particular system of meanings which one learns through cultivating various kinds of experiential awareness. A believer learns, for example, to experience things in the world as creations, to construe particular impressions as vehicles of divine guidance, and to view significant personal choices as contributing to or interfering with God’s redemptive purposes.

Here again, we see that experience plays a central role in the acquisition of religious belief.

Though the details differ, the important thing to see is that each of these accounts offers a picture of religious belief that gives a central place to experience in the formation and epistemic status of that belief. Note, too, that the sorts of experiences involved are relatively mundane and quotidian. We need not think that in order for experience to be involved in the formation of religious belief, there must be some sort of dramatic or overwhelming numinous experience. This means that the theistic belief of many ordinary believers can appropriately be said to be based on experience.

3.2.2 Religious Experience and Religious Seemings

Recall Plantinga’s claim that religious belief involves not only typical sorts of experiences (like “feeling afraid or guilty or ashamed”) but also what he calls “doxastic experience.” According to Plantinga, doxastic experience is the sort of experience involved when “you *see* that the proposition is true: and that involves an inclination or impulse toward believing the proposition. . . . Perhaps we should say instead that the proposition in question has a sort of attractiveness, or perhaps inevitableness about it, or perhaps a sort of perceived fittingness . . . ” (1993, 191).

What Plantinga calls “doxastic experience” is characteristic of the sort of experience involved with having a seeming.³ Recently, some philosophers have made explicit the connection between experience, seemings, and theistic belief. Bergmann (2015, 35-36), for example, writes:

Many things can trigger ordinary theistic seemings: feelings of guilt or being forgiven or desperate fear or gratitude can trigger them; so can admiration of the grandeur and majesty of oceans, waterfalls, mountains, deserts, and sky; and so can appreciation of smaller intricate parts of nature. Another way theistic seemings can arise is in response to the spoken or written testimony of others: we encounter the testimony and what is said simply seems right. Theistic seemings can also result from ruminating upon what we have learned about the immensity, complexity, mysteriousness, and possible origins of nature and of the human mind. Likewise, a consideration of the apparent design in nature (e.g., in the biological world and in Big Bang cosmology) can prompt a seeming that God designed these things, a seeming that isn’t based on any argument from design and that is compatible with believing in evolution. These theistic seemings aren’t the results of simply considering the proposition God exists and finding that it seems true; nor are they conclusions of arguments. They are more like what Audi calls ‘conclusions of reflection,’ which are not based on inferences from premises but instead emerge noninferentially from an awareness of a variety of observations, experiences, and considerations.

Similarly, in “re-describing the role of the *sensus divinitatis*,” Tucker (2011, 62) writes:

In response to a visual image of a beautiful sunset, the *sensus divinitatis* might be designed to produce a seeming about God, his love, power, etc. . . . On this picture, an appreciation of the glories of nature leads to a justified non-inferential belief that God loves one, not because this appreciation itself provides good evidence for that claim, but because it triggers an evidentially relevant seeming.

According to these accounts, experiences play a role in the formation of theistic beliefs by causing seemings, which are both the immediate causes and epistemic grounds of those theistic beliefs.

3. Bergmann (2015, 35n36) writes, “See Plantinga 2000: 182-183 where he discusses the nature of the experiences involved in the operation of the *sensus divinitatus* (which produces belief in God), and notes that what they have in common is that they all include doxastic experience. Such doxastic experience is the sort of thing that is involved in having a seeming.”

This sort of view comports well with the account of cognitive penetration offered in the first section, according to which the objects of cognitive penetration are the seemings that arise in response to experience and cause corresponding beliefs. Just as perceptual seemings that are caused by perceptual experiences are cognitively penetrable, so too are religious seemings that arise in response to certain kinds of experiences. Insofar as our account of cognitive penetration allows any cognitive state to be penetrated by any other cognitive state, we need not deny that religious seemings, like perceptual seemings, are cognitively penetrable.

To grant that religious seemings are cognitively penetrable is to allow that it is possible for two subjects (or for one subject in different counterfactual circumstances, or at different times) to have experiences that give rise to different religious seemings as a result of differences in other cognitive (including affective) states, while holding the objects of those experiences fixed (e.g., in the case of perception, the distal stimuli and external conditions) (cf. Siegel 2012, 205). For example, while experiencing a sunset, differences in existing cognitive states may result in that experience giving rise to a religious seeming in one subject (such as the seeming that *God created the universe*), while giving rise to a different religious seeming (or no religious seeming at all) in another subject. In this case, the experience is held fixed, but the seemings that arise in the context of that experience differ in virtue of differences in the subjects' existing cognitive states.

This difference in seemings explains why there is also a difference of belief. The subject whose experience of a sunset gives rise to a theistic seeming will (at least typically) go on to form a theistic belief, while the subject whose experience does not give rise to a theistic seeming will, *ceteris paribus*, not go on to form a theistic belief. Thus, while the object of cognitive penetration is not a belief, that penetration still affects what the subject ends up believing.

3.3 Cultural Influence as Cognitive Penetration

How does the cognitive penetrability of religious seemings (which arise in response to certain experiences) connect with the epistemological issue of cultural influence? In many cases, it is plausible to think that one's culture is responsible for instilling the cognitive states that penetrate religious seemings. One's beliefs, desires, hopes, and fears may owe largely to the influence of one's community. Once those culturally influenced cognitive states are part of one's noetic structure, they are able to penetrate the seemings that arise in response to various experiences. For example, if the influence of one's culture has caused one to have a strong desire that God exist, that desire can cause it to seem to one that *God created the universe* upon experiencing a beautiful sunset (of course, other cognitive states may cause that seeming, as well).

The preceding example shows how theistic seemings that arise in response to experience can be cognitively penetrated by culturally influenced cognitive states. It may also be that culturally instilled cognitive states can penetrate the cognitive states involved in rational reflection. It is often the case that we eventually reach a point at which we critically reflect on at least some of the beliefs that we think have been instilled by our cultures and communities. However, by the time we begin to reflect on our beliefs, we've already amassed a sizable portion of beliefs (and affective states) from our cultures and communities, and these cognitive states influence our reflection. Recall Holley's claim that "our starting-point is typically the world into which we have been inducted" and that religious belief "arises through being inducted into a particular system of meanings." Schoenfield (2014, 209) makes the connection between our culturally instilled beliefs and the construction of our larger system of beliefs even more explicit:

The earlier on my belief in *p* was formed, the less likely it is that this belief is in tension with other beliefs and standards of reasoning that I possess. This is because it is likely that many of the beliefs and standards we formed early on are deeply entrenched in the way we think about a host of other issues. Since the beliefs we formed early on had a strong influence on the

construction of our (hopefully) coherent system of beliefs, it is unlikely that these beliefs are in conflict with the rest.

The point is that we build our structure of beliefs around those with which we begin, and the beliefs with which we begin are often those instilled by our communities.

This means that even when we turn a critical gaze to those beliefs that we take to be dependent on our culture, we may not be able to step outside the influence of our culture to assess those beliefs. Suppose, for example, that one born and raised in a Christian home begins to study proofs for God's existence in an attempt to shift the grounds for her theistic belief from the influence of her community to a philosophical argument. If, in the course of her studies, a particular argument for theism comes to seem compelling, this seeming may be cognitively penetrated by cognitive states she has in virtue of her upbringing in a Christian community. Put counterfactually, it may be true of the reflective theist that if she were not in the background state she is in fact in (which includes her having been born and raised in a Christian home), she would not have the theistic seeming she does. Thus, there is reason to think that even the theistic seemings that arise out of rational reflection are cognitively penetrable.⁴

In light of these considerations, it is not difficult to see how the objector from cultural influence could appeal to cognitive penetration to help make his case. As we've seen, what motivates the objector's concern is the degree to which our beliefs appear to depend on our cultures. Recall Hick's (1997, 281) claim:

Religious allegiance depends in the great majority of cases on the accident of birth: someone born into a devout Muslim family in Pakistan is very likely to be a Muslim, someone born into a devout Hindu family in India

4. Recall Schoenfield's (2014, 205) case, encountered earlier:

You have grown up in a religious community and believe in the existence of God. You have been given all sorts of arguments and reasons for this belief which you have thought about at great length. You then learn that you only have the religious beliefs that you do, and only find the reasoning that you engaged in convincing, because of the influence of this community. If you had grown up elsewhere, you would have, on the basis of the same body of evidence, rejected those arguments and become an atheist.

Of particular interest here is that Schoenfield goes on to claim that this is the sort of case "we encounter in real life."

to be a Hindu, someone born into a devout Christian family in Spain or Mexico to be a Catholic Christian; and so on.

And Kitcher's (2011, 26) similar remarks:

Most Christians have adopted their doctrines much as polytheists and the ancestor-worshippers have acquired theirs: through early teaching and socialization. Had the Christians been born among aboriginal Australians, they would believe, in just the same ways, on just the same bases, and with just the same convictions, doctrines about Dreamtime instead of about the Resurrection.

By appealing to cognitive penetration, the objector can offer a plausible explanation of these counterfactuals. Indeed, these counterfactual claims dovetail nicely with Siegel's counterfactual characterization of cognitive penetration: If the subject's background had differed (by being born into a different culture), so too would the subject's beliefs (in virtue of having different seemings), despite the external conditions remaining fixed.⁵

Of course, in order for this appeal to cognitive penetration to be of much use in objecting to the epistemic status of the beliefs based on cognitively penetrated seemings, there must be something problematic about cognitive penetration. The mere fact that religious seemings are cognitively penetrable is not enough to draw conclusions about the rationality or justification of culturally influenced religious beliefs. This is because not all cases of cognitive penetration are epistemically problematic. Indeed, some cases of cognitive penetration are not only epistemically benign, but epistemically beneficial. Perhaps the clearest examples of beneficial cognitive penetration are cases of expertise and perceptual learning. Tucker (2013, 12-13) offers the following example:

Consider the lizard-like tuatara. . . . I look at the tuatara and it seems to be some kind of lizard; but it isn't. The background beliefs of an expert might make it seem to the expert that the creature is a tuatara, not a lizard. The

5. This also accords nicely with one of the conditions Ballantyne (2012, 241) thinks characterizes what he calls "historically variable" beliefs: "These controversial beliefs are connected to various causal factors such that if one's background is changed, one's belief is changed. More exactly: if one's background had differed in certain respects, then one would have had different beliefs."

expert's cognitively penetrated seeming doesn't seem problematic, and, if anything, seems to enhance the expert's cognition.⁶

When one's background cognitive states penetrate one's seemings in a way that enables those seemings to make a positive contribution to (or even fail to have a negative effect on) the epistemic status of the beliefs based on those seemings, that cognitive penetration is not problematic.

Nevertheless, while there are clear cases of cognitive penetration that are epistemically beneficial or benign, there remain cases in which the cognitive penetration seems intuitively problematic. When cognitive penetration is problematic, what makes it so? That is the question to which we now turn.

3.4 Siegel on Problematic Cognitive Penetration

3.4.1 *Circularity and Illicit Elevation*

Siegel argues that problematic cases of cognitive penetration involve a kind of circularity that prevents the penetrated cognitive states from contributing to the justification of a corresponding belief. Siegel (2012, 202) writes:

We can compare this situation to a gossip circle. In a gossip circle, Jill tells Jack that *p*, Jack believes her but quickly forgets that she's the source of his belief, then shortly afterward Jack tells Jill that *p*. It seems silly for Jill to take Jack's report that *p* as providing much if any additional support for *p*, beyond whatever evidence she already had. On the face of it, this looks like a feedback loop in which no new justification is introduced. Similarly, when beliefs are formed on the basis of cognitively penetrated experience, it is as if your belief that *p* told you to have an experience that *p*, and then your experience that *p* told you to believe that *p*.

In these kinds of cases, Siegel argues that it is intuitively implausible to think that the penetrated experience can epistemically elevate a corresponding belief—that is, the ex-

6. Lyons (2011, 300), following Goldman, offers a similar example: "The expert who identifies a bird as a pileated woodpecker is more justified in this perceptual judgment than the novice, who is simply guessing. This is because expertise and perceptual learning improve perception; they make one better at perceptual judgments, more liable to get things right."

perience cannot “elevate the subject from an epistemically bad situation to an epistemically better one” (2012, 202).

As already indicated, I think that cognitively penetrated experiences are better understood as cognitively penetrated seemings, so in what follows I’ll speak of seemings rather than experiences. Additionally, I take it that epistemic elevation would still be intuitively implausible even if one didn’t start in an epistemically bad situation. That is, even if my belief that *p* is justified, there would still seem to be something epistemically amiss with taking a seeming that *p* caused by my belief that *p* to provide additional justification for my belief that *p*. This suggests that problematic cases are not limited to those in which one moves from being epistemically unjustified to justified, but also include those cases in which an already justified belief allegedly becomes more justified. The primary issue is that cognitively penetrated seemings cannot contribute to the justification of the belief that caused those seemings, regardless of whether or not the belief was justified to begin with.

With that in mind, the question prompted by Siegel’s account is as follows: Can a seeming that *p* contribute to the justification of a belief that *p*, when that seeming that *p* is caused by the belief that *p*? To help focus the discussion, it will be helpful to have a concrete case to consider:

Teresa the Theist Teresa was born into a Christian community. Through the influence of this community (e.g., testimony, participation in religious practices, the instillation of epistemic standards, etc.), Teresa came to believe, from a young age, that God exists. Teresa sometimes has certain experiences in which it seems to her that God exists or is acting (or has acted) in the world. For example, on viewing the night sky, it sometimes comes to seem to her that God created the universe. On doing something morally wrong, it seems to her that God disapproves of her action. If Teresa hadn’t been born into a Christian community, she would not have these kinds of seemings in these circumstances.

Teresa has the sort of experiences that figured into the earlier discussion of religious experience. Let us call the kinds of seemings that arise in these circumstances *T-seemings*, which are seemings about God or his activity in the world. The question, then, is

whether Teresa's T-seemings can contribute to the justification of her culturally influenced belief in theism.

3.4.2 A (Potentially) Parallel Case

Toward answering this question, we can compare the case of Teresa with a clear case of epistemically pernicious cognitive penetration. If the two are sufficiently similar, then we should draw the same verdict in both cases—namely, the verdict that the seemings involved do not contribute to the justification of the corresponding belief. A good candidate for a parallel case is Siegel's (2013, 698) preformationism case:

Preformationism Some of the early users of microscopes were *spermist preformationists* who favored the hypothesis that sperm cells contained embryos, and claimed to see embryos in sperm cells when they looked at those cells under a microscope. Let's suppose their experiences had embryo-content.

In this case, it seems to the preformationist that there's an embryo in the sperm cell because he already believes that sperm cells contain embryos.

Can something similar be said of Teresa? That is, does it seem to Teresa that, say, God created the universe because she already believes (in virtue of the influence of her culture) that God exists? If so, then it might be thought that just as the preformationist gains no justification for his belief in preformationism from his seeming that there is an embryo in the sperm cell, neither does Teresa gain any justification for her belief in theism from her seeming that God created the universe (or any other cognitively penetrated T-seeming she might have).

One clear difference between these two cases is that the content of the preformationist's seeming is more similar to the content of the penetrating belief than the content of the Teresa's seeming is to her penetrating belief. The penetrating belief in the preformationism case is that sperm cells contain embryos, and the seeming penetrated by this belief is that *this* sperm cell contains an embryo. Here, the content of the seeming is just a particular instance of the preformationist's more general belief. However, that doesn't

seem to be true of the theism case. The content of Teresa's seeming (God created the universe) is not simply a specific instance of the penetrating belief that God exists. Might this difference between the two cases show that there is not enough similarity between the two cases to warrant drawing the same conclusion?

