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Chapter Four

We Are All of the Common Herd:

Montaigne and the Psychology of our ‘Importunate Presumptions’

Psychologists and Philosophers on our Bias Blind Spot

Let me begin this chapter by bringing back to attention the caption quote to Part II, Montaigne’s quote:

Our eyes see nothing behind us. A hundred times a day we make fun in the person of our neighbor, and detest in others, defects which are more clearly present in ourselves, and we marvel at them with prodigious impudence and heedlessness.

Oh, importunate presumption!

Montaigne's recognition of our many 'importunate presumptions' captures quite well a central claim in contemporary psychology, that our species suffers from a common *bias blind spot*. The judgments we make in ignorance of our own biases Montaigne calls our importunate presumptions, and he suggests a host of practical factors that make them appealing. Montaigne associates many of our errors with one or another kind of presumption, often about our similarity or differences from others, or from God. Our obvious psychographic diversity, and the polemical ground dynamics involved in our 'culture wars' are compounded on the agential side by the invisibility of our biases to ourselves. "We are all huddled and concentrated in ourselves, and our vision is reduced to the length of our nose. We are all unconsciously in this error, an error of great consequence and harm."¹ So many of our presumptions are ego, ethnic, or anthropocentric. Some may do much better at the reflective task of recognizing and/or compensating for their biases, but none of us are above them. Montaigne emphasizes their costs as well as their causes, a cost that is both moral and cognitive. Morally, he finds it a sad irony that "Our religion is made to extirpate vices; it covers them, fosters them, incites them." Cognitively, there is a matching irony: "for it comes to pass that nothing is more firmly believed than things *least* well-known." Here again, while these points focus on extremes, and reflect times of intra-Christian warfare in which Montaigne lived, I find them quite relevant today.

This chapter is concerned with connections between the comparative study of fundamentalism and the psychological study of biases and heuristics. In what ways might biases and heuristics play a special role in aiding our understanding of, and response to, fundamentalist orientation? The first section looks at efforts to provide useful scales for fundamentalist orientation; it also introduces research on a number of personal and social biases that plausibly affect *all* of our beliefs in domains of controversial views, religious views included. This is

background for the second section. The comparative study of fundamentalisms, religious radicalization, and religion and violence all recognize *formal similarities* among groups of religious believers. The proximate causes of belief are all that we can study, and in these there may be significant etiological symmetries. Yet those groups themselves, especially to the extent that they are exclusivist, are tunnel-visioned on claims of doctrinal uniqueness: on *content differences* of a theological sort. Todd Tremlin makes a point similar to this when he writes,

[W]hen we cut beneath the variegation in religious representations found around the world, we find a basic set of cognitive building blocks that simultaneously constrains possible variation and betrays an underlying unity to the diversity that does exist... It is attention to this shared psychology, and to the conceptual unity beneath cultural diversity, that revivifies the ‘comparative’ study of religion....²

The second section turns our attention to this intreaguig tension between form and content, or between etiological symmetry and doctrinal uniqueness. It asks how we get from etiological symmetry with respect to the proximate causes of belief, to not just religious “diversity,” but to religious “contrariety” and to even to contrariety of a polarized and polemical sort. Under what conditions can etiological symmetry be predicted to give rise to religious contrariety? There I present a kind of ‘genealogy’ of religious absolutism and exclusivism – importunate presumptions in the religious domain – broken down into steps where the role of biases can hopefully be more easily recognized.

As a brief aside before moving to the first topic, allow me to reflect on the fortunes of comparative philosophy of religion. Tremlin mentions “revivifying” this field, and this strikes me as the right goal particularly with respect to comparative fundamentalism (hereafter CF). This

field seems to have gotten off to a strong start, but then languished in recent decades, even as a lot of good work has been done in CSR. There are multiple reasons for this. One reason why interest in CF has not been strong is that it has followed a path similar to that of comparative philosophy and comparative methods in religious studies more generally. When I was a graduate student, comparative philosophy and comparative religious studies enjoyed a higher profile than they do today. Today, Hickian or neo-Kantian ‘essences’ of religion are for many scholars out; for the most part, so is the ‘correctness’ of the religious pluralist’s attempt to stress theological similarities rather than differences, ecumenism, and common ground rather than different ground. Radical “particularity” and the uniqueness of each tradition is back in. Under these conditions studies of similarities across religions or families of religion are largely uninteresting and possibly irresponsible projects conducted by individuals who do not really know what it is like to practice a particular faith tradition and to make it the basis of one’s worldview.³

Reported dissatisfaction with Kantian essences, with Hick’s Real in itself beyond human categories of thought aside, and with Tillich’s broad notion of religion as ultimate concern, is arguably only part of the reason for recent relative neglect of comparative methods. The larger reason is the postmodern and postliberal ‘turns’ in theology beginning around in the 1970’s. The two latter movements, post-modernism and post-liberalism seem in many ways counter-point to one another. They make strange bedfellows, as many have noted, since while they both champion particularity, post-modernist epistemology tends towards relativism and social constructionism, while post-liberalism as I understand it is the rejection of liberal theology in favour of religious absolutism and biblical literalism.⁴ But however different post-modern and post-liberal trends in theology may be, they do overlap at points, and on the view I will present, one of those overlaps is that they both tend to detract from the recognition that there are features

of religion that can be compared across traditions, and made the basis of scientific study. Those who think we need, or have entered a “post-liberal” or “post-Enlightenment” era, are often also the same who discount far too quickly the possibility and value of comparisons, both in theological content and in the proximate causes of belief, across families of the world’s religions.⁵ In philosophical terms of the 20th-century, the ‘myth of the given’ morphs into its mirror image, the ‘myth of the framework,’ simplistic foundationalism into radical anti-foundationalism and relativism. But of course cognitive relativism does not sit well with religious absolutism, and celebration of cultural particularity of the sort that post-modern theology supports together with dialogue for post liberals like Griffiths (1991; 1994) becomes a ground to reject the value of ecumenism and even of inter-religious dialogue. Proselytizing may be part of one’s evangelical religious identity, but “dialogue” in the sense of opening one’s own nurtured beliefs to criticism by religious aliens is described as pointless. For religious belief systems are taken as closed or sacrosanct in a way that makes *inter*-cultural critique normatively impotent, and compromise unthinkable. So “particularity,” “uniqueness,” and especially “intratextuality” have become buzz words of post-liberals, whether simply conservative or influenced by post-modernism. Why not instead say neither post-modern nor post-liberal, but simply *retribalized*?⁶ We should worry with Jeffrey Stout and the editors of the *Comparative Religious Ethics* collection (2016), that “tradition” can be employed rhetorically or in triumphalist ways that shut down understanding rather than as a term that engages recognition either of similarities *or* specific differences: “Of course, attention to particularism can move from a salutary and humbling recognition of the contingencies and contestability of one’s own location to a form of ideological identity politics that turns into a presumptive insistence that *this*, simply by being *this*, cannot also be *that*....”⁷

Neglect of etiological symmetry comes not just from fundamentalists. But the study of fundamentalist orientation is one area where etiological symmetry and asymmetry in trait-ascriptions are both highly relevant. Against the combination of neglect of etiological symmetry and over-estimation of content-uniqueness, I suggest we start over with Montaigne's recognition that "Each man bears the entire form of the human condition," and that "We are all of the common herd."⁸ These are two claims that are being confirmed to us in study after study in psychology and evolutionary theory. Humans appear hardwired to be part of a group, and we rely on our ingroup for many of our ideas. Mark van Vugt, who has studied group biases extensively, writes, "Human belongingness needs are embedded within a marked ingroup/outgroup psychology. Many studies show that our social identities are boosted through inducing competition, either real or symbolic, between groups."⁹

Turning to the psychological understanding of fundamentalist orientation, Hood, Hill and Williamson (2005) organize their fundamentalism scale around six attitudes that fundamentalists characteristically maintain toward their sacred text. Fundamentalist adherents to traditions of revelation "are forced to defend a particular text elevated to distinctiveness as *the* sacred text containing *the* revelation from *the* Supreme Being":

From the outside, there are many sacred text, allowing us to speak of various 'fundamentalisms.' But to do so is to be keenly aware that one has moved into a study of the *structure and process* of fundamentalist belief and away from a study of the *content* of fundamentalist belief, which... is best viewed as orthodoxy [and] orthodoxy is by definition tradition-specific....¹⁰

A recent article in *Scientific American Mind* highlighted a range of de-biasing strategies and theoretical approaches to religious radicalization that the authors believe may help us break what they term “the cycle of co-radicalization.” People sometimes have different core values. In the healthy cultural salad bowl or melting pot this is fine, but “when groups start becoming isolated from conventional society, this innate propensity to ‘swarm and norm’ can form a springboard for cliques, cults and other kinds of extremists.”¹¹ Intra-communally these behavioral tendencies can become a platform for groupthink conformity, and for not carefully questioning consensus opinion. Inter-communally, or between groups, they can become a springboard for group polarization. In certain group settings, people report experiencing “identity fusion,” where boundaries between individual and group identities break down and we empathize with our peers to an extraordinary degree. But at the same time, our moral empathy often evaporates when it comes to outgroupers. “The mind-set of us versus them – the psychological Ground Zero for all discrimination and prejudice.”¹²

This statement makes our Bias Blind Spot one of the deeper and more intractable problems, both morally and epistemologically. Let’s discuss seeing others as more prone to bias than yourself, since this has been demonstrated with groups in addition to individuals. There is a substantial body of work in psychology, a good deal of it due to Emily Pronin and her collaborators, which evidences “a broad pervasive tendency for people to see the existence and operation of bias much more than others that in themselves.”¹³ This is the exact insight, it seems to me, that Montaigne expresses in his point about our importunate presumptions and the difficulty of recognizing them as such!

