



Forthcoming as Chapter Five of *Problems of Religious Luck: Assessing the Limits of Reasonable Religious Disagreement*. Lexington Books, 2019. Guy Axtell, all rights reserved: author contact gsaxtell@radford.edu. This is libre copy. Please quote/cite published copy: ISBN 987-1-4985-5018-5 (e-text). <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781498550185/Problems-of-Religious-Luck-Assessing-the-Limits-of-Reasonable-Religious-Disagreement>

Chapter Five

Scaling the ‘Brick Wall’:

Measuring and Censuring Strongly Fideistic Religious Orientation

The Many Sources of Religious Diversity

Before we discussed the *epistemic location problem* in Part I, we located concerns about the historic, geographic, and demographic contingency of people’s nurtured controversial views within a much broader set of recognized sources of cognitive diversity. The epistemic location problem is one of the most unavoidable of these sources of contrariety, being basic to the human condition. But on the present view there are multiple sources of cognitive diversity that any balanced approach to the limits of reasonable disagreement should recognize. This is why we brought up the close relationship between beliefs that are underdetermined by evidence, and beliefs or doxastic strategies that are overdetermined by what John K. Davis terms trait-dependent factors. This chapter will develop those connections, and will largely conclude the side of the inductive risk account that challenges religious exclusivism with a *de jure* objection.

Here we also discuss more generally what force, what censure, a proper *de jure* objection can have for those against whom it is made.

The first section looks at trait-dependence together with evidential ambiguity, since ambiguity of total evidence, and the ensuing need to render holistic or all-things-considered assessments of claims made in domains of morals, politics, philosophy, and religion. We will examine different attitudes towards evidential ambiguity, and what psychologists and religious fundamentalist say about it. This is background for the ensuing sections of this chapter. The second section continues our study of fundamentalist orientation by distinguishing psychological (or descriptive) from religious (or prescriptive) fideism. This in turn allows us to better recognize not only the multiplicity of models of faith that religious adherents adhere to, but also that the relationship between forms of fideism is *scalar*: there is a spectrum of views running from rationalism to fideism, and at the fideistic end from moderate to strong forms of religious fideism. I further explain why developing tests and markers for a high degree of fideistic orientation is important to all those who study religion.

We have already talked much about salvific exclusivism, and about exclusivist responses to religious multiplicity more generally. But we have not yet made one crucial distinction reflected in the literature: the distinction between religion-specific and mutualist exclusivism. The mutualist doesn't talk just about the right of adherents of one specific religion to assert exclusivism, but the adherents of any and all "home" religions. So in the remaining sections of this chapter I return to the *de jure* challenge, arguing that some previously unrecognized problems for the reasonableness of exclusivist responses to religious multiplicity are brought to light when we make the distinction between the two basic ways to understand the claim that exclusivists are making. I then try to put particularist and mutualist defenses of exclusivist

responses to religious multiplicity on the horns of a dilemma. Paying special attention to apologetics for exclusivism that run along mutualist lines, I argue that despite the popularity it presently enjoys among post-liberal theologians, a close examination reveals that the very conceptual coherence of mutualist exclusivism is in serious doubt.

Ollie-Pekka Vainio's work as mentioned earlier, is exemplary of Christian philosophy that is empirically informed by social and cognitive psychology. In *Beyond Fideism: Negotiable Religious Identities* (2010), the author affirms the value of religious identities, together with "a framework of negotiability" and a sharp critique of what he calls the current wave of post-liberalism. Vainio's analysis of religious fideism and its various kinds adds to Terence Penelhum's earlier distinction between skeptical and conformist religious fideism. Vainio identifies conformism mainly with *non-reflective fideism*, where an individual accepts a religious identity and associated beliefs under influence of their surrounding family or culture, and without much care for epistemically good reasons, or for etiological challenges.

Vainio goes on to say that "Non-reflective conformist fideism...is not very interesting (while being without doubt of the most common belief-forming methods in the world)."¹ Here, however, I will take issue. Vainio seems to be setting normative standards for what is better seen as a descriptive distinction between skeptical fideism (where adherents hold that there is no religious *knowledge*, though there may be responsible belief) and conformist fideism (which simply assumes the authority of the "home" religious culture).² Conformist fideism as a category does not impugn the adherent's virtue or categorize them as non-reflective. But contented religious exclusivism, by the very description given by its defenders (Gellman; Margalit, D'Costa) places itself in Vainio's "non-reflective fideism" category. For Gellman describes this agent's complete "unconcern" for what religious aliens have to say about the validity of their

own religious way of life. Of course, one wants to encourage virtues of doxastic responsibility, and at least in every other area of life, at least, this would seem to require careful reflection about disagreement.³ But the doxastic methods (or “policies” as Vainio puts it), that are most common among us are far from being of little interest to theorists who study religion. Indeed, CF and CSR likely should be *most* concerned with those modes of belief-acquisition and maintenance that are most common; conformist fideism and its default, relatively unreflective style are of high, not low, interest. So while it is commonplace for theologians to admonish the mere rule-followers, or those who merely say the words but don’t mean them as they should, that admonishment of conformist fideism indicates a theological value in favor of holding belief in a more passionate embrace.

These considerations show us that Vainio’s reflective/unreflective fideism distinction is prescriptive rather than descriptive. For instance he writes, “In philosophy, fideism usually means a mode of thought or teaching according to which reason is more-or-less irrelevant to (religious) belief, or even that faith is strengthened, not undermined, if one judges that reason is unable to give it support.”⁴ The mode of thought or teaching here is understood as something *prescribed* by a model of faith. We will discuss prescriptive fideism at points going forward, but while it may be of theological interest in philosophy and psychology of religion descriptive fideism is the proper focus. It seems to be a fault of Vainio’s book that the author does not better mark these distinctions. Descriptive fideism does not provide an account of what faith properly is, but rather of how people acquire and hold their religious beliefs through passionate attachment. It recognizes that their inferences are not bound by evidence and argument. But it recognizes a range of supra and counter-evidential models of faith, and does not define fideism by the extreme of counter-evidential belief.

The models of faith (theological methods) most like one another in fideistic orientation are those most likely to take a propositional view of their scriptures. They are those, indeed, which cycle through some or all of the ‘steps’ discussed in Chapter 3, that foment fundamentalism. What from one perspective is an ‘inductive fail’ is from the other the grounds of difference that allow denial of the epistemic significance of disagreement. McKim points out that “Advocates of large-scale systems of beliefs that include discrediting mechanisms are not in a position to appreciate the appeal to systems of belief they think to be discredited. They are not likely to be able to give them a fair or sympathetic hearing.”⁵

McKim’s point seems confirmed by Gellman’s definition of the contented exclusivist as one for whom, “The home religion will teach that it is true and that other religions are false to the extent that they clash with the home religion. One’s home religion will include as a matter of course, a ready explanation for the failures of other religions to recognize the truth.”⁶ But if adherents of each home religion can do this to every one of the others, then given 100 home religions, 99% would be judged false by all others, all of the time, and nobody has any reason to ever take a close look at anybody else’s discrediting or vice-charging reasons. How does this not suggest that this is what we earlier termed rhetorical vice-charging, especially given that the right to ascribe such negative traits to outsiders and to take an exclusivist attitude is, for Gellman, clearly independent of any connection with truth? This is why the New Problem’s thought experiment of your switching places with a religious other, is a step forward to seeing the force of inductive norms. It might be better, though, to reverse the order, asking if under these conditions the exclusivist could plausibly deny that they would be likely to also come to believe that the faith the individual *in fact* holds as the uniquely true and salvific one, is false and non-salvific.⁷ For if the experiment leads to conceding that they would in other circumstances have

come to hold religious beliefs that *are by their own lights erroneous* and to reject beliefs *by their own lights uniquely true*, disagreement may begin to be taken as more significant. Its reasonableness is arguably shown up. No longer can disagreement be treated as a ‘bare fact’ easily explained by relevant metaphysical, epistemological, or moral differences between home and alien religions or sects. The exclusivist’s discrediting mechanisms of denying epistemic peerhood with unbelievers, and of explaining this denial by asymmetrical metaphysical, epistemological, or moral trait-ascriptions, becomes harder to motivate.⁸ The thought experiment bears directly on whether the bias charges that are supposed to confirm the errors of the religious alien’s ways are better seen as “robust” or merely “rhetorical.” The discrediting mechanisms of exclusivist apologetics are much better developed than in other domains, and they very often involve strategies of vice or bias-charging: the religious alien’s failure to see the truth of the home religion calls for explanation, and how would that be accomplished without charging unbelievers with ill-motivation or bias? So for Gellman, “[M]y contented exclusivist may rationally believe that all religions other than the home religion are works of the devil, and that the devil tricks others into believing them”⁹ Here I would simply question what the author means by “rationally believe”?

Some philosophers who study fundamentalism note how ambiguity is unreasonably devalued in fundamentalist and exclusivist religiosity. Imran Aijaz (2014; 2013) critiques this attitude and the attendant denial of inculpable non-belief in traditional Islam, arguing that these tenets are philosophically unsound. As Jamie Holmes also points out, fearful or highly negative/dogmatic responses to moral or cognitive ambiguity by fundamentalists do not reflect a balanced view. The feeling of ambiguity, including evidential ambiguity for theistic belief, isn’t *inherently* negative. Holmes understands the feeling of ambiguity as an “emotional amplifier,”

but this feeling “is not always unpleasant” and can spawn creativity. Psychologically, “we’re programmed to get rid of ambiguity, and yet if we engage with it we can make better decisions, we can be more creative, and we can even be a little more empathetic.” Holmes’ research highlights the many ways embracing ambiguity improves people’s ability to problem-solve and think critically.

A lot of times it [ambiguity] is threatening, just because of the content of what we happen to be facing: whether I’m going to be fired, or a physical threat, or the uncertainty of a medical diagnosis. But there’s also great research that shows that if we’re uncertain about whether someone’s romantically interested in us, or if we’re uncertain about whether something good or really good might happen to us, then those experiences are even more pleasurable than they usually are.¹⁰

Holmes’ psychological perspective on the benefits of ambiguity, whether experienced as pleasant or not, supports more philosophical discussion on religious ambiguity and the difference between exclusivist and inclusivist responses to religious multiplicity. McKim (2012) provides a complementary philosophical perspective, distinguishing between *simple*, *rich*, and *extremely rich* ambiguity. He then argues that even the question of the existence of God exhibits rich ambiguity, the main defining features of which are:

that there is an abundance of relevant evidence; that this evidence is diverse in its character, multifaceted, and complicated; that it contains discrete pockets of evidence that are particularly congenial to the advocates of particular interpretations of the evidence;

that one group regards as evidence phenomena that are not so regarded by other groups; and that it is extremely difficult to tell whether there is more evidence for one side or the other.¹¹

This sounds very much like the epistemic situation that William James describes before going on in his famous “The Will to Believe” lecture to reject “the veto ... which the strict positivist pronounces upon our faith,” and to affirm a person’s intellectual right to self-aware religious doxastic ventures that suit their affective character:

For such a half-wild half-saved universe our nature is adapted. The deepest thing in our nature is this dumb region of the heart in which we dwell alone with our willingneses and our unwillingneses, our faiths and our fears. As through the cracks and crannies of caverns those waters exude from the earth’s bosom which then form the fountain-heads of springs, so in these crepuscular depths of personality the sources of all our outer deeds and decisions take their rise. Here is our deepest organ of communication with the nature of things....¹²

Many writers focus on one source of contrariety in domains of controversial views. William James and J.S. Mill focus on character types and “crepuscular depths of personality,” hinting at the recognition of the partly somatic “background” to conscious experience, and the foreground/background distinction that John Dewey would later develop. Kidd (2013) follows James in focusing heavily on individual temperament as a key source of reasonable disagreement,¹³ while Hick and McKim focus much more on the religiously ambiguous nature of

evidence for deciding between what James would call “the religious hypothesis” and the “naturalistic hypothesis.” I am here focused more on social identity and doxastic risk-taking, but I also want to show the complementarity of the various sources of psychographic diversity. But the main point should be that the sources of diversity, especially but not exclusively found in our controversial views are *many*. They include symbolic aspects of cultural identity, religious ambiguity, confirmation holism, and what John Rawls calls the “burdens of judgment.”¹⁴ Pragmatic reasons for belief, when they are recognized, are another source of cognitive diversity.¹⁵ We should keep in mind that the different forms of inductive reasoning – generalization, cause-effect reasoning and analogy/disanalogy– are not always kept distinct in our reasoning, and especially not in inference to the best explanation. The holistic nature of evidence for worldviews and ideologies is correctly recognized as a source of diversity, as is the balance a person must choose between intellectual courage and caution, believing truly versus not believing falsehoods.¹⁶ What we should aim at in the next section’s account of descriptive fideism is a more balanced view of these sources of religious multiplicity, and of the trait-dependent factors that overdetermine belief when belief or another propositional attitude it is logically underdetermined by agent-neutral evidence and argument.

To summarize this section, models of faith (theological methods) that are like one another in strongly fideistic orientation are ones most likely to take a propositional view of their scriptures and to run adherents through the other ‘steps’ that foment fundamentalism, or the enemy in the mirror effect (EME) more precisely. These morally and intellectually paradoxical forms of faith establish responses to multiplicity that devalue dialogue across traditions, apart from evangelizing where that is part of the group’s perceived mission. All truth being contained within the home religion, there is nothing really to learn from “dialogue” with non-believers, and

perhaps even a positive moral danger in associating with them in any relationship other than an evangelizing one.

Descriptive and Prescriptive Fideism: A Crucial Distinction

Fideism has been the subject of a good deal of interest in both theology and philosophy of religion. I want to start by saying that it is clearly one of numerous philosophical concepts that it is crucial to recognize has distinct descriptive and prescriptive senses.¹⁷ To start with other examples, think of the concepts of ethical relativism, or again, of ethical egoism. The former is a metaethical theory, that latter a normative ethical theory. But in both cases, the thesis is a normative one about how people *should* understand ethical claims (relativism) or about what motives moral agents should act from (egoism). But there is in the attendant argument for these positions, an appeal to psychology, and to how ethical statements *actually* function, or the motives for which people *actually* act (psychological egoism). Textbooks and online encyclopaedias of philosophy routinely note the centrality of the descriptive/prescriptive (or psychological/normative) distinction when engaging either of these debates, and I take it that philosophy which fails to do so is never able to articulate a clear question for debate. To follow the egoism example further, confusion in philosophy itself between *is's* and *oughts*, between claims about how people do act and how they normatively should act, etc., makes it easy to wind up in a pseudo-debate. This can also reductively make the 'how we ought to' follow simply from the 'how we in fact do' make judgments question, when there is really quite a large gap between these two questions.

The same is true in regards to philosophical and theological debate surrounding reason and religious faith: without distinguishing psychological observations or claims about human nature from how different models of faith prescribe thinking about reason and faith, it is easy to talk past one another. But once the distinction is made, the relationship *between* “allowing” a descriptive claim and “endorsing” a normative one can be better approached.¹⁸ The Clifford-James debate over the ethics of belief might be an example of this. I have heard it said that Clifford could have come closer to James had he taken a wider view of “evidence” and of “sufficiency” of evidence, accepting pragmatic reasons along with strictly epistemic ones. And reciprocally, James could have come closer to Clifford had he taken a wider view of “faith ventures,” accepting that they may take something other than the status of beliefs. Both proposals make a good deal of sense, but for both men their shared assumption of volitionism actually served to harden their positions, leading each into the kind of conflation in question. For Clifford a person *ought* not to accept faith-based believing, because in fact such beliefs are evidentially underdetermined. For James one’s *passional* nature *ought to* decide for or against the religious hypothesis, because given the fact of underdetermination, it *must* be the deciding factor.

Psychological fideism is a unitary thesis, and one that makes a testable claim. Prescriptive fideism stands for any instance of multiple models of how the faithful *should* think, especially about the relationship between reason and faith. Those psychologists who try to confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis of descriptive fideism will need to recognize numerous proximate causes of religious multiplicity, including epistemic and psychographic location, a religiously ambiguous world, individual temperament and aesthetics, etc.¹⁹ In *Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James insists that “Among the buildings-out of religion which the mind spontaneously indulges in, the aesthetic motive must never be forgotten.” This is a

description of one of several factors causally-involved with the ‘building-out’ of particular religious identities.

The plurality of models available by which to understand the relationship between reason and religious faith isn’t well acknowledged in our debates, which is part of the problem. The major religiosity and spirituality scales utilized in religious studies and psychology do not aim to sort between different types and degrees of fideistic orientation. I do not believe great progress can be made in this debate until we recognize the diversity of conceptions of faith, even within Christian tradition itself. A specific model of faith is often the unquestioned first assumption that guides a religious grouping’s way of attributing religious value or disvalue to group insiders and outsiders. This does not mean that the model one adopts as authoritative is simply dictated by one’s religion. Each major world religion allows for interpretation and for a range of different models of faith, models that may have *different types of objects* and that may express different ways in which an adherent is *related to those objects*.²⁰

It seems descriptively true that what is taught at an early age to be religious faith’s demands upon you, most people will tend to become for them a first assumption, and something inviolable. But it also seems correct that many of these faith models are more problematic than others from logical, epistemic, and moral points of view. So we must insist that models of faith are not ‘above the battle,’ but are for reasonable and responsible agents subject to normative criticism of at least the three kinds we have identified. Models of faith should be the first, rather than last thing that a doxastically responsible agent assesses for adequacy. The plurality of these models, and how they are expressed in patterns of thinking along a spectrum from weak to strong fideism, should be an explicit concern for CF, and as we will argue more specifically in Chapter 6, for CSR as well.²¹

Our study in Chapters One and Two focused critical attention on how particular models of faith can aggravate luck-related worries, and this also suggests a need to recognize a plurality of models of faith operant in religious communities. This descriptive pluralism about theological methods complicates religious epistemics. Let me outline for the reader several reasons why comparative fundamentalism should focus upon differences among *models of faith* rather than *denominational* differences. Firstly, the debate among adherents of different religions are largely a matter of theology and apologetics, and when they are, they fail to readily engage philosophy and the human sciences. Secondly, the differences between Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant branches of Christianity, or related main branches of Judaism or Islam, suggest that “orthodoxy” is and has always been a more fluid concept than fundamentalists allow, since, as Voltaire put it, each religious viewpoint is orthodox unto itself.