I don't think so. Siegel recognizes that many cases of cognitive penetration will not be "ideal" cases in which the content of the seeming is the same as the content of the penetrating belief. Rather, the penetrating belief will often be more general. Siegel (2012, 211) writes:

In these cases, the contents of the cognitively penetrated experience are the same as the contents of the penetrating state. In many cases of cognitive penetration, however, the contents will diverge. The preformationist case itself would be like this, if it weren't oversimplified, as it is above. Prior to looking under the microscope, the preformationist isn't in a position to identify any particular sperm cell, and so isn't in a position to believe E2 [There's an embryo in the sperm cell]. In other cases, the penetrating state may have more general content than the content of experience. For instance, in depression, the penetrating state is a general mood, whereas the experience will concern specific items.

There is thus reason to think that problematic cases of cognitive penetration can arise when the contents of the cognitive states involved are not identical. In light of this, we should not immediately dismiss the theism case as sufficiently dissimilar from the preformationism case.

A positive reason for comparing the two cases is that the relevant counterfactual holds in both cases. Just as the preformationist (by stipulation) wouldn't seem to see an embryo in the sperm cell when looking through the microscope if he did not have a preexisting belief in preformationism, Teresa (by stipulation) wouldn't have the T-seemings she does if not for her preexisting, culturally instilled belief in theism.

In defense of the plausibility of this counterfactual in the theism case, recall Holley's claim that "a believer learns, for example, to experience things in the world as creations, to construe particular impressions as vehicles of divine guidance, and to view

significant personal choices as contributing to or interfering with God’s redemptive purposes” (2011, 751). Here, it sounds as if the belief in theism precedes the T-seemings associated with the kinds of experiences Holley mentions. In other words, one doesn’t start out neutral with respect to theism and then form a belief in theism upon having the right kinds of experiences. Rather, one is “inducted into a particular system of meanings” (which, in this case, is the system associated with theism) and then employs that system to “cultivate” the kinds of experiences that lead to T-seemings. We might also think that the simple fact that many people who aren’t born into a theistic culture don’t have T-seemings (or, at least, don’t report having them or have beliefs that correspond to T-seemings) is reason to think that this counterfactual is true.⁷

3.4.3 *Cognitive Penetration Doesn’t Remove Justification*

If we grant that the preformationism and theism cases are similar in these respects, should we conclude that the theist’s T-seemings are unable to provide any justification for her belief in theism when those T-seemings are caused by her belief in theism (just as we are inclined to think the preformationist’s seemings are unable to provide any justification for his belief in preformationism when caused by his belief in preformationism)? Before answering this question directly, let us suppose for the moment that we did draw this conclusion—what would follow? If the problem is that Teresa’s penetrated T-seemings cannot contribute to the justification of her belief in theism, then it would seem that Teresa’s theism would be justified to whatever degree it was initially justified by the influence of her community. That is, her belief in theism would not gain any additional justification from her T-seemings, but would have whatever justification it had prior to the point at which it began to penetrate the cognitive states that she takes to support her theistic belief (namely, her T-seemings). Compare: No matter how many

7. In a study that tracked the religious identities, practices, and beliefs of more 350 families over 35 years, Vern Bengtson found that “a majority of the parents and young adults in our sample share similar religious identities, practices, and beliefs. For example, six out of ten parents have young adult children who report they have the same religious tradition as their parents—or share their parents’ preference for no affiliation at all” (2013, 185). Though geographically limited, these findings lend support to the idea that the religious beliefs of many are significantly influenced by their upbringing, and so to the idea that one’s religious seemings are influenced by one’s upbringing.

sperm cells the preformationist views under a microscope, as long as it seems to him that those cells contain embryos because of his belief in preformationism, his belief in preformationism gains no justification over and above what it had before he looked into the microscope.

In light of this, even if Teresa's T-seemings don't contribute to the justification of her belief in theism, we cannot conclude that her theistic belief is thereby unjustified. If Teresa's theistic belief enjoys some positive epistemic status on the basis of the various influences encountered in her community, then it doesn't lose that status when it cognitively penetrates other cognitive states that she mistakenly takes to support that belief. Thus, even if Teresa's T-seemings don't add any justification to her theistic belief, neither do they remove any of the justification that belief had to begin with.⁸

3.4.4 Insufficient Evidence and Epistemic Responsibility

Despite this, however, it would be an interesting discovery if cognitively penetrated T-seemings could not contribute to the justification of theistic belief, given the justificatory role that some philosophers have assigned to those seemings. And, at least thus far, this is just the conclusion that the parallels between the preformationism case and the theism case suggest.

However, one important detail remains to be discussed. As Siegel tells the story, at the time at which the preformationist looks into his microscope, "no theory of mammalian reproduction is well-confirmed, and the epistemically appropriate attitude to take toward preformationism is suspension of belief. But our preformationist does not suspend belief" (2012, 211). Siegel considers several ways of filling out the preformationism case that illustrate how this might go:

8. That said, there may be some other reason to think that Teresa's belief in theism becomes less justified over time. Teresa came to believe that God exists at a young age (a common occurrence). Most epistemologists think that children learn from testimony even though they aren't reliable consumers of testimony (Goldberg 2008; Greco 2007). One explanation for this, put forward by John Greco, is that children learn from "socially approved" sources, and forming beliefs on the basis of socially approved sources is a reliable process. However, these socially approved sources change as one gets older. While it is reasonable to think a young child can learn from the testimony of her parents, it doesn't seem that the standards for an adult are the same. Adults cannot learn from socially approved sources in the same way children can. See (Orozco 2010) for further development of this point.

Case A (Confusion) The preformationist is confused about the relevant neutrality-factors, wrongly taking them to support preformationism.

Case B (Dogma) The preformationist is aware of the neutrality-factors but intent on holding preformationism anyway (e.g., out of faith or dogma).

Case C (Hope) The wannabe preformationist hopes that preformationism is true. He is not under any illusion about the (lack of) evidence for it. He just hopes that it is true.⁹

The problem, according to Siegel, is not simply that the preformationist's penetrating belief in preformationism is unjustified, but rather that the preformationist is in some sense *responsible* for having that unjustified belief:

Just as we hold people responsible for personality traits like over- or under-confidence, so too we often hold people responsible for being confused, for beliefs formed on the basis of confusion, and for known failure to adjust beliefs in accordance with evidence. . . . Cases where confusion, dogma, vanity or underconfidence are penetrators . . . will not make the elevation prediction more plausible. (2012, 213)

Siegel's point is that if the "cognitive penetrators are under your rational control," then the cognitive penetration is problematic (2012, 213).

In light of this, in order to establish a sufficient similarity between the preformationism case and the case involving Teresa, we must ask two questions: (1) Prior to the formation of any T-seemings, is the appropriate attitude for Teresa to adopt toward theism suspension of belief? (2) If so, is Teresa responsible for not suspending belief in theism (e.g., does she believe theism simply out confusion or dogma or hope)?¹⁰ If we

9. These cases are discussed in (Siegel (2012, 213–15). According to Siegel, "Neutrality-factors are the factors that make suspension of belief the epistemically appropriate attitude to take toward a proposition p" (213).

10. This is again to focus on the problem of the *fact* of irrelevant influence, apart from any beliefs one has about the etiology of one's belief. If Teresa has a believed defeater in any of cases A-C, then it is easy to see why her theistic belief is problematic. However, as Siegel is thinking of the cases, there is no defeater in these cases at least in part because "although you might be aware that your experience depends on your hope, confusion, or dogma, you need not be" (2012, 215–16).

I have a hard time seeing how case B doesn't involve a defeater. If one is aware of some factor that makes suspension of belief the appropriate attitude to take toward p but fails to suspend belief in p, it seems to me that one has a defeater for the belief that p since rationality requires that one suspend belief (see Bergmann 2015, 24–25). Despite these reservations, I'll assume for the sake of argument that Siegel is right that case B need not involve a defeater.

can answer both (1) and (2) affirmatively, then we can conclude that Teresa's theistic belief suffers from the same epistemic shortcomings as the preformationist's belief, and that her T-seemings cannot contribute to the justification of her theistic belief.

3.4.5 *Is There Insufficient Evidence for Theism?*

According to Siegel, in order for the cognitive penetration to be problematic in Teresa's case, there must be pertinent neutrality factors that make suspension of belief the appropriate attitude for Teresa to take toward theism (which, again, is the penetrating belief that has been instilled by her culture). Perhaps Teresa is confused about the relevant neutrality factors, or is simply ignoring them (either out of dogma or hope). I take it that the kinds of neutrality factors Siegel has in mind are facts rather than psychological states. In the preformation case, it is not just that the preformationist lacks some bit of available evidence, but rather that there is no evidence (or not enough) to be had—no one has looked into a microscope before, so no one has been in a position to see whether or not sperm cells contain embryos. Moreover, there is presumably no theory supported by other evidence that entails or adequately supports preformationism. The problem, then, is that there is insufficient evidence available to justify a belief in preformationism.

If this is the right way to think of neutrality factors, then is it true that there is insufficient evidence available to justify Teresa's culturally influenced belief in theism? In other words, is there simply not enough evidence out there to support theism? Establishing this is a tall order. How much evidence *would be* sufficient for theism? Could there be such a thing as a "confirmation" of theism? Moreover, who decides what constitutes sufficient evidence—the theist or the non-theist? And why should one accept the evidential standard put forth by the other? As John Pittard (2014, 89) writes:

The fact that one's religious beliefs are disputed by those who are epistemically qualified according to standard measures will not be a strong reason to doubt one's religious beliefs if one accepts a religious epistemology that, like Paul's, assigns a marginal (or nonexistent) role to such standard epis-

temic qualifications. If I am right in suggesting that many religious believers, both Christian and non-Christian, subscribe to non-standard theories of epistemic credentials with respect to religious beliefs, then an argument for religious skepticism that presupposes a standard theory of epistemic credentials will simply beg the question against many religious believers.

Pittard's point is that what counts as sufficient evidence depends on the epistemic standards one privileges, and there is little reason to think the theist and non-theist will agree about these standards.¹¹ The objector is thus tasked with showing that there is insufficient evidence for theism in a way that does not simply take for granted that only "standard epistemic qualifications" can constitute evidence.

Suppose, however, the objector simply says that the problem is that Teresa doesn't have sufficient evidence for her theistic belief (here, the claim isn't one about what evidence is available, but rather about what evidence Teresa in fact has). Given that Teresa's evidence consists (at least in large part) of the testimony of her community, this would amount to the claim that the testimony of her community is insufficient to justify her belief in theism. At this point, we encounter a familiar problem. For if the influence of her community is insufficient to justify Teresa's belief in theism, then it is difficult to see how to avoid the conclusion that her community's influence isn't insufficient to justify many other, seemingly unproblematic beliefs, as well. Put differently, why is suspension of belief the appropriate attitude for Teresa take toward theism but not toward other things she believes because of the influence of her culture?¹²

11. Plantinga (2011, 183) makes a similar point in terms of what he calls "evidence bases." Commenting on Scott Atran's evolutionary explanation of religious belief, Plantinga writes:

Atran thinks his conclusions are correct, given the scientific evidence base and the current evidence. Whether these conclusions are correct just as such will depend, among other things, upon whether the scientific perspective is, in this area, the right perspective and whether the scientific evidence base is the right evidence base. . . . The Christian theist will think that it isn't the right evidence base, because it is at best incomplete; it fails to include important elements of the Christian's evidence base.

Like Pittard, Plantinga thinks that what one is willing to countenance as good evidence depends, in at least some cases and to at least some degree, on one's antecedent views.

12. Of course, Teresa may have reasons other than the fact that her belief was influenced by her community for suspending belief, but that's beside the point. The question is whether cultural influence is any reason for Teresa to suspend belief.

Given the pervasiveness of cultural influence, it is difficult to come up with any criteria that will allow us to pick out those beliefs that intuitively seem to reflect a problematic kind of influence and those beliefs that don't. Plantinga, for example, points out that most of us were "brought up to believe that racial intolerance is wrong." Is that belief, for that reason, unjustified? Would we be willing to claim that we have insufficient evidence for that belief? Plantinga (correctly, in my estimation) thinks not. "But then," Plantinga (1997, 298) goes on to write, "why should it be different for Christian belief?" Similarly, it is hard to see why we should grant that Teresa has insufficient evidence for theism unless we're also willing to grant that she has insufficient evidence for many other, seemingly unproblematic culturally influenced beliefs, as well.

3.4.6 Cultural Influence and Epistemic Responsibility

Notice, however, that even if we were to grant that Teresa has insufficient evidence for her theistic belief, this wouldn't be enough to show that the cognitive penetration in her case is problematic. This is because, according to Siegel, in order for cognitive penetration to be problematic, it must also be the case that Teresa is responsible for maintaining her theistic belief despite this lack of evidence, perhaps through dogma or confusion (this point corresponds to question (2) above).

While it is possible that some of those whose religious beliefs depend on cultural influence maintain those beliefs out of dogma or confusion, it is difficult to see why we should think this is true of most believers. Is there any reason to think Teresa is confused, or maintaining her belief simply out of dogma, or simply because she hopes theism is true? After all, it certainly seems reasonable to believe the testimony of one's community when one lacks any reason not to trust that testimony, and so it would be odd to think that doing so is an instance of confusion or dogmatism. If it were, then many other beliefs would appear to be the product of confusion or dogma, as well. Moreover, this is so even if one's community is wrong about *p*. For while one wouldn't

have knowledge in such a case, that needn't be because one holds that belief out of confusion or dogma.

Thus, Siegel's account of problematic cognitive penetration doesn't help the objector from cultural influence secure the conclusion that culturally influenced religious beliefs are epistemically problematic, unless he is also willing to claim that other, uncontroversial culturally influenced beliefs are problematic. This is because in order to show that theistic belief is problematic, the objector would have to show that there is insufficient evidence for that belief. This, however, is difficult to establish. Moreover, even if it could be shown that there is insufficient evidence for theism (the first of Siegel's conditions), the objector would still have to show that one who believes theism because of her community's influence is responsible for not suspending belief in theism (the second of Siegel's conditions). This, however, is implausible given the apparent rationality of holding beliefs on the basis of the testimony and other influences of one's community.

In light of this, the objector will have to look elsewhere to mount a compelling argument against the rationality of culturally influenced beliefs on the basis of problems stemming from cognitive penetration. Let us, then, consider an alternative account.

3.5 Lyons on Problematic Cognitive Penetration

3.5.1 Cognitive Penetration and Reliability

According to Jack Lyons, what distinguishes good and bad cases of cognitive penetration is reliability: "So which cases of top-down influence are good and which are bad, and why? There is a fairly obvious answer, which is simply that the good kinds of cognitive penetration are the kinds that increase reliability, while the bad ones are the ones that decrease it" (2011, 300).

Lyons's account has the virtue of making it easy to explain why the sort of cognitive penetration at play in cases of perceptual learning are not problematic, despite having the same structure as more intuitively problematic cases of cognitive penetration. For

example, Lyons can claim that the reason why expertise in identifying tuataras isn't a problematic sort of cognitive penetration is "because expertise and perceptual learning improve perception; they make one better at perceptual judgments, more liable to get things right. This is largely a matter of reliability" (2011, 300).

Additionally, Lyons is able to avoid the issue that made it difficult to use Siegel's account to motivate a problem stemming from cultural influence. This is because, according to Lyons, the epistemic status of the penetrating belief plays no role in determining whether or not a case of cognitive penetration is problematic. Even an evidentially unsupported or unjustified penetrating belief can make one more reliable with respect to some propositions. To illustrate this point, Lyons (2011, 296–97) offers the following example:

Suppose my visual system is primed to spot snakes because I believe—for no good reason at all—that there are likely to be snakes along the trail. If this unjustified belief primes my visual system for snakes, making me thereby better at spotting actual snakes on the path, then the resulting perceptual beliefs seem to be justified, despite the role of cognitive penetration in their genesis, and despite the role of unjustified beliefs in that cognitive penetration.