Our bias blind spot and our tendency to engage in doubtful, sharply asymmetrical characterological trait-ascriptions are intimately connected. Both can be a reflection of what psychologists working on human conflict and conflict resolution refer to as naïve realism. One manifestation or marker of our bias-blind spot is self-versus-others asymmetries; another is attributions involving ingroup-outgroup traits. In Pronin, Gilovich, and Ross's terms

Important asymmetries between self-perception and social perception arise from the simple fact that other people's actions, judgments, and priorities sometimes differ from one's own. This leads people not only to make more dispositional inferences about others than about themselves ... but also to see others as more susceptible to a host of cognitive and motivational biases.”¹⁴

Our social biases make self-privileging strategies of explanation appealing to us; charging others with bias can be a self-exculpating strategy. Bias-charging is sometimes well-motivated and sometimes not, but it is almost always attended with an implicit assumption of asymmetrical insight on the part of the attributor. In “You Don't Know me, but I Know You: The Illusion of Asymmetric Insight,” Pronin, Kruger, Savitsky, and Ross analyze studies that test the hypothesis that people often exhibit “an asymmetry in assessing their own interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge relative to that of their peers.”¹⁵ We see it when our peers make self-serving attributions on tasks like explaining one's own and others' test performance. We judge them as biased. But we are more likely to judge our own similarly self-serving attributions to be free of bias. It is not just doctors who report that other doctors but not themselves are susceptible professional perks in the pharmaceutical they prescribe. In addition to seeing others as biased when they are, but largely exempting ourselves, we can also go so far as to infer that others are

biased, when such an attribution is *merely* self-serving, and not based in fact. We can even impute motivational or cognitive bias (impugning motives, or doubting the sincerity or competence of others) *just because* they differ from us in what they believe; such evidentially unmotivated bias-charging is itself a marker of this extreme form of bias.

Psychologists recognize multiple specific social biases, and different contexts in which they are commonly displayed. Specific concerns with symmetry and asymmetry in explanations were crucial to the design of many of the cited psychological experiments, and to the hypotheses they test. Pronin and Ross in particular have also suggested broader application of their findings by describing more of the psychology of “naïve realism” that biased trait-attributions often presupposes: “although this blind spot regarding one's own biases may serve familiar self-enhancement motives, it is also a product of the phenomenological stance of naive realism.”¹⁶ These psychologists therefore raise theoretical and practical questions directly relevant to our own project, questions about “the relevance of these phenomena to naïve realism and to conflict, misunderstanding, and dispute resolution.”¹⁷

Now if, as seems plausible, religious thinking sometimes plies upon social biases and heuristics, this should not lead to positing biases that are completely unique to the religious domain. Comparative philosophers and CSR scholars seem to agree on this. Even if there could be some bias that is unique to inferences from statements with religious or metaphysical content, it would be a strange assumption to think that the biases affecting religious ideas are somehow domain-specific. Rather, although manifesting in religious ideas, they are more likely to be the effects of biases like *Ingroup-Outgroup Bias* that psychologists have identified through more general studies of biases and heuristics. The point is that an array of cognitive, perceptual and

motivational biases affect human judgment and decision making, and what would be miraculous is if this were not the case only in one particular domain, or for adherents of one religion or sect. Our biases affect our social interactions in all domains, and all that we need to presume at this point is that religion is no principled exception to this rule.

Cristina Cleveland points out that when social biases like *Ingroup-Outgroup Bias* do take hold — in whatever sphere of life—“the tendency to cling to rigid and oversimplified categories of other groups quickly leads us to exaggerate differences between *us* and *them*”:

We want to be perceived as different from *them* so we exaggerate our differences with the other group... In fact, we often distinguish ourselves from other groups even when there's no logical reason to do so.... This natural inclination to obsess over the characteristics that distinguish our group from other groups is exacerbated by the fact that we spend the majority of our time with fellow group members who confirm our beliefs, culture, and way of life.... Exaggerating differences also gives way to wider differences in viewpoints. This is called *perspective divergence* --[or] *the gold standard effect* – and is one of the main causes of divisions between groups...lead[ing] us to believe that not only are we different from them, but we are also better than them.¹⁸

False consensus effect, according to Tricia Yurak, “demonstrates a kind of bias to which people fall prey to in their typical thinking, thus often referred to as a cognitive bias.

Unfortunately we fall prey to a number of such biases. This is problematic when we consider how often in our daily lives we make judgments about others...”¹⁹ False consensus effect occurs when people believe or estimate that others are more similar to them than is actually the case.

Pluralistic ignorance refers to cases of actual similarity being interpreted as dissimilarity:

Unlike the other biases which seem to be self-serving, pluralistic ignorance emphasizes the individual's distinctiveness and even alienation from others.... Several studies have shown that people underestimate the proportion who also behave in a socially desirable way—an indication of false uniqueness. For example, persons who regularly engage in physical activity tend to underestimate the actual proportion of other people who exercise. For undesirable attributes and behaviors (such as smoking cigarettes), people overestimate the proportion of peers who behave the same way they do.... This bias is thought to be the result of a self-enhancement or self-protective motivation: By underestimating the number of other people who behave desirably, the person can feel distinctively positive. On the other hand, perceiving one's undesirable behaviors or attributes as more common than they actually are can create a feeling of safety in numbers, and help to justify irresponsible practices....²⁰

False consensus effect and pluralistic ignorance arguably have especially strong connection with counter-inductive thinking. They are essentially egocentric biases. By contrast, *Ingroup-Outgroup Bias* and *False Uniqueness Bias* regard us/them relations. Russell Spears writes, "One of the key objectives of research in intergroup relations has been to explain evidence of ingroup bias in its various forms, as a necessary step to reduce and resolve intergroup discrimination." Social identity theory is one of the leading available theories, aiming to explain why, for more symbolic reasons than simple self-interest or self-protection, people discriminate in favor of their group. According to Spears, "The explanation proposed for this [is]

that such discrimination provides the group with distinctiveness that can enhance the identity and self-esteem of ingroup members.... More recently social identity theory has been extended by emotion theory to explain the more malicious forms of prejudice and discrimination towards outgroups and the different forms this may take....”²¹

Bias may be detected even where superiority is not assumed, as people naturally-enough use their own culture as the touchstone for making comparisons. Correlations between ingroupers and out-groupers are not always negative for ethnocentric thinkers. But often when they *are* negative, they elicit a false uniqueness bias. False uniqueness permits an individual or group to self-attribute exceptional traits or behaviors. “This perception may support general feelings of self-worth, but it also might contribute to overconfidence and lead to negative impressions of peers.”

Another, sometimes related effect is *confabulation*. William Hirstein writes, “Confabulation involves absence of doubt about something one should doubt: one’s memory, one’s ability to move one’s arm, one’s ability to see, etc. It is a sort of pathological certainty about ill-grounded thoughts and evidences.” More than simple rationalization, “Confabulators don’t know that they don’t know what they claim.” Hirstein gives these conditions:

“Jan confabulates if and only if:

- 1) Jan claims that *p* (e.g., Jan claims that her left arm is fine).
- 2) Jan believes that *p*.
- 3) Jan’s thought that *p* is ill-grounded.

4) Jan does not know that her thought is ill-grounded.

5) Jan should know that her thought is ill-grounded.

6) Jan is confident that p .”²²

Confabulation is arguably of special philosophic concern when it manifests in connection with the holding of controversial views for which there are strong etiological challenges. Confabulation is counter-point to contingency anxiety, though they could be seen as two different ways to deal with the cognitive or moral dissonance. If we fill in that claiming or believing “that p” in the above is a claim or belief *about a trait asymmetry between Jan and another person or persons*, then we can see that asymmetry and confabulation are often found combined. Often we confabulate to actually hide a bias from ourselves. Rationalizing an asymmetric ascription or explanation on weak rational grounds *incites* psychological contingency anxiety or another form of cognitive dissonance, which may in turn leads to confabulatory explanations. Because the operation of bias typically eludes conscious awareness, introspection is a poor tool for its discovery. Favoring intuitional methods invites my-side bias, where people evaluate evidence, generate evidence, and test hypotheses in ways biased toward their own prior opinions and attitudes. Critical thinkers need a solid understanding of general human biases and heuristics, and of their potential effects on our cognitive and moral judgment. For purposes of our study we should delve beyond bias blind spot, with its interpersonal and group asymmetries, and describe a number of more specific social biases that affect the ways that people acquire and maintain beliefs across various domains. I do not make direct connections to religion in this section, but simply ask the reader to keep in mind how these biases *could be* instanced where persons, narratives, or theologies ascribe traits differentially to religious insiders and outsiders. More specific connections between bias studies and religious apologetic strategies can be approached later.

We could pursue this line of reasoning, but the more general psychological tendencies to resist epistemic norms, and hence to incur inductive risk, is simply *directional thinking*. Michael

Philips gives many examples to show how wide-spread directional thinking is, and cites studies showing that humans are not very good at recognizing it in ourselves.²³ Seeing directional thinking and its effects as centrally important, he argues that philosophers often ignore it and that psychologists have not gone far enough in constructing markers and tests. It is not easy, but directional thinking can be tested for:

Since few of us realize that our thinking is directional when we are doing it, experimenters can't rely on what we tell them to identify directional thinking and discover how widespread it is. Instead, they test it by asking experimental subjects to evaluate a theory (a study, or a packet of information) that is unwelcome news to some of them and either welcome or neutral news to the others. If the group to whom the results are unwelcome reject or criticize them significantly more often than the group to whom they are welcome, experimenters infer that they are not evaluating what they have read or heard on the basis of the evidence alone (however much they may think they are). That is, they infer that what the subject wants to believe plays an important role in determining what they *do* believe. If the experimenters can run these experiments with enough variation of belief types, circumstances, and subjects, they can determine the extent to which and the conditions under which we believe what we want to believe.²⁴

If Philips is correct that both philosophy and the experimental literature on directional thinking remains underdeveloped, more attention on trait-attribution symmetry and asymmetry could help: "If it is to have important practical implications, the experimental literature needs to

be much more fine – tuned than this. It needs to tell us how to recognize directional thinking in ourselves and others. It also needs to tell us what the so-called ‘reality constraints’ are for different people under different circumstances and to what degree they constrain us.”²⁵

Relatedly, classical *Attribution Theory* tends to treat explanations as a purely cognitive activity, and the worry with this is that there is no accounting for the social functions of explanation.