Thirdly, conceptions of theological adequacy are subject to broad intellectual movements such as progressivism and liberalism, which sought to render faith acceptable to reason and to modern sensibilities even if this leads to theological revisions. These movements often hold even across religions, while at the same time, almost all major world religions show a range of conservative to revisionary positions. Fourthly, even within sects, as seen vividly in Protestant traditions but well-evidenced elsewhere as well, there is no single agreed model of faith –no single view that uncontroversially designates what faith is and means. Therefore, to emphasize differences between religions or between denominations would be to focus only on the content claims of different religions but to miss seeing models of faith as what so often drives substantive differences among doctrines and attitudes.

When the proximate causes of religious beliefs or avowals are roughly symmetrical, fideistic orientation is strong, and purported prophets or special revelations are numerous, we

have an environment for religious epistemics that is rife for the generation of exclusivist ideologies. Similarly generated, each becomes a ‘sibling rival’ of all others. Inductively speaking, the greater degree of conflicting beliefs that spawn from a formally similar pattern of belief acquisition, the weaker its grounds. Think of this as the inverse of the famous *diversity of evidence principle* which is ubiquitous in the different forms of induction, accruing to generalization, causal, and analogical reasoning. This combination of inductively weak grounds and contrariety in the output of a belief makes disagreement in such cases *quite* epistemically significant. But among theologians and not just apologists, instead of recognition of this we too often get a merely a notional acknowledgement of etiological symmetry.²²

If a person is relying on testimonial transfer, or even appeal to facts to support their beliefs, there are very basic inductive norms that reasonability demands conformity with. These norms prescribe that we: acknowledge that people may be mistaken about what they believe to be fact; be cautious in characterizing a statement as making a factual claim if it is equivocal between ‘is’ and ‘ought’; be cautious with claiming factuality or historicity for things not widely agreed upon; use facts that have been verified by reliable sources, and where there is not consensus among experts, consult multiple and diverse sources; and consider whether sources of claims are neutral or given to directional thinking.

Then there are inductive risk norms: Where beliefs are a ground for decisions and actions, recognize the risks, to others as well as oneself, of holding beliefs unsafely; spend extra time to verify your facts where the risk of getting it wrong could result in harm to others; abide by the diversity principle by looking for the sources of cognitive and moral diversity, and by considering the empirical, conceptual, and axiological (valuative) issues in any particular disagreement from diverse points of view.

Now, to say that a mode of thinking is counter-inductive is also to characterize it as counter-evidential: This would seem to follow by definition. The implicit but clear claim is just as Wittgenstein put it: “The pattern stops here.” How counter-inductive one’s claim is depends entirely, it would seem, on how strong the violated pattern was, and what reasons one has claiming a violation of the pattern. Again how strong the pattern was is determined scientifically, when it can be determined at all, by employing the diversity of evidence principle. Phenomenal seemings are a controversial grounds for assuming other-worldly, or even this-worldly truth. But if it doesn’t matter to someone how counter-evidential the ground of their belief is, either because they think faith requires subjective certainty and expulsion of all doubt, or because they shut down critical reflection by conflating subjective certitude with objective *grounds* for a truth-claim, then the ‘shoe’ of *radical fideism* clearly fits. Our theory suggests that persons who easily dismiss etiological challenges through responses that violated inductive norms will scale at the high end of the spectrum of orientations running from moderately to strongly fideistic. Those who deny or rationalize-away the epistemic force of inductive norms, and the moral concerns with our risking others in our practical reasoning, similarly exemplify the radical fideistic view that faith ‘needs no justification from reason.’²³

Counter-inductive religious thinking is on our account an indicator of a strong as contrasted with a moderately fideistic theological method. The reader familiar with philosophy of religion might therefore assume that I intend to employ the distinction between “supra-evidential” and “counter-evidential” fideism, since this is perhaps the most common way that philosophers of religion have tried to mark kinds or degrees of fideistic orientation. However, I hold that the supra/counter distinction is helpful neither to philosophy nor psychology of religion. The idea behind that distinction is that some *beliefs* are consistent with total evidence

yet go beyond it (moderate fideism), while other beliefs ‘fly in the face’ of total evidence (strong fideism). While such a distinction may aim to get at what encourages those who John Locke and other Enlightenment thinkers described as religious enthusiasts, it does a poor job of it. The related distinction between “reflective” and “unreflective” fideism that Vainio employs I think has some of the same flaws, since it does not distinguish critical self-reflection from a use of reason in the service of apologetics, where one’s pre-existing beliefs are never genuinely questioned, but only defended. The *post hoc* and *ad hoc* use of reason when so enlisted to defend unquestioned first principles is often an indication of more rather than less extreme fideism.²⁴ When it comes to tribalistic particularism, the defense of the worldview may be purely negative, a “basic belief” imbued by God, not by culture; or it may be an evidentialist apologetic, taking on the trappings of science, as in ‘scientific creationism.’²⁵

This book’s concern with counter-inductive thinking has clear association with counter-evidential fideism, and the old distinction between “supra” and “counter” evidential fideism seems to recognize the importance of there being degrees of fideism. So why shouldn’t we accept it? The supra/counter contrast is a blunt tool; the concept of counter-evidential imports a belief-focused account inconsistent with the methods of the sciences. What the total evidence is for something like God’s existence is of course disputed, and matters get still murkier with respect to claims derived from purported special revelations. Social scientists should not be tied to classifying agents and their beliefs in this way, a way that makes them judge the synchronic level of evidence supporting a belief, in order to recognize the agent’s theological method as moderately (supra-evidential) or strongly (counter-evidential) fideistic.

These points are worth elaborating because they explain why I take an inductive risk-based approach to classifying forms of fideism as far more helpful to philosophers and

psychologists both. The main reason why the approach to identifying and measuring strongly fideistic orientation is in need of rehabilitation is that the supra/counter distinction leaves the researcher with unwanted “Who decides?” questions. Who decides the level of total evidence for a religious belief, in order to know whether it is supra or counter-evidential? The ‘strong fideism equals counter-evidential’ approach seems to assume a belief rather than agent-based approach. It neglects *how* the agent makes inferences, focusing instead on degree of epistemic justification.²⁶ By contrast, we have proceeded from two grounds, the first with asymmetrical religious trait attributions as a primary psychological concern, and the second with problems of religious luck as reflected in moral, epistemological, and theological perspectives on the primary data of asymmetrical religious trait attributions. These two grounds led us to interest in a broader study of fideistic orientation, one that, by focusing on epistemically risky methods of belief-acquisition, directly addresses *how* the agent makes inferences.

But few persons who are descriptively (i.e., from a third-person perspective) fideistic in their conception of faith describe *themselves* as holding beliefs counter-evidentially. Tertullian, Kierkegaard, and paradox-embracing Buddhists and Sufis get classified as counter-evidential and hence as extreme fideists, mostly just for honestly admitting mysteries of faith, and the limits of reason and knowledge in religious metaphysics.²⁷ Pascal opined that “Man is more inconceivable without this mystery than this mystery is inconceivable to man.” The problem is not in recognizing paradoxes in faith-based belief, but in *failing* to recognize them, an act of trying to deny the intellect and to simultaneously claim it for oneself. Propositionalism can withstand paradox no more than reasonably disagreeing peers. While there probably has been no historical instance of a conception of faith that eschews reason *completely*, there are clearly instances that engender a Conflict model of the relationship between religion and on the one hand, and science

on the other. Yet in fact how much more extreme are those who exhibit self-delusion about total evidence? Affectively-driven evaluations of total evidence thrives on conflation between the *de dicto* and *de re* standing of evidence, that is, roughly, between subjective conviction and objective certitude.

Relatedly, we should reject definitions of *normative* fideism that identify it with claiming a right or mandate to believe counter-evidentially, or *against* reason. This creates a straw man characterization of fideism, and ironically has been a rhetorical tool *both* for aggressive atheists like Dawkins, and for religious exclusivists like Plantinga. The former are happy to strawman all religious believers as advocating acceptance on insufficient evidence. And this same overly narrow definition, where all fideism is characterized by the extreme, is also a rhetorical device that serves Plantinga by allowing him to maintain that his “basic belief” apologetic for Christian exclusivism is *not* a form of fideism. Yet on our own inductive risk-based account, this apologetic clearly has all the marks.

As a side-note on the just-mentioned similarity between fundamentalists and aggressive atheists as usually being proponents of a conflict model of the relationship between science and religion, let me mention that Richard Dawkins takes religious orientations generally, and not religious extremism, as responsible for acts of atrocity. On the topic of martyrdom he writes, “The take-home message is that we should blame religion itself, not religious extremism.”²⁸ I strongly disagree: Even violent forms of radical Islam are not simply religious phenomena as Dawkins here assumes. As Karen Armstrong puts it, Dawkins is “not correct to assume that fundamentalist belief even represents or is typical of either Christianity or religion as a whole.”²⁹ The dynamics of radicalization may have as much to do with political autonomy and hegemony

in an era of globalization, and with maintenance of a politics of identity, as they do with religious doctrine or religious ethics.

Now although fideistic orientation is a degree concept best measured on a spectrum, this does not mean it varies *only* in degree, as the supra versus counter-evidential distinction might suggest. Many more factors might be involved. For example, some models of faith acknowledge mysteries, puzzles, or paradoxes of faith. Others do more than acknowledge them. They try to resolve them in systematic theology by showing why they need not be challenges to the reasonableness of faith. Or they embrace the mystery of a reality transcending our natural and social being, taking our relationship to it to be found in fleeting direct experience of ultimate reality and not through “secondary” systematic theology. Some even revel in paradox and make it a direct focus of reflection; Kierkegaard seems to do this does almost as much practice-oriented Buddhism. Mystery and the call of faith determine that religious insight into the nature of the universe comes through primary experience and sometimes rigorous ritual or meditative practice. Philosophers and natural theologians generally want to render faith acceptable to reason, but acknowledging limits to rational understanding can be *honest*. The strong fideist who acknowledges mysteries of faith may maintain a basic religious realism, and still respond to them as did Kierkegaard: "If I am capable of grasping God objectively, I do not believe, but precisely because I cannot do this I must believe." Or as James did, they may respond by bidding that we not take as “necessities of universal reason,” what are “at bottom, accidents more or less of personal vision which had far better be avowed as such.”

Kierkegaard insisted that faith “has in every moment the infinite dialectic of uncertainty present with it.” His understanding of faith was of “an objective uncertainty, held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness.”³⁰ Let’s identify this as a tenet of at least this

self-aware type of *prescriptive* fideism, that faith requires acceptance of the condition of objective uncertainty. Risk-acknowledging intellectual honesty is the logically necessary prelude to *taking responsibility* for doxastic risk, and for seeing how peerhood is not plausibly denied in any domain where efforts to acquire justified beliefs are especially challenged by evidential ambiguity or underdetermination. This is the case with respect to most all of our nurtured beliefs, but peer denial is rarely as dogmatic as in those that deny objective risk on the basis of a metaphysical truth claim, while at the same time prescribing faith as supra or counter-evidential belief. Prescriptive fideism –still more explicitly defended by William James through a permissive ethic of belief that validates faith ventures comports with one’s individual spiritual and intellectual temperament– becomes incoherent apart from Jamesian-Kierkegaardian acknowledgment and acceptance of epistemic risk. Hence James insists that the world is religiously ambiguous, and that under conditions like this, the individual is the rightful “chooser of the risk” that his or her doxastic strategy entails, notwithstanding qualification by harms that one’s fideistic commitments may visit upon others who don’t share them.

Risk and venture are nearly synonymous because our human curiosity and desire for knowledge exceeds our human competence. But risk-taking and personal identity overlap as well –a point well-recognized in personal and social psychology.³¹ Psychological studies show that shared risk-taking promotes social bonding. So Kierkegaard insists that, “To venture causes anxiety, but not to venture is to lose one's self... The most common form of despair is not being who you are.”³² This again is simple *honesty* on the part of a fideistic thinker to accept the riskiness of their faith venture. But moderately fideistic claims like this one and radically fideistic claims are often expressed by the same author. The most radically fideistic (and morally and philosophically objectionable) comment that I see in Kierkegaard’s writing is not any of

these acknowledgments. Rather it is, “For without risk there is no faith, and the greater the risk, the greater the faith.”³³ Does taking a good idea to its furthest extreme always, or even regularly, result in a better one? The greater the risk the better the faith is a fitting motto for the Flat Earth Society perhaps, but it is not a doxastic method that supports reasonable faith ventures. It is the opposite of a moderately permissive account that allows place for doxastic responsibility, or even for virtues apart from religious virtues assumed to be free-floating from intellectual virtues. But this latter view should itself be theologically inadequate, should it not? At any rate, how much one believes something does not make it true, and such a doxastic policy would clearly be under the bar of reasonability.

No disagreement will be a reasonable one where one or more parties to it cops a ‘risk-maximizing’ attitude. In this direction truth becomes subjectivity, with neither objective uncertainty nor the constraints of facts, moral principles, or the beliefs of our fellows allowed purchase. Believing that p on the basis of “the most passionate inwardness” resolves evidential ambiguity, but assumes inordinate epistemic risk, and ignores doxastic responsibility. The issue again is more about self-awareness of risk, and of assumption of responsibility in the second-personal claims and demands we make upon each other. Elsewhere I have argued against the internalist-evidentialist ethic of belief, partly on the grounds that it cannot preserve the reasonable disagreement that Rawlsian *reasonable pluralism* would establish.³⁴ But that Kierkegaard and much of Protestant Christian apologetics in Europe and the Americas moves so counter-point to the claims and demands made by evidentialists like William Clifford, clearly indicates why epistemic and moral risk-related measures should be foremost among the marks of radically fideistic models of faith.

These claims might draw support from Robert M. Adams' careful treatment of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard famously describes faith as 'holding fast the objective uncertainty so as to remain out upon the deep.' Adams finds it interesting that Kierkegaard's prescriptive fideism held that "it is precisely a misunderstanding to seek an objective assurance," and "it is impossible in the case of historical problems to reach an objective decision so certain that no doubt could disturb it."³⁵ He describes Kierkegaard's "decision of faith" as "a decision to disregard the possibility of error [...a decision] not to be unaware of it, or fail to consider it, or lack anxiety about it." Adams' corrective to Kierkegaard's radical fideism is that "faith ought not to be thought of as unconditional devotion to a belief." To make faith, as the greatest possible passion, depend upon making the greatest possible sacrifices on the smallest possible chance of success, setting up "an impossible ideal." Perhaps this is what invites teleological suspension of the ethics. Adams says it "would set the religious interest at enmity with all other interests, or at least with the best of them."³⁶

Adams' last point makes an especially strong reply to Kierkegaardian fideism, and by extension to religious virtue divorced from concern with moral and intellectual. His point is well-supported empirically because the technique of exposing people to a 'taken-to-the-limit' version of a good idea, and having them learn and articulate what went wrong in that movement to the nth degree is one of the notable techniques of *debiasing* that Dalton and Abrams think encouragingly about as sometimes able to break the cycle of co-radicalization.³⁷ Most people, when exposed to this thought-experiment, tend to moderate their views and thereafter exhibit more sensitivity to difference. In essence they are starting to reason inductively rather than think counter-inductively. If taking the idea to an extreme didn't work or wasn't well-motivated in my view in all these other cases, how can I say it will work and be well-motivated in my own case?

Apparently people can see through the idea that the nth degree is always better than a moderate degree; they tend to avoid rather than seek such a fast track to truth-as-subjectivity. The concept of religious truth is a very *thin* concept, but one that is thickened in different ways in scriptures and theologies. Still, propositional belief on the basis of non-propositional evidence such as temperament, wishfulness, practical interest, etc. challenges the positive epistemic status of those beliefs. The more passionate the motivation to believe, the less the “truth” claim resembles anything we can connect with evidence, and with formal modes of reasoning. The more we are concerned with inductive reasoning, the less credence will we place in statements of passionate commitment to contrary religious propositions.

Let us summarize the stated reasons for wanting to rehabilitate discussion of fideism so that it can be employed with more scientific and philosophical acumen. Firstly, fideism is one of numerous philosophical concepts that it is crucial to recognize has distinct descriptive and prescriptive senses.³⁸ The two senses of fideism are important for scholars to make clear, because fideism tends to confuse the psychology or phenomenology of belief with epistemology. The result of such confusion is a muddling of descriptive and normative categories.³⁹ Secondly, the old way of marking differences in degrees of fideistic orientation by contrasting ‘supra’ and ‘counter’-evidential belief has outgrown its usefulness. It needs to be replaced with more sophisticated models, which philosophers of luck and epistemologists can help design. This old way was belief-based, and given to a propositional model of religious commitments. It focused on a relation between a proposition with religious content and the overall or all-things-considered level of evidence for that proposition. But what makes Kierkegaard’s ‘best faith equals highest risk’ formula so symptomatic of strong fideism is not *what* was believed, but *how* one’s religious belief is to be formed, and how risk-inviting one’s doxastic method is while

acquiring and maintaining beliefs. The “how formed” question refers us not to a belief-content, but to an agent and a context of inquiry.