The moral Lyons's draws from this is that "it is the nature of the process, not the penetrator, that determines whether the penetration is vicious or benign. And again, this seems to be a matter of whether the reliability of the process is impeded" (2011, 303).¹³

Because of his focus on reliability, Lyons's (2011, 301) offers a different diagnosis of what drives the intuition in Siegel's cases:

Siegel's cases are convincing cases of unjustified belief because they are cases where the agent's beliefs influence her perception to such an extent that she would see Jack as angry (or the sperm as containing an animalcule) *whether this was true or not*. This insensitivity to the facts is probably what

13. Lyons adds, however, "An unjustified belief is unlikely to be true and thus especially prone to interfere with the reliability of perception; insofar as penetrating beliefs are self-corroborating, false ones are going to lead to experiential states that will conduce to further falsehood. However, this is only a rough correlation; it is really the nature of the penetration, not the penetrator, that determines whether justification is impaired" (2011, 301)

has always bothered us about the possibility of cognitive penetrability, that it threatens to make our beliefs insufficiently dependent on the perceiver's environment and thus, insufficiently likely to be true.

According to Lyons, the problem in both of Siegel's cases is that the subject would have the relevant seeming whether or not it was veridical—Jill would have the seeming *Jack is angry* whether or not Jack was in fact angry; the microscope user would have the seeming *there is an animalcule* whether or not there was in fact an animalcule in the sperm cell.

3.5.2 Cultural Influence and Reliable Cognitive Penetration

Does this account of problematic cases of cognitive penetration provide the objector from cultural influence with the resources to identify what's problematic about culturally influenced beliefs? Let us return again to the case of Teresa. On Lyons's account, the key question is whether Teresa's T-seemings (which are cognitively penetrated by her culturally influenced belief that God exists) make her more or less reliable with respect to theism (which I here take to consist of belief in propositions about God and God's activity). We can draw parallels here with what Lyons says of Siegel's case: "If Jill's belief that Jack is angry makes her less sensitive to his actual mental state, i.e., less likely to get it right, then this is bad penetration; if it makes her more sensitive, then it is good" (2011, 301–02). Similarly, then, if Teresa's belief that God exists makes her less sensitive to the religious facts, i.e., less likely to get it right, then this is bad penetration; if it makes her more sensitive to the religious facts, then it is at least benign, and perhaps beneficial.

In light of this, in order to show that the cognitive penetration in Teresa's case is problematic, the objector needs to show that Teresa's belief in theism (which she has because of the influence of her community) makes it less likely that she'll get things right when it comes to religious matters. How could the objector show this? One strategy would be to show that Teresa would have the T-seemings she does whether or not those seemings were veridical. The objector could claim that just as the preformationist's

belief in preformationism would cause it to seem to him that there are embryos in sperm cells whether or not there were in fact any embryos there, so too would Teresa's belief in theism (instilled by her community) cause her to have T-seemings whether or not God in fact exists and acts in the world.

Would Teresa have the T-seemings she does if theism were false? One might think so, given that not everyone has T-seemings in the same circumstances that give rise to Teresa's T-seemings. Suppose, for example, that upon observing a beautiful sunset, it seems to Teresa that God created the universe. Those who don't believe that God exists do not have that kind of seeming upon observing a beautiful sunset. This latter fact may be thought to serve as evidence that Teresa's seeming is not caused by any religious facts, but is instead caused by her culturally instilled belief that God exists. And if it is Teresa's existing theistic belief that causes her T-seeming rather than any relevant religious facts, then that provides some reason to think that Teresa's T-seemings are independent of the truth of theism, and that she is therefore not reliable when it comes to religious matters.

The key move here is the inference that Teresa would have the T-seemings she does whether or not theism is true from the claim that those who do not believe that God exists do not have T-seemings like Teresa's in the same (or relevantly similar) circumstances. But why should we make this inference? Consider an analogous case. Lewis believes that there will be snakes on the path, while Clark does not. Because of Lewis's belief, it seems (correctly) at various points along that way that there is a snake on the path. Lewis's penetrating belief thus makes him more reliable at detecting snakes. Clark, by contrast, has no such seemings. Does the fact that Clark fails to have any snake seemings in relevantly similar circumstances provide reason to think that Lewis would have the snake seemings he does whether or not there were any snakes along the path, and is therefore not reliable at detecting snakes? It is difficult to see why it should.

Of course, if it could be shown that it is false that there are snakes along the path, then we would have good reason to think Lewis's snake seemings aren't responsive to the facts (how could they be?) and that he is not reliable when it comes to detecting snakes. Absent a reason for thinking there are no snakes along the path, however, it would appear that Lewis's penetrating belief (namely, his belief that there will be snakes along the path) makes him more reliable when it comes to detecting snakes. Likewise, if it could be shown that theism is false, then we would have good reason to think that Teresa's T-seemings aren't responsive to the facts, and that Teresa is not reliable when it comes to detecting God or facts about God. Absent a reason to think theism is false, however, the fact that those who lack theistic belief do not have T-seemings does not show that Teresa is unreliable when it comes to religious matters.¹⁴

3.5.3 *Reliable if True*

This means that if theism is true, Teresa's T-seemings are veridical, and the penetrating theistic belief (instilled by her community) makes her more reliable with respect to God's existence. On the other hand, if theism is false, then Teresa's T-seemings aren't veridical, and her penetrating theistic belief makes her less reliable with respect to God's existence. It would thus appear that what the objector would have to show in order to

14. Reliabilist theories of knowledge and justification are often classified according to whether they require reliability in the subject's actual environment or in other possible worlds (variously delimited) as well. The reliability analysis of problematic cases of cognitive penetration is distinct from reliabilist analyses of knowledge and justification, so it is unclear the extent to which considerations that bear on the plausibility of reliabilist accounts of knowledge and justification are applicable to the reliability account of cognitive penetration. Nevertheless, it seems clear that a particular instance can be reliable in the sense relevant to the analysis of cognitive penetration under consideration here even if it fails to count as reliable according to a reliabilist theory of knowledge or justification.

To expand on this, my claim is that Teresa's seemings satisfy Lyons's criterion for benign cognitive penetration if theism is true. I am not claiming that all cognitively penetrated theistic seemings are unproblematic. As Lyons (2011, 301) points out, "If top-down influence is so extreme that I see snakes or the Virgin Mary everywhere I look, then the top-down processing is interfering with the reliability of perception." However, there is no reason to think the top-down influence is this extreme in all cases involving theistic seemings.

Moreover, my claim here is compatible with the claim that there may be other ways of thinking of reliability according to which Teresa's theistic belief *is* problematic. For instance, perhaps the belief-forming process Teresa employs is such that it would not "yield a high proportion of truths over a wide range of situations of the sort we typically encounter" (Alston 1995, 10). If this were true of the belief-forming process Teresa employs, then her belief would not be justified. It is worth noting, however, that Baker-Hytech (2014) argues that even when we think of reliability this way, it is difficult to formulate a successful objection to theistic belief from cultural influence.

make it plausible to think that the influence of Teresa's community is problematic is that theism is false.

This puts the objector from cultural influence in the same position that Plantinga thinks the objector to his account of warranted Christian belief is in. Plantinga (2000, 191) writes:

This dependence of the question of warrant or rationality on the truth or falsehood of theism leads to a very interesting conclusion. . . . What it shows is that a successful atheological objection will have to be to the *truth* of theism, not to its rationality, justification, intellectual respectability, rational justification, or whatever. . . . There aren't any *de jure* objections that are sensible when conjoined with the *truth* of theistic belief; all of them either fail from the start (as with the claim that it is unjustified to accept theistic belief) or else really presuppose that theism is false.

The conclusion is equally interesting in the case with which we are concerned. For, as we've seen, the target of the objection from cultural influence is the rationality or justification of religious belief, not the truth of religious belief. But, at least on Lyons's account, without some additional argument for the conclusion that the beliefs in question are false, we have no reason to think the cognitive penetration is problematic. In fact, if theism is true, then the influence of a theistic culture appears to put one in a position similar to that of the expert. Just as the background beliefs of the expert enable him to identify tuataras more reliably than one who lacks those background beliefs, the background beliefs of the theist enable her to identify God's activity more reliably than one who lacks those background beliefs.¹⁵

15. There are some difficulties here. Suppose Teresa gets things right about God's existence, but the same influence that causes her theistic belief also causes her to have beliefs about other religious matters that are false. In this sort of case, the influence of Teresa's community (and the penetrating belief it imparts) would make Teresa more reliable with respect to God's existence, but less reliable over the whole range of religious facts.

Suppose, for example, Judaism is true. The influence of Teresa's Christian community will lead her to (correctly) believe that God exists, but it will also lead her to erroneously believe that God is triune, that Jesus is the messiah anticipated in the Hebrew Scriptures, etc. Alternatively, even within the same religion, different traditions have different views (e.g., different views among Christians about infant baptism or predestination). Thus, Teresa's community makes her overall less reliable with respect to religious matters, even though it makes her more reliable with respect to God's existence than she would be apart from that influence. (*cont.*)

Thus, Lyons's reliability account of the problematic cases of cognitive penetration will not help the objector formulate a plausible objection to the rationality of our culturally influenced controversial beliefs that is independent of the more difficult question of whether those beliefs are true.

3.6 When Cognitively Penetrated Religious Seemings are Problematic

3.6.1 *Religious Seemings and Proper Causation*

If neither circularity nor unreliability pose a problem for religious seemings that have been penetrated by a culturally influenced belief, should we conclude that those seemings are never problematic? Not at all. Problems arise when those seemings are not sufficiently dependent on inputs that are external to the subject. Lyons touches on this when he argues that one way to distinguish cognitive penetration from less empirically plausible forms of theory-ladenness is to suppose "that top-down influence is merely probabilistic in the sense that theory-consonant observations are more likely than they would otherwise be but that objective facts are still significant determinants of what is observed" (2011, 293). Lyons's point here is that even if you start out in system A and so are more likely to receive observations that corroborate system A, there is still enough outside influence (i.e., influence from things other than your cognitive states) to allow those observations to provide support for A.

For example, even if one starts out believing preformationism and so is more likely to see embryos in sperm cells, perceptual seemings remain sufficiently dependent on influences external to the subject's mental states to mitigate any concerns that cognitive

While this does complicate matters, there are two things to keep in mind. First, even if Teresa is less reliable about the whole range of religious facts, she remains reliable when it comes to the question of whether or not God exists. Considered in isolation, cultural influence working via cognitive penetration does not threaten the epistemic status of *that* belief. Compare: A penetrating fear that there are snakes along the path may make me more reliable when it comes to correctly identifying snakes, but less reliable when it comes to correctly identifying sticks and other objects lying on the ground. Even if I am overall less reliable with respect to the whole range of perceptual facts, I can still be reliable at spotting snakes.

Second, recall again that the objector's claim is that cultural influence threatens all religious beliefs. Thus, even if that influence may cause one to form false beliefs about some religious matters, the fact that it may also lead one to get at least some things right is a knock against the opponent's view (for more on this point, see [Baker-Hytch 2014, 183–84]).

penetration could swamp the effects that those outside influences have on the formation of perceptual seemings. The idea seems to be that if there was nothing that resembled an embryo in the sperm cell, the perceptual seeming that *there is an embryo* would not arise in response to the experience one has upon looking through the microscope, despite the fact that such a seeming is more probable given the preformationist's antecedent belief in preformationism.¹⁶

We can generalize this point as follows: In order for a seeming that *p* to be epistemically appropriate, that seeming must be properly caused—i.e., caused by the relevant facts in the right sort of way.¹⁷ To be appropriate, the preformationist's seeming that *there is an embryo in this sperm cell* must be causally dependent in the right sort of way and to a sufficient degree on input from the external world. If that seeming is the product of the preformationist's cognitive states without sufficient input from the external world, then it is problematic. Similarly, Jill's seeming that *Jack is angry* is inappropriate because it is solely (or predominantly) the product of her existing cognitive states—Jack's actual appearance has no (or too little) influence on the formation of that seeming.

When the problematic cases of cognitive penetration are understood in this way, the objector can claim that the problem with many religious seemings is that they are caused in the wrong way. Specifically, they are caused by the beliefs one has because of one's culture, rather than the relevant religious facts. Teresa's T-seemings are problematic because those seemings are caused by the beliefs that have been instilled by her culture instead of the facts that those seemings are about.

Religious seemings might be thought to be especially susceptible to this objection. Recall that religious seemings sometimes arise in the context of ordinary experiences

16. Lyons compares the kind of case in which one's seeming is insufficiently responsive to the "objective facts" to the kinds of considerations that motivate the isolation objection to coherentism. According to that objection, a perfectly coherent set of beliefs could be completely isolated from the external world. As such, there is no reason to think a coherent system of beliefs is thereby one that truly or accurately represents the external world. Similarly, then, there is no reason to think that a seeming that is caused by the subject's cognitive states without any (or enough) input from the external world is veridical.

17. It is notoriously difficult to say what exactly something being "caused in the right sort of way" amounts to. I don't have anything insightful or profound to say that would lessen that difficulty. Fortunately, however, the examples of problematic cases of cognitive penetration provide enough for us to grasp the nature of problem without having a complete account of proper causation.

that don't seem obviously religious, such as the experience of a sunset. What is it about this experience that causes a religious seeming? As Tucker (2011, 60) writes, "The sensation and admiration of a sunset, whether taken jointly or individually, seem evidentially irrelevant to the claim that God loves one. . . . Presumably, the sensation and awe of the sunset seem irrelevant to whether God loves one because they don't have the right content to be evidence for the existence of a God who loves one." The content of the religious seemings appear to go beyond the facts of the experience in a way that the perceptual seemings do not. Perhaps we could capture this by saying that the religious seemings are about facts of a different kind from the facts that cause those seemings.

Moreover, it may be that this problem is further compounded when the cognitive states that cause religious seemings are the result of cultural influence. For, in many such cases, not only are one's religious seemings insufficiently sensitive to the relevant facts, but there will also be fewer occasions in which one receives conflicting seeming reports from others. Thus, not only will one's religious seemings be caused in the wrong way (i.e., by one's existing cognitive states rather than the relevant facts), but one will have no reason (or significantly fewer reasons) to think that those seemings are misleading since other members of the community report having the same kinds of seemings.¹⁸

In short, the objection here is as follows: Many religious seemings are epistemically inappropriate because they are improperly caused insofar as they are caused solely by (or depend to some unacceptable degree on) the influence of one's community or culture. Specifically, they are caused by the cognitive states (including affective states) instilled by one's community. Because seemings caused by one's community are not sensitive to the relevant facts, those seemings cannot confer justification on corresponding beliefs. Thus, religious beliefs based on these kinds of religious seemings are unjustified.¹⁹

18. Or, perhaps better, one infers that they have the same kinds of seemings based on what other members of the community report believing. I suspect we report our beliefs to others more often than we report our seemings to others.

19. Unless those beliefs have some independent source of justification. I ignore this possibility to focus on the case at hand.

3.6.2 *The Source of Religious Seemings*

Before evaluating this objection directly, it will be helpful to first consider the way in which religious seemings arise.²⁰ This will both set the stage for the next section and show why one way of developing this kind objection to religious seemings is misguided. My focus here will be on theistic seemings (and so, in what follows, I will use ‘religious’ and ‘theistic’ interchangeably).