Without such attention, psychologists may fail to identify psychological factors besides raw information that influence the explanations people construct. Specifying these factors, however, is arguably key to predicting such important phenomena as actor-observer asymmetries, and self-serving biases.²⁶ Our suggested measures for counter-inductive thinking, while they are far from precise, are intended as a contribution to the study of directional thinking.

Researchers have done quite a bit of work on asymmetries in children’s induction projections, and on category-based induction more generally. These studies begin to illuminate the conditions under which disparities between in and outgroups, and asymmetries of trait-ascription arise.²⁷ In attribution studies there is research on actor-observer differences in people’s behavioural explanations, and we have reviewed some of this “ingroup-outgroup attribution research.” But Knobe and Malle (2002) argue convincingly that attribution theory has sometimes been burdened by efforts to reduce a multiplicity of different effects to a single, unifying one. They sketch a very different framework for understanding folk explanations of behavior, a framework on which different processes are more readily acknowledged, and allowed to involve different effects. Amenable to our own concern to develop better scales for fundamentalist orientation, the authors suggest that, “This new framework gives a central role to the distinctions among various types of explanations. How do actors and observers choose which events to explain? How do they choose whether to give reason explanations or causal history

explanations? When do they choose to offer beliefs and when desires? And how do they choose whether or not to linguistically mark belief reasons?”²⁸

This brings us back around to the attribution of luck, whether religious luck or some other kind. Explanations in terms of good or bad luck we have seen are often highly asymmetrical and applied in a manner favouring the ingroup. They may for these reasons be akin to what psychologists in more clinical psychiatric settings call *confabulatory explanations*. If so, our approach through problems of religious luck and the inductive risk that asymmetric ascriptions of religious value entail, provides resources. It arguably provides the right kind of theory to suggest fruitful hypotheses, and to improve psychological markers and measures of confabulation. That agents ‘mask’ their explanations and value-ascriptions in distinctly theological terms is to be expected, and does not mean that ascriptions of religious value/luck aren’t prime examples of this more general phenomena.

We need significantly more studies of laypeople’s perceptions of luck, including religious luck. What Hales and Johnson (2014) investigate experimentally about attributions of moral luck is potentially of still stronger validity and import with regard to attributions of religious luck: practices of asymmetric trait-ascription that appeal to luck in a ‘masked’ way. The authors hypothesized that “the luck attributions of naive participants are shot through with various cognitive biases,’ including the cognitive bias of framing,” where framing is understood as a change in the wording of a problem. Participants in their studies read and answered questions about the luckiness of events in various short narratives of “vignettes.” For these investigators, the deep worry is that,

The existence of pervasive bias raises the possibility that there is no such thing as luck. It may be that attributions of luck are a form of *post hoc* storytelling, or even mythmaking; that they are merely a narrative device used to frame stories of success or failure.... [L]uck is a cognitive illusion, and assignments of luck are merely a way to subjectively interpret our experience.²⁹

So what implications might studies of bias have for intra and inter-religious relations? In summary thus far, we have reviewed important individual and group biases, but they are biases that can affect us in all domains of controversial views. If I cannot show that exclusivist attitudes towards religious multiplicity *manifest* known social biases we have reviewed, I can argue that they *mirror* them, and that this fact is a marker of high inductive risk. But before going on to explain how etiological symmetry can give rise, when it plies on bias, to polarized contrariety, I want to acknowledge that there are a good number of religious philosophers who are today encouraging more critical thinking about religious disagreement, and even taking deliberate steps to incorporate bias studies into their religious epistemics. To introduce someone whose work we will discuss at some length in later chapter, Olli-Pekka Vainio carefully examines causes of disagreement in two books, *Beyond Fideism: Negotiable Religious Identities* (2010), and *Disagreeing Virtuously: Religious Conflict in Interdisciplinary Perspective* (2017). Vainio closely relates these issues to the need to understand religious fideism: “While the social theories of this postliberal theological wave are predominantly communitarian, their philosophical theories of religion have been claimed to be ‘fideistic.’ What does this concept mean?”³⁰

Looking ahead, we will develop an answer to this question in Chapters 5 and 6 that incorporates Vainio’s (2010) work clarifying different types of fideism, and his emphasis on the

need to recognize variety in the ways that faith and reason are understood to be related in the “belief-policies” or “theological methods” recommended in different faith traditions. While I will make some specific criticisms of *Disagreeing Virtuously*, I broadly agree with his virtue-theoretic approach to philosophy of religion as common-ground between theologians and philosophers, and with his attempt to use psychological studies to make theologians and laypersons aware that “if we were more conscious about the way our minds work, we could be more effective in resolving our disputes” (80).

How Etiological Symmetry Begets Religious Contrariety in Testimonial Traditions

Our approach to ‘scaling’ the brick wall of religious fundamentalism directs us to identify some unique ways in which fundamentalists think, rather than what specific beliefs they hold. This more formal rather than belief-based approach I think coheres with the approach of researchers in the field of comparative fundamentalism. James Peacock and Tim Pettyjohn for example argue that narrative is an especially useful analytical window into fundamentalist religious traditions. “The analysis of narratives leads us to look at representation instead of looking for essence. Our materials are stories told by fundamentalists about themselves, not abstract categories such as ‘belief’ or ‘faith’ (although these certainly find their way into the narratives).”³¹ Starting with this excellent methodological suggestion, we can next describe four ‘steps’ that illustrate a common way that etiological symmetry begets polarized and polemical religious contrariety.

Step One: Narrative Content Confounds our Source Monitoring

Source-monitoring is a very important concern both for comparative fundamentalism and CSR. Naïve realism, as psychologists like Pronin and Ross use the concept, seems to be exhibited in agents in cases of the kind that philosophers such as Lisa Bortolotti & Matthew Broome (2009) refer to as *failures of belief ownership and authorship*.³² Robert McCauley, a leading figure in CSR, notes that under certain circumstances we can all be prone to failures in distinguishing *inner* from *outer* sources of phenomenal experience. He studies source monitoring primarily through focus on popular religiosity and on people who report experiences of hearing voices. How, and how reliably or unreliably, do agents attribute their phenomenal experience to an outer versus an inner source? In pathological cases such as schizophrenia the agent disowns or is unusually confused about the status of sources that are in fact internal. “Self-disownership” (or “disowning”) of the sources of one’s experience of course does not always manifest a pathology, but is also ever-present in religious belief, and is similarly a phenomena open to psychological study.

What interests us here is that source monitoring studies open out onto more epistemological issues concerning the reception of *testimony*. The concern with source monitoring can easily be extended to include psychological studies of how competently people recognize differences between simple and narrative testimony, or again, between *assertive* and *narrative* testimonial transmissions.³³ Even apart from a specific interest in religious narrative, it is clear that basing beliefs upon narrative testimony is a complex matter that goes far beyond a simple matter of trust of the author or authors.³⁴ The difficulty of interpreting a narrative and its characters as being intended as history, as moral allegory, or as some mixture of each are compounded as the recipients of the testimony become separated in time from the authors and their original intended audience.³⁵

Rachel Fraser (2017) has codified some of these points by detailing how and why our reliability in source monitoring is particularly challenged when we deal with *narrative* testimony. If we are interested in whether narrative testimony is a good source of beliefs about what the world is like, we should, Fraser argues, find empirical studies on *narrative credulity* quite concerning.³⁶ Test subjects in these studies quite often fail to reliably monitor the differences between historical fact-assertion and story-telling. Charged with the task of interpreting short written vignettes, a substantial portion of test subjects are highly unreliable at such tasks even when the written vignettes include markers of their narrative intent.

We are less reliable in processing narrative, in contrast to simple testimony, since narrative testimony is often ambiguous as to what elements are factual, and what elements are products of imagination. To interpret it, we need a context that allows us to make educated assumptions about author intent. This is generally not an issue either with simple testimony, on the one hand, or fiction on the other. Fiction is narrative, but contrasts with other forms of narrative like biography and auto-biography, which while they always “sharpen” and “level” certain aspects of their subject matter deemed important or non-important, also purport to *inform* us about how things are in the historical world.

Narrative testimony is attended with a unique and rich phenomenology, Fraser argues, one that, especially in recognition of the somatic and modal elements of the reception of narratives, places one in a good position to understand *what it feels like* to have certain experiences.³⁷ You can have knowledge *of the story* without thinking yourself well-situated to have a settled view about whether the personages and events within it as historically accurate, or what the authorial

intent was. One can know the story without knowing or claiming to know what specific audience it was originally a story for, or what the author's intent with respect to that audience.

Fraser argues that differences between narrative and simple testimony shows up at the epistemic as well as the phenomenological level. Arguably, the claims of post-liberals and post-modernists that religious texts can only rightly be understood “intratextually” need to be understood with these *provisos*.³⁸ Narrative testimony behaves in *epistemologically* distinct ways, and there is a crucial trade-off. Narrative testimony comes with a distinct phenomenology, a sense of being enveloped in the story world. We associate no such phenomenology with simple testimony. So the relationship between them is hydraulic: Simple testimony is phenomenologically poorer but epistemically richer, while narrative testimony is phenomenologically richer but epistemically poorer.³⁹ Fraser's strongest thesis is that (religious) narrative testimony places one in a good position to understand what it is like to have certain sorts of (religious) experiences, but in a *poor* position to make factual claims or to gain knowledge of empirical/historical facts.