Our study of descriptive (psychological) and prescriptive (religious) fideism suggests turning back to *formal* features of doxastic methods (i.e., of how people process), features that may be straightforwardly tested for in studies utilizing scales of religious orientation. So the chapter thus far has mainly been about what, to serve the research interests of theologians, philosophers, and cognitive scientists, should *replace* the supra/counter-evidential fideism distinction. How can we better distinguish the relevant types of fideistic inference that people actually employ? How can we better understand the philosophic and social scientific interest in each type? If our focus on inductive risk is worth anything, it should allow us to rebuild the spectrum of religious orientation from the ground up. The psychological effects that the thesis of descriptive fideism predicts are scalable: There are measurable degrees of fideistic orientation. The measures take note especially of patterns of inference that violate inductive norms.

Bridge Building, or Burning? A Critique of the Belief Model

William Lad Sessions' *The Concept of Faith* develops and compares six distinct but often overlapping models: Personal Relationship; Devotion; Attitude; Confidence; Hope; and Belief.⁴⁰ In this section I want to more directly critique the naïve realism of the belief model of faith, and the practical consequences of a theist accepting this particular model. We will not be able to comment on each of the models directly, but we earlier cited psychological work supporting the claim that our blind spot regarding one's own biases is exacerbated by an agent's

phenomenological stance of naive realism. I want to put a focus on the belief model and provide reasons to think that it is rationally challenged in ways that other models need not be.

As Sessions characterizes the belief model, “faith is propositional belief. ...Belief is not ‘believe in’ but ‘believe that,’ belief that such and such is the case, or belief that a certain proposition is true.” But also on this model,

Faith’s belief lacks adequate evidence. ...S’s faith that p is not at all a matter of proportioning one’s belief or degree of conviction to the evidence, and any conception of belief that essentially ties belief or level of conviction to evidence must forge a different conception of faith...Unlike rational conviction or knowledge, faith’s believing involves going beyond, perhaps far beyond, the evidence – it requires an evidential risk or ‘leap.’⁴¹

Here I hope the reader will agree that the truth claim and the fideism or anti-rationalism about grounds that we see expressed, are deeply in tension with one another.⁴² Firstly, there is a mismatch between the description of faith as belief, and the belief model’s denial of the need for or desirability of epistemic reasons or arguments as grounds for assent.⁴³ Secondly, there is deep ambiguity in the belief model of faith between what are supposed to be the voluntary aspects of faith, and what are supposed to be the irresistible effects of grace, or the involuntary status of faith-based belief more generally.⁴⁴

Relatedly, we earlier endeavored to explain why the belief model invites cognitive dissonance.⁴⁵ It combines the propositional attitude of belief (as essential to a state of faith), with anti-rationalism about grounds. This is considerably different than saying either that what we take to be evidence is broad, or that revelation or religious authority are kinds of evidence. It is

asserting normatively that belief based on evidence does not meet the bar of what genuine faith *is*. So for our purposes the belief model nicely articulates much of the strong end of any scale running from religious rationalism to religious fideism. Connections with naïve realism appear strongest where the belief model allows that agent to ‘disown’ their own agency in coming to have theistic, and even religion-specific beliefs. Disownership allows for discounting the moral and epistemic risks of their faith-based belief. Faith-based and God-caused will be happily conflated if this alleviates cognitive dissonance.

Sessions’ “model-theoretic” methodology also allows him to describe each different model of faith by what cognitive stances its adherents deem *inconsistent* with faith. So we learn much more about the belief model when he writes that for it, “[f]aith’s opposites are nonbelief, disbelief, evidential belief, and tepid belief. Each opposes the central conditions of faith according to the belief model, but in different ways.”⁴⁶ This side of the belief model reinforces moral ownership of faith qua personal sincerity and response to perceived divine command. Sessions’ project does not involve attempt at philosophical justification of any one of his models of faith over others. While he does describe some actual conceptions of faith as embodying the belief model, Sessions does not point to any single denomination let alone religion that takes it as orthodoxy. The main point for us to take away from Sessions’ work is, “Evidential risk is therefore ineradicable for the belief model.”⁴⁷ In this model more so than others, we have a clear prescription for taking up and maintaining belief through a high-risk, perhaps even explicitly counter-probabilistic doxastic method.⁴⁸

While I share much the same criticisms of the belief model which Philip Kitcher (2011) articulates, I am happy to concede several points to the knight of faith who might champion it. First, let me agree with Sessions’ claim that, “Proportioning conviction (and belief) to evidence

need not be the only way of being rational in one's doxastic economy, for there may well be nonevidential considerations bearing on rational believing."⁴⁹ Second, I heed Sessions' caution that "one must be careful not to overdramatize such evidential inadequacy. In particular one must not equate belief lacking adequate evidence with irrational belief, much less with irresponsible fanaticism... [I]nadequately evidenced belief is not always [but is sometimes] irrational belief." Third, I confirm Sessions' pragmatism on which "truth is not the only interest of reason in believing." And fourth, I confirm his claim that "Actions, emotions, and attitudes may all be rationally justified, and not always, or even often, is this justification a matter of evidence." Still, as Sessions in turn concedes, "The force of evidence-rationality derives from the obvious interest of reason in truth and hence in believing true rather than false propositions; since evidence is what bears on the truth of propositions believed, reason takes note of evidence."⁵⁰

The pronounced tendency among heart-felt believers to confuse their subjective conviction with objective certitude is part of Sessions' argument that claims of unique-access-to-truth are difficult to maintain, whatever model of faith one espouses. There is a form of irrationality (associated with directional thinking) that consists in confusing subjective factors with objective ones. But ironically enough, as Sessions notes, the drive to affirm the conceptual uniqueness of one's own faith tradition is not itself unique to any one sect, any one religion, or even any one family of religions.

But let us return to a key point: "Evidential risk is therefore ineradicable for the belief model, and it prevents faith from pretending it is knowledge." This is Sessions' fuller claim about this model. Let me note a big concern, because the "prevents" is here intended by Sessions as a *logical* and *epistemological* implication. But this seems odd since the belief model is explicitly anti-rationalistic in its understanding of grounds. So if a suspension of the logical and

epistemological are already made by the agent, what force is this ‘implication’ supposed to have for him or her? Why should adherents of the model comply in not contending that they possess religion-specific knowledge even in the face of strong religious contrariety?

The problem I am pointing out is this: Sessions clearly identifies a logical implication of the belief model as *skeptical fideism*, but the idea that a person can believe, perhaps believe truly, while fulfilling religious virtue *yet still not know* – that doesn’t register for most people. *Of course* the true believer knows any true proposition s/he believes! The Thomistic, Calvinist, and Lutheran conceptions of faith that Sessions identifies as sharing in the belief model are not in general *skeptical fideisms* that deny positive knowledge. To consistently fit Sessions’ abstract belief “model,” champions of actual extant “conceptions” of faith attracted by the belief model would need to acknowledge that all faith-based belief falls short of knowledge (perhaps because of safety and epistemic credit concerns discussed earlier). Proper intellectual humility and religious virtue would take this form of separating belief in the religious domain, from knowledge.

Indeed there have been times when fideism and skepticism were more closely aligned, as Session’s model prescribes. In those time faith are unlikely to be identified. But do we find this implication accepted today? Hardly. In fact what we more often find is the *opposite* claim or assumption: that whatever appeal to epistemic luck might be implicit in their theologies, when it comes to religion x, the adherent’s epistemic luck ‘must’ be benign luck, because it *must be* that the true believer in *that* faith tradition knows what s/he (truly) believes. To put it another way, to accept personal responsibility in the faith venture would mean to accept that while “non-evidential firm belief is central to faith on this model... the belief is a matter of conviction, not certainty” (68). But aside from the odd Kierkegaardian or Jamesian, strong fideists are the least

likely to assent to this difference. Or to reverse that, those least likely to assent to this difference are the strong fideists. Ignoring the resulting circularity, they often make the *tu quoque* argument, under veil of “broad parity,” that secular faith and even belief in other minds, or a material universe, is always in the same situation.

To his credit, Sessions does appear to recognize that extant conceptions of faith sometimes run rough-shod over his clear logical distinction between psychological conviction and objective certitude. This is a key reason why he points out barriers to claims of religious exceptionalism. So what I surmise from this odd situation is that in general, the more strongly fideistic and risk-inviting is the conception of faith which one is studying, the more likely one will find endorsement of just this conjunction of a truth claim and an extra-epistemic basis.⁵¹ For it is a clear case of what we earlier described as teleological suspension of the logical and of the epistemological.

Let us return to my mention of broad parity arguments. How are they entangled with naïve realism in the belief model? Pritchard describes parity arguments:

This is the idea that when we consistently apply the epistemic standards in play as regards ordinary belief, we find that religious belief is no worse off... Assuming this claim is correct, it is dialectically significant because, radical skepticism aside, there isn't thought to be a standing challenge to the epistemic standing of perceptual belief. Hence, given that skepticism about the rationality of religious belief is meant to be specific to religious belief (i.e., and not a trivial consequence of radical scepticism more generally), then it follows that there is not a serious epistemic challenge to religious belief.⁵²

Parity arguments show that claims about symmetry and asymmetry can play a large role not only in philosophy of religion, but in a broader epistemology of controversial views more generally. But the best religious candidate for a permissive parity argument to basic beliefs like other minds or a material world would be a quite generic theism or deism. Both the broad parity and basic belief defenses become less plausible the more specific and diverse are the specific beliefs defended on these bases.⁵³ We can debate the merits of broad parity, but let us coin the term *rhetorical parity-claiming* as the apologetic complement to rhetorical vice-charging. There *are* instances of rhetorical parity-claiming, though this charge may need to be made on a case-by-case basis. But *tu quoque* arguments are a general example of rhetorical parity arguments, and even if broad parity arguments are not abused in this way, I think they are based on weak analogy and should be rejected on that basis.⁵⁴ Consider also that epistemic peerhood is standardly understood in the literature in terms of cognitive and evidential parity between individuals *vis-à-vis* some target question. So it stands to reason that the more closely concerns with cross-domain parity are conceptually connected with concerns about *peer* parity that heighten the epistemic significance of disagreement, the *less* philosophic sense can it make for a person to hope to use broad parity across domains to their advantage, while at the same time tossing such epistemic symmetries to the side in order to claim religion-specific knowledge for themselves alone.

One thing we tried to be clear about in Chapter Four's four-step genealogy of religious contrariety arising out of etiological symmetry in testimonial faith traditions, was the epistemological importance of the "ugly, broad ditch": a problem that Lessing, Kierkegaard, Barth, and many others have each individually struggled with. James' talk of the faith ladder as no ordinary 'chain of inferences' from evidence, and Kierkegaard's talk of the disconnect

between passionate appropriation and objective certainty, are related expressions of the ‘ditch.’ James says this about our self-serving failure to acknowledge the ‘mood of faith’ in so many of our controversial views, and the doxastic responsibility that comes with a doxastic faith venture. Acknowledging the broad ditch and the moral-epistemological challenge that it presents is itself an accomplishment, not only because so few do, but also if it is bad faith that does not recognize itself *as* faith. Lessing reports that the ugly, broad ditch is something “I cannot get across, however often and however earnestly I have tried to make the leap.” Kierkegaard also finds Lessing compelling, by which I mean he agrees with Lessing that the gap between subjective conviction and objective knowledge is impossible to bridge in a way that isn’t a paradox to reason. Purported truths of revelation are not plausibly synthetic *a priori*, which they would have to be to avoid such paradox and get over the ‘ditch’ safely. Barth and Lindbeck by contrast have no problem taking that leap and holding the Christian uniquely successful in it. Unlike Lessing, Barth’s response was classically that of the personal ‘leap’ of the crevice, the simple sort of *testimonial authority assumption* that leads him to self-attribute the religious “prize.” This is truly the fideistic ‘leap of faith.’

Scholars have discerned multiple senses of the “ditch,” and perhaps we could delineate these. There is the underdetermination of supernatural beliefs by natural facts, and the underdetermination of the historicity of biblical miracles by agreed empirical facts. There is also the *overdetermination* of ‘prescribed certainty,’ and there is the elevation of one’s acquaintance with a purported revelation into possession of a kind of *a priori* synthetic knowledge (since the first assumption is that God said it, and the conclusions are that the Bible must be inerrant and that it must recount literal truth about creation and early human history). The only way to avoid the force of inductive norms over causal explanations and generalizations about groups is to treat

one's experience of a putative revelation as *a priori* synthetic apprehension. But the specific sense of the ugly, broad ditch that I want to highlight is the assumption of an objective metaphysical absolute on the basis of an epistemology that is based on a subjective method. We spoke of how for Kierkegaard, the passionate appropriating of objectively uncertain propositions is a definition of faith.⁵⁵ But importantly for the subject of religious epistemics, Pojman points out that Kierkegaard's definition of faith "in turn is used to characterize the concept 'truth.' The passionate appropriating of objectively uncertain propositions is 'the highest truth attainable for an existing individual.'" Kierkegaard says that "only the truth that edifies is truth for you."⁵⁶

Following Kierkegaard, James' early subjective method placed "It *shall* be true, at any rate true for *me*" at the top rung of his 'faith ladder.' Both strongly suggest an indexical or a subjectivist-relativist notion of truth. It no longer looks like the fideist is allowing "truth" its normative function.⁵⁷ For how are such truths, which are not *normative* over other persons, supposed to provide explanations that genuinely *apply* to others? The adherent still thinks s/he is asserting a cosmic truth, by which is understood one that has genuinely causal effect on every human and animals since the beginning of time. But in terms of epistemology, the fideist is using 'truth' or other terms like 'knows' in a non-philosophical sense and in a sense that no one else besides those of the in-group would likely judge well-founded. The suspension of the logical and epistemological, it once again appears, is the only way that the chasm gets 'crossed' for adherents of the belief model.

Chasms are either uncrossable, or their crossing requires a means and method. But here is the sad truth. The darkness of the proverbial blind faith leap in the dark is a self-imposed darkness. If one's goal is the self-assurance of truth or salvation, feeling the edge of the crevice with one's toe before leaping individually into the darkness one after another is much riskier than

trying first to build a bridge. The bridge-building is a collective project, while the other seems to be pure existential risk. Now when some persons are recognized as having failed, it may be that the rest should come to expect that the chasm is just far too wide, not for one of them (brave soul) but for all. A person would have to far overvalue their own ability to leap, as from one wall of the Grand Canyon, having already seen others of their species fail at the task.

Bridge-building is the alternative means and method. There are indeed many ways to build a bridge, and they are each connected with what Paul Knitter calls some kind of *religious mutualism*: an inclusive soteriology and response to religious multiplicity. “That religions mutually claim their superiority is the problem for theologies of religions, not a valid solution.”⁵⁸ This means for us that bridges are not built in the dark of indifference to the experience and virtue of religious aliens, but in the light of ongoing dialogue over similarities and differences among faith traditions, and through constant checks-and-balance between the three kinds of adequacy: theological, epistemic, and moral.

This first of Knitter’s three bridges is the *philosophical-historical* bridge, which holds that salvation centers on God and not on any one particular faith or putative special revelation. God is a divine reality with many cultural expressions (Hickian pluralism). For example, the affirmation that God, for the Christian, is triune is at the same time affirmation, not denial, that Godhead is unified but experienced in substantially different ways.⁵⁹

There is the *mystical bridge*, in which one says with Rumi, the 13th century Sufi seer and poet, “The lamps are different but the light is the same. It comes from beyond.” In the story of the blind men and the elephant retold by Rumi but of South Asian origin, they each perceive the transcendent using human categories reflecting their own experience and applied method. Direct experience of the divine transcendent is what each sought, and how the mystical bridge is built.

The construction of theological systems is at best secondary to religious experience and *praxis*.⁶⁰ But since they have all equally touched it, how the men each describe it (its phenomenal forms) – as a tree, a snake, a rock, a rope, etc. – reflects a genuine *aspect* of godhead, not a merely human *perspective*. This is why Rumi says that had our blind men been given sight, they would have each been shown as partially right, in contrast to all being shown wholly wrong. Like the philosophical-historical bridge, the mystical bridge is partly motivated by the gulf between human experience and concepts/language, on the one side, and transcendent or ultimate reality on the other. But it puts direct personal experience first, and agrees with those who think of theological systems as secondary constructions rather than as the life-blood of religion (Mill, James). Resistance to both of the first two bridges (it seems to me) comes especially from naïve realism, from creedalism, from group/institution oriented religion, and from what sociologists call priestly religion.

Thirdly there is the *ethical-practical* bridge, which Knitter describes as concerned especially with the fruits –the pragmatic, moral, and life-guiding consequences of holding any particular religious worldview. This was Lessing’s moral in his parable of rings, since pragmatic and moral ‘fruits’ are confirmable in ways that authoritative ‘roots’ of one purported scripture over others, are not. This bridge is also supported by humanists and secularists. Enlightenment thought more generally tended to de-emphasize the importance on one or another special revelation in the religious life, abandoning creedalism as divisive and favoring a simpler (sometimes deistic or even humanist) *common faith*. The pragmatist William James, whose descriptive fideism recognized that accepting or rejecting a metaphysical claim typically involves a blend of logical, empirical, and emotional considerations.⁶¹ This psychological fideism is indirectly connected with James’ permissivist ethics of belief which holds that “By

their fruits ye shall know them, not by their roots.”⁶² Theologians and philosophers who argue that we should promote ‘friendly’ theism, atheism, and agnosticism, such that while we disagree we make sure not to villainize others for not seeing things as we do, are also helping to construct and maintain the ethical-practical bridge.⁶³

But the sad truth I alluded to is this: *Exclusivists are bridge burners, not bridge builders.* It is sad because, as Knitter argues, “All religious traditions, in various ways, recognize that the ultimate reality or truth which is the object of their quest or discoveries, is beyond the scope of complete human understanding”; and because, as Knitter also argues, all religions contain the *theological resources* to affirm some sort of inclusivist response to religious multiplicity.