Recall that religious seemings arise in response to various experiences, many of which involve perception (e.g., seeing a beautiful sunset). Importantly, however, religious seemings are not the product of perception alone. Rather, perceptual (and other) experiences are what Plantinga, following Calvin, calls the “occasion” or “trigger” for the formation of religious seemings. Plantinga writes, “Calvin’s idea is that the working of the *sensus divinitatis* is triggered or occasioned by a wide variety of circumstances, including in particular some of the glories of nature” (2000, 174). Thus, while religious seemings often arise in the same circumstances as perceptual seemings, religious seemings are not the product of our perceptual faculties alone. Rather, the *sensus divinitatis* (or something like it) is also crucially involved in the formation of religious seemings.

This is important because it means that in order to show that religious seemings are problematic, the objector cannot simply show that those seemings are not fitting responses to the facts that cause (mere) perceptual seemings. It may be, as Tucker (2011, 60) claims, that “the sensation and awe of the sunset seem irrelevant to whether God loves one because they don’t have the right content to be evidence for the existence of a God who loves one.” That, however, does not suffice to show that religious seemings

20. In the remainder of this section, I rely on the account of theistic belief formation that has been developed and defended by Reformed epistemologists. Reformed epistemology is itself controversial, so not everyone will agree with the account I make use of here. For some criticisms of Reformed epistemology, see (DeRose ms), (Feldman 2003), (Grigg 1990), (Martin 1990), and the collection of essays in (Zagzebski 1993).

It is worth noting that one long-standing objection to Reformed epistemology—the so-called ‘Great Pumpkin Objection’ (GPO)—has recently been revitalized by Kyle Scott (2014). Scott argues that the considerations that motivate the GPO are indeed problematic for Plantinga’s account, but he argues that the problem can be surmounted in virtue of the fact that Christians “possess favouring evidence for the claim that Christian belief is intellectually acceptable by considering the historical and social environment in which the belief occurs” (307).

that arise in those circumstances are problematic. For there may be other features of the circumstances (aside from the sensation and awe of the sunset) that *are* relevant to the existence and action of God, and to which the *sensus divinitatis* is sensitive.

This can be compared with the circumstances in which seemings about the emotional states of others arise. When it seems to us that someone is disgusted, that seeming is not the product of our perceptual faculties alone, but also of some additional ability or faculty that allows us to accurately recognize various facial morphologies as indicative of certain emotions. Research has shown that those who suffer from various brain injuries or diseases are unable to recognize some emotional states, despite having perfectly intact perceptual abilities. For example, those who suffer from basal ganglia dysfunction as a result of Huntington's disease cannot accurately recognize expressions of disgust, but are able to recognize facial expressions that are indicative of other negative emotions (Matsumoto et al. 2010, 224).

These kinds of findings have led researchers to postulate the existence of a distinct ability that is partly responsible for our judgments (and corresponding seemings) about the emotional states of others. In their review of the current research, Matsumoto et al. (2010, 224) write, "A second literature has shown that different patterns of regional activation in the brain occur when individuals perceive distinct facial expressions, raising the possibility that we humans have evolved distinct emotion perception systems or circuits." The point here is that our seemings about the emotional states of others is responsive not only to the physical arrangement of another's face, but also to the emotion in the mind of that person.

We can think of the *sensus divinitatis* as operating in a way that is similar to this ability that allows us to make judgments about the emotional states of others. Just as the seemings associated with our emotional-state judgments do not arise solely from perception but also from the operation of a faculty or ability that is responsive to the actual emotional states of others, religious seemings do not arise solely from perception but

also from the operation of the *sensus divinitatis*, which is (or at least may be) responsive to the relevant religious facts.

Just as we would not grant that one's seemings about the emotional states of others are epistemically inappropriate because the perceptual facts (i.e., the physical arrangement of another's face) are not the right kind of evidence for judgments about emotional states, neither should we grant that one's religious seemings are inappropriate because the perceptual facts (e.g., the sensation and awe of a sunset) are not the right kind of evidence for judgments about God. For it is plausible that in both cases there is some additional ability or faculty that is responsive to features that are relevant to seemings about emotional states or God. For example, we may have a perceptual seeming, caused by the arrangement of S's face, that *S's eyebrows are raised*, and an emotional-state seeming, caused by S's emotional state, that *S is surprised*. Likewise, we may have a perceptual seeming, caused by the physical environment, that *the sun is setting*, and a religious seeming, caused by the relevant religious facts, that *God created the universe*. In neither case does the fact that these seemings arise in the same circumstances and depend on perception show that only the former seeming in each case is epistemically appropriate or that only the former seeming is responsive to the facts.

In light of this, it would be a mistake to conclude that religious seemings are problematic because they arise through perception but are not, strictly speaking, perceptual (just as it would be a mistake to conclude that seemings about another person's mental states are problematic because they arise through perception but are not, strictly speaking, perceptual). Thus, it won't do to claim that religious seemings are inappropriately caused simply because the mind-independent sensorily perceived facts (whatever exactly they may be) are not the right kinds of things to cause religious seemings. For even if the sensorily perceived facts play some role in causing religious seemings, this doesn't show that there aren't, in addition, some religious facts that also play a role in causing religious seemings. (Likewise, even if sensorily perceived facts—concerning, for example, facial expressions—play some role in causing seemings about the emo-

tional states of other people, this doesn't show that there aren't, in addition, facts about other people's emotional states that also play a role in causing emotional-state seemings.)

3.6.3 *How Some Religious Seemings May Be Properly Caused*

The objector's claim is that religious seemings are problematic when they are caused by one's culture because, in being so caused, they are not responsive to the relevant facts. Perhaps surprisingly, if this is supposed to be the problem with cultural influence, then the objector has allies in the Christian tradition. For example, according to Jonathan Edwards, the beliefs of the "regenerate" are the product of a "new sense" or "spiritual sense." This spiritual sense is responsive to the "divine and supernatural light" that allows believers to perceive the "excellence" and "beauty" of God. Note how Edwards (1999, 416) characterizes the nature of this process:

It is not intended that the natural faculties are not made use of in it. The natural faculties are the subject of this light: and they are the subject in such a manner, that they are not merely passive, but active in it; the acts and exercises of man's understanding are concerned and made use of in it. God, in letting in this light into the soul, deals with man according to his nature, or as a rational creature; and makes use of his human faculties. But yet this light is not the less immediately from God for that; though the faculties are made use of, it is as the subject and not as the cause. . . . As the use that we make of our eyes in beholding various objects, when the sun arises, is not the cause of the light that discovers those objects to us.

Though anachronistic, it is plausible to understand this process as one involving cognitive penetration. As McClymond (1997, 213) writes:

The regenerate and the unregenerate alike have mental notions or ideas of God conveyed to them through the Word of God or by other means. Yet, only the regenerate perceive the divine excellency, and the unregenerate remain wholly insensible to it. The regenerate and the unregenerate alike possess the natural faculty of reason, and both employ their reason with respect to spiritual things. Yet, only the regenerate receive that added "divine

and supernatural light” that enables their natural reason to see God as God truly is.

According to McClymond, Edwards’s view is that something is added to the natural reason of the regenerate that allows them, *through the exercise of their natural faculties*, to perceive God.

This appears to be a case of cognitive penetration. Importantly, however, the ultimate source or cause of the penetrating cognitive state here is not one’s community or culture, but the Holy Spirit. This would explain why Edwards (2009, 295) thinks that if one’s culture *were* the ultimate cause of that cognitive state, it would not lead to a veridical perception of divine beauty:

But if the religious affections that persons have, do indeed arise from a strong persuasion of the truth of the Christian religion; their affections are not the better, unless their persuasion be a *reasonable* persuasion or conviction. By a reasonable conviction, I mean a conviction founded on real evidence, or upon that which is a good reason, or just ground of conviction. Men may have a strong persuasion that the Christian religion is true, when their persuasion is not at all built on evidence, but altogether on education, and the opinion of others; as many Mahometans are strongly persuaded of the truth of the Mahometan religion, because their fathers, and neighbors, and nation believe it. That belief of the truth of the Christian religion which is built on the very same grounds, with Mahometans’ belief of the Mahometan religion, is the same sort of belief. And though the thing believed happens to be better; yet that don’t make the belief itself, to be of a better sort: for though the thing believed happens to be true; yet the belief of it is not owing to this truth, but to education.

If we take a “strong persuasion” or “conviction” to be akin to a seeming, then Edwards is explicit that such a seeming is not real evidence when it is solely the product of one’s “fathers, and neighbors, and nation.” Edwards thus agrees that if one’s community were the sole source of one’s T-seemings, those seemings would not be evidence for theism (or, more precisely, for Christianity).

Some of Plantinga’s remarks illuminate this point, as well. According to Plantinga, a proper sense of the word ‘faith’ denotes a tripartite process consisting of the presen-

tation of the gospel, the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit, and belief in the gospel (2000, 252). Plantinga (2000, 250) describes how this process might go:

We read Scripture, or something presenting scriptural teaching, or hear the gospel preached, or are told of it by parents. . . . What is said simply seems right; it seems compelling; one finds oneself saying, “Yes, that’s right, that’s the truth of the matter; this is indeed the Word of the Lord.” . . . What one hears or reads seems clearly and obviously true and (at any rate in paradigm cases) seems also to be something the Lord is intending to teach.

The ultimate source of this seeming is the Holy Spirit: “According to the model, this conviction comes by way of the activity of the Holy Spirit” (2000, 251). So, we encounter some presentation of the gospel, the Holy Spirit causes it to seem true to us, and then we believe the great things of the gospel. This may happen suddenly, “or perhaps it is a matter of a belief’s having been there all along (from childhood, perhaps), but now being transformed, renewed, intensified, made vivid and alive” (2000, 251). In either case, it is the work of the Holy Spirit that makes the seeming a proper ground for theistic belief.

Suppose one had the seemings Plantinga mentions not because of the work of the Holy Spirit, but *solely* because of the influence of one’s community. On Plantinga’s model, that would be problematic because proper function dictates that faith arise through the testimony of the Holy Spirit. As Plantinga writes, “Faith will have to be a *gift*, not in the way a glorious autumn day is a gift, but a special gift, one that wouldn’t come to us in the ordinary run of things, one that requires supernatural and extraordinary activity on the part of God” (2000, 269). Thus, for Plantinga, much like Edwards, the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit is required for genuine faith. A T-seeming that resulted only from a background belief instilled by one’s community without the involvement of the Holy Spirit would be unable to confer justification on a corresponding theistic belief.²¹

21. Proponents of phenomenal conservatism might disagree, thinking that the T-seeming has evidential value even if it is caused in the wrong way.

Notice, however, that none of this precludes the possibility that the Holy Spirit could cause the relevant T-seemings in support of a belief imparted by one's community (indeed, Plantinga explicitly grants as much). T-seemings arise in response to a reading or hearing of the gospel, and that hearing may come through one's culture or community. One's community could instill a belief in theism, and the Holy Spirit could then cause various T-seemings that support that belief. Crucially, in this kind of case, the theistic belief is transformed on the basis of a seeming caused ultimately by the Holy Spirit, *not* on the basis of a seeming caused solely by that very belief (as is the case in Siegel's examples of pernicious cognitive penetration). Even though the belief and the seeming have the same content, it is not the belief that is the ultimate cause of the seeming.

The key point here is that while a T-seeming that is caused solely by a culturally instilled belief may not be responsive to the relevant religious facts, a T-seeming caused by the Holy Spirit clearly would be.²² This is because, according to Christian teaching, the Holy Spirit is God, and so the seemings the Christian has about God would, according to this account, be caused by God. This is important because the objector's claim is that T-seemings that are caused by one's community are improperly caused because they are responsive only to the person's cognitive states rather than the relevant facts. In light of the preceding, the Christian can grant that if a T-seeming were caused solely by beliefs instilled by one's culture, then that T-seeming would be problematic. But the Christian will deny that her T-seeming is caused solely by her culture, insisting

22. What is the nature of the causal relation between the Holy Spirit and the seeming? Depending on how one views things, either a nonphysical being (the Holy Spirit) is causing a physical neurophysiological state (a seeming), or else a nonphysical being is causing a nonphysical mental state. In the former case, there is an instance of <x causes y> where x is nonphysical and y is physical. In the latter case, there is an instance of <x causes y> where both x and y are nonphysical. Both cases assume that causation can occur when at least one of the relata is nonphysical.

Obviously, a full defense of the possibility of causal relations involving nonphysical entities is far beyond the scope of this chapter. If we think of the question here as the question of whether or not God (in the person of the Holy Spirit) can act in the physical world (to cause seemings), then the answer will depend on what reason there is for thinking God cannot produce physical effects. If the reason is that the laws of nature preclude such a possibility, then there are good reasons to reject that claim (see Mackie 1983, 19–20; Alston 1989, 211–13; Alston 1993; and Plantinga 2011, 78–90).

Note, too, that it is plausible to think that God, conceived of as an omnipotent being, could have causal effects in the physical world. Moreover, it is plausible to think that causation between immaterial beings is at least possible, given that most are willing to grant Descartes' claim that it is possible for an immaterial evil demon to deceive an immaterial mind.

that God, through the Holy Spirit, is also crucially involved in the production of that seeming.²³ Thus, her T-seemings may be responsive to the relevant facts, even if it is also true that the beliefs that the Holy Spirit cause to seem true to her were instilled by her culture.

Note, too, that the issue is whether the Holy Spirit *in fact* causes the theistic seeming, not whether the theist *believes* that the Holy Spirit is the cause of that seeming. As Plantinga points out, “No doubt it was the Holy Spirit who was at work in the hearts of the faithful and faith-filled patriarchs and others mentioned in Hebrews 11; but presumably they didn’t know about the Holy Spirit and didn’t have any views to the effect that their beliefs were due to the activity of the Holy Spirit” (2000, 253). What’s important is that the process that results in theistic seemings (and theistic beliefs based on those seemings) is working as it should, which will involve the activity of the Holy Spirit in the production of those seemings.²⁴ What one *believes* about the way in which that process works isn’t relevant to the epistemic propriety of the outputs of that process.²⁵

Of course, if we had reason to think the Holy Spirit does not exist, then we would have reason to think the Christian’s T-seemings are not veridical. For, clearly, if the Holy Spirit does not exist, then the Christian’s T-seemings are not responsive to the relevant facts. Apart from such an argument, however, it is difficult to see why the Christian should think her T-seemings are not responsive to the relevant facts. The fact that the Christian’s beliefs were instilled by her culture is not sufficient, by itself, to show that those beliefs are epistemically inappropriate, since that fact is compatible

23. This strategy could also be employed by adherents of other theistic religions, though presumably their account would not appeal to the activity of the Holy Spirit.

24. It might be thought that what is at issue here is something other than the epistemic status of the culturally influenced belief in theism. The Holy Spirit brings about faith in God, which is distinct from mere justified belief that God exists. However, (true) faith in God entails that a belief that God exists is justified. Moreover, we’ve already seen reasons for thinking that the fact of cultural influence by itself (apart from any considerations about the work of the Holy Spirit) does not license the conclusion that those beliefs are unjustified.

25. Of course, if one thinks (or should think) that the process that led to one’s theistic seeming isn’t working in the right way, then one would have reason to be skeptical of the veridicality of that seeming (and any beliefs based on that seeming). This, however, would be an undermining debunker rather than a blocking debunker, since it depends on one’s beliefs about the process, rather than the facts about the process itself. My focus here is on whether or not cultural influence is a blocking debunker, which, recall, is the sort of debunker that arises when the “facts about your causal predicament block you from ever being justified, whether you realize it or not” (White 2010, 575).

with the seemings on which those beliefs are based being responsive to the relevant facts. Unless the objector can make a compelling case that cultural influence prevents one's religious seemings from being caused in the right way by the relevant facts, the religious person isn't in trouble, especially if it seems plausible to her that God (in the person of the Holy Spirit) is involved in the process that leads to theistic belief—through cultural influence—on the basis of theistic seemings.²⁶

3.7 Conclusion

It is plausible to think that cultural influence works via cognitive penetration. Specifically, the seemings on which our controversial beliefs are based are cognitively penetrated by the cognitive states instilled by our cultures and communities. For this reason, if the cognitive penetration in these cases is problematic, then we will have located an epistemological problem that arises from the fact of cultural influence.