Unfortunately, the unique features of narrative testimony often go unacknowledged in epistemology –even in the recent resurgence of research on epistemology of testimony! Similarly, the role of imagination in religious understanding is understudied, and despite some efforts to rehabilitate in, is routinely ignored by most theologians and religious philosophers.⁴⁰ Both the unique features of narrative testimony and the special problems people have processing it are generally ignored in discussions of testimonial transmission, trust, and the proper limits of trust. Beyond the claim that these special problems with narrative testimony are often

conveniently ignored, I agree with Fraser that extent models in the epistemology of testimony are rather ill-suited to capturing the unique features of narrative testimonial exchange:

Epistemologists interested in testimony have, for the most part, explored the epistemic dimensions of very simple, one sentence assertions ('simple testimony'). But our testimonial lives are richer than this picture suggests: much of what we tell each other comes packaged as narrative. This matters: the phenomenology typical of reading or hearing narrative is very different to the phenomenology typical of simple testimony –when we read or hear narrative, we often feel immersed or enveloped in the story-world, or feel like the events being described are happening to us in ways rarely associated with simple testimony.⁴¹

We can argue about whether there are religious experts and about what constitutes evidence in the domain, but it is almost unanimously affirmed that unusual testimonial claims, such as claims of psychic power or supernatural occurrence, demand especially strong evidence. We monitor sources of claims as well as claims themselves, and authority or expertise sometimes leads us to accept a claim because an authority figure conveys it. In other areas, there may be no recognized expertise, only self-appointed experts.⁴² When we confuse narrative and simple testimony we don't give the source of the testimony its proper scrutiny. Critical thinking texts teach that responsible reception of testimony involves evaluation both of *claims* and of *sources of claims*. But narrative form appears to distort our credibility judgments about content, and a narrative presented to people as canonized scripture may do the same by distorting one's credibility concerning a particular source of

testimony.⁴³ This is not the place to discuss it, but if this is correct it may have direct implications for discussions of trust and our epistemic dependence on one another.

Step Two: An Adopted Revelation Becomes the Ground for a Self-Awarded ‘Prize’

It is directly relevant to the connections that I want to establish between strong fideistic theological methods and polarized contrariety that Karl Barth writes at the very outset of *Church Dogmatics*, “The basic problem with which Scripture faces us in respect of revelation is that the revelation attested in it refuses to be understood as any sort of revelation alongside which there are or may be others. It insists absolutely on being understood in its uniqueness.” This might well be an example of self-disownership of a belief (something discussed in Step One) since it is the text itself that “refuses” any alternative non-absolutistic understanding. We also earlier (Chapter 1) used Barth’s evangelical account of the testimonial authority of Christian scriptures as an example of a theological method that makes its claim only by leaned on the intervening type of veritic religious luck. We compared the formal structure of his appeal to luck, finding Barth’s soteriology, where God intervenes to make the Christian revelation the lone true means of salvation, highly analogous to a standard Gettier case. The uniqueness of Christianity for Barth as for other strong conformist fideists is manifested by God’s *intervention* to make human religion the vehicle of genuine revelation and salvation, an intervention lucky or unlucky for the individual, depending on how one is situated.

What should strike us as logically odd in Barth’s account is how easily the exclusivist narrative could change. With no more or surer epistemological signposts for humans, God could have ‘meta-chosen’ a different religion, for Barth pulls back from and even explicitly denies any

inherent epistemic superiority in the one chosen.⁴⁴ The uniqueness demand that Barth makes so primary is also inextricable from his way of dealing with religious difference.⁴⁵ *Church Dogmatics* is a long book, but Barth very quickly dispenses with any concern about religious multiplicity. He is not completely flippant about it since he does place himself briefly in conversation with Gotthold Lessing, the Enlightenment-era thinker who's Parable of the Rings in his play *Nathan the Wise* "forbade evangelical theology to award itself the prize in comparison with other theologies." Barth does not engage with any of the reasons that Lessing's tale of the three rings provides for being sceptical of the exclusivist claim that one's own ring or faith tradition is the only one with the truly authoritative 'roots.'

A sacred narrative is a source of testimonial belief, but that testimony is itself a contingent fact, and so cannot prove historical facts from a position independent of faith. Lessing argued both through his play and in his philosophical and theological writings that no historical truth can be demonstrated, and if no historical truth can be demonstrated, then nothing can be demonstrated by *means* of "historical proofs." The soundness of this *modus ponens* argument, would undermine the appeal to scripture as a "proof-text," where this means that it somehow overcomes or bridges the difference between the strength of faith-based conviction, and objective or evidence-driven reasoning.⁴⁶

What our descriptive fideism recognizes as the *fideistic minimum*⁴⁷ to any model of religious faith is just my more formal way of describing the "ugly, broad ditch" that Lessing found that he, or any honest inquirer, must acknowledge. It is closely associated with what prevents Lessing from the prize awarding decision he wishes he could make. For he recognizes the intellectual poverty of it, and how it perpetuates conflict over authoritative 'roots' or special

revelation.⁴⁸ If historical evidence underdetermines faith-based assent, then as Lessing saw, faith-based assent also underdetermines claims about history. Yet while Barth notes Lessing's point he does so only to immediately reject this *epistemological* objection on the *phenomenological* ground that true religion is "self-proclaiming." Prize awarded, it is already time to move on: "For this reason we will dispense with any comparison or evaluation that would separate or synthesize various theologies. Instead, let this simple pointer suffice: the theology to be introduced here is *evangelical* theology."

We see here why Barth believed he needn't worry that the testimonial authority assumption he makes may be mirrored by adherents of *other* testimonial traditions or purported revelations. He explicitly asserts at one point that phenomenological differences *can't* decide on matters of truth, yet (as I read him) seems to miss the point that what he means by the gospel being "self-proclaiming" can only be something phenomenological —something along the lines of what it *feels like* to experience reading the gospels, or to have been a witness to events in a biblical narrative. This suggests that no text "refuses" or "insists" on being treated differently than another, but that these are judgments made only consequent to a personal experience of being emotionally moved by reading the text.

Related self-contradictions appear in Barth's *Church Dogmatics* where some pages further on he writes that evangelical theology is a *modest* and non-boastful theology even though it is "fundamentally and totally different from that of other theologies." This latter claim must mean that Christianity is unique in God's eyes, by his making it and it alone his vehicle for salvation. The claim is *not* that it is fundamentally and totally different on phenomenological, historical, philosophical, etc. grounds, since Barth rejects that. But superiority in the special status God confers on Christianity is clearly presupposed. This superiority lies wholly in

Christianity's all-or-nothing truth, but this truth is, from the epistemological perspective, an evidentially underdetermined assumption that can and is made to adherents of other faith traditions as well. So the grounds of the superiority are epistemically circular.

The circularity of debates over authoritative roots was of course what Lessing's parable was about. Lessing's key contrast is between 'roots' and 'fruits,' that is, between the circular debate over the divine authority of a special revelation a far more enlightened acknowledgment of spiritual fruits to be found in many forms of religiosity, and expressed through mutual respect and toleration. True religiosity bears moral fruit, and this is what the ring was originally supposed to function to do for its wearer: bring love for and all others. Pragmatic fruits are not, in Lessing's parable, something different than Barth's or Lindbeck's "prize." But for Barth and Lindbeck, it is different: what is prized is prized because authoritative. The uniquely authoritative roots of their special revelation are what constitutes it as a prize, and as *to be* prized by the Christian.⁴⁹ Justification by faith alone takes on a radical, arguably new interpretation when take as Christian commitment to authoritative testimonial roots *rather than* anything indicated by pragmatic fruits.

George Lindbeck, like Barth a noted proponent of exclusivism, writes, "What, then, of other religions? *There can be any number of claimants ... but the prize winner stands alone.* The notion of a truly comprehensive outlet defines a class of, at most, a single member."⁵⁰ So none of Lessing's *reasons* for censuring a theology from awarding itself "the prize" seem to be engaged by Barth. After quickly dismissing the significance of disagreement, Barth thereafter treats contrary theological systems as false, and their followers as epistemically vicious. The logical circularity of his fideism could not be more evident than when Barth goes on to assert that the

true believer's knowledge of God is all of "the God who reveals himself *in* the Gospel" [emphasis original]. Barth even describes a person's assent to the unique truth and authority of Christian revelation as encompassing them in "the magic circle."⁵¹

Step Three: 'Have Their Ditch and Cross it, Too,' or, Testimonial Authority Assumption Comes to be Identified with a Propositional View of Revelation

Barthian theology's truck with religious luck-leaning asymmetrical ascriptions of religious truth and value was explored earlier (Chapter 1) when we considered its strong formal similarity to a Gettier-case. But to push further the common formal features of religious fundamentalism, it can be compared with the Avishai Margalit's *propositional* view of revelation, and with Paul Griffiths' defense of the "absolute claims" of religion. In "The Ring," Margalit provides a formal argument for this exclusivist conclusion: "A religion based on constitutive, redemptive, and revealed truths cannot ascribe value to a religion that contradicts these truths. Thus, each religion sees itself as the only true religion and ascribes no value to the others."⁵²

The first premise of the argument for this conclusion, and what is needed to get it off the ground, is that "Revelation is propositional." A propositional view of revelation is presupposed in soteriological and doctrinal exclusivism. Essentially this is the view that God said it, and that what constitutes faith is that one believes it. "A proposition is generally an indicative sentence that makes a statement that can be either true or false...When the revelation is transmitted in book form (the Koran, for example), the transmission itself is propositional." The propositional view asserts that revelation is God's Word, and the agent's role is to assent to it *as* truth. 'God

said it, and God said believe it,' or 'God said it, so I believe it,' is what religious faith and virtue are basically said to be.

We can easily see how narrative content is reduced to what Fraser called "simple" testimony, such that events in narrative are also either "true" or "false," simpliciter. But Margalit then adds, "However, I see the concept of propositional revelation as including commandments as well, such as 'Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.'"53 This adds a second reduction, in this case from value-charged imperatives to human reception as simple fact asserting about piety or divine command. But the second reduction is not more logically suspect than the first, where narrative 'becomes' fact by an act on the part of an interpreter.