Bridge burning occurs not by holding one’s nurtured religious ideas to be true in some strong sense, and salvific, but only in the further and more specific endorsement of exclusivist attitudes and teachings. Proof-texts, scriptural inerrancy, biased-closure inferences, and easy religion-specific knowledge for the true-qua-home religion, are among the tropes of bridge-burners. We must look closer at the apologetic strategies that stoke these flames. We can only hope to convince more people of them of the existing bridge-building resources within their own traditions, conceptual resources and dialectical commitments to inter-religious dialogue and reciprocity consistent with recognition of real and important theological differences among faith traditions.

I do not think its well-appreciated how much the historical development of Abrahamic monotheisms out of a background of polytheism conditions the branding of religious others as idolaters and worshippers of a ‘different god.’ Does the divine plan that one’s conception of faith corresponds with envision a radically *agonistic* scenario of different faith communities battling it out for supremacy? Where it does, it again fits ill with the traits of a perfect being; on the other

hand, such accusations are the quite predictable outcome of worship of a tribal god once that worship has grown absolutistic.⁶⁴ Absolutization of an essentially tribal god, as the means and method crossing the chasm, has an unfortunate theological consequence: the consequence of suggesting an agonistic struggle between religious groups holding similarly-derived but non-identical theologies, each now casting the worship of these others as idolatry.⁶⁵ This idolatry or false religion is something *their* god, the true god, detests and righteously punishes. Due in part to the problems of religious luck that afflict religious particularism, many consider this agonistic scenario pitting tribe against tribe to be a conception of providence unworthy of a genuinely benevolent and universally loving god. Really it is not a claim about systematic theology, but a vivid narrative of cosmic warfare until the end of time, now applied backwards to religious epistemics. For how is it that a loving god would put us in such poor epistemic circumstance that the exclusivist *qua* true believer *needs* to mirror all manner of known biases in order to acquire saving knowledge? How is it that a philosophical ethics of belief is permissive, but God's judgment of us is not?⁶⁶

Having just critiqued certain ideas that many or most religious exclusivists share in common, it is time to more carefully distinguish between different strategies for supporting one's exclusivist response to religious multiplicity. Particularist (or singly-virtuous) and mutualist (or plurally virtuous) defenses of religious exclusivism are distinct positions as one finds them in the literature, and making the distinction explicit will help us make sense of a marked ambiguity in the religious exclusivist's defining claim. You see, all forms of salvific exclusivism hold that one religion alone is the gateway to salvation; all forms hold that religious value in God's eye is held exclusively by just *one* religion. But when we look closer we find exclusivism's scholarly defenders are not all making the same claim. Is the exclusivist saying that the adherents of only

one of the world's religions are rational and responsible in claiming uniqueness, and in 'awarding themselves the prize,' as Barth puts it? Or is the exclusivist saying 'I am rational and religiously virtuous in being an exclusivist of *my* home religion, and you are rational and religiously virtuous in being an exclusivist of *your* home religion'? *Any exclusivist must choose between these two claims.*

Griffiths terms the more traditional account "religion-specific exclusivism," and here we will term it *particularist exclusivism*.⁶⁷ Most philosophers of religion would take Karl Barth and other evangelicals to be committed to particularist exclusivism.⁶⁸ Particularist or religion-specific exclusivism is far and away the traditional sort, but in recent years it seems to have been largely supplanted, at least in journals of philosophical theology, by exclusivism along mutualist lines.

Let's now consider Griffiths' own influential redevelopment of exclusivism along mutualist lines. This we will term *mutualist exclusivism*. The mutualist element of this defense of exclusivist attitudes is the concession that religious aliens *to us* are symmetrically granted an intellectual right to analogous exclusivist belief about *their* home religion. The mutualist sanctions the same exclusivist attitude to all those who are religious aliens to him or herself.

While the two ways to develop exclusivism have not been very well-marked in the literature, the differences are quite apparent by attention to the *language* that each employs. A particularist exclusivist, who says that only adherents of religion x are within their intellectual rights in making the exclusivist claim, will always use the *title* of that religion. In other words, who can rationally claim uniqueness and superiority is always a 'religion x-er,' where x does not change. This again is the case for Christians like Karl Barth, George Lindbeck and very many more.⁶⁹ By contrast, the mutualist defense of exclusivism by such authors as Paul Griffiths,

Jerome Gellman and Avishai Margalit is developed without reference to a single, named religion, but instead using the *formal* terms of “home” and “alien.” I call them *formal* terms because they act as placeholders. Each mutualist author of course is personally an adherent of one particular faith (Gellman and Margalit are both Jewish, while Griffiths is Christian). Yet the *thesis* of exclusivism as they develop it is a formal one, and brings indexicality with it, since Barth will be a religious alien to these latter two authors, and they will be religious aliens to Barth. Their mutualist arguments defend the rationality of the exclusivist attitude *generally, meaning for each against the others*. This is why I think its logical coherence bears very close scrutiny, for its implication seems to be an unlimited multiplication of enemies in the mirror.

The main initial point here is simply that mutualist epistemics can't just be the empty claim of D'Costa, that I can use my earlier beliefs to judge false any claims that don't conform to them. Mutualist ethics /epistemology can't just be saying, yes, you are both pious and reasonable, but you simply are not my epistemic peer because your religion is false. The mutualist claim *says* something. It commits the mutualist to the *rationality* of a person's exclusivist attitude, whatever home religion she hails from. While I don't agree with that claim, I do agree with mutualist ethics / epistemology. What mutualism commits a person to is crucial to notice, so we will focus on it closely below. But the commitment as to rationality as just defined may be about all that we need to show that “mutualist exclusivism” is conceptually incoherent.

The Conceptual Incoherence Argument

I now want to argue that an apologetic strategy to defend religious exclusivism along mutualist lines is deeply in tension with itself. It's very logical coherence can be called into question even

apart from more specific concerns regarding its epistemological, moral, and theological adequacy. The mutualist exclusivist's core negative claim, that no religion based on constitutive, redemptive, and revealed truths can ascribe value to the religious lives of religious others (Margalit), is in danger of being recognized as what Aristotle termed "sophistic refutations: "what appear to be refutations but are really fallacies instead."⁷⁰

First, let's get our definitions clarified. Griffiths defines salvific inclusivism in a formal and hence non-religion-specific way. "Exclusivism...makes belonging to the home religion essential for salvation," while inclusivism says that "belonging to the home religion is not necessary for salvation, that belonging to an alien religion may suffice...."⁷¹ While of course there are numerous soteriologies and many ways to combine theological ideas, Griffiths manner of defining the relationship between salvific exclusivism and inclusivism quite formally seems quite practical and intuitive: inclusivism is the denial of exclusivism.

Griffiths' position that I am calling mutualism defends not just Christian exclusivism, but "structurally similar forms of religion-specific exclusivism." Mutualist exclusivism we can therefore define as asserting the reasonableness of adherents of a plurality of faith traditions in taking a salvific exclusivist response to religious multiplicity. We know what the exclusivist thinks about the falsity of their belief and their status as unsaved. But what is the exclusivist saying about their *reasonableness*? The mutualist as we have seen, defends it. Mutualism is intended to show proper awareness that judging another religion solely by the criteria and standards of one's own tradition is a highly problematic exercise. Mutualism must imply some positive moral and/or epistemological commitments, and we have seen those expressed in philosophical terms of the "rationality" of the agent. I will use the broader term "reasonable."

To add some specificity, let's understand mutualist ethics/epistemology as acceptance of (IGR), John Hick's much discussed Intellectual Golden Rule (IGR) "a rule of granting to others a premise which we rely on ourselves....": that our own experiences and those of the religion-founders are veridical, and that our tradition's transmission and instruction through elders is sincere.⁷² The denial of mutualism, defined in this formal way of acceptance of such a dialogical/epistemic rule, would be particularism, though we do not need that term here. Concern about self-consistency in the mutualist account is perhaps the result of post-modern, or again 'Hickean' elements that postliberal theology has tried to use to its advantage, but which on closer inspection is consistent only with the rejection of religious exclusivism, but not with its affirmation. Let's be still more specific about these elements that set mutualism apart from particularism. The difference between particularist and mutualist exclusivisms can be put in terms of Christopher Adamo's elaboration of Lessing through what John Hick termed the Intellectual Golden Rule (IGR), a rule of granting to others a premise which we rely on ourselves:

(IGR) If it is rational to trust my own experiences as veridical and my elders as sincere, provided I am open to defeating conditions, I must grant that it is rational for others to trust the veridicality of their experiences and the sincerity of their elders.⁷³

(IGR) is very much in the spirit of Lessing's parable of the rings, though as we have seen that story is open to varying interpretations.⁷⁴ Those theists who allow (IGR) would seem to be granting that adherents of different revealed religions stand equally vulnerable in relation to

Lessing's "ugly, broad ditch," and can be equally sincere in their religious identity. So mutualist ethics / epistemics and acceptance of (IGR) seem to me closely linked, and particularist ethics / epistemics with denial of (IGR).

With these definitions in place for salvific inclusivism as the denial of salvific exclusivism, and for particularist ethics / epistemology as the denial of mutualism (and more specifically of (IGR)), I now argue:

- (1) Mutualism implies the reasonableness of religious aliens in maintaining belief in their home faith tradition even after exposure to ours.
- (2) The reasonableness of religious aliens in maintaining belief in their home faith tradition even after exposure to ours implies the reasonableness of any one person's non-belief in any other person's home faith tradition.
- (3) A just creator's final judgment of a person's religious value would not devalue transcendentally false but reasonable belief or non-belief in any one person's home faith tradition.
- (4) If a just creator's final judgment of a person's religious value does not devalue trait x, then it allows for the value (actually or at least potentially) of trait x.
- (5) So by 1-4, a just creator's final judgment of a person's religious value allows for the religious value (actually or at least potentially) of religious aliens with the trait

of reasonably maintaining belief in their home faith tradition even after exposure to ours.

(6) (5) is the thesis of salvific inclusivism, and the denial of salvific exclusivism.

(7) Therefore, by 1-6, mutualist salvific exclusivism implies its own negation.

(8) Therefore, by 1-7, mutualism is logically inconsistent with religious exclusivism.

The potential religious value of religious others is the thesis of salvific inclusivism, and at the same time the denial of salvific exclusivism. (1) and (2) seems to me straightforward applications of the mutualist thesis, and indeed they reflect the key difference between religious particularists and mutualists, that mutualist guidance does not ask you to convert to my religion, but instead says to stay within your own home religion, as where God intends you to be. (3) would seem to be the most debatable premise, but its denial would seem to me to imply that God judges us not for sincere worship or moral virtue or intellectual reasonableness, or for anything but assent to what theological system is transcendentally true. The more that the human epistemic condition is religiously ambiguous, the more that this external success is far beyond anyone's control. So the denial of (3) strongly suggests a soteriology beset by problems of religious luck.

That we are each rational in thinking one another irrational I take to be deeply paradoxical, and I will assume that the mutualist exclusivist is not trying to defend *that* claim. But as I think the logical incoherence argument shows, they are defending something

uncomfortably close to it. The mutualist but not the particularist allows that one has to embrace *plural* reasonableness to defend reasonableness of the exclusivist attitude at all. But then the content of the claim shared by other mutualists isn't that they are 'really' reasonable, but that they are 'really' wrong, and in some sense God (but not human?) understands, culpable for their wrongness. Mutualist exclusivism is non-traditional; it would not, for example, have been by the authors of *The Fundamentals* (1910-1915). It was supposed to be how post-liberal theologians respond to the Enlightenment challenge, and also to 19th century liberal theology and 20th century post-modernism.⁷⁵ And it was supposed to move post-liberal theology beyond them rather than simply denying them without some positive apologetic to plausibly explain how.⁷⁶ Our conclusion that mutualist ethics / epistemology is logically inconsistent with religious exclusivism would be significant, if the argument holds, because it would mean that this improvement simply does not hold water: a mutualist apologetic for exclusivism collapses back into the particularist doctrine it started out repudiating as small-minded and rationally unsustainable. The hope for a positive apologetic along mutualist lines collapses back into more purely negative religious apologetics.

Dickey Advising? Dilemmas for the Two Forms of Exclusivism

The Conceptual Incoherence argument is pretty bare-boned, so adding another argument or two will help us to further elaborate problems of religious exclusivism, and to discuss other writers who defend versions of it. Avishai Margalit defines exclusivism, including his mutualist version, as the claim that an adherent of a revealed religion *cannot ascribe value* to a religion which contradicts the teachings of the home religion: There is no room for a different response to

religious multiplicity, because on this view “false religious propositions are valueless” and the holders of them inherit this status as valueless. Thus, Margalit claims that his “one ring argument” demonstrates “that each religion denies the others intrinsic value.”⁷⁷

There are, as we have already seen, some major differences between two forms of religious exclusivism, particularist (or singly-virtuous) and mutualist (or plurally virtuous) exclusivism. Next I construct the following dilemma that challenges the conceptual coherence of the exclusivist response to religious multiplicity, whichever of these two basic forms it takes.

A Religious-value Focused Constructive Dilemma

This *Value-focused* version of the Dickey Advising Dilemma is in the form of a constructive dilemma. It takes the following valid form: (1) If A then C, and (2) if B then D; (3) But either A or B; (4) Therefore, either C or D.

- (1) If exclusivism is understood on Mutualist premises, then God’s divine judgment *is sensitive* to the reasonableness of persons in maintaining multiple religious ways of life, and so God might well confer religious value on multiple religious ways of life.
- (2) If exclusivism is understood on Particularistic premises, then God’s divine judgment *is not sensitive* to the reasonableness of persons in maintaining multiple religious ways of life, and so God’s divine judgment makes personal salvation a matter of religious luck.
- (3) But God’s divine judgment is either sensitive or it is not sensitive to the reasonableness of persons in maintaining multiple religious ways of life.

(4) Therefore, either God might well confer religious value on multiple religious ways of life, or God's divine judgment makes personal salvation a matter of religious luck.

This Value-focused dilemma is intended to bring particularist and mutualist forms of exclusivism to task. If we accept the truth or plausibility of its premises, then we could conclude with a simple *modus tollens* argument:

(5) If religious exclusivism is a reasonable response to religious multiplicity, then religious exclusivism's reasonableness must be adequately supported by either its Particularist or its Mutualist version.

(6) Religious exclusivism's reasonableness is NOT adequately supported by either its Particularist or its Mutualist version.

(7) Therefore, religious exclusivism is NOT a reasonable response to religious multiplicity.

A version of salvific exclusivism that expects conversion or baptism may be conceptually incoherent if combined with a strong view of grace as a gratuitous act on the part of God. For the latter view logically implies that there are no certain necessary conditions on God's judgment, and that humans are presumptuous and prideful to think so; but the former view takes conversion to a specific religion, religion x, as a humanly-known necessary condition on personal salvation.

While soteriologies are cast in theological terms, we have seen that some more than others are faced with problems of religious luck, and particularist doctrinal and salvific exclusivism have been highlighted as views deeply affected. Absolute sovereignty doctrines

become conceptually incoherent the more that human judgment is substituted for God's judgment. Similarly to the above, I think it is clear that the cost of taking this particularist horn is simply appealing to phenomenal seemings plus religious luck, while being unable to say why people of other faith traditions cannot do the same. Or again in other terms, to assume as Barth puts it, that the truth and uniqueness of religion x is self-authenticating, while being unable to put it in more objective terms than phenomenal seemings plus asymmetrical attribution of good religious luck to religion x-ers, and bad religious luck to all others. Green notes that "Barth is making no claim whatsoever for the superiority of Christianity on historical, philosophical, phenomenological, comparative –or any other non-theological—grounds."⁷⁸ But what exactly does this leave particularist exclusivists with? Apparently it leaves them with nothing but a negative apologetic and a wholly unpersuasive claim that only adherents of religion x are personally justified in making this sort of claim. Remember that religiously-neutral scholars, in so far as they discern a phenomena of religious exclusivism, are going to express that phenomena in *generic* terms, with conservatives of religion x, and conservatives of religion being instances of that strong inductive generalization. As we earlier quoted McKim, it is "The *home* religion will teach that it is true and that other religions are false to the extent that they clash with the home religion. One's *home* religion will include as a matter of course, a ready explanation for the failures of other religions to recognize the truth."⁷⁹ If rationality is internalist, and we are just starting with how it feels to an individual, and not considering how it feels to others, then on what rational basis can I go on to claim that non-Christians are lacking on the internalist side of things, as Barth does in claiming they are vicious instead of virtuous?

Since I think that the manner in which particularist exclusivism leans on religious luck are insurmountable for it, I will be brief in commenting on those who would 'grab' the

particularist horn of the dilemma or try to go ‘between’ the horns. But the problems for mutualist exclusivism may not be so clear, and these problems require our close attention.