Focusing on religious seemings and beliefs, I've argued that Siegel's circularity account of problematic cognitive penetration does not provide the objector from cultural influence with the resources to develop a compelling case against the rationality or justification of culturally influenced religious beliefs. Lyons's reliability account is similarly unhelpful to the objector unless the objector can also provide an additional argument against the truth of the religious beliefs in question.

The most promising way of pressing an objection from cultural influence is to claim that the problematic instances of cognitive penetration are so in virtue of the fact that the penetrated cognitive states (specifically, the religious seemings) are not caused by

26. What should one say about a case where one has religious seemings and mistakenly thinks they are caused by a being that doesn't exist (e.g., the Great Pumpkinites)? Here again, the focus is on whether cultural influence generates a blocking debunker, precluding the possibility of justification. In such a case, there will be a blocking debunker because the seemings on which the Great Pumpkinite beliefs are based are not veridical—there is no Great Pumpkin, and so no relevant facts to which the seemings could be responsive.

If one were to focus instead on undermining debunkers, there may be different ways to answer this question. For example, if one were a phenomenal conservativist (and so uninterested in blocking debunkers), then the question of whether or not the Great Pumpkinites were justified would amount to the question of whether or not the seeming that the Great Pumpkin exists is stronger for them than any contrary seeming.

the relevant facts but merely by the preexisting cognitive states instilled by one's culture. This kind of case does pose a genuine threat to the epistemic appropriateness of culturally influenced beliefs. Importantly, however, there are good reasons to think that religious seemings could be responsive to the relevant facts even when the beliefs involved are instilled or influenced by one's culture. In other words, cultural influence does not preclude the possibility that some religious seemings are also caused by the relevant facts.

Thus far, the focus has been on the question of whether or not the fact of cultural influence threatens the epistemic appropriateness of the affected beliefs. It is now time to consider the epistemological consequences that arise when one believes or recognizes that one's beliefs have been influenced by one's culture. That is the topic of the next chapter.

4. CULTURAL INFLUENCE AND EPISTEMIC DEFEAT

Thus far, I have focused on the epistemological consequences that follow from the fact of cultural influence. In this fourth and final chapter, I take up the question of when one's recognition that one's beliefs have been influenced by one's culture gives one a believed defeater for those beliefs.

In the first part of the chapter, I consider whether the recognition that we could have believed differently gives us a reason to think we are unreliable when it comes to the sorts of controversial matters that have been at the center of concerns over cultural influence. Having argued in earlier chapters that the sorts of beliefs at issue are based on seemings, I focus first on cases in which one lacks a reason to think one's seemings are reliable. Initially, it appears plausible that we should doubt our reliability when we lack a reason to think we are reliable. If such evidence of reliability is lacking in cases of cultural influence, then we will have a defeater for our culturally influenced beliefs. However, as recent work on the problem of peer disagreement has shown, this initially plausible idea leads to implausible consequences. Once it is replaced with a principle that avoids these consequences—a principle that requires that we have a positive reason to think we are unreliable—it is much less clear that reflection on cultural influence provides one with a defeater.

However, while the use of such a principle suggests that cultural influence need not provide one with a defeater, it is problematic insofar as it implies that the possibility that our beliefs have been influenced by our cultures is no more troubling than the possibility that we are globally deceived. While perhaps defensible, such a verdict is unintuitive. After all, most of us think we can reasonably ignore the possibility that we

are, for example, being deceived by an evil demon. It is less clear, however, that we can reasonably ignore the very real possibility that our culture's have had a distorting influence on some of our most important beliefs. With this in mind, I consider a principle that does not threaten to put the problem of cultural influence on a par with the problem of global skepticism, and explore its implications for cases of cultural influence.

In the second part of the chapter, I sharpen the argument against the rationality of culturally influenced beliefs in an attempt to make explicit another feature of those beliefs that might be thought to generate a defeater. Even if recognizing that we could have believed differently isn't problematic, perhaps thinking that we could have *easily* believed differently is. I explore this possibility by casting this potential problem in terms of luck. The question, then, is whether thinking that one's culturally influenced beliefs are lucky is sufficient to provide one with a defeater for those beliefs.

There are several varieties of epistemic luck that have received attention in recent years, particularly in connection with safety-based accounts of knowledge. Some of these varieties of luck have proven to be epistemically benign, while others—and especially what has been labeled veritic luck—have been thought to be more problematic. I ask whether the sort of luck involved in cultural influence cases is most plausibly construed as being of the problematic or unproblematic variety. I conclude that, as far as rationality is concerned, there is no good reason to think that being lucky gives one a defeater for one's culturally influenced beliefs.

4.1 Cultural Influence and the Possibility of Error

In the preceding chapters, I've argued that culturally influenced beliefs are held on the basis of seemings. Generally, believing that *p* in response to a seeming that *p* is inappropriate when one fails to account for counterevidence or undercutting evidence that makes believing that *p* an inappropriate response to a seeming that *p*. It might be thought that recognizing the possibility of cultural influence provides that kind of counterevidence or undercutting evidence, making belief an inappropriate response to

a seeming caused by those influences. More precisely, that recognition may reveal that one lacks any evidence for one's reliability with respect to the kind of belief that one takes to be culturally influenced.

Before exploring how this applies to cases of cultural influence specifically, it will be helpful to get a better understanding of the more general problem of believing that p on the basis of a seeming that p when one lacks evidence for the reliability of that seeming. Here's a vivid case, due to Matthias Steup (2004, 413), in which forming a belief that p in response to a seeming that p may be thought to be inappropriate:

Suppose an ingenious neurosurgeon invented a procedure to equip humans with the faculty of echolocation, a faculty normally found in bats. Suppose James is the first person to agree to let this surgeon operate on him. The surgeon tells James that there is no guarantee that his new faculty will work reliably. It might, but then it might not. If it does not, it will produce in James hallucinatory experiences of objects that are not really there. He is brought into a pitch-black room. The expectation is that his new sonar faculty will produce a quasi-visual experience of the room's interiors. In due course, although with his eyes he can see nothing, it 'visually' appears to James as though there is a table in the room.

According to Steup, in this case "there is evidence neither for nor against reliability" (413). For this reason, Steup thinks James has good reason to withhold judgment about the reliability of his table seeming, and so it would be inappropriate for him to form the belief that there is a table in the room on the basis of that seeming.

Turning now to cultural influence specifically, compare the case of James with John:

John is given up for adoption at birth and cared for at a facility that adopts a strict policy of maintaining a religiously neutral environment. After several years, John is adopted. The adoption agency tells John that there is no guarantee that his new community will be reliable about religious matters. It might, but then again it might not. If it is not, it will produce in John seemings about spiritual beings that are not really there or about the absence of spiritual beings that really are there. He is brought into his new community. The expectation is that his new community will produce religious seemings. In due course, it seems to John as though God exists.

It is plausible to think that if James has good reason to withhold judgment about the reliability of his table seeming, then John has good reason to withhold judgment about the reliability of his theistic seeming. And if John has good reason to withhold judgment about the reliability of his theistic seeming, then it would be inappropriate for him to believe that theism is true on the basis of that seeming (just as it would be inappropriate for James to believe that there is a table in the room on the basis of his seeming).

The structure of these two cases is similar. In the former case, James believes inappropriately because he has no evidence that the cause of his table seeming—namely, his echolocation abilities—is a reliable indicator of the truth about the location of physical objects. In the latter case, John believes inappropriately because he has no evidence that the cause of his theistic seeming—namely, the religious influence of his community—is a reliable indicator of the truth about God’s existence.

Importantly, while some of the details of John’s case are admittedly far-fetched, it may be that our own epistemic situation is similar to John’s. For all we know, the community into which we are born may be reliable about religious matters or it may not. It is not as if we have any way of determining, prior to being influenced by that community, whether it is reliable when it comes to religious matters. From our perspective, it is epistemically possible that the influence of our community is unreliable. In light of this, prior to being influenced by our community, we (like John) have no evidence that our community is reliable with respect to religious matters. If this is problematic, then we may have reason to withhold believing on the basis of the religious seemings we think are influenced by that community.¹

1. One might, of course, deny that this is problematic since we aren’t skeptical of other kinds of seemings despite recognizing that it is epistemically possible that our culture is misleading with respect to those kinds of seemings (e.g., our perceptual or moral seemings). If one does deny this, then perhaps cultural influence won’t be as troubling. However, my aim here is to uncover what might be driving the objector’s worry in these cases with respect to our controversial beliefs, and it seems that something like this possibility claim is at work.

4.2 Lacking Evidence of Reliability

The idea that James, John, and we should withhold judgment in these kinds of circumstances depends on an intuitive judgment that it is inappropriate to believe that *p* in response to a seeming that *p* when one lacks evidence for the reliability of that seeming. As Steup (2004, 413) notes, this intuition is not universally shared. Phenomenal conservativists, as we've already seen, deny that one must have evidence for the reliability of one's seemings in order for those seemings to confer justification. They would thus maintain that unless the cases of James and John are construed so that they involve the agent's having a defeater, there is nothing problematic about the beliefs based on their seemings.

One needn't be a phenomenal conservativist, however, to arrive at the verdict that these cases do not pose a problem. The negative assessment of the agents' beliefs in these cases stems from something like the following thought: Without a reason to think you are more reliable with respect to *p* than you would be had some other salient circumstances been actual, you should withhold judgment about your reliability with respect to *p*. We find a principle like this at work in Nathan Ballantyne's treatment of cultural variability:²

2. What follows in the text is not a direct quote, but is rather a principle intended to capture Ballantyne's position, which depends on a belief he labels NR (presumably, 'NR' stands for 'no reason,' but Ballantyne doesn't explicitly say). I have done this in order to make it easier to compare Ballantyne's view with some alternatives. In doing this, I do not think that I have misconstrued Ballantyne's position, as I shall now explain.

For Ballantyne, NR represents the proposition: "You lack reason to think that event *e*₁ makes it more likely than event *e*₂ that you now believe truly and not falsely whether *p*." NR is one component of Ballantyne's full conditional, which includes an additional condition: "(a) If you have no reason to think *e*₁ makes it more likely than *e*₂ that you get *p* right and (b) if you have no reason to think each of *e*₁ and *e*₂ make it highly likely that you will get *p* right, then your belief that *p* is irrational" (252). Thus, for Ballantyne, NR is simply (a).

However, Ballantyne himself recognizes that the real question in cases of cultural variability is whether or not (a) (which corresponds to his NR) is satisfied. According to Ballantyne, "When it comes to controversial propositions . . . we don't have reason to think that our background and some alternative background make it highly likely that in each one we'd get the matter right" (252). This is, of course, to say that (b) will always be satisfied in cases involving controversial matters. Thus, "the real action" lies in determining whether or not (a) is satisfied.

I have also added that the reason that is lacking is one that is independent of the dispute, since, as will emerge shortly in the main text, this is something Ballantyne thinks is required in order to break the symmetry between *e*₁ and *e*₂.

NR* If you lack a dispute-independent reason to think that event e1 makes it more likely than event e2 that you now believe truly and not falsely whether p, then your belief that p is irrational.

Event e1 is “a rather complex event . . . which has led you to believe p” that consists of your actual background, while event e2 is “an alternative background . . . that leads you to not accept p” (Ballantyne 2012, 252). Ballantyne argues that when it comes to our belief in “difficult and controversial propositions,” there will be “a wide sweep of cases [in which] we should believe [the antecedent of NR*]” (253).³

The motivation for endorsing NR* stems from the fact that there are actual disagreements among apparent epistemic peers over controversial matters. Ballantyne (2012, 254) writes:

What lies in their past that holds them back from attaining your position with respect to getting p right? Ruminating in this way, it appears doubtful that you have reason to think your position is better than theirs. But then you lack reason to think e1 makes it more likely than e2 that you get p right, and so you have reason to accept NR.

Ballantyne adds that it would be misguided to break the symmetry by relying on the belief that p, since in doing so you “deploy reasoning that is not independent of your initial reasoning for your belief. You beg the question on your counterfactual self” (254).

If something like NR* is correct, then it explains what is epistemically problematic in the cases of James and John (and, by extension, in the case of our own culturally influenced beliefs). For what motivates the concern in those cases is precisely the fact that the subjects lack a reason to think they are more reliable than their counterfactual selves.

It is instructive to note that there is a close connection on Ballantyne’s view between concerns arising from peer disagreement and concerns arising from cultural influence. Just as lacking an independent reason to think one is more reliable with respect to p than one’s interlocutor in a peer disagreement requires giving up that belief (or at least

3. Ballantyne’s claim is that “we should believe NR,” which just is the antecedent of NR* (see the previous note for why I think this does not misrepresent Ballantyne’s position).

reducing confidence), so too does lacking a reason to think one is more reliable with respect to p than one's counterfactual self require giving up that belief. This suggests that one way in which we can evaluate NR* is by applying lessons learned from similar principles developed in the disagreement literature.

Toward that end, consider the following two principles offered by David Christensen (2011, 15) for resolving disagreements following a dispute-independent assessment:

- A Insofar as the dispute-independent evaluation fails to give me good reason for confidence that I'm better informed, or more likely to have reasoned from the evidence correctly, I must revise my belief in the direction of the other person's.
- B Insofar as the dispute-independent evaluation gives me good reason to be confident that the other person is equally well-informed, and equally likely to have reasoned from the evidence correctly, I must revise my belief in the direction of the other person's.

Christensen's principle A accords closely with Ballantyne's NR*. Both A and NR* claim that epistemic pressure to revise my belief that p arises when I lack a dispute-independent reason to think that I'm more reliable than my opponent (in the case of disagreement) or my counterfactual self (in the case of cultural influence). By contrast, Christensen's principle B claims that I must revise when I have a positive dispute-independent reason to think that my opponent is as reliable as I am.

Christensen argues that principle A is problematic because it "threatens to lead straight to skepticism" (2011, 15). If someone disagrees with virtually everything I believe, then there will be nothing independent of the dispute to which I can appeal to establish that I'm more reliable. If that's the case, then I will clearly lack a dispute-independent reason to think I'm more reliable, and principle A will demand that I revise virtually all of my beliefs. This, however, is unintuitive.

Given the affinities between A and NR*, the same problem that faces the former also faces the latter. Suppose event e_2 consists of the counterfactual background that includes my being born into a community of skeptics, which would have led me not

to accept *p*, but instead to endorse skepticism. As was the case with principle A, NR* would demand that I give up or reduce my credence in *p* since I have no reason, independent of the dispute over skepticism, to think that I'm more reliable with respect to *p* than my counterfactual skeptical self.⁴ Note, too, that this verdict cannot be avoided by citing the restricted scope of NR* to controversial matters, since, as the history of philosophy attests, skepticism is a difficult and controversial matter.

Principle B, on the other hand, avoids this problem. B says I have a defeater if I have a positive dispute-independent reason to think I'm no more reliable than my opponent (or counterfactual self). I will be given no such reason in global skeptical scenarios, since there will be no dispute-independent reasons to undergird any judgment about my opponent's reliability and, consequently, no dispute-independent reasons to which I can appeal to make a judgment about my reliability relative to hers. Thus, NR* should be rejected and replaced with a principle that resembles Christensen's principle B.

4.3 Having Evidence of Unreliability

In her treatment of the problem of irrelevant influences, Vavova (ms, 14) offers such a principle, which she labels the "Good Independent Reason Principle:"

GIRP To the extent that your independent evaluation gives you good reason to think that you are unreliable with respect to matters like *p*, you must reduce your confidence in *p*.