Narratives are retained, shared, reinterpreted, and sometimes modified. Narrative and ritual are closely linked in most religions, but how the narrative dimension of religion relates to its doctrinal dimension varies widely by the view of scripture that one assumes. The propositional view fails to recognize differences between simple and narrative testimony; it treats the canonization of scripture quite ahistorically. Creedalism and the propositional view go hand-in-hand. Arguably, if the meaning of narrative cannot be reduced to a group of assertive empirical statements, then by conflating these kinds of meaning the propositional view both over and understates its religious meaning. If so, this easily leads to an impoverished view of faith. This is the sense in which many theologians themselves have noted that fundamentalism based on biblical literalism/inerrantism is something rather new rather than being the long-standing orthodoxy it claims to be. Religious language as treated on the propositional view not only cannot distinguish narrative meaning and historical truth, it also does not allow enough distinction between empirical and metaphorical uses of language, or between univocal, equivocal, and analogical predication.

An agent's affectively-conditioned appropriation of scripture is not logically associated with their meeting a basing requirement for propositional faith. The conflation is evident in various places, including perhaps most especially, for inheritors of a testimonial tradition, in a disregard for differences between narrative and fact-assertive content.⁵⁴ Faith *in* a promise, or *in* one's relationship with the divine gets reduced to faith *that* the teachings, and even narratives, are inerrantly *true*. On the propositional view of revelation, revelation is historical and not existential or dialectical. As one author puts it, "Revelation according to this theory is originally given to a few privileged recipients, to whom the word of God comes directly. Prophets receive the word of God as an interior gift... Revelation, having been received by the prophets and apostles, is then handed down in scriptures and tradition, which constitute the written and oral vehicles of the word of God."⁵⁵ This relates to the absolutistic ways that religious assertions will be treated on the propositional view. Griffiths writes,

Religious claims to truth are typically absolute claims: claims that explain everything; claims about the universal rightness and applicability of a certain set of values together with the ways of life that embody and perpetuate that; and claims whose referent possesses maximal greatness. These tendencies to absoluteness, although they have certainly been typical Christian doctrines, are not typical only of them; they are characteristic also been the most interesting claims made by the religious virtuosi of non-Christian traditions.⁵⁶

Griffiths makes at least two logical mistakes here: failing to distinguish universal from absolute claims, and attributing absolutism to "religions" rather than to fundamentalists within

various religions. Because he takes his own model of faith as normative for everyone, he also fails to acknowledge that many believers even in his own tradition find no need to absolutize as he does.⁵⁷ It is true to say that theologies almost without exception make *universal* claims: claims valid not just for themselves but for all people.⁵⁸ Paul Knitter responds to Griffiths on this point by distinguishing universal and absolutistic claims:

To give up what we are calling *absolute* claims to truth would not mean abandoning both the particular and the universal claims to truth that are inherent in both religious experience and in the teachings of most religions... Particular and universal claims are not at all denied when religions are asked to pull in the range of their absolute claims. Each religion continues to announce that what it contains is really true and important for all people. But in abandoning their absolute claims, each religion would also be open to the possibility (if not probability) that other religious figures or events may also bear truths – very different perhaps – that are also really and universally important.⁵⁹

To be clear, the social phenomena of our construction of ‘enemies in the mirror’ is explicable in philosophic and social psychological terms as prize-awarding, together with the counter-inductive thinking necessary to rationalize one’s fideistic assent. In its most formal sense, counter-inductive thinking is something much more specific than weak inductive reasoning. It is not just weak analogy, weak causal inference, or faulty generalization, to refer to the three forms of inductive reasoning. We follow inductive norms when we draw a generalization about a population or apply such a generalization to predict something about individuals within a population. We follow inductive norms anytime we draw disanalogies and

analogies between two things, and also when we draw a causal implication from things observed to be either positively or negatively correlated. Counter-inductive inference is the logically illicit move of reasoning *oppositely* to what induction suggests. This puts our definition of counter-induction in synch with dictionaries, which define it as a pattern of inference *reversing* the normal logic of induction, a strategy of taking the way things are within our past and present experience not as a *guide*, but as positively *counter-point* to how we should take them to be outside our past and present experience. For our purposes it is more simply a logical failing to apply to one's self (or to one's own epistemic situation) an explanation that one applies to others (and others' epistemic situations).

Step Four: Biased-Closure Inferences Rationalize Peer-Denial and *Pave the Way for 'Easy' Knowledge*

We have discussed inductive reason a great deal but deductive reasoning can also be co-opted by adherents of strongly fideistic models of faith. It is said by some that 'fundamentalism proceeds rationally from its own first assumptions.' I think this gravely overlooks violation of inductive norms, but there is something to it on the deductive side when people accept a deceptively simple 'closure principle' as a way to close out the significance of any claims inconsistent with one's own. The "logic of exclusivism" according to Gavin D'Costa is that "there are certain claims to truth and those other claims that do not conform to these initial claims, explicitly or implicitly, are false."⁶⁰

Christian philosopher Dick-Martin Grube (2015; 2005) understands what we have called biased-closure inferences in terms of the doubtful assumption of a bivalent truth-focused account of religious beliefs. Bivalence “implies a particular way of dealing with that which is genuinely different: It implies that, if position A is true and position B differs from A, B *must* be false. [Yet]... B’s falsity is not affirmed after careful scrutiny by default, viz., simply by virtue of the fact that A is held to be true. Under bivalent parameters, there is no other choice than to consider B to be false. Since only A *or* B can be true but not both, B must be false if A is true. I summarize this point by suggesting that bivalence implies an *equation between difference and falsity*.”⁶¹ Rejecting bivalence as a sound basis for religious epistemics, Grube argues that we cannot “overstep the limits of what is humanly possible to know in order to maintain positive religion.”⁶²

Following these suggestions, let us call *biased-closure inferences* (BCI) the kinds of ‘natural’ but very self-serving inferences people often make from their own belief being true, to any belief contrary to it being false. In biased-closure inferences, the third option with regard to contraries, that they could *both* be wrong, is neglected, and so is the evidence that the disagreement provides that may support inferring that neither the thesis nor its contrary is true. As a psychologically-driven inferences, biased-closure inferences reduce contrariety to simple contradiction, and the central theological or religious claims of the home religion as true or false, simpliciter.⁶³

Epistemologists often focus on a closure principle being necessary to “save knowledge,” but rarely do they give study as to how closure reasoning easily lends itself to a host of *easy knowledge problems*. Closure inferences are biased when they are valid but not sound. If I start with a false belief then closure reasoning will close off truth, simply because truth will be

contrasted with the false belief which is held as true. Even if I start with a justified belief, an uncritical application of a closure principle invites the agent too easily to conclude that no belief incompatible with her own can enjoy positive epistemic status. I am enjoining by this reduction to ‘go binary’ and infer contradiction from what may very well only be contrariety of a lesser sort.⁶⁴

The “contented religious exclusivists,” whose rationality Jerome Gellman defends, is a believer who, as a result of biased-closure inferences, doesn’t care to investigate religious disagreement or to consider adjudicating any causes of disagreement besides what their accepted testimonial authority says about idolaters and un-believers. Gellman’s thesis about contented exclusivism is not just that “religious beliefs may stay rationally unreflective,” but also that “a person’s religious beliefs acquired as described earlier, can legitimately, and without impugning full rationality, serve for assessing other religions or religious claims outside one’s own religious circle.”⁶⁵ One sees the world *very clearly and satisfactorily* through rose-colored glasses, and if other persons wear other shades and see the world differently, it is of no concern to me as a contented exclusivist. Necessarily then, this contented fellow is unconcerned about etiological symmetry problems, or about any alleged bias-mirroring in their own perspective. It is enough to know that these etiological challenges are *challenges*, to know that, whatever their basis, they are false and so can and should be ignored. As Hood, Hill, and Williamson write,

It is when openness is lacking that fundamentalism more easily takes hold. Attitudes of fallibilism that should be accorded to our answers to ultimate questions are supplanted by attitudes of absolutism, and the sanction for those attitudes is exported to a source outside the agent: the inerrancy of Pope, of the

home religion's elders, or of special revelation. A special revelation is provided to God's chosen but still understood as normative for every person because true of the world absolutely.⁶⁶

According to these authors, for fundamentalists their sacred text guides its own interpretation, being perceived as true and complete in itself. Thus intratextuality rules —the brick wall of fideism. “The issue for fundamentalists is more correctly one of inerrancy, not one of literality.... Furthermore, inerrancy is crucial, since finding an error within the text can only be claimed on the basis of criteria outside the text....” Lack of openness is also at issue with failure to recognize etiological symmetries and similarities among believers in different faith communities. Different attitudes towards comparative study are on display in Silverstein and Stroumsa (eds., 2015), *The Oxford Handbook of the Abrahamic Religions*. Stroumsa wonders why modern scholarly study has shown “a remarkable lack of interest in thinking and studying the three religions together, in comparative fashion” (56). He suggests that resistance to the idea of a family relationship, of a *suggeneia*, between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam” reflects the ‘zero-sum-game polemics’ to which the Abrahamic religions have often been given (69). But reflecting post-liberal theology, Remi Brague associates ‘Abrahamic family’ talk, and the ‘three rings’ discussion, primarily with a debunking ‘three imposters’ thesis. Thus he criticizes the whole language of families of religion along with a drive for comparative study he thinks “masks real differences underneath a surface harmony” (104). But other contributors including Weltecke and Ruthven supply historical evidence which limits the kind of brute appeal to tradition that Brague and Margalit make to support their doctrinal and/or salvific exclusivism.

Conclusion

Bias is clearly *part* of the reason for cognitive diversity, but a good deal of diversity is arguably generated without need to appeal to overt bias on the part of some or all agents as explanatory of differences in belief. What has drawn our critical attention in this chapter is the puzzlement that symmetric or essentially similar doxastic strategies should give rise not just to cognitive diversity, but to what we can call *polarized or polemical* contrariety, contrariety of a kind where each view adamantly rejects all others. This is certainly possible in other fields besides that of religious ideas, but most apparent in that domain where political and theological intolerance have so often been conjoined. It is indeed a surprising outcome, and a concerning one, if and when the very similarities shared by members of a *family* of religions generate and maintain exclusivist attitudes about religious truth and salvation. Such, indeed, I believe to be the case with the sons of Abraham: *It is not nearly so much their different sacred narratives or their doctrinal-level differences, but what they have formally in common, that makes them fight.* As we will continue to develop, bias studies take on a much stronger salience in explanations of religious contrariety under such conditions of bias mirroring effects.