Premise (1) summarizes this in a common-sense assertion that if God exists and is mutualist on the question of rationality and virtue across religious traditions, then s/he would not (and could not justly) disconnect this from divine judgment. On pain of issuing manifestly unjust judgments, God would confer at least some salvific value on persons living *different* religious ways of life. It would be a doubtful supreme deity, indeed, who says, ‘You were conscientious and faithful in your inherited religion; but you got the wrong religion, period, and I don’t want to argue about it.’

Although I will leave the support of the premises minimal. But we said that while we wanted to present a dilemma that puts these two basic ways of conceiving religious exclusivism on different horns, we also want to throw substantial critical focus on mutualism, since it has not received as much discussion in the literature, and its internal coherence might be doubted. So we move now to a more specific dilemma for mutualism.

An Advice-focused Dilemma for Mutualist Exclusivists

Knitter understands Griffiths’ *Apology for Apologetics* as arguing that, “If all religious people engage in such [exclusivist] apologetics, if in the dialogue they mark their differences and make their cases why one’s own position excels over the others, everyone would find themselves more resolutely and happily on the road to truth.”⁸⁰ This seems like a correct description of religious exclusivism defended along mutualist lines: what we can term mutualist exclusivism (noting that our usage of the term “mutualist” differs substantially from Knitter’s own).⁸¹ But it

should indicate that mutualist salvific exclusivism structurally resembles ethical egoism, and is subject to some to the same kinds of objection. Ethical egoism is a doubtful normative ethical theory in its principled as well as its unprincipled or merely opportunistic version.⁸² Principled egoism says that *everyone* should act egoistically. This is thought by its proponents to be an improvement over opportunistic egoism, which says to feign cooperation, and act egoistically when it is to your advantage. But principled ethical egoism provides *inconsistent* moral advice: it tells you that your actions are right when you are pursuing your self-interest, and that mine are right when I am pursuing my self-interest, but this predicts that these prescribed actions may clash, and it's doesn't really say how such clashes are to be met. It just repeats that each should pursue their own interests in it. It seems that mutualist exclusivism is like that: it tells each person to be an exclusivist in their home religion, but this predicts clashes, and the theory provides to way to adjudicate those clashes, but just says to be exclusivist in attitude towards religious aliens, come what may in the present world, or in the hereafter. Principled ethical egoism at least has going for it that promises that egoistic actions by each will work to the collective good (Adam Smith's "invisible hand" argument). But what good is there in the prescription to stay in one's home religion if there truly is one saving faith but many contenders? This advice to stay put virtually guarantees damnation for the many, who now will never confess the true faith or coming to that saving knowledge, as the mutualist exclusivist must concede.

To drive home the cost of this concession (the cost of 'going mutualist), we can construct an advice-focused dilemma. In defending salvific or doctrinal exclusivism, the mutualist exclusivist must either:

Advise persons of a different religion than their own to go apostate in order to convert to their religion (something that would violate rationality norms since they are affirmed to be already rational and justified in their own religion).

Or,

Advise persons of a different religion than their own to remain in the religion in which they grow up or otherwise find themselves (something that would respect their rationality but preclude their chance at the religious goal of personal salvation).

This seems simple enough, but the rub comes when we consider that only the particularist can consistently take the first option. For the mutualist it would be dicey advising, because according to the mutualist, everyone is already rational and reasonable in holding the religion that they already do. Our dilemma does not, like the previous two, depend on any thesis around religious value. It depends only on considerations of what advice the exclusivist can consistently give.

To expand upon this, our dilemma gains force by recognition of a trade-off for the mutualist between two basic ways of framing advice: as epistemically fitting from an internalist or ‘mixed’ internalist / externalist point of view, or as what their own religious teachings would regard as theologically unsound. The trade-off is between giving religious outsiders what the advisor take to be sound epistemic advice, and what you as a salvific exclusivist take to be sound theological advice. Let’s define sound epistemic advice as advice that symmetrically applies virtues of responsible inquiry, and respects claims made on behalf of phenomenal feelings. That is how post-liberalism essentially describes itself. Sound theological advice will be understood as advice that aims at the salvation of the religious alien—something that in all the Abrahamic

faiths, a just and loving God wants. The dilemma is that the exclusivist cannot supply both kinds of advice at the same time, since these two ways of advising the religious alien are complete opposites. Either way, the mutualist gives dicey advice. Should the advice a mutualist gives entail that the other commit the religious sin of apostasy? The particularist *qua* evangelist always says ‘Yes, go apostasy’ but the mutualist says ‘No, you are rational to remain in your home religion’s belief, since you are justified in them in a way that you are not if you go apostasy in order to convert to another.’

Besides driving a wedge between the more traditional and post-liberal defenses of an exclusivist response to religious multiplicity, our dilemma gains force if we affirm that the relationship between the two kinds of advice is *hydraulic*, or subject to a costly trade-off. For if the advice the mutualist exclusivist gives is from their own perspective sound epistemic advice, it is from their own perspective unsound theological advice: For why should one be guided to hold to their home religion, if it is not salvific but will result in their damnation? And if it is from their perspective sound theological advice, then it must also be from their perspective unsound epistemic advice. For why should one to give up the seemings of their home religion to embrace the seemings of another, when this would entail the religious vice of going apostasy, and the one faith tradition is anyway not more epistemically discriminable as more objectively rational or well-grounded than the other?

Conservative theologies ask that we take difference seriously, and mutualism understood as endorsement of (IGR) does that. The question is whether exclusivism does that in any consistent way. If I acknowledge the sincerity, the piety, the morally strenuous mood that I experience in my religious identity and worldview, as following from having a ‘home’ religion

to begin with, then what is alien to one is home to another, so far as . “Rationality” regards agential factors, like doxastic responsibility or personal justification, but is not truth-linked. Since it is used almost synonymously with sincerity, it must be granted in some way to unbelievers on any form of mutualism. Religious inclusivism and pluralism are clearly consistent with mutual respect on the basis of perceived epistemic symmetries. But exclusivism is not, and that is what this discussion is about. There is a surface concession of epistemological similarity among faith traditions when one appeals to the mutualist concepts of “home” and “alien,” but that concession is insincere if it grants rational differences only to continue an attitude of indifference to that difference. For now the religious other is an epistemic peer and as such a resource one can learn from; it is contradictory for me to ascribe rationality to someone disagreeing with me, and still not take my disagreement with them as significant to the well-foundedness of my belief.

Reasonability is a concept that seems to go with blamelessness. But an exclusivist is now supposed to charge the religious others with vices, unless the only difference between them is allowed to be sheer good epistemic luck of a religious kind. There can’t be undefeated defeaters to my home religion, so there must be to others. But what are they? If these religious others are by hypothesis reasonable, quite possibly as reasonable as myself, with what vices should each charge the other?

Exclusivists like Griffiths and Gellman provide no clear account of rationality, but we can surmise that whatever “full rationality” means, it does not rate highly with God. On closer inspection this position combining mutualist ethics / epistemics with exclusivism can succeed only upon a radical expansion of the gap between epistemic justification and truth. The foray into epistemology is supposed to serve to rebut challenges by non-believers to the reasonableness of

religiously absolutist and exclusivist attitudes, but then it seems that what is given is quickly taken away as the true believer reverts to their usual mode of metaphysics-as-first-philosophy: non-believers are fully culpable, and rightly damned, and this attitude, not that of mutual respect, rightly predominates within any particular religious person's life. Recognizing a gap, as mutualist epistemics does, between subjective justification and rationality, on the one hand, and objective truth (empirical or trans-empirical), is one thing. That is as it should be. But an exclusivism along mutualist lines seems to present the absurdity of a *complete bifurcation* between personal doxastic responsibility (rationality, right motivation, effort) and religious value (God's judgment). The mutualist exclusivist must charitably hold religious aliens as rational in adhering to their own discovered home religion, yet somehow still deny that they can hold value in God's eye. But how can this concession and this assertion cohere, given that personal justification and intellectual virtue are widely supposed to be what give us an intellectual right to think that our beliefs are true?

The big shift from apologists giving religion-specific defenses of salvific exclusivism, to their giving a generalized defense along mutualist lines, should for all the reasons discussed, have tempered the ability to grant religious others rationality, but deny them epistemic peerhood so as to claim truth all for oneself. But what mutualist exclusivism instead results is essentially *mirrored disrespect*. We should say of those with such hatred of opposing or unorthodox theological views what J.S. Mill says of them in *On Liberty*: "the *odium theologicum*, in a sincere bigot, is one of the most unequivocal cases of moral feeling... [S]o natural to mankind is intolerance in whatever they really care about that religious freedom has hardly anywhere been practically realized, except where religious indifference, which dislikes to have its peace disturbed by theological quarrels, has added weight to the scale."⁸³

The mutualist must thus allow that there is real piety and spiritual commitment in alien religions, yet an exclusivist must somehow pair this with denying their epistemic peerhood. The theological adequacy problem is that the mutualist exclusivist, as a mutualist, must charitably hold religious others rational in adhering to their own discovered home religion (and even “fully rational” to use Gellman’s odd phrase), yet somehow deny that they can hold value in God’s eye. For salvific exclusivism, again, is this exact claim about religious value. But how can this be, given that personal justification and intellectual virtue are widely supposed to be what give us an intellectual right to think that our beliefs are true? If a deity only cared if you had true belief and not at all about your intellectual personal justification for your inherited beliefs, wouldn’t that deity would be basing divine judgment on what, from the human point of view, are the ‘wrong kinds of reasons’?

Recognizing the gap, as mutualist epistemics does, between subjective justification and rationality, on the one hand, and objective truth (empirical or transempirical), is a big point in its favor. It works *against* confusing psychology (or phenomenology) and epistemology. But when one tries to run an argument for religious exclusivism along mutualist lines, this natural “gap” is expanded to unnatural proportion. It seems to present the absurdity of a complete *bifurcation* between religious value and personal doxastic responsibility, such that the former has nothing whatsoever to do with the latter. This would mean it has nothing to do with a person’s sincerity, rationality, effort, or even good moral motivations.

Insistence on this wide of a gap between truth-possession and agent rationality serves to rationalize peer-denial that would otherwise be seen as baseless. The gap is related also to the fideistic circle, and to insulation of the truth-holding religion (but none other) from criticism. If you have the truth, what else do you need? No one else will be your peer, however reasonable or

skilled they may be. So another way to pinpoint the logical inconsistencies in mutualist exclusivism is by a focus on the logic and psychology of peer denial. Gellman and Griffiths' mutualist exclusivist presumably holds that peer denial is fully rational. But if so, this is also logically odd, since peer denial needs to be based on something, and that is usually a kind of vice-charging. But how can a person both be fully rational, and at the same time rightly charged with a vice or bias in the etiology of their belief? The mutualist exclusivist wants to defend the rationality of exclusivism whatever religion the home religion is, but at the same time to prescribe that each *individual* believer should deny all significance for one's own beliefs of this disagreement with rational others. But how can an intellectual right to peer denial track something *other than* normative concerns like those of rationality? What else would it track?

This suggests that the mutualist apologetic for exclusivism has a key flaw: A grossly-expanded gap between metaphysical fact and human epistemic virtues. Gellman's claim that exclusivists are fully rational and deserving of respect asserts something about people's *normative* properties. These normative properties can be realized plurally, and quite independently of having true religious beliefs since for all exclusivists, one particular religion at most is true. But then as a condition of moral and theological adequacy it seems that God, as good and just, should value the normative stuff—responsibility, effort, virtue—and not the now purely metaphysical concern of assenting to just the one true set of beliefs. Indeed that latter, arguably, cannot *be* normative for us, since while we may all seek the truth, to possess it is by logical implication, outside of the agents control *whatever* religious tradition they adhere to. If success in this is rendered radically independent from intellectual virtue and personal justification, then it is clearly outside of human control and salvation will in large part be a matter of luck from the perspective of even exemplars of intellectual virtue. Ditto for exemplars

of religious virtue, so far as we take this from the point of view of someone in a faith tradition which prescribes religious virtue. How can virtue and value be so opposed? How is it that God's judgment is said to follow a trait which people apparently have no control over –truth– but *not* one that they do –their rationality? If reasonableness doesn't go with what legitimates claims to truth and knowledge, what does it go with?

Another way to put this is that in particularist exclusivism, truth and justification are both rare, because these go together and are the basis for God's just condemnation of unbelievers; but on mutualist exclusivism truth is still rare, but justification or rationality broadly available. On both views outsiders to the one salvific religion still have to be morally culpable and complicit in their damnation. Just condemnation of heretics and unbelievers of the true opinion is, after all, exclusivism's basic claim. Yet a *desire* by persons of different faiths to be committed to the true opinion seems presupposed in mutualism's defense: otherwise their rationality would be impugned rather than supported. So if the mutualist is indeed defending religious aliens' a) motivation for truth and b) virtuous effort, then they go wanting for a reason how God could justly condemn unbelievers in the true religion. The rationality and virtue of the exclusivist now insisted upon, God's failure to value it becomes paradoxical in the extreme. Furthermore, the more this gap widens between good faith effort and veritic success, the more clearly are we again confronted with only a brute appeal to religious luck on the part of the one — or really the all — in *claim* veritic success uniquely for themselves. The more parity there is on the side of ability, rationality, motivation, etc., the less independent grounds there are for the exclusivist claim that our own inherit religion is uniquely true and all others that conflict in any way with it, universally false. That the mutualist exclusivist says that *all* religious adherents should make that claim on the part of their home religions does not resolve this problem; it only increases it. I thus

submit that there is no less circularity, and no more conceptual coherence in mutualist as compared with particularist exclusivism. Theologically, there is no more ‘positive’ apologetic strategy that ‘going mutualist’ can supply to advance beyond the purely negative apologetics associated with a particularist, or religion-specific exclusivist view. If problems of religious luck are insurmountable for the one, they present no less an objection to the other.

To conclude this section, we have presented serious dilemmas for particularist and mutualist exclusivism, and we have argued that mutualist exclusivism even lacks conceptual coherence. Exclusivism is inconsistent with mutualist ethics / epistemics. Mutualist exclusivism has not escaped worries about implicit relativism and overt appeal to religious luck in the older particularist or singly-rational defense.⁸⁴ It has not built a better defense of the reasonableness of an exclusivist response to religious multiplicity.

Objections and Replies

As we did following the presentation of the *Exceptionalist Dilemma* in Chapter 2, we can close with some objections and replies. The first objection, coming from an exclusivist perspective, asks ‘Why target only the exclusivists? If the inductive risk account as you describe it is permissive of doxastic ventures (as you call them) in domains of controversial views, including religion, then how can it not be permissive of my exclusivist belief, which is, after all, just one more specific belief within my cohesive religious worldview? Also, most exclusivism comes from scriptural ground. How can it be doxastically irresponsible and epistemically vicious for me to believe *anything* biblical? Indeed, I’d hold myself irresponsible and vicious if I *didn’t*.

The second objection is similar in challenging the scope of our *de jure* argument, though it comes not from an exclusivist but by a skeptical evidentialist or skeptical rationalist. It is not ‘Why target only the exclusivists?’ but ‘Why *only* target the exclusivists? Why not extend your *de jure* objection to any belief about special revelation and religious testimonial authority, or indeed all theistic, or all supernatural belief? None of these beliefs are epistemically rational or well-founded. Doctrinal and exclusivist religious belief as you point out is encouraged by overtly anti-rationalist requirements on faith-based belief. But such irrationalism is true in some degree of all religious belief. So instead of limiting the *de jure* objection to a target as narrow as religious exclusivism, we should take disagreement in the whole domain of theology or religious discourse to be beyond the limits of reasonable disagreement. I more generally also contest what you call your pragmatist / permissivist ethics of belief: There is no such interpersonal ‘epistemic slack’ as permissivists talk about or as you think Rawlsian reasonable pluralism requires.

Reply to Objection 1

Self-described post-liberals like Paul Griffiths bid philosophers to accept exclusivism as just one among other aspects of religious particularity. This reasoning may seem initially plausible. People are taught an attitude toward religious outsiders along with other substantial doctrines, and that some sects are more missionary or more evangelical in orientation than others is just one of the ways that sects differ. But on closer inspection this defence of the reasonableness of exclusivist responses to religious multiplicity falls apart, and I think even reiterates the strong grounds for criticism of exclusivist apologetics as a cornerstone of fundamentalist religiosity.

Firstly, scriptures teach that the faithful do not just perform rituals as a matter of course, but really take ownership of their faith. Scriptures admonish those who don't. But taking ownership of faith does not plausibly require the agent to *disown* his or her own doxastic responsibility; it must not be thought to require any of the three forms of teleological suspension: of the logical, epistemological, or ethical. Where such a suspension is involved either in ascriptions of disvalue that one places on religious aliens, or in dismissive attitudes one takes towards religious disagreement, what is really going on – or so our inductive risk account has argued – is that the agent is 'passing the buck' on their doxastic responsibility by outsourcing all risk and responsibility to a supernatural source. They are conveniently ignoring the etiological symmetries they share with religious others, on the false assumption that casting their moral and intellectual trait-ascriptions in theological, or final cause terms, makes the symmetry in proximate causes somehow no longer salient in the least. I think the inductive risk account is right in maintaining that where there is teleological suspension of the logical, epistemological, or ethical, there is a basic failure to accept doxastic responsibility for one's beliefs or actions. Appeal to tradition to settle the matter of belief reduces normative questions of what ought to be believed, or done, with some psychological or sociological fact.