Unlike NR* (and principle A), GIRP says we acquire a defeater when we have a good dispute-independent reason to think we are unreliable with respect to matters like *p*. In this way, GIRP is similar to Christensen's principle B. Moreover, Vavova adds that it is a mistake to think that lacking a reason to think we are reliable is sufficient for

4. The claim here is not that my dispute-independent evaluation fails to give me a reason to think I am reliable, but rather that my dispute-independent evaluation fails to give me a reason to think I am *more reliable* than my opponent. It may be that both my opponent and I have good reason to think we're very reliable with respect to *p*. Thus, this doesn't preclude the possibility of having good evidence for one's reliability, and so one can consistently endorse this strategy for rejecting principle A without thereby being committed to the possibility of so-called "easy knowledge."

a defeater, for the same sorts of reasons that Christensen mentions in connection with principle A.⁵

Let us evaluate the cases considered earlier in light of GIRP. Does John have a good reason, independent of his belief in God and the seeming that caused it, to think he is unreliable with respect to question of whether or not God exists? Independently of his theistic belief, John knows that it is possible that his seeming is not veridical. And he knows that if his seeming were not veridical, he would be in no position to know it wasn't veridical. Do these two things give John a reason to think he is unreliable with respect to God's existence?

It is hard to see why unless the possibility that we're globally deceived also gives us a reason to think we're unreliable. We know it is possible that we're being deceived by an evil demon and that none of our seemings about the external world are veridical. We also know that if our seemings weren't veridical for this reason, we would be in no position to know they weren't veridical. Do these two beliefs give us a good reason to think we're unreliable when it comes to forming beliefs about the external world? Most of us would deny this. Similarly, then, we should also deny that John's beliefs about the possibility that he is in error give him a good reason to think he is unreliable when it comes to religious matters.⁶ And, since our epistemic situation is like that of John's, we should conclude in our own case that the mere possibility that our culture's have misled us is not sufficient to provide us with a reason to think that we are in fact unreliable.⁷

5. See her discussion in (ms, 21–22). Vavova is explicit that GIRP is modeled after Christensen's principle B precisely in order to avoid the kinds of problems that arise for principles like Christensen's A.

6. Elga (2008) draws a similar conclusion, though he arrives at it in a different way. According to Elga, the problem posed by irrelevant influences "is no more troubling than a much more general skeptical worry." This is because, in both the general skeptical scenarios and cases involving irrelevant influences, there is an inference from "I have no independent reason to think such-and-such" to "it would be unreasonable for me to be confident that such-and-such" (2008, 8). Thus, irrelevant influences are problematic only to the extent that a much more general skepticism is problematic.

7. To anticipate a possible objection, I acknowledge that there is an important difference between the recognition that it is possible we are globally deceived and the recognition that it is possible that our cultures have had a distorting influence on our beliefs. The former possibility is one that most of us think we can reasonably ignore, while the latter is, at least for many, a "live" possibility. This difference lies in the fact that we know cultural influence is distorting for most cultures and people, since most people are mistaken if at most one religion is true and no religion constitutes a majority. My point here is that the principles considered thus far do not explain why cultural influence is more troubling than global skepticism.

Before proceeding, it will be helpful to summarize what I've argued for thus far. I've argued that the consideration that motivates giving up the beliefs in cases in which we lack a reason to think we're reliable should be rejected and replaced with a principle that requires giving up (or reducing our confidence in) beliefs in cases in which we have a reason to think we're unreliable. When we adopt this latter kind of principle, however, there is no reason to think that reflection on the possibility of cultural influence is sufficient to generate a defeater for those beliefs that we take to be influenced by our cultures, unless we also think that the possibility of global error is sufficient to generate a defeater for almost all of our beliefs.

4.4 When You Should Doubt Your Reliability

Should we conclude that cultural influence never (or very rarely) threatens the epistemic status of our beliefs? No. For while principles like B and GIRP identify one sufficient condition for acquiring a defeater, there are other ways in which one can acquire a defeater upon recognizing the influence of one's culture on one's beliefs. Let us, then, examine a different principle and explore its implications for cultural influence.

Consider a modified version of a principle Bergmann (forthcoming) employs in his treatment of religious disagreement:

- D* If in response to recognizing that your different respective cultural influences have played a role in you and S holding opposing views about p (which you heretofore rationally believed), you either do or epistemically should disbelieve or seriously question or doubt the claim that you are, on this occasion, both trustworthy with respect to p and more trustworthy than S with respect to p, then your belief that p is defeated by this recognition; otherwise not.

D* bears some similarities to Christensen's principle A, but differs in two important respects. First, D* does not say you have a defeater if you lack a reason to think you're in an epistemically better position than your opponent, but says instead that you have a defeater if you do or should disbelieve or doubt that you're in an epistemically better

position than your opponent. Second, unlike all of the principles considered thus far, D* does not limit the relevant evidence to the dispute-independent evidence.

With D* in mind, let us ask: Does or should the recognition of cultural influence on my belief that p give me reason to disbelieve, seriously question, or doubt that I am both trustworthy with respect to p and more trustworthy than S (which may be my counterfactual self) with respect to p? It will if I think S's influences are as reliable as mine when it comes to question of whether p, and if I think that those influences make S as good at responding to her evidence for p as my influences make me at responding to my evidence for p. For, given that S's evidence for p is as good as mine, and given that I think S is as good at responding to that evidence as I am, then I have good reason to think that S is reliable with respect to p. Because I think S is reliable with respect to p, and given that S's attitude toward p is opposed to my own, I have good reason to think that I am unreliable (or untrustworthy) with respect to p. After all, one of us is wrong, and I have just as much reason to think it is me as I do to think it is her.

Recall Teresa the theist from the third chapter. Suppose that Teresa recognizes that the influence of her culture has played an important role in her forming and maintaining her theistic belief. She also recognizes that, had she been born into a predominantly atheistic culture, the influence of that culture would have played an important role in her forming and maintaining atheistic beliefs. If Teresa thinks that the influence of the (counterfactual) atheistic culture is as reliable as her (actual) theistic culture with respect to the question of whether God exists, and if she also thinks that she would be as good at responding to the evidence for God's existence if she had been influenced by the (counterfactual) atheistic culture as she is given the influence of her (actual) theistic culture, then Teresa will have a defeater for her belief that God exists. In other words, if Teresa thinks that she would be as trustworthy with respect to God's existence if she had been influenced by an atheistic culture, then she has a defeater for her belief that God exists (which has been influenced by her actual, theistic culture).

To avoid this defeater, Teresa must give up the belief that she would be as trustworthy in the counterfactual circumstances in which she believes that God does not exist as she thinks she is in the actual circumstances in which she believes that God does exist. In short, Teresa the (actual) theist must think she's more trustworthy than Teresa the (counterfactual) atheist with respect to the question of whether God exists. Does Teresa have any reason to think this?

Bergmann (forthcoming) argues that there are at least three kinds of evidence relevant to an assessment of one's epistemic trustworthiness with respect to p relative to an opponent's trustworthiness with respect to p . First, there is the evidence bearing on p (p -evidence). Second, there is the evidence bearing on the proposition that one's belief that p is formed in a reliable and nonmisleading way (Rp -evidence). And third, there is the evidence bearing on the proposition that the belief of one's opponent is formed in a reliable and nonmisleading way ($R\neg p$ -evidence). The relative strengths of these three kinds of evidence determine when disagreement provides one with a defeater for one's belief that p . Bergmann (forthcoming) writes:

When your p -evidence and Rp -evidence are strongly supportive (of p and Rp , respectively) and your $R\neg p$ -evidence is no more than weakly supportive (of $R\neg p$), it is rational to demote the one disagreeing with you. But when your $R\neg p$ -evidence is at least as strongly supportive as your Rp -evidence and your p -evidence, then it is not rational to demote and you have a defeater.

The same evaluation can be used to determine whether the recognition of cultural influence provides one with a defeater.

Return again to Teresa. Teresa's p -evidence is the seeming that God exists, influenced in various ways by her culture. A seeming that God exists can come in varying degrees of strength. Perhaps for some, a culturally influenced theistic seeming isn't very strong. Rosen (2001, 85), for example, considers "a distinctive sort of theist"

who takes himself upon reflection to have no positive grounds for his belief: no arguments, no compelling authority, and most importantly, nothing that he would regard as direct experience of the divine: a theist who believes

simply because he has been immersed in a culture in which God's existence is taken for granted.

For such a theist, the seeming that God exists may be rather weak.⁸ We need not assume, however, that this is true of all culturally influenced theistic seemings, especially those that arise in the way discussed in chapter two. According to the account of cultural influence defended there, cultural influence is not a matter of believing that God exists simply because one has been immersed in a culture in which God's existence is taken for granted. Rather, cultural influence involves properly epistemic factors, such as testimony from those who seem trustworthy and the instillation of epistemic standards. Culturally influenced seemings that arise in this way can be quite strong.

What about Teresa's Rp-evidence, the evidence bearing on her belief that her belief that God exists is formed in a reliable and nonmisleading way? As I have argued in previous chapters, it is difficult to find a compelling reason to think that culturally influenced beliefs, formed on the basis of seemings, are, in virtue of being culturally influenced, unreliably formed. One primary reason for this is that the processes that lead to many of our culturally influenced beliefs also lead to other beliefs that are usually taken to be epistemically unproblematic, and so reliably formed. Thus, if Teresa has reflected on these issues, the considerations of which she is aware may be strongly supportive of the proposition that her belief that God exists is formed in a reliable and nonmisleading way.

Admittedly, however, it is not implausible to think that few believers are likely to engage in this sort of philosophical reflection on the reliability of the processes that led to their theistic belief. Do such believers therefore lack good Rp-evidence? Not necessarily. Note that the kind of reflection discussed in the previous paragraph will itself issue in a seeming that one's theistic belief was formed in a reliable and nonmisleading way. This higher-order seeming about the veridicality of one's first-order seeming may arise through reflection of the sort just discussed, but it can arise in other ways, as well. Consider the higher-order seeming that our memorial, moral, and mathematical seem-

8. This is not to deny, of course, that seemings that arise in this way can also be strong.

ings are veridical. Such higher-order seemings are often quite strong, but rarely arise through reflection on the processes that led to the beliefs that correspond to those kinds of seemings. Rather, in noting the felt veridicality that attends those first-order seemings, one acquires the relevant higher-order seeming that those first-order seemings are veridical. As Tolhurst (1998, 298–99) writes:

Felt veridicality can also ground a felt demand that one form a second order belief about the seeming. In calling the feeling of felt veridicality to mind one reflects on one's experiences and considers how they feel. This generates a second order seeming in which the seeming is itself the object of a seeming. When we become self-consciously aware of a seeming it seems to us that the seeming is veridical. This second order seeming is grounded in our awareness of the feel of felt veridicality.

Thus, one need not engage in deep philosophical reflection in order to acquire good R_p -evidence. Such evidence is available simply by attending to the felt veridicality of one's first order seemings.

Teresa may thus have strong p -evidence for her belief that God exists and strong R_p -evidence for her belief that her theistic belief is reliably formed. However, if Teresa's $R_{\neg p}$ -evidence is at least as strongly supportive as her p -evidence and R_p -evidence, then she will nevertheless have a defeater for her theistic belief. This raises two questions: First, what is Teresa's $R_{\neg p}$ -evidence? Second, how strong is this $R_{\neg p}$ -evidence?

Teresa's $R_{\neg p}$ -evidence is the evidence she has that bears on whether the atheistic belief of her counterfactual self is (or would be) formed in a reliable and nonmisleading way. Presumably, Teresa will think that the process of cultural influence that would lead her counterfactual self to form a belief in atheism is, in certain respects, very similar to the process of cultural influence that led to her actual belief in theism.⁹ Moreover, Teresa recognizes that if cultural influence had led to her atheism, it would likely seem to her (as an atheist) that that process is reliable.

9. If Teresa didn't think this (that is, if she thought cultural influence worked differently depending on the resulting belief), then it would be more difficult to see why the recognition of cultural influence is troubling. For, in that case, there would be an explanation for why one believes differently that depends on more than just the culture by which one was influenced.

Recognizing these facts, however, is not enough to give Teresa $R \neg p$ -evidence that is strongly supportive of $R \neg p$. For, given that Teresa thinks theism is true, she will think that her counterpart is mistaken. In other words, actual Teresa thinks counterfactual Teresa believes falsely with respect to God's existence. Thus, she must think that the process employed by her counterfactual self is defective in some way, since she thinks it would lead her counterfactual self to believe something that is false.

Note that in thinking that the belief of her atheist counterpart was formed in an unreliable way, Teresa need not deny that, had she been born into an atheistic culture and believed atheism as a result, it would both seem to her that atheism is true and that the process that led to her atheistic belief is reliable and nonmisleading. In other words, Teresa is likely to think that, in the counterfactual circumstances in which she is an atheist, her atheistic belief would be *internally rational* for her counterfactual self. Internal rationality is concerned with belief-formation downstream from experience. In those circumstances in which atheism both seems true to her, and in which her evidence for atheism seems reliable and nonmisleading, the appropriate response for her, *given those mental states*, is to believe that atheism is true.

However, to grant that things would seem epistemically fine to her counterpart is not to grant that things are *in fact* epistemically fine for her counterpart. For while she may think that her counterpart is internally rational, Teresa will deny that her counterpart is *externally rational*.¹⁰ External rationality concerns not only how things are going downstream from experience, but also concerns how things are going upstream from ex-

10. This bears some similarity to the strategy Plantinga (1997, 298) employs in his response to Hick on religious pluralism using the example of racial intolerance:

No doubt Hick, like me, was brought up to believe that racial intolerance is wrong. Now it is fairly likely that most relevant place-times are such that if he and I had been brought up there and then, we would have had quite different views on this topic. Does that mean that we should eye our tolerance with special suspicion? Maybe we should; but if, after careful, prayerful thought and consideration, it still seems to us that racial intolerance is wrong, unjust, and morally repugnant, there is nothing arbitrary in our continuing to reject racism.

Clearly, Teresa's judgment about the atheistic belief of her counterfactual self involves nothing like the sort of moral evaluation that attends reflection on the kind of case Plantinga mentions. However, Teresa's perspective on her counterfactual atheism, minus the moral abhorrence, is very similar in this respect: she is happy she didn't have the kind of cultural influence that would have led her to to have seemings and beliefs that are false and externally irrational.

perience (Plantinga 2000, 110–12; Bergmann 2015, 31–32). Since actual Teresa thinks counterfactual Teresa shouldn't have atheistic seemings in the first place (because actual Teresa thinks atheism is false), actual Teresa will think counterfactual Teresa's atheism is not externally rational (despite the fact that it is internally rational).

This does not show that Teresa's counterpart *is* externally irrational. If actual Teresa is mistaken and theism is false, then *she's* the one who's externally irrational. The question under consideration, however, is whether Teresa has a defeater. Even if Teresa is externally irrational, this is not sufficient to provide her with a defeater, since she doesn't believe that she's externally irrational (and, moreover, she does believe that she is internally rational). As Plantinga (2000, 200–01) points out, the question of whether one's belief is externally rational is largely the question of whether one's belief is true: "External rationality and warrant are harder. The only way I can see to argue that Christian belief has *these* virtues is to argue that Christian belief is, indeed, *true*." Speaking of theism rather than Christianity, Teresa may not be able to prove that theism is true, but since she thinks it is true, she will also think that it is externally rational and, therefore, that the atheistic belief of her counterpart is probably not externally rational.