Inductive risk and related concerns about the doxastic riskiness of a strategy of belief formation or maintenance, is a largely descriptive and scalar concern. These scales could be used to test and revise what we described as the hypothesis of psychological fideism. But the concept of high inductive risk also lends themselves to *normative* applications. The connections between strong fideism and counter-inductive thinking do not just have explanatory implications of interest to psychologists, but also normative implications for the well-foundedness of belief, both in terms of the reliability and the reasonableness of a religious belief premised upon an act of

testimonial authority assumption. But rather than argue for any over-generalized thesis about highly risky doxastic methods impact the epistemic status of religious, we tried to invite a broad-based discussion of these matters. We insisted only that luck aggravation and high inductive risk provide are concepts that help us to determine different *kinds* of normative adequacy, theological, moral, and epistemic. A highlighted point was that a person's specific inherited or adopted model of faith is as open to critique and to re-thinking as is any other aspect of religious identity. Indeed, it would behoove us all to take better notice of the various models of faith we operate with, since conceptions of faith we have shown differ significantly in how far they aggravate problems of religious luck, and these differences bear quite directly upon their theological, moral, or epistemic appraisal. Criticism of a particular model of faith may involve more than one kind of adequacy, especially as concepts of moral and epistemic risk are intertwined.⁶⁷

The "four steps" were intended to be descriptive and explanatory, but they also invite a more direct critique. The next chapter begins by defending reasonable disagreement in domains of controversial views, but also returns us to the *de jure* side of the inductive risk account, and to direct concern with the *limits* of reasonable disagreement. There I argue more directly that exclusivist responses to religious multiplicity, and associated self-serving peer denial and vice-charging, lie beyond the pale of reasonable disagreement.

Notes to Chapter Four

¹ Montaigne (D. Frame, ed.), 116.

² Tremplin 2010, 146.

³ Compare Dostoyevsky's related insights: "So long as man remains free he strives for nothing so incessantly and so painfully as to find someone to worship. But man seeks to worship what is established beyond dispute, so that all men would agree at once to worship it... This is the chief misery of every man individually and of all humanity from the beginning of time. For the sake of common worship they've slain each other with the sword. They have set up gods and challenged one another, 'Put away your gods and come and worship ours, or we will kill you and your gods!' And so it will be to the end of the world; even when gods disappear from the earth, people will fall down before idols just the same." From "The Failure of Christianity."

⁴ Other key contrasts are that post-modernists tend to be explicitly non-foundationalist, while post-liberal theology is foundationalist about revelation. Post-modernists are radically constructionist and anti-realist, while post-liberalists arguably evince naïve realism in their reading of scripture.

⁵ We will focus on self-described post-liberals like Paul Griffiths, since this fits best with our special concern with critical examination of religious exclusivism and contemporary forms of fundamentalism. Griffiths and Blanshard's historical descriptions of the post-liberal turn are interestingly very similar, although they assess it from very different perspectives, the one

championing it and the other highly critical of it. Both see post-liberalism as claiming that faith is not aided by philosophy or natural theology but is “a descent of grace. Don’t try to defend Christianity; take the offensive against rationalism as a stupid misunderstanding and irrelevance” (Blanshard, Chapter vii, “The Revolt against Reason in Theology”). The relationship between post-liberalism and post-modernism is difficult, since post-modernism had many more varieties, some of which do, and others which don’t militate against propositional conceptions of faith. For an excellent introduction to post-modern theology, see Pamela Sue Anderson (2010).

⁶ Their particularism provides only a *notional response* to etiological challenges of the sort elaborated through the thought experiment of Chapter 2. By ‘notional’ responses I mean to suggest responses more grounded in religious imagination than in anything sustainable by appeal to facts, evidence, or logical reasoning. The *absolutizing* of the particular is different from theism or deism in the sense of belief in a universal creator from natural facts or reason. This point is suggested by Hume: “We often find, amongst barbarous nations, and even sometimes amongst civilized, that, when every strain of flattery has been exhausted towards arbitrary princes, when every human quality has been applauded to the utmost; their servile courtiers represent them, at last, as real divinities, and point them out to the people as objects of adoration. How much more natural, therefore, is it, that a limited deity, who at first is supposed only the immediate author of the particular goods and ills in life, should in the end be represented as sovereign maker and modifier of the universe? Even where this notion of a supreme deity is already established; though it ought naturally to lessen every other worship, and abase every object of reverence, yet if a nation has entertained the opinion of a subordinate tutelary divinity, saint, or angel; their

addresses to that being gradually rise upon them, and encroach on the adoration due to their supreme deity” (Hume 2009, 151-52).

⁷ Mathewes, Puffer and Storslee (eds.) 2016, “Introduction to Volume III,” 8. The editors see the field expanding even though they say it would be hard to find another area of study who’s “several component pieces are more fundamentally contested than CRE” (3). They point out that a one-sided focus on ‘sameness’ and un-self-critical appeals to neutrality or objectivity have been subject to much opprobrium, but at the same time that making all understanding ‘internal’ to a tradition stunts its growth.

⁸ Montaigne (Frame, 611; 429). Between psychology’s meliorism and the biblical ‘bent wood’ of humanity, afflicted with error, there seems to be only consistency. The problem is just resolved in very different ways. The psychologist finds us a herd animal, and our nature human, all too human; theology finds us equally flawed, but giving a primordial moral/spiritual reason for it, and prescribing moral and spiritual nourishment the cure for a universal sickness of soul.

⁹ Mark van Vugt, “Averting the Tragedy of the Commons,” 171.

¹⁰ Hood, Hill & Williamson, *The Psychology of Religious Fundamentalism*, 191-192.

¹¹ K. Dutton and D. Abrams, “What Researchers say about Defeating Terrorism,” *Scientific American Mind*, March 2016.

¹² Or as Dick Simon puts it, when we allow our “themification process” to carry us along without correction, “we lose much of our capacity to reason, and to empathize.... We label others as THEM rather than doing the hard work of trying to garner a more nuanced understanding of complex situations. We categorize others as THEM to protect us from ambiguity. We stereotype others as THEM to rationalize our own behavior.” Dick Simon, “The Most Dangerous Four-Letter Word.” Accessed from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dick-simon/the-most-dangerous-fourle_b_4555551.html

¹³ Pronin 2007, 37. Ballantyne calls this the bias bias “-a bias that sways judgment and reasoning *about bias*. One of the several cognitive mechanisms that it has been found to manifest the bias blind spot is “evidential asymmetry between judgments of self and others” (150). There is a form of irrationality (associated with confabulation) that consists in thinking one believes on one basis, when in fact they believe on another. There is also a form of irrationality (associated with directional thinking) that consists in confusing subjective factors with objective ones. These problems arguably affect religious belief more so than other of our controversial views, since the “basis” of belief is often a claimed supernatural event. We rarely can *know* on the basis of self-deceived evidence, and we rarely know when we *are* self-deceived.

¹⁴ Pronin, Gilovich, and Ross (2004, 781). “[W]e feel that our own judgments reflect the true nature of things, and thus assume that, to the extent that others perceive events or objects of judgment (including “us” and “them”) differently, those others reveal in impact of various perceptual, cognitive, or motivational biases” (Pronin et. al. 2001, 640). If we are objective, people who disagree with us must be uninformed, or [irrational](#). See other works by Lee Ross for

a fuller general account of naïve realism and its ill-effects on human judgment. I would relate this assumption to what Keith Stanovich terms a “crystallized inhibitor,” and contrasts with the critical reasoning dispositions of “fluid rationality.”

¹⁵ Pronin, Kruger, Savitsky, and Ross (2001), 639.

¹⁶ Pronin, Gilovich, and Ross (2004, 781).

¹⁷ Pronin, Lin, and Ross (2002), 369.

¹⁸ Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ*, 68-70.

¹⁹ Tricia J. Yurak 2007, 344.

²⁰ Roughly put, pluralistic ignorance is the case when a group of interacting agents all experience a discrepancy between their private opinions and the perceived opinions of the others.” Yurak, 344.

²¹ Russell Spears, “In-group-Outgroup Bias,” 484.

²² William Hirstein (2005) *Brain Fiction: Self-Deception and the Riddle of Confabulation*, 209 and 187. Compare Lisa Bortolotti: “When people confabulate they ignore some of the psychological processes responsible for the formation of their attitudes or the making of their

choices, and produce an ill-grounded causal claim when asked for an explanation” (2018, 235). Confabulation theorists like Hirstein concede that studies in this area treat themselves to some strong assumptions about rationality. But this potentially fits cases of sharply asymmetric religious luck attributions exchanged between adherents of different religions. Further evidence that it does fit might be that confabulation involves failure to meet the norms both of internalist and externalist epistemologies. Internally the confabulator’s failure is unaware of the implausibility of her claim, or holds it in such a way that she does not downgrade confidence even in the face of evidence of the unreliability of her doxastic strategy. In the religious case this might be the failure to be aware that her reasoning is fideistic and that those she attributes either vice or bad religious luck to can utilize very similar reasons for their own incompatible religious views. Externally the confabulator’s failure might be insensitivity to the etiological symmetry between her own belief and those of other religious believers, often even as she attributes falsehood to what similar processes produce in other agents.

²³ Michael Philips, *The Undercover Philosopher*, 90. “One reason it's hard to say when directional thinking occurs is that it’s difficult to come up with a model or theory of how directional thinking happens. That is because directional thinking seems to involve a kind of self – deception, and self-deception is difficult to model... How exactly do we pull this off? What are the processes by which we recognize evidence as relevant so that we may hide from ourselves? ... The fact that we don't have a successful theoretical model for self – deception seriously hobbled scientific study of directional thinking" (93).

²⁴ Philips, 89-90.

²⁵ Philips, 91.