Secondly, our inductive risk account of the limits of reasonable disagreement allows us to maintain that people are not necessarily intellectually vicious for accepting nurtured beliefs and holding them without a great deal of reflection. But neither does such a permissivist account as mine rationalize dogmatism or imply the reasonability, *tout court*, of holding to what we are taught. The exclusivist's objection treats religious beliefs as beyond criticism by any but persons in one's own faith tradition. But the inductive risk account says that moral risk comes in degrees. High risk is not equal to moderate risk, and cannot claim the same immunity from censure.

Inclusivism not open to the same objections of bias mirroring, or reliance upon counter-inductive thinking. Moreover, permissionism should *sharpen* reasoned criticism rather than lead to its abandonment.⁸⁵

Thirdly, the objection does not deal with the problem of the practical consequences of exclusivism, in terms of epistemic injustices done to those persons whose moral and religious lives are judged by salvific exclusivists of other faiths as lacking religious value. Exclusivist attitudes and non-accommodationist theologies have profound effects on others.⁸⁶ The literature on testimonial injustice focuses on the injustice done to a speaker or group S by a hearer H when, due to a –(in my terms, bias-mirroring) stereotype) which H holds about S, H unjustly accords too little credibility to S’s testimony.⁸⁷ Any of the markers of religious fundamentalism noted above can be considered from the perspective of moral risk that one person or group’s faith venture may affect others in adverse ways. Griffiths claims that the ecumenical dialogue sponsored by the World Council of Churches or the Vatican “has no discernible benefits, many negative effects, and is based upon a radical misapprehension of the nature and significance of religious commitments.”⁸⁸ All that is wanted by an exclusivist in the way of dialogue is what Griffiths terms “interreligious polemics.” This seems to be as true of mutualist as of particularist exclusivism. If our thesis of bias-mirroring in fundamentalist religiosity is correct, such polemics do not plausibly contribute to the mutual discovery or recognition of truth. Indeed, victims of what Kennedy and Pronin (2012) term a *bias-perception conflict spiral* typically come to hold their disagreement situation as larger and more irreconcilable than do persons who don’t necessarily impute bias to others.⁸⁹ Mutualist exclusivism just reflects desire for the *normalization* of a spiral, or what we previously called not just polarized, but polemical religious

contrariety. If they were reasonable they would acknowledge that the image in the mirror is their own.

The problem of the exclusivist ignoring practical consequences extends to the ills of bias-mirroring judgments of others. There is also the not insignificant problem that on Griffith's mutualist approach, there is no way to criticize or rationally constrain exclusivist attitudes in religions other than ones one. This leaves Gellman and Griffiths with no resources at all to criticize praxis-oriented exclusivism in the form of Islamism aimed at subjecting everyone, Jew, Christian and Muslim alike, to *sharia* law. So long as something is prescribed in their scriptures, they are being 'fully rational' by insisting that everyone should live under God's law as understood in their own scripture.

Griffiths points out that religious exclusivism are often motivated by conformity with scripture. It is undoubtedly true that this is one of the strongest motivations for it, and that a fundamentalist mind-set will throw out options that a judged not to fit with the scriptures of the home religion. Again this kind of 'disowns' responsibility for the way we treat others, but I will not return to that point. But differences between approaching questions of salvation by way of traits of a perfect being, on the one hand, versus by way of scriptural authority or appeal to a settled theological orthodoxy on the others, has very real-life consequences. This is why we have maintained that religious virtue does not plausibly stand independent of moral and intellectual virtue, nor the theological adequacy of a certain view from its moral and epistemic adequacy. It is why matters of potential injustice to others of one's response to religious multiplicity are not a concern that can responsibly be dealt with by appeal just to one's own scripture or tradition.

While I can only speculate about what my critics will say is theologically adequate, it looks to me that exclusivists are ignoring Biblical resources and the fact that the Bible says thing

that can and are interpreted different ways. When used to support salvific exclusivism, a selective reading emphasizes some biblical passages while largely ignoring others.⁹⁰ This makes an essentially dead doctrine out of a living tradition that needs to constantly renew itself for each new generation, and knit together with what else we are learning about ourselves. According to theologians like Knitter, inclusivism is the best way to make sense of a very scriptural teaching: that the life of Jesus is a momentous event for all. Neither doctrinal nor salvific inclusivism presents a harm to *koinonia*, the Christian term for fellowship, and a concept which we may generalize as participative sharing in a common religious commitment and spiritual community.⁹¹ Theological naturalism and supernaturalism can both support dialogical principles such as (IGR). But instead, “non-accommodationist” theology winds up excluding much of the middle ground between religious and humanist-naturalist ethics.⁹²

Reply to Objection 2

This objection comes from a very different and more skeptical perspective, but shares with the previous one that neither objector sees a point in a targeted *de jure* objection such as we have constructed. I do not want to tie the inductive risk account too closely to my own pragmatism and neo-Jamesian ethics of belief. Depending on the ethics of belief one endorses, and its relationship with normative notions of rationality, reasonableness, etc., philosophers might derive more skeptical conclusions than I do from premises derived from considerations of luck / risk in Part I of the book.

But acknowledgment of reasons for standing diversity was for John Rawls the largest stumbling-block to affirmation of “reasonable pluralism.” The proper recognition of these many

sources of cognitive diversity should make us expect diversity, and also respect it. I firstly hold that permissivism rather than impermissivism, and the affirmation rather than the denial of reasonable pluralism in the Rawlsian sense, is both advantageous and philosophically superior to impermissivism. I am happy to situate the normative side of my inductive risk account with a broadly permissivist ethics of belief. Disagreements in domains of controversial views are not necessarily unreasonable even if in the broader scheme one thinks that the domains of all or some controversial views as only minimally truth-apt, and that the debaters do not always make proper allowance for this. Trait-dependence is not necessarily bias: The kinds of overdetermination that we find manifested in beliefs in domains of controversial views are not especially troubling except under special circumstances.⁹³ Ill-founded beliefs are challenged from the side of philosophy by counter-inductive reasoning (violation of inductive norms) and rhetorical vice-charging. Ill-founded belief is challenged from the side of cognitive and social psychology by established markers of cognitive or moral dissonance, indoctrination anxiety, confabulatory explanation, or personal or social bias more generally. So while the dependence of nurtured beliefs on one's epistemic location is not *prima facie* evidence of bias, more specific things like the dependence of a belief on counter-inductive thinking, or the manifestation of those markers of bias that promote the *enemy in the mirror effect*, do strongly challenge the well-foundedness of an agent's belief. They do so far more than does the simple recognition of the cultural contingency of the agent having just that belief.

Others besides self-described pragmatists have argued that the *rational uniqueness thesis* is misapplied to the epistemology of controversial views. The defense of the universal applicability of the rational uniqueness thesis is the main dividing point between impermissivists and permissivists. Impermissivists, including evidentialists and principled agnostics, defend that

principle, while permissivists deny its proper applicability to domains of controversial views. The defender of the rational uniqueness thesis claims that there is always one objectively right and epistemically rational way to weight evidence bearing on a proposition of any kind, not many. For skeptical evidentialists, if it ‘can’t be determined,’ that just means one’s duty is to suspend judgment until it can. So the theist must stop believing and instead ‘wait for the bell’ of sufficient evidence, even if it is never likely to come. On these claims, however, I think Thomas Kelly (2014) is convincing that the evidentialist conflates between intrapersonal and interpersonal epistemic ‘slack.’ Principled agnosticism over questions of moral, politics, and religion – the demand that people wait for a ‘bell’ that will likely never ring– has seemed to its many critics to prohibit actions where an act is forced.

In a sense the difference between low and high inductive risk is also reflected in disagreement about disagreement, or more particularly in the two sharply opposed “universalist” councils for how to respond to religious disagreement: conciliationism and steadfast. As a permissivist though, I reject universalist theories—those that claim there is one strong master principle to tells us how we ought to respond to disagreement. Both concessionist and steadfast guidance I take to be overgeneralized prescriptions about morally and intellectually responsible responses to genuine peer disagreement. So here I just note that my pragmatist ethics of belief, like John K Davis’ “divergentism,” is more permissivist than concessionism, or principled agnosticism. Yet I will want to suggest that it may be more effectively able to challenge a dogmatic thinker’s faulted attempts to epistemically privilege their own or their ingroup’s nurtured beliefs, and to insulate certain of them from rational criticism.⁹⁴

I have elsewhere argued that the norms that inform an ethic of belief are typically more diachronic than synchronic, and that guidance-giving takes place in the context of ecological

rationality, not ideal agency where the *order* of acquired evidence should make no rational difference as all.⁹⁵ As the evidentialist thinks, censure *can* take the form of saying that the agent should reduce their confidence level in a proposition in response to undercutting etiological information. But *must* it? Many epistemologists of disagreement talk exclusively in these synchronic (and arguably voluntaristic) terms. The importance of the reliable etiology of belief for doxastic justification seems from my pragmatist or *inquiry-focused* epistemology to cast doubt on why doxastic responsibility and guidance-prescriptions should take a primarily or exclusively *synchronic* form. So while I appreciate J. Adam Carter's risk-focused account of controversial views, his principled agnosticism is still impermissivist.⁹⁶ If as Carter (2018) argues, we should discern a more diverse set of doxastic attitudes than the Triad model (*believe, suspend belief, disbelieve*) allows us to see, then we should also try to discern a more diverse set of permissible diachronic as well as only synchronic means of response to genuine peer disagreement.

For permissivists, moreover, guidance is not free to ignore the agent's ecological rationality in favor of such an atemporal ideal agent.⁹⁷ It is implausible that either on a moral evidentialist or epistemic evidentialist basis, guidance on doxastic responsibility given to agents should demand strict suspension of nurtured beliefs. The treatment both of epistemic assessment and of guidance-giving needs to be more contextual than this, and, granting reasonable credit to people for their background beliefs, different forms of normativity (epistemic assessment, personal justification or rationality, and guidance / censure) need to be much more carefully distinguished than they are in the stated objection.⁹⁸

Conclusion

Religious exclusivism was given its most specific critique in this chapter. I critiqued its moral adequacy and presented common-sense reasons why theological adequacy should never be taken wholly independently, or in suspension of, moral and epistemic adequacy. Nothing could be riskier than that. The three kinds of adequacy were given more focused attention through our three formal arguments, and the comments I made about them. The Exceptionalist Dilemma of Chapter 2 also targeted the reasonableness of religious exclusivism, but was focused around the costs and conceptual difficulties of making either a “same process” or “unique process” response to the New Problem of religious luck. With its focus on attempts to break default symmetry among people in order to make the preferred response that one’s own religious beliefs are caused in a different way than all false beliefs in the same domain are, that dilemma is clearly about epistemic adequacy. In this chapter, the Value-focused Dilemma hinges on basic differences between religion-specific and mutualist exclusivism, putting each on a different horn. The Advice-Focused Dilemma and Conceptual Incoherence argument each added to this; they allowed us to further flesh out problems specific to mutualist exclusivism, and to thereby to rebut the claim that it makes an exclusivist response to religious multiplicity any more reasonable than does standard religion-specific exclusivism.

My key claim about inductive risk account is again not that it undermines knowledge claims, or is a general grounds for scepticism, but that it provides useful diagnostic and evaluative tools, and in particular a way to measure degrees of fideism in particular agents or in the specific model of faith they employ. Our inductive risk toolkit helps us to address the sources of deep conflicts that often seem to make those debates intractable. If what we have contended is

on the right track in terms of its methodology, the debates between religious exclusivists may not be as intractable as they seem. Disagreements characterized by mutual claims of uniqueness and superiority often reflect bias on all sides, and their reasonableness may be challenged by careful, empirically-informed studies. Theological disagreements between exclusivists of different sects or religions are not exception to this, and indeed may be an example of what the social and cognitive science of religions are making good strides in explaining. We can explore this further in the final chapter.

Notes

1 Vainio 2010, 59. Criticisms of unreflective conformism, whether religious or not, are common-place. For Bacon they fit as idols of the cave or of the Market-place. We are all susceptible to conformism in respect to our Controversial Views, and so constant reminders are generally good. But these admonitions to avoid it are often also the stuff of unfair generalizations, like the New Testament criticisms of the Pharisees as rule-followers rather than as people of true faith. This not only over-generalizes, but implicitly puts in place a more cognitive or creedal conception of faith (that can be just as unreflective) in contrast to the practice-centered Jewish model. So the worry with over-simple denunciations of conformist fideisms, is that these are often just more self-serving us/them dichotomies used even intra-religiously to assure one of his or her own controversial views, and to accuse others of some failing on thin, ‘psychologizing’ evidence that assumes access to their motivations. normatively urging better motivations. In a religiously-neutral way, President John F. Kennedy perhaps stated the general worry about cognitive idols of the cave and market-place best in a speech in which he

stated, “The great enemy of truth is very often not the lie—deliberate, contrived and dishonest—but the myth—persistent, persuasive and unrealistic. Too often we hold fast to the clichés of our forebears. We subject all facts to a prefabricated set of interpretations. We enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought.”

2 An example of skeptical fideism might be William James, who defends the right to personal doxastic risk while at the same time acknowledging the doubtful epistemic status of doxastic faith ventures. Montaigne is another example perhaps. One needs to allow the agent permissible doxa, but not religious knowledge to be a skeptical fideist.

3 Vaino holds non-reflective conformist fideism to be of little interest because “From the viewpoint of this study, it does not –although it definitely should!—really engage the question whether there exists adequate reasons for choosing a particular worldview over another more than the mere commonness of this worldview.” (59) He thus puts both forms of conformism under his own broader classification, *pragmatic fideism* in contrast to the *communicative* fideism he argues for, which while still eschewing evidentialism, takes differences and reasons for belief seriously in ways that he thinks conformist fideism doesn’t. He concedes, though that “there is a dose of pragmatism in all forms of fideism” (and I agree): “The ultimate test of truth is life itself, which makes the belief a part of public life and discussion” (64). Also, Vainio clearly allows that all these categories are gradational.

4 Vainio (2010), 2.

5 McKim, 152. Allen Buchanan (2004: 97) discusses a process of Credibility-Prejudicing via Isolation: “A person brought up in a racist society typically not only absorbs an interwoven set of false beliefs about the natural characteristics of blacks (or Jews, and so on), but also learns epistemic vices that make it hard for him to come to see the falsity of these beliefs. For example,

when a child, who has been taught that blacks are intellectually inferior, encounters an obviously highly intelligent black person, he may be told that the latter “must have some white blood.” Along with substantive false beliefs, the racist (like the anti-Semite and the sexist) learns strategies for overcoming cognitive dissonance and for retaining those false beliefs in the face of disconfirming evidence. (11)

6 Gellman, 402

7 See Muscat, 2015.

8 For notice that the need to hold beliefs by your own lights erroneous, or more especially to condemn as error and as especially a culpable error, is certainly *not* so of religious beliefs held in ways other than with the exclusivist attitude towards religious difference; neither is it true of the way we hold most of our moral, political, and philosophical commitments.

9 Gellman 2008, 382.

10 See Jesse Singal’s 2015 review of Holmes for discussion.

11 McKim (2012), 143.

12 James, “The Will to Believe.” There James affirms, “It is only by risking our persons from one hour to another that we live at all.” See Axtell 2018 and 2019. James maintained that our “overbeliefs” or venturesome emotional and intellectual “visions are usually not only our most interesting but our most respectable contributions to the world in which we play our part” (*Pragmatism*, 10). With this I argue all permissivists (who are anyway the defenders of rational disagreement against religious dogmatists and strict empiricists) can readily agree. One can be virtuous in *responsibly-held* religious and philosophical faith ventures. Symbolic and analogical thinking, which James sees as affecting philosophical and religious overbeliefs, he associates with anti-rationalism.

13 “Understanding how temperaments regulate conviction, doubt, and other epistemic evaluations is essential to the project of critical inquiry, not least because it indicates that philosophical disagreements may reflect different ‘ground-floor intuitions’ ... rather than necessarily indicating the obstinacy, dogmatism, or ignorance of one’s interlocutors.” Kidd (2013), 393.

14 The response of fundamentalists to religious diversity perhaps just stands out for the degree to which their conceptions of faith deny off these burdens, denying faultless non-belief in just the religious domain. It stands out also for the degree to the extent that there is an apologetic dimension in the historical religions which explains religious belief and unbelief in theological, and sometimes highly moralized language. And it stands out also for the degree to which religious apologists go unchallenged due to the authority they claim for themselves to define orthodoxy.

15 As children of time, we deserve respect for background beliefs and for many other effects of culture. Guidance that philosophers give must be consistent with psychological acknowledgment of pragmatism about reasons and of the ecological rationality of human agents. I would not presume to say that belief may never be permissibly responsive to non-epistemic reasons. We must not forget that we rightly reason holistically, and that as creatures of time as well as of place, we so inevitably ‘live forward.’ Looking backwards, as Montaigne correctly says, is much more difficult for us, and this is where philosophy and the sciences help the most. We simply do not know, prior to careful reflection and honest dialogue with others, the ‘real’ causes for our beliefs. We need not agree with a broad skepticism that insists that ‘ignorance of our ignorance is the death of knowledge,’ in Whitehead’s phrase. But again, what consequences to draw from the epistemic location problem are not clear cut.

16 Gilbert Harman makes a related point when he contrasts the lack of “complete specification” in inductive reasoning, in contrast to our expectation for it in deductive reasoning. He adds, “It is doubtful that anyone has ever fully specified an actual piece of inductive reasoning, since it is unlikely that anyone could specify the total relevant evidence in any actual case. The difficulty is not simply that there is so much relevant evidence, but also that one cannot be sure whether various things should or should not be included in the evidence. One cannot always be sure what has influenced one’s conclusion” (1970, 844).