It is also instructive to note something else Plantinga says in connection with determining the rationality of theistic belief. Plantinga (2000, 190) writes:

What you properly take to be rational . . . depends on what sort of metaphysical and religious stance you adopt. It depends on what kind of beings you think human beings are, what sorts of beliefs you think their noetic faculties produce when they are functioning properly, and which of their faculties or cognitive mechanisms are aimed at the truth. Your view as to what sort of creature a human being is will determine or at any rate heavily influence your views as to whether theistic belief is warranted or not warranted, rational or irrational for human beings. And so the dispute as to whether theistic belief is rational (warranted) can't be settled just by attending to epistemological considerations; it is at bottom not merely an epistemological dispute, but an ontological or theological dispute.

Teresa's belief that her counterpart is mistaken (and externally irrational) depends on her actual religious views. Again, if theism is false, then actual Teresa is the one who

is externally irrational. But unless and until Teresa comes to believe that theism is in fact false (something that reflection on epistemological considerations alone is unlikely to produce), she will continue to think that the belief of her atheistic counterpart is defective.

In light of these considerations, it appears that Teresa's $R\neg p$ -evidence is not (or need not be) as strongly supportive as her p -evidence and her Rp -evidence. Thus, Teresa's justification for her theistic belief is not defeated by her recognition that cultural influence has played a role in her holding that belief.¹¹

4.5 An Argument from Luck

If the conclusion of the previous section is correct, then Teresa's theistic belief need not be defeated by her recognition that her culture played a role in her holding that belief. In light of this, it is tempting to think that Teresa must consider herself *lucky* to have been born into the culture that happened to have gotten things right about God's existence. After all, given that both she and her atheist counterpart are internally justified, Teresa must admit that if *she* were the one whose belief was not formed in a reliable and nonmisleading way, she would be in no position to recognize this. If Teresa reflects on this fact—the fact that she is in some sense lucky to be right because she could have easily been wrong—then perhaps she isn't off the epistemic hook just yet.

The idea motivating this concern is something like the following: Reflection on the etiology of my belief that p can lead me to think that had different influences been at work, I could have easily been wrong about p (e.g., had I been born in a different culture, I would have believed $\neg p$ instead of p). Presumably, I will also think that if I were in those counterfactual circumstances, I would think that I was right about whether or not p . This is because in those counterfactual circumstances in which I believe $\neg p$,

11. This is not to say, of course, that things will always go this way. As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, whether or not one has a defeater in these cases depends on the relative strengths of the relevant bits of evidence. For theists whose p -evidence and Rp -evidence fail to be strongly supportive, recognizing cultural influence may provide a defeater. My point is simply that cultural influence is not, by itself, sufficient to defeat the justification of those beliefs that have been influenced by one's culture.

$\neg p$ would seem true to me. Together, these two thoughts give me reason to think that my seeming with respect to p could have easily been unreliable—it could have easily seemed to me that $\neg p$, even though (from my perspective in my actual circumstances) I think that $\neg p$ is false.

But once I think this about my counterfactual self, how do I know that my actual circumstances haven't put me in the same position? In my actual circumstances, things are just as I think they would be in the counterfactual circumstances, only my attitude toward p is different (p seems true to me and I believe p). If I think I would have been unreliable with respect to p in the counterfactual circumstances, what reason do I have for not drawing the same conclusion about my reliability in my actual circumstances? It would be problematic to appeal to my belief that p or my belief that I'm reliable with respect to p to avoid this problem, since those are the very beliefs that have been called into question. It thus seems that once I reflect on my belief in this way, I have some reason to doubt that I'm reliable with respect p . And if I have reason to doubt that I am reliable with respect to p , then I have a defeater for p .

The following argument is an attempt to make this line of thought more precise. Suppose that each of the following is something I believe:

1. p
2. If I had been born into a different culture, then $\neg p$ would seem true to me.
3. I could easily have been born into a different culture.
4. Therefore, $\neg p$ could easily seem true to me. (From 2 & 3)
5. $\neg p$ is false. (From 1)
6. My seeming with respect to p could easily have been unreliable. (From 4 & 5)
7. If my seeming with respect to p were unreliable, I would not believe it was unreliable. In other words, I could easily be mistaken about my reliability with respect to p .
8. If I could easily be mistaken about my reliability with respect to p , then I have reason to doubt my reliability with respect to p .
9. Therefore, I have reason to doubt my reliability with respect to p . (From 7 & 8)

10. If I have reason to doubt my reliability with respect to p , then I have a defeater for my belief that p .
11. Therefore, I have a defeater for my belief that p . (From 9 & 10)

In order to avoid getting a defeater, I need to give up at least one of these beliefs. Which one should I give up? I think premise (8) should be rejected, but before explaining why, let me briefly say something about (7).

Why should I think that if my seeming were unreliable, I would not treat it as such (as premise (7) says)? In those circumstances in which my seeming is unreliable, it would still seem to me that $\neg p$, and (let us stipulate) I would believe that $\neg p$. It is only because I actually believe that p that I think the seeming that $\neg p$ would be unreliable. But in the counterfactual circumstances, I don't believe that p (rather, I believe that $\neg p$), and so I would have no reason to think my seeming that $\neg p$ was unreliable.

Now, onto premise (8). I think premise (8) is problematic, but first let me say a bit in its defense. Why think that if I could easily be mistaken with respect to p , I therefore have some reason to think I am unreliable with respect to p ? The answer is that I have reason to think that there is a close possible world in which I am unreliable with respect to p (namely, the world in which I'm born into a different culture). But once I think this, how do I know that world isn't the actual world? It seems that my only reason for thinking the world in which I'm unreliable isn't the actual world is that, in the actual world, I believe that p is true and it seems to me that p . This appears problematic, however, since it is precisely p and the seeming that p that have been called into question.

Roger White (2010, 604) raises a significant concern for the plausibility of this line of thought:

Had you been in the other situation, for better or worse, you would have thought you were right. You would cite various reasons for your different conviction and it would seem to you that these considerations were rationally persuasive. But you can't be right in both cases. But of course that is just our predicament any time we believe anything. Whatever I believe,

there is always the possibility of my having believed otherwise. And had I done so I would no doubt think that I was right. This point alone can hardly lead to a limited skepticism.

I agree with White, but I don't think this objection is effective against the argument under consideration. This is because, according to that argument, it is not simply that I believe I could have been wrong, but that I believe I could have *easily* been wrong.

This is what separates this argument from the cruder characterization of the argument from cultural influence considered earlier in this chapter. I suspect that the *ease* with which we think we could have been wrong is a large part of what makes concerns over cultural influence a distinctive worry. Many of us can imagine without much difficulty what it would have been like to grow up in a culture where beliefs contrary to our own were the norm, and to have adopted those beliefs as a result. In contrast, it is more difficult to take seriously the idea that we're involved in some sort of global skeptical scenario (after all, even Hume couldn't maintain that belief at the backgammon table).

Moreover, thinking that we could have easily been wrong *does* allow for a limited skepticism, since not all of our beliefs are such that we think we could have easily been wrong about them.¹² Because we can't easily imagine (or easily take seriously the idea of) being part of a demon world, we can't simply replace references to cultures and cultural influence with references to demon worlds in the argument above and get the same result. Thus, dismissing this worry because it leads to an implausibly broad skepticism won't work.

4.6 Varieties of Epistemic Luck

While the 'easily' qualifier allows the argument to avoid one criticism, it invites others. Of central importance is the question of what exactly it means to think *I could have easily been wrong*. Perhaps the most popular way of understanding this is in terms of epistemic luck. Duncan Pritchard (2009, 26), for example, writes of the agent in the

12. Of course, we *could* think we could have easily been wrong about any belief we hold (and if we did, the argument would go through for that belief), but most of us don't think we could have easily been wrong about all of our beliefs.

famous barn façade case that “her true belief is epistemically lucky—in the sense that she could have easily been wrong. . . .”¹³ Thus, one way of understanding what it means to think *I could have easily been wrong about p* is to think that it is a matter of luck that I believe that (and am right about) *p*. With this in mind, we can understand the problem posed by reflection on cultural influence as a problem that arises in connection with thinking that one is, in some sense, lucky to believe as one does.

4.6.1 Benign Epistemic Luck

What is supposed to be the problem posed by epistemic luck? This has proven to be a difficult question to answer, despite the widespread intuition that luck is incompatible with knowledge (as evidenced by the Gettier cases). One of the earliest explicit treatments of epistemic luck is due to Peter Unger, who helpfully distinguishes between several kinds of epistemic luck, and points out that not all of them pose epistemological problems.¹⁴

We can begin to get a sense of the kinds of benign epistemic luck Unger has in mind by attending to the way in which he broadly characterizes his position (taking Unger’s use of ‘accidental’ to be synonymous with ‘lucky’):

In my analysis of human knowledge, a complete absence of the accidental is claimed, not regarding the occurrence or existence of the fact known nor regarding the existence or abilities of the man who knows, but only as regards a certain relation concerning the man and the fact. (1968, 159)

13. This is a theme that runs throughout Pritchard’s work. For example, in his treatment of the lottery problem, he writes:

Why is knowledge lacking in the first scenario where the subject’s true belief is based solely on the odds, but present in the second scenario where it is based on reading the result in a reliable newspaper? Here is a perfectly natural explanation. In the first scenario the subject’s true belief is just down to luck, since she could so very easily have formed a false belief (i.e., had the balls fallen in a slightly different configuration, such that she owned the winning lottery ticket). In the latter case, in contrast, the subject’s true belief doesn’t seem lucky at all. Given how she formed her true belief, she couldn’t have easily formed a false belief, since reliable newspapers tend to publish the right result in worlds like the actual world. (2014, 597–98)

14. Since most the discussions of epistemic luck have focused on whether or not luck is compatible with knowledge, I’ll do the same in what follows. However, because my ultimate interest is in justification, I’ll later say something about how the connection between luck and knowledge can be applied to questions about the connection between luck and justified belief.

Here, Unger distinguishes between three kinds of epistemic luck, but for now, I want to focus only on the first two, those that Unger claims are compatible with knowledge:

EL1: It is a matter of luck that *p* obtains.

EL2: It is a matter of luck that *S* is able to know that *p*.

Why, according to Unger, should we think that EL1 and EL2 are compatible with knowledge?

According to EL1, there is no epistemological threat to *S*'s belief that *p* when it is a matter of luck that *p* obtains. By way of illustration, Unger (1968, 159) offers the example of a car accident. If I witness a car accident, there is some sense in which I am lucky to believe that *p*, where *p* is something like the proposition that *a car accident just occurred in front of me*. This is because there are close possible worlds in which the accident doesn't occur, and, for that reason, close possible worlds in which I don't believe that *p*. Thus, I am lucky to believe that *p*. Nevertheless, this fact alone doesn't threaten the epistemological status of my belief that *p*.

The second kind of epistemic luck Unger mentions, EL2, says that my belief that *p* is not threatened if it is a matter of luck that I exist or am able to know that *p*. There is a sense in which I'm lucky to exist at all, and also a sense in which my ability to know that *p* is a matter of luck (had evolutionary history had gone differently, it is unlikely that there would have been any creatures with the kinds of cognitive abilities we humans have).¹⁵ These general facts do not seem epistemically problematic, nor do

15. Because the kind of luck in EL2 is described disjunctively, Mylan Engel Jr. (2011) suggests that EL2 actually captures two distinct kinds of luck, which he describes as "existential luck" and "facultative luck." He characterizes these two kinds of luck as follows:

Existential luck: For *S* to know that *p*, *S* must exist, and it might be extraordinarily lucky that *S* exists. If *S* is the lone survivor of a fiery plane crash, *S* is lucky to be alive, but *S*'s existential luck does not preclude her from knowing that she survived the crash.

Facultative luck: To know that *p*, *S* must possess the cognitive skills requisite for knowledge. Suppose *S* is shot in the head but the bullet narrowly misses all vital regions of the brain required for conceptual thought and knowledge. *S* is overwhelmingly lucky that she still possesses the cognitive capacities needed for knowledge, but since she does possess them, she is still capable of knowing many things, including that she was shot in the head.

While this distinction is helpful for understanding EL2, I won't use this more fine-grained account since my focus will not be on EL2.

more specific instances in which EL2 is true. Unger (1968, 160) offers the following example:

Suppose that a man is looking at a turtle and even seeing that the turtle is crawling on the ground. This man may know that the turtle is crawling on the ground (and will in that he sees that it is); for because he is using his eyes (and because of other things as well), it may be that at that time it is not at all accidental that the man is right about its being the case that the turtle is crawling on the ground. However, suppose further that just at this time, or immediately before it, a heavy rock would have fallen on the man and would have killed him then and there, smashing him to smithereens, but for the occurrence of an accidental happening which prevents the rock from falling and allows him to remain alive. Say, all of three terrible people who were pushing the rock that was to fall were themselves, coincidentally and simultaneously, hit on the head by three independently falling bricks and were killed upon impact. Each of the bricks, quite independently of the others, just happened to fall loose from an ancient wall of which they all were a part. Thus, quite by accident, all three of the terrible rock pushers were killed, and the turtle watcher's life was spared, perhaps only until some later time. On these suppositions, it is indeed quite an accident that the turtle watcher is alive at the time he sees the turtle crawling on the ground before him. Yet, at that time, it is not at all accidental that he is right about its being the case that there is a turtle on the ground.

There is a lot of epistemic luck involved in this case, yet we aren't inclined to think that it prevents the man from knowing that the turtle is crawling along the ground.

These considerations provide good reasons to think that the kind of epistemic luck captured by EL1 and EL2 are not problematic. Moreover, in addition to EL1 and EL2, Pritchard argues that there is a third kind of benign epistemic luck tacit in Unger's account, which can be extracted from the following case Unger (1968, 159) considers:

A man may overhear his employer say that he will be fired and he may do so quite by accident, not intending to be near his employer's office or to gain any information from his employer. Though it may be an accident that the man came to know that he will be fired, and it may be somewhat accidental that he knows this to be so, nevertheless, from the time that he hears and onward, it may well be not at all accidental that the man is right

about its being the case that he will be fired. Thus, he may know, whether by accident or not.

As Pritchard points out, the kind of luck involved in this case does not conform to EL1 or EL2 since “this is not a scenario in which the agent is lucky to be able to possess knowledge in the first place nor even a case in which the proposition known is only luckily true” (2004, 201–02). Rather, what’s a matter of luck in this case is the possession of a particular bit of evidence. Just as it seems intuitively appropriate to ascribe knowledge in the cases considered in connection with EL1 and EL2, it also seems appropriate to ascribe knowledge to the man in this case. Note, too, that this intuition remains even when we consider that there are nearby possible worlds in which the man believes that $\neg p$ (since, presumably, had he not overheard his boss, he would believe he would not be fired).

This suggests that in addition to EL1 and EL2, we can add the following kind of benign epistemic luck:

EL3: It is a matter of luck that S acquired evidence that supports p.

EL3 involves what has come to be known as “evidential luck.” According to Engel Jr., “A person S is evidentially lucky in believing that p in circumstances C if and only if it is just a matter of luck that S has the evidence e for p that she does, but given her evidence e, it is not a matter of luck that her belief that p is true in C” (2011). One popular example used to demonstrate that evidential luck is compatible with knowledge comes from Robert Nozick, who asks us to imagine a witness to a bank robbery who sees that the bank robber is Jesse James because “the bank robber’s mask slips off as he is escaping” (Nozick 1981, 193). Had the bystander not been looking when the mask happened to slip off, she would not have the evidence she does for the proposition that *Jesse James is the robber*. In other words, she is lucky to have the evidence she does for that proposition. Yet, despite this, Nozick claims that the witness can “know that Jesse James is robbing the bank” (193).

So much for our discussion of the unproblematic varieties of epistemic luck. Let us now consider a kind of epistemic luck that *is* problematic.