²⁶ Bertram Malle, “Attributions as Behavior Explanations: Towards a New Theory,” (unpublished manuscript, University of Oregon, 2003. Copyright by Bertram F. Malle). The actor-observer asymmetry is made relevant by evident due to belief reasons being more dominant over desire reasons among actors than among observers, and due to belief reasons being favored over desire reasons whenever an explainer tries to present the agent in a rational light.

²⁷ While there are a variety of interpretive theories, the studies show among other things that causality and similarity can each form the basis for drawing a generalization. Bob Rehder, “Property Generalization as Causal Reasoning,” in A. Feeny and E. Heit (ed.), *Inductive Reasoning: Experimental, Developmental, and Computational Approaches*, p 84. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2008. In the same volume, see also Douglas Medin and Sandra Waxman, “Interpreting Asymmetries of Projection in Children’s Inductive Reasoning.”

²⁸ Malle and Knobe, 22. See also Michel and Newen (2010), and Christina Borgoni (2015).

²⁹ Hales and Johnson, 60 and 75. But I here risk using Hales and Johnson out of context by turning the attention to the participants rather than the adequacy of theories, since the authors argue that the three main philosophical theories of luck cannot adequately accommodate their empirical results. So to stop here with luck attributions in ‘folk’ morality, etc. is a bit unfair to

authors who argue that experimental results just as well make hay with philosophical theories of luck. My basing the value of the concept of religious luck on its diagnostic value is my main response to their scepticism about philosophical theories. These theories can allow us to articulate the implications of these empirical findings, and to frame new testable hypotheses.

³⁰ Vainio (2010), 2.

³¹ Peacock and Pettyjohn 1995, 115. For a well-informed recent discussion, see Christina M. Gschwandtner 2016. For essays on faith and narrative, see Yandel (ed.) 2001. Munivar (2017) connects narrative identity with still broader functions of *literature*: “Some literary scholars have begun to see literature as adaptive, and thus they think that a proper understanding of this art must be carried out in biocultural context. This is not to say that natural selection somehow adapted humans to literature, but rather that the skills that give rise to literature, when so exercised by literary art, then prove advantageous” (415).

³² If this is correct, then strong connections between *failure or belief ownership and authorship* and appeals to constitutive (moral) religious luck, and to both propositional and veritic luck, become obvious. We could give religious examples of each of each of these types of appeal. Bortolotti and Broom argue that “by appealing to a failure of ownership and authorship we can describe more accurately the phenomenology of thought insertion, and distinguish it from that of non-delusional beliefs that have not been deliberated about, and of other delusions of passivity.” Breyer and Greco (2008), in their account of the epistemological importance of cognitive integration and the ownership of belief, hold that a belief is well-integrated in the way that brings

ability and epistemic credit to the agent, not only if the subject *owns* the belief, but also *only if the (real or putative) process or ability is not subject to any defeaters to which the agent has access*. But contrary to these authors, I argue that counter-inductive methods of belief-formation have defeaters of which the agent has access. Disowning grounds for the truth or justification of belief of one's belief, against inductive pattern, is *itself* a most serious violation of the second condition of the absence of accessible defeaters.

³³ The genuine distinction between narrative and simple testimony is supported in CSR by the differences between *modal* (visualized or sensory-engaging) and *amodal* (propositional) forms of representation and processing. Modal processing is exploited by narrative to engulf the hearer in the narrative setting and make her feel what is like to have certain experiences.

³⁴ For a well-motivated attempt to balance the intentional, world-making stance on narrative with research in the cognitive sciences, see David Herman 2013.

³⁵ “[Claims] are statements that indicate a position has been taken. ... One of the first judgments a good critical thinker must make, then, is to determine in just what way a statement is presented. ... There are countless things one can do with words and other forms of expression....”
(Foresome, Fosl, and Watson (2017), *The Critical Thinking Toolkit*, 8).

³⁶ Studies of this include instances where test subjects receive hints about (but fail to pick up on) non-literal/factual authorial intent, and others where there are no such hints but some passages read by test subjects have what most people would consider fantastical elements of some sort.

Studies of this sort can be seen as focusing on another major concern of monitoring, not this time our ability to reliably monitor inner and outer sources of ideas of experiences, but of our ability to reliably monitor differences between *narrative and assertive* testimonial transmissions.

³⁷ The stories about persons and events to whom we trace our heritage *are us*, in an important sense. Narratives, especially communal ones and ones of an epic nature, are deeply connected with people's sense of identity. Nietzsche talks about "the happiness of knowing oneself not to be wholly arbitrary and accidental, but rather growing out of a past as its heir, flower and fruit and so to be exculpated, even justified, in one's existence." The problem is when this antiquarian sense of reverence for a people's history no longer preserves life but mummifies it; when it constrains people to a very limited field of vision and when the new, or newfound facts inconsistent with it, are treated with hostility. Then it is properly countered by a critical sense of history that Nietzsche says drags it to the bar, interrogates it, and condemns what is worth condemning. Nietzsche *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, 21. Some of the recent best work on the distinctive features of narrative testimony is being done by in ways informed by enactivist theory. We are not just narrative but *enactive* selves: The bodily and emotional components of our awareness, and the "background to consciousness" blends with culture and contributes to diversification in ways that enactivists have studied. More attention to embodied religious practices follows from giving proper due to the role of the body in cognition (see Axtell 2018b).

³⁸ The point was recognized in ancient Greek thought. In a quote attributed to Hypatia of Alexandria, "Fables should be taught as fables, myths as myths, and miracles as poetic fancies.

To teach superstitions as truths is a most terrible thing. The child mind accepts and believes them, and only through great pain and perhaps tragedy can he be in after years relieved of them.” Hypatia’s point is at base a criticism of a common mistake in source monitoring –of not telling the difference between strictly historical and imaginative narratives. Even religious studies scholars struggle with the classification of some narratives as mythical, others as religious, where the difference may only be that the mythical designation refers to dead religions—one’s for which there are no present defenders who may be offended by that characterization of their sacred narrative. They are not well differentiated by content.

³⁹ If this is correct then narrative testimony is *not* well suited to placing the agent in position to have well-justified testimonially-based beliefs, beyond one’s about the structure, plot, or themes of the narrative itself.

⁴⁰ Roger Pouivet (2002) is an exception. He tries to rehabilitate healthy respect for the role of the religious imagination, tying this to classical tradition (Aquinas) as well as to contemporary narrative theology.

⁴¹ Rachel Fraser, “The Pragmatics and Epistemology of Testimony.” Podcast of her at the Moral Sciences Club (Cambridge), May 16, 2017. Accessed from <https://sms.csx.cam.ac.uk/media/2481645>

⁴² Montaigne points this out when he writes, “It comes to pass that nothing is so firmly believed as that which we know least; nor are there any persons so sure of themselves as those who tell us

fables... to which I would join, if I dared, a host of persons, interpreters and verifiers-in-ordinary of the designs of God.” *Essays*, Bk. I, 32.

⁴³ Hume and James both correctly argue that first-personal experience may rationally ground someone’s belief in something that it would not rationally ground for someone else who only heard testimony of the experience second-hand.

⁴⁴ This is also why Kierkegaard also finds Lessing compelling, and the gap between subjective conviction and objective knowledge impossible to bridge. Purported truths of revelation are not plausibly synthetic *a priori*.

⁴⁵ Arguably, with no less and perhaps substantially more plausible grounds in the traits of a good and loving God, God could have used his freedom to allow *more* that more than one prophet, revelation, or religion is a vehicle of genuinely salvific revelation. In so doing, this unbounded God would also be addressing the problems of epistemic location, selective access, and evidential ambiguity from the human perspective, since decision under conditions of underdetermination by evidence impacts both theism vs. non-theism, and one particular testimonial tradition over others.

⁴⁶ A more accurate term than proof-texting here may be *Eisegesis*, which can refer to a whole text rather than a selective passage being taken out of context. Eisegesis refers to interpreting a text in a way that imports one’s own presuppositions, agendas, or biases *into* and/or *onto* that text. This term also makes for a strong connection between fideistic uptake and the previously-

discussed issue of conflating narrative and simple testimony. I would relate this to how, in the field of biblical exegesis, it is sometimes said that ‘*eisegesis* is poor *exegesis*,’ and in post-liberalism it is arguably present in the notion that all genuine understanding comes from studying a text “intra-textually.”

⁴⁷ Carroll (2008, 18), notes, “If ‘fideism’ were defined loosely as the idea that the truth about religious matters cannot be established by natural reason alone, then the vast majority of religious thought – among the many religions in the world – would be fideistic.” This is close to what I mean by a fideistic minimum. Descriptively, few come to their beliefs by objective reasoning.

⁴⁸ Lessing, 55. Lessing writes, “That, then, is the ugly, broad ditch which I cannot get across, however often and however earnestly I have tried to make the leap.” Asserting the “fact” that the source of religious truth is revelation, or that, as special revelation is inerrant, can gloss over this gap to make it less noticeable, but it never can never truly bridge it.

⁴⁹ The bees, working collectively, spiral up above the fruits. But the interpretation of faith that apologists for religious exclusivism leads them to dig for roots, and has the potential at least to go spiraling down into an alethic stalemate between exclusivist communities. For Lessing’s parable, good relations between the ‘three sons of Abraham’ is judged to be indication of the veracity of the ring(s): its blessing upon its wearer is in good part that it is able to bring harmony and flourishing. We might interpret their prize *as* the ring(s). Lessing’s tale is of a ring of many colors and bright stones, a ring inherited by the son from his father, going back many

generations. It was a *prized* ring, this “ring of inestimable worth [whose] real value lay in its ability to make its wearer beloved of God and humankind.” So the ring(s) take the shape of the prize, and Barth and Lindbeck are certainly talking about the same thing in so far as the “prize” involves a person’s trust in veridicality of their personal and group experiences, and the sincerity of their own testimonial tradition’s elders/founders.