17 For further background on different kinds and senses of “fideism,” see Quinn (2007), Amesbury (2005), Penelhum (1997), and Popkin (1960).

18 McKim relatedly argues that the availability of inclusivist responses to religious multiplicity “constitutes a difficulty for exclusivism insofar as they provide a way to give expression to much of what fuels exclusivism but that is free from its most serious difficulties” (2012, 68).

19 I treat “pluralism” as a position that needs support, but “multiplicity” and “diversity” as referring instead to a factual state of affairs.

20 What object of faith and how the agent is devoted to it are the main variables in light of which Sessions (1994) develops his taxonomy of six models of faith.

21 Debates over religion and science often seem almost intractable. Wittgenstein is right that scientists and theologians often talk past one another, making it difficult to see what the presumed disagreement is really about. But the reason for talking past one another is not to be that these groups are playing vastly incommensurable language games. It might also be that a person’s very conception of what “faith” means, functions like the ‘hard core’ of a Lakatosian research program, being protected from refutation and revision, come what may. I do not believe

great progress can be made in this debate until we recognize this diversity of conceptions of faith, even within Christian tradition itself, and address the merits—both philosophic and theological—of competing accounts of that relationship.

22 Penelhum defines fideism more in terms of an attitude towards the relationship of reason and faith: “the insistence that faith needs no justification from reason, but is the judge of reason and its pretensions” (Hanson 10). Penelhum’s definition may capture the sense in which reformed tradition is fideistic, but the ‘no’ seems to be over-stated in that it does not capture any differences between moderate and radical fideism. I think that the relevant way to judge moderate vs. radical as supra vs. counter evidential is not quite right, but in regards to *how* counter-inductive it is, this still helpful. If it *doesn’t* matter to someone how counter-evidential, including how counter-inductive their asymmetrical attributions are, that does fit the radical, ‘needs no justification from reason’ notion.

23 This is Penelhum’s definition. If one continues to hold that they know x, when the path to accepting or assenting to x was counter-inductive thinking, then an error theory arguably kicks in: It is better to interpret it as possibilist hope, wish, or some other propositional attitude than belief? This goes to the supra-evidential. H-S says you can’t have faith in what you hold improbably, but I really doubt that. Any football team, since they *all* have long odds, makes that clear. Faith can attach to ‘better than the others’ even when one has little insight of overall odds. Many, and perhaps most time that people engage in counter-inductive thinking, they aren’t aware that they are doing so. They aren’t thinking logically either about disagreement or about probabilities, or about modal environments. Emotion is one thing that clouds all of these.

24 An aggressive religious evidentialist apologetics appear on the surface as attempts to meeting independent standards of reason and evidence, but they can betray a more radical

fideism in the descriptive sense especially when they treat one tradition's purported special revelation as objective evidence. The very fact of their confusion of subjective and passionate factors with being in a position to know, reveals the radical character of their fideism. Thus our basic scale running from rationalistic to fideistic is perhaps not best seen as opposite extremes, as we may have to bend the ends up into a circle to reveal how religious evidentialism –even about theism but especially about a particular religion, is an indication of self-deceived fideism.

Rationalists in the primary sense will generally disdain holding the beliefs they think cannot be argued for by neutral or *independent* reason; fideists do not. For example, short earth creationists likely do not recognize themselves as fideistic, but are sure that their religious cosmogonic narrative is a question of historical facts. This is accounted for if, as I would hypothesize, those who responded to psychological measures as implicitly fideistic, will be some of the quickest to adopt explicit evidentialist stance in favour of the literal truth of their own sacred narratives.

Relating the distinction between moderate and radical fideism to degree of violation of inductive norms (some of the evidence for which will be implicit measures rather than self-reporting) will be our preferred measure, and I will try to show why this is better-suited to reveal shared features of religious extremism.

25 The literature in dual-process theory uses the implicit-explicit distinction in another way, where implicit is basically automatic or Type 1, and explicit is slower but more self-conscious Type 2 processing. Partly what I am pointing out is the need for implicit as well as explicit (for example, self-reporting) measures of strongly fideistic orientation.

26 This in turn reflects ambiguity between whether we are treating fideism as a descriptive or a normative thesis, and also between subjective and objective perspectives on “total evidence.” If this is correct then already it is not well suited to open up avenues for

comparing models of faith and their relationship to religious extremism. Also, if it is the agent herself who decides whether her credence level is epistemically justified, supra-evidential, or counter-evidential, then the standard model will reward the self-deceived as being moderate, and punish with the ‘counter’ label those who simply concede that there are mysteries of faith that they accept but cannot provide “sufficient” evidence to rationalize.

27 As Pojman paraphrases Kierkegaard’s argument, “If the objective uncertainty of the object [of religious faith] is not constantly recognized, the temptation is to ‘confuse knowledge with faith,’ transforming faith into pseudo-knowledge” (119).

28 Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 306.

29 Karen Armstrong (2010), 304.

30 “In a human being there is always a desire . . . to have something really firm and fixed that can exclude the dialectical, but this is cowardliness and fraudulence toward the divine.” Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to ‘Philosophical Fragments’* I: 34–5.

31 For an interesting perspective on the social and psychological aspects of risk-taking, see Cynthia Lightfoot (1997): “Risks are actively sought for their capacity to challenge, excite, and transform oneself and one’s relationships with others. In this regard, risks are speculative, experimental, and oriented toward some uncertain and wished-for future” (2). There are two perspectives on risk that go far back in the history of ideas; one is of risk-taking-as-trouble, or as irresponsibility; the other is of risk-taking-as-opportunity. Conceived of as opportunity, “risk-taking is as bound to issues of experimentation, autonomy, and identity, development as it is to rebellion, trouble-making, and mischief” (17). On *cognitive* risk-taking and identity, see also Dan. P. McAdams (1997), Jennifer Welchman (2006) and my papers on William James.

32 Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*,

33 Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 188. Pojman comments, “What is wrong with the argument is the inherent volitionalism.... By making faith, based on insufficient evidence, a virtuous act, it could be shown to follow — as Kierkegaard does — that it is clearly more virtuous to believe improbable propositions than probable ones... but I think it presents a consistent *reductio ad absurdum* of volitionalism. Kierkegaard’s shrewdness lies in the fact that he saw these consequences, his weakness in the fact that he accepted them” (1984, 120). I am similarly critical of James’ constant appeal to the need for an emotionally-charged “strenuous mood” for faith (an idea that he takes from Kierkegaard) which presents the same dangers of inspiring zealotry. But Pojman notes that, though not well noted in the literature, the later Kierkegaard’s ‘attitude seems more favourable to the demands of reason’ (129), and that he offers a more psychologically plausible view of faith. Much the same could be said for James, whose late views are far more qualified than his early, Kierkegaard-influenced subjective method. See Axtell 2018 for a critique of James’ treatment of risk in faith ventures, but also 2013 for development of a fuller neo-Jamesian permissivism.

34 Elsewhere I argue against Richard Feldman that the combination of cognitive evidentialism and the *rational uniqueness thesis* (RUT) that they endorse functions to destabilize the “friendly” versions of both theism and atheism while empowering the “unfriendly” versions of each, instead. This is because of the positions it entails that undermine the philosophic support of reasonable disagreement. To do the opposite of this is what is philosophically and practically advantageous, but to be able to take this path requires rejecting internalist evidentialism or as a sound basis for a normative or prescriptive ethics of belief. The alternative I propose and develop more constructively in more recent papers is *zetetic* (inquiry-focused) virtue responsibilism. Virtue theory is the champion of the importance of diachronic norms, and the simple facts that

we live forward but find ourselves already situated in the world are enough to explain why what norms should inform a sound ethics of belief are primarily diachronic. As children of time, we deserve respect for background beliefs and for much of the effects of culture. Guidance must be consistent with psychological acknowledgment of pragmatism about reasons and of the ecological rationality of human agents. I would not presume to say that belief may never be permissibly responsive to non-epistemic reasons. We must not forget that we rightly reason holistically, and that we are creatures of time as well as of place, and so inevitably ‘live forward.’ But looking backwards, as Montaigne says, is much more difficult for us, and this is where philosophy and the sciences help the most. We simply do not know, prior to careful reflection and honest dialogue with others, the ‘real’ causes for our beliefs, and our interactions with others are our best means of discovery. Perhaps this is why James said that for him, the most interesting and important thing about a person is their spiritual and philosophic ‘overbeliefs.’

35 Adams (1998) says that “Kierkegaard, in the *Postscript*, is willing to admit a dispositional element at one point in the religious venture, but not in another. It is enough in most cases, he thinks, if one is *prepared* ... but it is not enough that one *would* hold to one’s belief in the face of objective improbability. The belief must actually be improbable....” (239).

36 Adams, 235, 241.

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

38 For further background on different kinds and senses of “fideism,” see Quinn (2007), Amesbury (2005), Penelhum (1997), and Popkin (1960).

39 Sands 2014, 147.

40 Pronin, Gilovich, and Ross, 2004.

41 Sessions 50, 57. More formally, Sessions defines the influential belief model this way: S has faith that p only if S believes that p, S is (firmly) convinced that p, S has inadequate evidence for p, and S's belief that p is non-evidentially based (9).

42 This explains why one might expect a competent agent to respond to the tension by expressing some sort of cognitive dissonance, for example, feeling some genealogical or contingency anxiety. It is also why, if they don't respond in this way, one could suppose that the agent is self-deluded about the epistemic goods that she thinks her faith-based belief delivers to her. Her delusion, if it is such, could be confirmed by other measures, such as her recourse to confabulatory explanations and/or rhetorical bias-charging and biased-closure inferences, in order to justify her belief and rebut all criticism.

43 This is why I earlier suggested that if there is a basing requirement on doxastic justification, the strong fideist fails it on account of their claim of religious knowledge being a claim dependent on propositional religious luck. What we have described as Kierkegaard's strong religious fideism, Louis Pojman analyzes in terms of a thesis of *prescriptive volitionalism*: "Kierkegaard accepted the prescriptive feature of volitionalism: it is good to tailor one's beliefs to one's deepest desires." Pojman qualifies this by saying that volitionalism is prescribed only for worldview-type beliefs. This sounds very much like early James and his subjective method. It is interesting, though rarely noted, that both men actually qualified their views substantially as they got older.

44 Proponents of the belief model of faith fall into the quandary that a) faith is voluntary (bringing culpability into the picture), b) belief is involuntary, and c) belief is a necessary condition for faith. Relatedly, Hartman (2011) examines the coherence of the following claims: (1) one cannot have faith, (2) one has an obligation to have faith, and (3) ought implies can. For

Kierkegaard, genuine faith, the faith that ventures, is a *choice*. Were it merely the working out of a prior divine decree: “subjectivity cannot be excluded, unless we want to have fatalism” (see Sands 65-66 for discussion of how Kierkegaard gets through this dilemma by viewing God’s grace as “*indispensable but not irresistible, a necessary but not sufficient condition*” for faith).

45 There is a related literature on epistemic *akrasia* (weakness of will), understood as arising when one holds a belief even though one judges it to be irrational or unjustified. Scholars have debated whether this is even possible (Pojman’s “volitionalism” charge against Kierkegaard and counter-probabilistic faith demands in the Bible) and whether and in what sense it might be reasonable or adaptive. I have chosen not to engage this literature, though I find it odd that the debate on epistemic *akrasia* avoids the elephant in the room –the belief model of faith as Sessions understands as combining ‘believing *that*,’ and anti-rationalism about grounds. For here norms of belief and of evidence appear to be deliberately violated or ‘suspended.’

46 Sessions, 67. “Nonevidential firm belief is central to faith on this model, as is shown by faith’s opposites: Not believing, as well as believing contrarily, on evidence, or tepidly, all center on how (or whether) a person holds some proposition to be true” (69).

47 Sessions, 65. In philosophical theology there is some interesting work utilizing model theoretic approaches. See Jeanine Diller and Asa Kasher (eds.) 2013. My differences from Sessions might in a nutshell be that he thinks this strongly fideistic model can rationally support belief but must deny knowledge, while I am not clear how in what sense it supports “S believes that p,” in contrast with the alternative of describing the agent in such cases as holding some subdoxastic attitude, or as having some truth-apt conception of the propositional content, p. Not every believing *in* is something that must be analyzed by epistemologists as a believing *that*, and the strong fideist seems to commit this conflation in spades. Among theologians this conflation

becomes a motivation for *post hoc* evidentialist apologetic strategy, and self-ascription of religion-specific “knowledge,” in the face of religious contrariety and despite the agent’s belief being fundamentally supra or counter-evidential nature. Such claims seem psychologically but not philosophically interesting to me. I explore this further in Chapter 6 with discussion of those who distinguish certain statements of religious “credence” from belief. There are psychological markers of belief that so-called anti-evidential belief seems to lack.

48 For Kierkegaard the life-crucial or existential types of commitments accentuate the passional aspects of faith, marking differences between them and everyday beliefs. The logic that Kierkegaard employs in regard to them, Pojman observes, “seems to be counter-probabilistic: the less probability, the better!” (119). What is the relevant difference between Kierkegaard’s counter-probabilistic fideism, and Wittgenstein’s religious adherent who says, “No. There it will break down. No induction. Fear”?

49 Sessions 58, n.54. Here I would refer to my work on the centrality of diachronic concerns with responsible inquiry, in contrast to the merely synchronic notion of evidential fit. I would also leave off speaking about “rationality” especially in its bivalent ‘rational or irrational’ connotation, when we get to decision-making under conditions of local underdetermination, and speak about reasonableness in a dialectical setting, instead.

50 Sessions, 59, 63.

51 This potentially comes back to haunt Sessions’ commitment to be able to tell when an act of propositional acceptance is indeed determinable as irrational (59). He writes that “faith is indeed irrational in certain circumstances, in cases where the evidence positively and conclusively counts against believing.” But “conclusively” is far too strong to be the norm of rational assent, and counter-inductive reasoning is counter-evidential (and not just supra-

evidential, *by definition*). So any belief-formation produced by a doxastic method rightly described as counter-inductive would be ‘irrational’ –*epistemically* irrational– by his own definition, regardless of what pragmatic reason may say in its favor.

52 Pritchard (2017, 114).

53 So for example, skeptics like Michael Martin make the ‘Great Pumpkin’ objection of Plantinga’s claim of properly basic religion-specific belief, while even other Christians like Linda Zagzebski charge Plantinga’s basic belief apologetic with the violating a “Rational Recognition Principle: If a belief is rational, its rationality is recognizable, in principle, by rational persons in other cultures” (Zagzebski in Plantinga et al. 2002, 120).

54 See Quinn 1991, for what is one of the best papers of the use and potential abuse of broad parity arguments. Rhetorical status can be investigated case by case and we needn’t suppose all claims of parity across domains to be without merit.

55 This passionate appropriation conception of faith is how Kierkegaard himself appropriates the Lutheran conception of faith. Like Luther also, he affirms this appropriation of the Biblical narratives and Christian special revelation, but rejects, often in a fiery manner, natural theological attempts even to prove God’s existence. Squaring Luther’s passionate appropriation conception of faith his own denial of free will is considered by many to be theologically difficult, and part of the broader tension between grace and free will. How Kierkegaard deals with Luther’s explicit rejections of free will, given Kierkegaard’s Christian existentialist emphasis on our freedom in and responsibility for our choices, is also philosophically and theologically difficult. Free will was central issue of his debate with the Northern Humanist, Erasmus.

56 Pojman, 115-116. Many Christian philosophers and philosophical theologians seem to me often to forget that for Kierkegaard, there are clear logical implications on Lutheran and more broadly internalist or Christian witness-evidentialist premises, why faith is not a form of knowledge in the philosophical sense. They follow a passionate appropriation model of faith, yet from Kierkegaard's perspective, and in this instance also from a purely philosophical position, they conflate the agent's affectively-conditioned appropriation of scripture with their meeting a basing requirement for propositional faith. While Lessing says that he cannot honestly make the leap required to cross the ugly broad ditch, Kierkegaard tells us that he makes it, but also that the mystery or paradox of pronouncing subjective passions as the path to highest truth must remain unresolved but explicitly acknowledged. Apparently, though, it is 'resolved' in the minds of many contemporary Protestant Christian philosophers simply by going *unacknowledged*. The mutualist version of exclusivism proliferates religious "truth" and "knowledge." It allows Kierkegaard's move the Pojman points out, from faith to truth, but doesn't seem to notice that it proliferates truths and knowings at the same time. The idea of religion-specific knowledge in the face of religious contrariety is a difficult concept, indeed. So it is unclear to me if the mutualist is just saying that exclusivists have an intellectual right to say or think that they know all kinds of religion-specific theological claims, (e.g., that God is triune, or the Jesus is God), or actually saying that the Christian, the Jew, and the Muslim, just for starters, actually *have* contrary, religion-specific knowledge. This multiplication of 'knowings' with contrary propositional content is the cost of reducing truth to faith-based belief, and not letting it serve its expected normative function as an independent corrective of belief.

57 Compare Grube (2015), 421.

58 Knitter (2004, 25). This is why for Knitter, “Doing comparative theology is not an alternative to the theology of religions but should be an integral part of it, preventing us [i.e., theologians] from aprioristic and apodictic judgments so that we can arrive at our various positions cautiously and tentatively, always open to critical objections and potential revisions” (29). Compare Neville 2018 on the value to theology of comparative methods and sincere dialogue.