4.6.2 *Problematic Epistemic Luck*

Recall Unger's claim that the kind of luck incompatible with knowledge "regards a certain relation concerning the man and the fact" (1968, 159). This relation is one that makes it a matter of luck that S is right about p. To see this, note that Unger requires for knowledge that p "that it is not at all accidental that the man is right about its being the case that p" (1968, 158). Admittedly, this formulation is not the clearest. Fortunately, recent work on epistemic luck has clarified the nature of this sort of knowledge-precluding luck.

Taking his cue from Unger, Pritchard (2004, 204) writes that this sort of luck arises when S's belief that p meets the relevant conditions for knowledge, yet it remains a matter of luck that S's belief that p is true. Thus, we can identify a fourth kind of epistemic luck:

EL4: It is a matter of luck, given that S's belief that p meets the relevant epistemic conditions, that S's belief that p is true.

Unlike EL1, EL2, and EL3, there are good reasons to think that EL4 is epistemically problematic.

First, note that this way of thinking about the issue reveals that the distinction between the benign and problematic kinds of epistemic luck lies in whether or not the luck involved arises in connection with the subject meeting the proposed conditions for knowledge, or instead in connection with the truth of what is believed. Consider the Gettier cases. In the Gettier cases, Smith isn't lucky that he meets the relevant condition for knowledge (specifically, justification). Rather, Smith is lucky that the proposition he believes is in fact true (since it is false in most nearby possible worlds). Put differently, the problem for Smith is not that he is lucky to be justified. Rather, it is that he is lucky that the proposition he believes is true.

The case of the stuck clock has a similar structure. I may have perfectly good reasons to trust the clock in my living room (I just put a new battery in it yesterday evening and set it according to the website time.gov, which reflects the time kept by the National

Institute of Standards and Technology and the U.S. Naval Observatory). I wake up at my usual time, walk into my living room, glance at the clock, and see that it reads 8:22. It is indeed 8:22. However, unbeknownst to me, the clock stopped at 8:22 yesterday evening. In this case, I'm not lucky to meet the conditions for knowledge, but I am lucky that it is true that it is 8:22 a.m.

The sort of luck captured by EL4 and at play in the Gettier and clock cases has been labeled *veritic luck*. Pritchard (2005, 196) offers the following modal analysis of veritic luck:

Veritic Luck: For all S, the truth of S's belief in a contingent proposition, p, is veritically lucky if, and only if, S's belief that p is true in the actual world, but false in most near-by possible worlds in which the belief is formed in the same manner as in the actual world.

According to a number of epistemologists, it is precisely the presence of veritic luck that prevents knowledge in the Gettier cases (Engel Jr. 1992; Vahid 2001; Pritchard 2004; Hiller and Neta 2007). Thus, the presence of veritic luck, unlike the presence of the kinds of luck discussed in the previous section, is epistemically problematic.

It is largely for this reason that veritic luck plays a central role in safety-based accounts of knowledge. Indeed, for Pritchard, the safety condition simply is a condition on knowledge that excludes veritic luck.¹⁶ To say that a belief is not veritically lucky is to say that it is safe, and to say that a belief is veritically lucky is to say that it is unsafe. Thus, Pritchard offers the following safety-based account of knowledge: "If S knows that p then S's true belief that p could not have easily been false" (2012, 253). Importantly, the issue here is not whether the proposition p could have been false, but is instead whether the way in which S formed her true belief could have easily led her to believe something false. As Pritchard (2012, 256–57) puts it, "What we are interested in is how the agent forms her beliefs in similar circumstances and in response to the

16. See, e.g., Pritchard (2003, 118): "The type of anti-veritic-luck epistemology at issue here is one that is based around something like the . . . safety principle for knowledge. . . . What this principle ensures is that there is no gap between the agent's meeting the epistemic conditions and forming a true belief in which veritic luck can get a hold, for in so far as the agent meets the epistemic conditions—which includes meeting the safety principle—it cannot be a matter of veritic epistemic luck that her belief is true."

same stimulus. These beliefs may be beliefs that *p*, but equally they may be beliefs in distinct propositions.”¹⁷

4.7 Cultural Influence and Epistemic Luck

With these different ways of understanding epistemic luck in mind, let us return to the argument from cultural influence. What sort of luck is involved when reflection on the influence of our culture makes us think that we could have easily been wrong? Since I take it to be obvious that the sort of luck involved in EL1 and EL2 isn't what is at issue in cases of cultural influence, we can limit our discussion to evidential luck (EL3) and veritic luck (EL4). If it turns out that it is evidential luck that is involved, then there is little reason to think that culture influence is problematic. On the other hand, if it turns out that it is veritic luck that is involved, then there will indeed be a problem for culturally influenced beliefs.

4.7.1 Cultural Influence and Evidential Luck

If I think I'm evidentially lucky with respect to *p*, then I think that it is a matter of luck that I have evidence that supports *p*. Put differently, I will think that there is a close possible world in which I don't have evidence that supports *p* (and, as a result, don't believe that *p*). Is this the case when I reflect on the possibility that my belief that *p* is influenced by my culture? Here again, I will focus on religious beliefs, but I think these considerations apply equally well to other kinds of controversial beliefs.

I think it is indeed true that reflection on cultural influence can give me good reason to think I am evidentially lucky with respect to *p*. For I will think that if I had been born into a different culture, I wouldn't have the evidence I do for *p*, and so (at least in many cases involving controversial beliefs) wouldn't believe that *p*. This will include

17. This is important because it allows safety to apply to beliefs in necessary truths. A necessary truth is not false in any possible world, but the way in which one arrived at one's belief in a necessary truth may be such that it would easily lead one to believe falsely in nearby world. Pritchard (2012, 257) offers the example of someone using a calculator that generates answers randomly, but happens to produce the correct answer in response to a particular input. In this case, while what's believed is true in every world, the way in which the belief in that proposition is formed leads one to believe falsely in nearby worlds.

my propositional and experiential evidence, along with my seemings. For example, if I'm a Christian, I will think that if I had been born into a Buddhist culture, it is likely that I wouldn't have encountered arguments for God's existence. Moreover, I won't have had the experience of attending church, participating in the sacraments, praying to God, and the like. I will also think that it wouldn't seem to me that God exists, since I have reason to think that it doesn't seem (or, at least doesn't seem to nearly to the same extent) to most of those who are born into Buddhist cultures that God exists. For these reasons, I will think that I am evidentially lucky with respect to my Christian beliefs.

As we've seen, however, evidential luck does not prevent me from knowing that *p*. Does it prevent me from rationally believing that *p*? I don't think so. For one thing, if I know that evidential luck is compatible with knowledge, then I shouldn't think that my being evidentially lucky prevents me from knowing. But even if I don't know that evidential luck is compatible with knowledge (suppose I have never thought about the matter), then recognizing that I'm evidentially lucky with respect to my belief that *p* need not give me a defeater for that belief, since part of what's involved in being evidentially lucky is having evidence that supports *p*. Just as the man in Unger's example who recognizes he's evidentially lucky with respect to his belief that he will be fired need not think he thereby has a defeater, neither does one who recognizes she's evidentially lucky with respect to her religious beliefs need to think she thereby has a defeater.

We might put this point as follows: If I think I'm evidentially lucky with respect to *p*, then I will think both (a) that I have good evidence, *e*, for *p*, and (b) that I'm lucky to be in possession of *e*. If this is supposed to give me a defeater, then it must be because I think (b) is problematic (since, presumably, I won't think the fact that I have good evidence for *p* poses an epistemic threat). If I do in fact think (b) is problematic, then I will have a defeater. However, the point of the preceding discussion is that I need not think that (b) is problematic. Neither being evidentially lucky with respect to *p* nor thinking that one is evidentially lucky with respect to *p* is incompatible with rationally believing that *p*. Thus, if evidential luck is the only kind of luck that is involved when

reflecting on cultural influence, then it appears that there is no reason to be skeptical of culturally influenced beliefs.

4.7.2 *Cultural Influence and Veritic Luck*

While thinking I'm evidentially lucky with respect to my culturally influenced beliefs need not threaten the epistemic status of those beliefs, thinking that I'm veritically lucky with respect to those beliefs does threaten their epistemic status. If, upon reflection, I think that my culturally influenced belief that *p* is veritically lucky, then I will think that even though that belief meets all of the conditions that I think are relevant for knowledge, it is a matter of luck that my belief that *p* is true. In a situation like this, I will think that my culturally influenced beliefs are like the beliefs of those in Gettier cases. Are there good reasons for thinking that I am veritically lucky with respect to my culturally influenced beliefs?

Note that the issue here—insofar as the focus is on undermining rather than blocking debunkers—is not whether the belief *actually is* veritically lucky, but whether I *believe* that it is veritically lucky. A belief's being veritically lucky (or unsafe) may prevent that belief from constituting knowledge, but it need not thereby threaten the rationality of that belief. The beliefs of those in Gettier cases are veritically lucky, yet it remains the case the subjects in those cases have good evidence for their beliefs. The problem is that there is something that undercuts the connection between their (good) evidence and their belief. As White (2010, 596) writes, "If we are convinced by Gettier's examples we judge that Smith for example lacks knowledge while lacking nothing in the way of justification. He has perfectly good evidence strongly supporting his conviction, he ought not change his opinion one iota (without obtaining further evidence)."¹⁸ This

18. Similarly, Engel Jr. (2011) writes, "Since *S* need not know or even believe that she is not Gettiered with respect to *p* in order to know that *p*, the possibility of Gettier-style, knowledge-destroying, veritic luck poses no special obstacle to first-order knowledge."

means that while veritic luck might pose a problem for knowledge, it doesn't pose a problem for the justification or rationality of one's belief.¹⁹

But while the *fact* that my belief is veritically lucky doesn't threaten the justification or rationality of that belief, *believing* that it is veritically lucky or unsafe does. This is because if I think my belief is veritically lucky, I have an undercutting defeater for that belief. To see why, note that safety is a modal reliability condition.²⁰ On this understanding, to say that a belief is safe is tantamount to saying that it is formed in a reliable way. In light of this, if I think that my belief is veritically lucky, then I have some reason to think that it was not reliably produced. And if I have reason to think my belief was not reliably produced, then I have reason to give up that belief.

Should reflection on cultural influence make me think that my culturally influenced beliefs are veritically lucky? To answer this question, first recall the discussion from chapter two about the way in which many culturally influenced beliefs arise. There, I argued that the immediate basis of a culturally influenced belief that *p* is a seeming that *p*. That seeming is the product of a number of different factors—testimony, experiences, social pressure, epistemic standards, and perhaps others. Those factors cause a seeming that *p*, and it is on the basis of that seeming that I believe that *p*. If I think my culturally influenced belief is veritically lucky, then I will think that this process is such that in nearby possible worlds it would have led me to believe something that is false. For example, I will think that if I had been born into a different religious culture, a process similar to the one that led to my actual religious beliefs would have led me to have other religious beliefs that (in the actual world) I think are false.

19. On the question of whether veritic luck (in connection with the safety condition) prevents knowledge in cases of cultural influence, see the discussions in (White 2010), (Bogardus 2013) and (Baker-Hytch 2014).

20. As Becker (2009) writes, because safety and sensitivity “share process reliabilism’s commitments to externalism and fallibilism, and because they aim to explicate how knowledge requires more than an accidental connection between belief and truth—it requires a reliable link—they belong in the reliabilist family.” Similarly, Baker-Hytch (2014, 174) writes, “On the one hand, there is what might be termed modal reliability. Modal reliability is what is lacking in a Gettier case, in which a subject is lucky, in a certain sense, to wind up with a true rather than false belief. . . . Duncan Pritchard has termed this kind of luck ‘veritic luck.’ A modal reliability condition on knowledge aims to exclude precisely this sort of luck.”

However, as the arguments of the previous two chapters showed, if I think that my culturally influenced beliefs were formed in an unreliable way, then I should also think that a significant number of my other beliefs—beliefs that appear to suffer from no epistemic shortcomings—were formed in an unreliable way. This is because the same process that led to many of my controversial beliefs also led to many other, seemingly uncontroversial beliefs. As we have seen, it is difficult to identify why cultural influence makes the seemings that arise from those factors problematic when it comes to our controversial beliefs, but not when it comes to our other, uncontroversial beliefs.

In light of this, it appears that I shouldn't think that cultural influence makes my controversial beliefs veritically lucky unless I should think that many of my other beliefs about uncontroversial matters are veritically lucky.²¹ Because skepticism stemming from cultural influence about those uncontroversial beliefs seems implausible, I should conclude that skepticism stemming from cultural influence about controversial beliefs seem implausible.²² Thus, I need not conclude that cultural influence makes my controversial beliefs veritically lucky, and, for that reason, reflection on cultural influence need not give me a defeater for those beliefs.²³

21. Baker-Hytch (2014) draws a similar conclusion when considering an argument from cultural contingency that appeals to the failure of safety. His account, however, does not appeal to the kinds of considerations about that way in which cultural influence works that motivate my argument for the same conclusion. Bogardus (2013) also considers an argument from cultural variability in terms of safety. However, he argues that safety isn't necessary for knowledge in the first place, so thinking my belief is unsafe need not give me reason to think my belief is problematic.

22. Again, the "stemming from cultural influence" bit is important. For, it may well be the case that I have other reasons to be skeptical about my controversial beliefs (e.g., disagreement). That, however, is clearly a reason for skepticism that is distinct from cultural influence.

23. My claim here is not that I can avoid getting a defeater simply by asserting the reliability of the process that led to my religious beliefs. I cannot, for example, say that my belief is not veritically lucky because if it was, I wouldn't be reliable and I am, in fact, reliable. My claim, rather, is that the defeater can be avoided because it threatens to lead to a much broader and much more implausible skepticism. In other words, it is the implausibility of widespread skepticism that allows me to avoid getting a defeater, not my belief that I am reliable. As White (2010, 574–75) writes, "If premises aimed at a more limited target turn out to entail that we are not justified in believing much of anything then this just shows that we are imposing implausibly strong constraints on justification."

4.8 Conclusion

I have argued that the question of whether or not our culturally influenced beliefs are defeated by the recognition that we could have believed differently if different cultural influences had been at work depends on the conditions under which one acquires a defeater. Principles that claim we have a defeater when we lack a reason to think we are reliable lead to implausible consequences, and should therefore be rejected. Likewise, principles that claim we have a defeater when we have a good dispute-independent reason to think we are unreliable are implausible because they lead to general skepticism. A more plausible principle about defeat is one that claims we acquire a defeater when we do or should doubt that we are both reliable and more reliable than our counterfactual selves. Whether or not such a principle actually does result in a defeater depends on the strength of the relevant evidence. There is, however, no reason to suppose that the recognition of cultural influence always gives one a defeater for one's beliefs.

Of course, if one avoids getting a defeater from cultural influence, then one might think one is lucky to have gotten things right, and this thought about being lucky might itself be viewed as a defeater. But there are several kinds of epistemic luck, and only one of those—veritic luck—threatens to provide one with a defeater. This is because if one thinks that one's belief that *p* is veritically lucky (or unsafe), then one has reason to think one is unreliable with respect to *p*. However, one need not think that one's culturally influenced belief is veritically lucky, and so the recognition that one is lucky to believe as one does need not provide one with a defeater for one's culturally influenced beliefs.

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Is it irrational to believe something when that belief reflects the influence of one's culture or community? Some have argued that it is, especially when it comes to beliefs about controversial matters like religion, morality, and politics. In my dissertation, I first situate the problem of cultural influence within the broader discussion surrounding irrelevant influences on one's beliefs. After clarifying the way in which one's beliefs are influenced by one's culture, I argue that neither the fact nor the recognition that one's belief has been influenced by one's culture is sufficient to render that belief unjustified or irrational.

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