⁵⁰ Italics added. Lindbeck continues, “Thus of all the religions and professedly non-religious *Weltanschauungen* which aspire embrace without being embraced, only one, if that, can be ultimately successful” (“The Gospel’s Uniqueness,” 430). But in Lessing’s tale, this is exactly the claim that leads the three proverbial ‘sons of Abraham’ to fall into quarreling. For the ring had come down to a father with three sons, whom he loved equally, So before dying he went to a smythe, and upon his deathbed called each son in alone, and gave him a ring as his own final blessing. But barely had the father been put into the ground before the sons took notice that they each had a ring indiscernibly different to all who looked on them without wearing them, and took to quarrel over who had the true one of the father. A wise judge had to intervene into this sibling rivalry to challenge the sons by saying that if this ill-will were the practical result of wearing a ring from the father, likely the true ring was lost, or had now lost its powers and its value: for outward practical and social fruits had originally been a big part of its blessing, and that which is most evident to a neutral judge.

⁵¹ Many theists embrace the religion-specific exclusivist ‘leap of faith,’ understood as courageous and heroic, or as humble and pious; but others have denied its necessity, and still others have acknowledged it but been embarrassed by it, since moral objections follow the

epistemic ones. Gary Habermas (1991) points out that “Lessing’s ‘ugly ditch’ and Kant’s ‘mighty chasm,’ which we do not jump, have become an ‘abyss’ [in Barth’s words] into which we take a leap by exercising faith in Christ.” Barth’s distinction between [Habermas, Gary R., "An Appraisal of the Leap of Faith" (1991). Faculty Publications and Presentations. Paper 398. http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lts_fac_pubs/398]

⁵² Margalit, 1996, 150.

⁵³ Margalit, 150.

⁵⁴ Unless there is the clearest consensus about authorial intent and the relation of narrative to historical fact, narrative testimony should very plausibly be treated by philosophers of religion as only minimally truth-apt. This supports theologians who argue that faith and belief should be distinguished, and that fundamentalist inerrantism and literalism is both too strong and too weak as an understanding of religious faith.

⁵⁵ A propositional view of revelation is presupposed in salvific and doctrinal (sometimes called alethic) exclusivism, a view on which revelation is God’s Word, and the agent’s role is to assent to it *as* truth. ‘God said it, and God said believe it,’ is pretty much all one needs to know. Faith in a promise, or faith in one’s God gets reduced to faith *that* the teachings and the narrative are inerrantly *true*. On the propositional view of revelation, revelation is historical and not existential. As one author puts it, “Revelation according to this theory is originally given to a few privileged recipients, to whom the word of God comes directly. Prophets receive the word of

God as an interior gift...Revelation, having been received by the prophets and apostles, is then handed down in scriptures and tradition, which constitute the written and oral vehicles of the word of God.” Dulles, “The Problem of Revelation,” 78. On non-propositional views, by contrast, “the term ‘Christian revelation’ is not itself exclusive or intolerant. A Christian can acknowledge the existence of ‘Mosaic revelation’ or even ‘Islamic revelation.’ There is no impossibility of God revealing himself at different times in different ways, as Hebrews 1.1 asserts that he has in fact done. The alleged superiority of God’s revelation in Christ is not an automatic consequence that follows from belief in Christianity as a particular revelation.” If the exclusivist attitude takes hold, it is usually more through an all-or-nothing Christological doctrine than from the concept of revelation.

⁵⁶ Griffiths, *Apology for Apologetics*, 2.

⁵⁷ Barth’s language suggests that Christian faith is virtuous while that of religious aliens is vicious. He and Alvin Plantinga thus serve as examples of *particularist exclusivism*, which we will later contrast with the *mutuality exclusivism* of Gellman, Griffiths and Margalit.

⁵⁸ Several authors have done extensive work on debates over the implications of religious diversity for religious epistemics. These include Paul Knitter, David Basinger, James Kraft, and Michael Thune, though I will only treat Knitter here (see Bibliography).

⁵⁹ Knitter (2002, 233).

⁶⁰ D’Costa 1996, 225. Note that Plantinga and D’Costa both hold that Knitter’s “inclusivism” collapses into exclusivism. My own taxonomy is simplified rather than expanded from the standard one that includes pluralism as a separate position from inclusivism. My treating inclusivism as the denial of exclusivism has the advantage of saying that the complete dichotomy resolves Plantinga and D’Costa’s claim. But in practice way that in inclusivism the religious alien’s potential “fulfillment” of the goals of their religion through the goals of the home religion (for instance, through Christ’s sacrifice) makes inclusivism look like warmed up exclusivism. Given the way we have defined the dichotomy, this is not how we are using the term. My proposal is that the luck-free theology project, and the “three kinds of adequacy” rule, enables distinguishing the cases where inclusivism seems to collapse into exclusivism. Theology of religions could be an example of this, but so could other comparative theological research projects such as Neville’s pragmatic theology.

⁶¹ Grube (2015), 421. For fuller development, see also Grube and van Herck (eds.) 2018. Grube argues that this is one of the ways (another is sociological or other (including postmodernist ‘reductionisms’) *of depriving the concept of truth of its normative function*. He points out Joseph Margolis (1991) as arguing against bivalence as a general logical principle taken as holding indiscriminately across domains of inquiry. Margolis argues that there are many domains where applying a bivalence principle is misguided.

⁶² Grube describes a “critique of bivalence” and the “standard model” prioritizing truth over epistemics as “a springboard” for developing his constructive alternative. Grube’s form of (what I call) mutualist religious epistemics is *also* consistent with holding that some doxastic ventures

are responsible while others are not, and with moral and intellectual norms leading to recasting theological/soteriological accounts. Grube does not comment on salvific exclusivism or soteriological evil, but does indicate that there are good *theological* reasons for respecting other religions” (419). Grube calls for “criteria to distinguish between” responsible and irresponsible faith ventures, and of course this book considers not ‘nurtured,’ but counter-inductive aetiology and asymmetric ‘privileging’ (or simply, luck-leaning), along with risk to others, as prime criteria.

⁶³ John Locke’s *A Letter Concerning Toleration* contains a related critical reflection on what we are calling biased-closure inferences among the religious enthusiasts of different testimonial faith traditions: “But if one of these churches hath this power of treating the other ill, I ask which of them it is to whom that power belongs, and by what right? It will be answered, undoubtedly, that it is the Orthodox Church which has the right of authority over the erroneous or heretical. This is, in great and specious words, to say just nothing at all. For every church is orthodox to itself; to others, erroneous or heretical. For whatsoever any church believes, it believes to be true and the contrary unto those things it pronounce; to be error. So that the controversy between these churches about the truth of their doctrines and the purity of their worship is on both sides equal; nor is there any judge, either at Constantinople or elsewhere upon earth, by whose sentence it can be determined” (124).

⁶⁴ Aikin and Talisse (2013) explain what I am calling easy knowledge problems in simpler terms in their textbook *Why We Argue (and How we Should)*. They relate the *Simple Truth* and *No Reasonable Opposition* theses. The first says that disagreement over Big Questions “always

admit simple, obvious, and viable, and easily – stated answers. [It] encourages us to hold that a given truth is so simple and so obvious that only the ignorant, wicked, devious, or benighted could possibly deny it.” They see the second thesis as a corollary of the first: “According to the *No Reasonable Opposition* thesis, argument and debate with those with whom one disagrees is a pointless and futile endeavor. If in fact the answer to a given Big Question is a Simple Truth, then there is no opponent of that answer who is not also woefully ignorant, misinformed, misguided, wicked, or worse” (61).

⁶⁵ Gellman, 403. Kelly (2008) connects what I am calling biased-closure inferences to belief polarization, and to Kripke’s account of it. “It is characteristic of the Kripkean dogmatist to treat apparent counterevidence in a dismissive manner. Indeed, a Kripkean dogmatist need not even attend to the specific content of such evidence: as soon as he knows that a given piece of evidence tells against one of his beliefs, he knows all that he needs to know in order to employ his general policy; he thus pays it no further heed” (8). Kelly discusses the *principle of the commutivity of evidence*, but goes on to give an alternative account of belief polarization. But the issue is that whatever I believe *first*, can then be used to dismiss as not relevant to learning, anything the contradicts what I learn first. It is certainly pertinent to an epistemology for controversial views that the justification for our nurtured beliefs seems rarely to abide by the evidentialist principle of the *commutivity of evidence*. Rather, earlier-acquired evidence generally settles belief in such a way that reinforcements on a pattern of confirmation and my-side bias seem to be the norm for humans, and the individual making a break due to an assessment that total evidence does not support the initial enculturated belief, is rare.

⁶⁶ Hood, Hill & Williamson, 2005, 194. “[For some Christians, for example] trusting that Jesus’ words are not intentionally deceitful and that the Gospel accounts are historically accurate is an act of faith.” “[I]t is only when the sacred text emerges and is understood as sufficient in itself, and as the ultimate criterion of truth, that fundamentalism emerges – not as a religion, but as a way or process of being religious within a given faith tradition....” If any part of the sacred text is allowed to be shown in error by such means, the entire text loses authority, as many scholars both in sympathy with and in opposition to fundamentalism have noted.” (192) Brand Blanshard voices the classical dilemma for inerrancy: “It is sometimes argued that the human author must either be a passive agent (which raises all the problems of inerrancy as well as being psychologically implausible and plainly inapplicable to many of the biblical writers) or be employing his own creative capacities to the full (leaving no room for the alleged activity of God).... Either revelation is totally immune from rational criticism, or it is subject to such criticism. If the former, it is wholly discontinuous with our ordinary standards of what is reasonable and right; if the latter, it can have no independent authority” (quoted and discussed in B. Mitchell 1973, 144).

⁶⁷ My arguments may not have convinced all my readers that the strength of religious fideism is an important orientation to develop psychological scales for, or that strong fideistic orientation tracks formal features of highly counter-inductive thinking. But I take the book thus far to have provided ample reason for concluding that belief-acquisition, revision, or maintenance that plies on highly counter-inductive thinking may be challenged as epistemically vicious *wherever* it may be found.