59 Rather than identify this first bridge with Hick’s transcategorical Real in Itself, a philosophical approach might be exemplified by James’ “religious hypothesis” or by Ian Barbour’s Dialogue model, where methodological parallels between theological and scientific reasoning are developed, and “limit questions” that science raises but does not answer are ones that each person might blamelessly answer for themselves using their own religion’s concepts. Many who build such a bridge argue for a simpler, common faith and this sometimes finds expression in deism, humanism, or New Age spiritualism as well, so this sort of bridge is broadly inclusive.

60 Every Abrahamic religion has a mystical sub-stream. The Christian medieval work, *The Cloud of Knowing* has it that, “Whoever hears or reads about all this, and thinks that it is fundamentally an activity of the mind, and proceeds then to work it all out along these lines, is on quite the wrong track. He manufactures an experience that is neither spiritual or physical.” Apophatic perspectives deserve their due, but in defense of positive theology also (because I have criticized only exclusivist apologetics), the Hindus acknowledge multiple *margas* or paths for virtuous expression, a more scholarly and systematic mode of study being one of them. If I am one blind person and you another, we each need to determine a method for determining the presence we feel, but that method may not be the same.

61 For discussion see Sands, 183. I think Sands is right to see a close complementarity between pragmatist and virtue theoretic approaches in philosophy of religion.

62 William James, *Varieties*, 21. For example, when Teresa of Avila was questioned by Church authorities over whether or not her mystical visions were veridical, or a sign of heresy or witchcraft, her life was in great danger. She could do no better than give evidence of the profoundly positive effects of her visions over her moral actions, and faith. In her case this argument was successful, and she was canonized St. Teresa in the early 17th century, forty years after her death.

63 On “friendly” versus “unfriendly” theism and atheism, see Greco 2008, and Kraft and Basinger, 2008. Numerous authors who argue in favor of “friendly theism” and “friendly atheism” support it through epistemic humility, against the non-reciprocating “unfriendly” versions of each that tend to predominate in the polemical discourse of our present-day ‘culture wars’ over reason and faith, science and religion. Kitcher’s term “soft” atheism and its contrast with the hard and aggressive (‘militant modern’) atheism that he rejects, strongly overlaps.

64 See Karen Armstrong’s *A History of God* for an insightful discussion of the slow development of monotheism and its lasting effects. My point is that religious absolutism and universalism are different things, and that claiming that God as described in a particular putative revelation is “*the* one and true god,” presupposes a background of competition like that between Moses and the magician of Pharaoh (who, not incidentally, could also perform genuine miracles or magic). It suggests a quite different and far less rationally compelling response to religious contrariety than should logically follow from the divine attributes of a universally loving and just god.

65 Knitter sees Griffiths' mutualist exclusivist stance as vaguely drawing upon the valid Hegelian/Marxian insight that the search for truth works dialectically through the clash of opposing ideas. But on closer inspection it is not hard to see how exclusivism militates against dialectics. The analogy between philosophical dialectics and "polemical apologetics" Griffiths recommends is a weak analogy.

66 This is what J. R. Hustwit (2014) terms a *discontinuity* or a *warfare* model of the relationship between religions. Hustwit writes that to deny (IGR) requires both to privilege one's own experiences and "to fail to extend this charity [symmetrically] to others and/or to overlook the fact of foundation for one's own beliefs. Either way, without evidence that the cognitive faculties of Christians are superior to Jain, Hindus, and Buddhists, the warfare model is, at best, guilty of serious inconsistency" (36). A Conflict or *warfare* model of the relationship is *one way* to try to motivate rejecting (IGR). But an Independence or *discontinuity* model appears to try an end-run around (IGR) rather than claiming an intellectual unique right to deny it outright. The logical-inconsistencies are equally apparent here, however. Hustwit seems correct that, "The discontinuity model results in a superficial tolerance of other religions because genuine revelation is not a competitor, so there is no need for explicit hostility. However, the inclination towards dialogue is non-existent in a discontinuity model. One finds, at best, a cool indifference toward religious diversity" (36). This description of *discontinuity* reflects the mutualist perspective of Griffiths and others quite well, and depending on one's interpretation of Barth, he is sometimes placed in this camp as well.

67 Steve Clarke (2012) refers to interventionist exclusivism: when a group aims for conversion of non-believers by love or by force. Clarke notes, “The benefits of coercion for the interventionist salvific exclusivist are not exhausted by opportunities to make additional conversions. The interventionist salvific exclusivist is in competition with other religions, many of which have an interest in making apostates of the followers of her religion. If believers in these other religions are also [interventionists] then all things being equal, they will be as motivated as she is to make conversions” (211).

68 For context, we might note that Barth’s influence was greatest in what we might take as first-wave post-liberal Protestant apologetics. While he was German, he became influential in Protestant thought in the U.S., not long after the term “fundamentalism” was introduced into public discourse with the publication between 1910 and 1915 of *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* by the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. Whether Alvin Plantinga’s view is an explicit example of single-religion exclusivism is up for debate, as his treatment of proper basicity pushes him in a plural-religion or mutualist exclusivist direction.

69 Plantinga I take it must be a particularist exclusivist since warrant or reliability, unlike internalist justification, cannot be true of incompatible beliefs, or belief understood on a bivalent understanding of truth for the religious domain.

70 “This happens with arguments, as also elsewhere, through a certain likeness between the genuine and the sham.” Aristotle, *On Sophistical Refutations*, 164a20.

71 Griffiths 2001, 159.

72 Hick, *The Interpretation of Religion*, 2nd ed., 235. Hick continues, “Let us avoid the implausibly arbitrary dogma that religious experience is all delusory except with the single exception of the particular form enjoyed by the one who is speaking.” Discussed in Adamo, “One True Ring or Many?” 145-146.

73 Hick is a highly influential philosophical theologian, and it is plausible to conceive Griffiths and other mutualist exclusivists as trying to accommodate his Golden Rule by conceding to John Hick that those who experience the world religiously cannot “reasonably claim that our own form of religious experience, together with that of the tradition of which we are a part, is veridical whilst the others are not” (235).

74 J. R. Hustwit (2014, 36-37) understands (IGR) as asserting, “that we ourselves believe there is a right relation between our own experience and our religious beliefs, and there is no rational reason to deny this relation to others.” This is why (IGR) militates against bivalence and peer denial. Indeed, Hick’s use of it comes in the service of rebutting religious exclusivism and supporting a still realist, but pluralist alternative. But the mutualist exclusivists as I understand them are endorsing (IGR) while expressing their own indifference to difference. They still hold that there is no *religious* value in other traditions, and nothing to be learned through dialogue. The question is, when one takes mutualism seriously, whether one can consistently hold this.

75 In terms of Ian Barbour's influential taxonomy of models of the relationship between religion and science (Conflict, Independence, Dialogue and Integration), the linguistic and post-modern turns (perhaps as exemplified in Wittgensteinian fideism) push away from Conflict and towards Independence. But in these same terms, mutualist exclusivists are accepting most of the *premises* for such a turn, while somehow claiming that it is logically consistent with maintaining almost unchanged the attitudes towards religious aliens and asymmetric trait-ascriptions of the earlier, 'naïve' particularist stance. All that has changed, it appears, is the apologetic strategy, through the addition of a purportedly strong positive apologetic in mutualist ethics / epistemology. This is why I would say that mutualist exclusivism is strongly analogous to the a kind of moral (or cognitive) relativism that would assert, 'All morals (or beliefs) are relative to culture, but *within* each culture, wrong and right (or false and true) are absolutely clear, and beyond criticism.' Obviously, this view is one-sided and seems to be a refutation of facts, since in real life sub, intra, and inter-cultural change is an ongoing process.

76 Another way to put the question is, "How one can assent to moral / epistemic mutualism, yet not go on to endorse *religious* mutualism in any one of Knitter's multiple senses?"

77 Margalit, "The Ring," 152.

78 Garrett Green, 1995, 474.

79 Gellman, 402

80 Knitter, 186.

81 In attributing mutualism to Griffiths and others who defend exclusivist attitudes using neutral “home” and “alien” terms, I want to be clear that I am not using the term in Knitter’s sense (I came upon Knitter’s work very lately). In discussion not only of Knitter’s “bridges” but also of our own approach, I take inclusivism and exclusivism as exhaustive of the possibilities, with “pluralism” just being a strong form of inclusivism. Various taxonomies would argue for more categories, but it is appropriate for someone trying to stay neutral to questions about realism or non-realism about religious language, and the inclusivist/exclusivist distinction is simply enough to allow this.

82 The principled version of ethical egoism, championed by Adam Smith, holds that pursuing our individual self-interest is our goal, but that this pursuit of our own individual goods also maximizes the greatest good overall. As if by an invisible hand, our each promoting our own individual interests or happiness works to maximize happiness overall. Unprincipled ethical egoism also advises acting self-servingly, but it makes no such claim about a collective good being promoted by egoistic actions.

83 Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter 1.

84 As Bob Plant (2011, 177) writes, “Wittgenstein’s remarks on religious and magical practices are often thought to harbour troubling fideistic and relativistic views. Unsurprisingly,

commentators are generally resistant to the idea that religious belief constitutes a ‘language-game’ governed by its own peculiar ‘rules’, and is thereby insulated from the critical assessment of non-participants. Indeed, on this fideist-relativist reading, it is unclear how mutual understanding between believers and non-believers (even between different sorts of believers) would be possible.” While many (especially exclusivist) theologians explicitly or implicitly do embrace adopt this very radical combination of fideism and relativism, Plant argues that it is not the best way to read Wittgenstein’s remarks of religious belief. Still, Kierkegaard’s influence on Wittgenstein’s lectures was profound, and it is difficult *not* to read Kierkegaard as endorsing this combination. Genia Schönbaumsfeld (2009, 131) interestingly argues that what the two thinkers have in common, however, is an attempt to go beyond the dichotomy of ways to treat faith either “as a ‘propositional attitude’ on the one hand or as a mere ‘emotional response’ with no reference to the ‘real world’ on the other.”

85 The appeal to supernatural or final causes as trumping any and all philosophical and scientific standards of epistemic risk does not provide an avenue for by-passing inductive normativity as based on shared, observable proximate causes. It always carries the rider, ‘in the home religion but not others,’ which is itself an asymmetry that demands neutral criteria if not to be seen as but an article of faith. This is a retreat from reason and accountability for faith-based commitments. Such theologically cast, religion-specific appeals to final causes as discounting shared, neutral evidence, are inevitably claims that ‘the pattern stops here’; but doing so marks it as an authority-based claim or a fideistic article of faith. This objectively, i.e., in the shared natural and social world we inhabit, increases the alethic and epistemic (and potentially also, moral) riskiness of the faith ventures based on such assumptions. One can say that ‘metaphysics

is first philosophy,' but from the interest of neutrality where truth claims need to be justified and not simply assumed, this as I argue is descriptively an instance of *testimonial authority assumption*, a clear marker of religious fideism.

86 Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (2009) provides a poignant example of these real-world consequences, and of tensions regarding them cannot be ignored because they deeply affect the life of many churches. His case is that of Bishop Carlton Pearson, a graduate of Oral Roberts University who ran a Tulsa, OK-based evangelical megachurch. The website description of Bishop Pearson is from <http://www.bishoppearson.com/about-us> . Thanks to Walter for bringing this case and his use of it in his book to my attention. As an update, Pearson's spiritual journey and the reactions it continues to provoke are portrayed in the outstanding docudrama, *Come Sunday* (2018).

87 See Fricker, M. (2007) *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Consistent with work on epistemic injustice, I hold that attitudes and beliefs about others can wrong others. But this claim is not uncontroversial. For recent work on this question of doxastic responsibility and its limits, see the journal special edition edited by Rima Basu and Mark Schroeder (2018a), and their paper "Epistemic Wronging" (2018b) which (like Axtell 2013) appears to defend Susan Haack's (1997) moral-epistemic "overlap" account.

88 Griffiths, 1994, 32.

89 What psychologists Kathleen Kennedy and Emily Pronin argue in their recent article, “Bias Perception and the Spiral of Conflict,” seems to apply. They argue that reciprocally aggressive and competitive behavior, as seen in cases of spiraling conflict, typically roots in “people’s inclination to perceive others as biased —particularly others who disagree with them.” This inclination “can initiate this conflict spiral, as well as fuel it and prevent its resolution.” What their studies demonstrate is “that people’s perceptions of their adversaries as biased leads them to act conflictually towards those adversaries. That conflictual action, in turn, is perceived by its recipients as a sign of bias, thereby leading those recipients to respond conflictually, as the spiral continues” (2012), 406.

90 Christian inclusivists often cite 1 Timothy 4:10: “For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers”; also 2 Peter 3-9: “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance; also 1 John 2:2: “and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.” See Aydin (2004) for similar inclusivist interpretation of the Hebrew Bible and even the Quran, despite its many exclusivist passages.

91 The conclusion of Ramelli’s study of Church history is that, “The case against Origen compels not, and the arguments adduced against *apokatastasis* are largely weak. Justinian’s argument from the supposed symmetry of the eternal punishment and eternal life is demonstrably invalid” (S. Nemes 2015, Review of Ramelli). See Ramelli (2013) for a theological defense of

the orthodoxy of *Apokatastasis*, and Wessling (2019) for discussion. For overlapping theological work, see Fringer and Lane (2015) and Gibberson (ed.) 2016.

92 Reflecting on the similarities between the naturalistic faith of John Dewey and the supernaturalistic orientation of William James, John Bishop (2016) writes, “Both Dewey and James defend models of faith with a view to advancing the idea that authentic religious faith may be found outside what is generally supposed to be theological orthodoxy. Furthermore, they suggest that ‘un-orthodox’ faith may be *more* authentic than ‘orthodox’ faith. ‘The faith that is religious’, says Dewey, ‘[I should describe as] the unification of the self through allegiance to inclusive ideal ends, which imagination presents to us and to which the human will responds as worthy of controlling our desires and choices’” (*A Common Faith* 1934, 33).

93 On the present view, the *overdetermination* of religious choices or actions by numerous evolutionary, affective, and social causes is only the flip side of the problem of the *underdetermination* of faith-based belief by evidence, i.e., of the *fideistic minimum* present in all faith traditions. Under and overdetermination are *paired* theses. Therefore, the multifarious causes of violence are perhaps not as unanalyzable as Cassam suggest, and I propose that we see *overdetermination theory* as itself an important part of what Cassam terms the epistemology of terrorism and counter-terrorism. Understood as a study of *contributory* causes, overdetermination theory tied to scales for fideistic orientation can yet provide an epistemological footing for optimism about the continued improvement of our ability to predict behaviors and to suggest when intervention of some kind might be appropriate.

94 As children of time, we deserve respect for background beliefs and for many other effects of culture. Guidance must be consistent with psychological acknowledgment of pragmatism about reasons and of the ecological rationality of human agents. I would not presume to say that belief may never be permissibly responsive to non-epistemic reasons. We must not forget that we rightly reason holistically, and that as creatures of time as well as of place, we so inevitably ‘live forward.’ Looking backwards, as Montaigne correctly says, is much more difficult for us, and this is where philosophy and the sciences help the most. We simply do not know, prior to careful reflection and honest dialogue with others, the ‘real’ causes for our beliefs. We need not agree with a broad skepticism that insists that ‘ignorance of our ignorance is the death of knowledge,’ in Whitehead’s phrase. But again, what consequences to draw from the epistemic location problem are not clear cut.

95 My paper “From Internalist Evidentialism to Virtue Responsibilism” argued that the norms that inform an ethic of belief are typically more diachronic than synchronic, and that guidance-giving takes place in the context of ecological rationality, not ideal agency where the *order* of acquired evidence should make no rational difference at all. Note that the objections I present to Feldman and Conee’s explicitly *epistemic* evidentialism are meant to be complemented by my direct response (2018) to the over-weaning *moral* evidentialism of Scott Aikin and Rob Talisse (2018). Both parties I think mis-apply the *Rational Uniqueness Thesis* to the epistemology of controversial views.

96 See Carter (2017) and Bondy and Carter (eds.) 2019. To accommodate the unlivability objection to principled agnosticism, Carter expands the connotation of “agnosticism” to include

the sub-doxastic attitude of ‘suspecting that,’ when conditions are right. But in this prescription, much like Feldman, there is still assumed a single right response to revealed peer disagreement among controversial views: agnosticism. Like Feldman it appears that Carter’s categories of doxastic attitudes are still essentially treated deontologically, since they line up with epistemic duties or entitlements. These are things denied by permissivists like myself. I take epistemic and pragmatic reason, and again, the rational and the social, to be artificially dichotomized in accounts that treat guidance in this way. Recognition of the collapse of the fact-value dichotomy is advantageous to the epistemology of controversial views. Until we dichotomize the rational and the social our dependency on epistemic and doxastic luck is not (or not so) troubling. But much of what I take to be best work on the epistemology of disagreement is on the permissivist side. See especially the work of Thomas Kelly, and Matthew Kopec and Michael Titelbaum.

97 Sometimes contingency or variability arguments are described as arguments from *evidentially irrelevant causes of belief*, or simply as *debunking arguments*, on assumption that they threaten to explain the etiology of these beliefs in a way that has nothing to do with their likelihood of being truth. I doubt this approach, since I doubt the rational-social dichotomy on which it is based. On the other extreme are dogmatists and phenomenological conservatives who have also taken some interest in the epistemic location problem, but who use “parity” and other sorts of arguments, often authority-based, to argue that evidential or environmental luck is no concern to well-founded beliefs. For some, ‘seeming is believing,’ and the seriousness of the problem finds no foothold.

98 See Booth (2011) in support of the separate projects idea, the ‘divorce’ between the theory of rationality and the analysis of knowledge earlier proposed by Richard Foley.