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possible-worlds interpretation seems to force him to beg the question of God's existence, albeit in a more subtle way than those who have leveled this objection against Anselm have argued.

24. Presumably, the notion of "associated concept" could be cashed out in terms of the relation between a definition and the thing defined; I will simply assume that such can be done without great difficulty.

25. That is, we can conceive of such a concept. I take it that it is the same for there to be a concept and for a concept to be conceivable.

26. Just as Anselm's notion of greatness is somewhat vague, it is unclear what makes one concept greater than another. However, since this reconstruction of the argument will be unsound for other reasons, I shall ignore that wrinkle here.

A DEFEATER OF THE CLAIM THAT BELIEF IN GOD'S EXISTENCE IS PROPERLY BASIC

Michael J. Shaffer

Abstract: Some contemporary theologically inclined epistemologists, the reformed epistemologists, have attempted to show that belief in God is rational by appealing directly to a special kind of experience. To strengthen the appeal to this particular, and admittedly peculiar, type of experience, they venture to draw a parallel between such experiences and normal perceptual experiences. If beliefs formed on the basis of the later are taken to be justified and rational to hold, then by parity of reasoning, beliefs formed on the basis of the former should also be regarded as justified and rational to hold. Such appeals to religious experience have been discussed and/or made by Robert Pargetter, Alvin Plantinga and William Alston and they claim that they provide sufficient warrant for religious beliefs, specifically for the belief that God exists. The main critical issue that will be raised here concerns the coherence of this notion of religious experience itself and whether such appeals to religious experience really provide justification for belief in the existence of God.

1. INTRODUCTION

Some contemporary theologically-inclined epistemologists have attempted to show that belief in God is rational by appealing directly to experience, and this appeal to experience in difficult epistemological matters is not itself in general an unusual tactic as familiarity with, for example, Reid and Moore indicates. In this case, however, these theologically-inclined epistemologists appeal to a special kind of experience intended to ground the rationality of religious belief. This special kind of experience is typically referred to as "religious perception," or, in the more specific and germane case of Christianity, "Christian perception" or "Christian experience." To strengthen the appeal to this particular, and admittedly peculiar, type of experience many of these "Christian epistemologists" or "reformed episte-

mologists" venture to draw a parallel between such experiences and normal perceptual experiences in order to show that, by parity of reasoning, if beliefs formed on the basis of the later are taken to be justified and rational to hold, then beliefs formed on the basis of the former should also be regarded as justified and rational to hold. For convenience sake, this sort of approach will be referred to here as *the appeal to religious experience*.¹

Robert Pargetter,² Alvin Plantinga³ and William Alston⁴ have all made, or at least discussed, appeals of this sort that have been supposed to provide sufficient warrant for religious beliefs, specifically for the belief that God exists.⁵ The main critical issue that will be raised here concerns the coherence of this notion of religious experience itself, and, more specifically, it concerns what it is that differentiates religious experience from typical, garden-variety, perceptual experience. It will be argued that (1) the notion of religious experience offered by the defenders of these sorts of arguments is problematically unexplainable, and that (2) when the appeals based on this concept are subjected to critical scrutiny, the concept of religious experience turns out to be incoherent, at least to the extent that such experiences, as typically conceived, cannot be adequately individuated from other more mundane types of experience. It will then be further argued that any reasonable attempt to differentiate religious experience from normal experience is doomed to fail in a way that is critically important for the aims of those who defend such appeals to religious experience. As a result, the justifying of beliefs in the existence of those things religiously perceived on the basis of religious experience fails. More specifically, the rationality of the belief in God's existence cannot be justifiably established by appeal to religious experience, at least as reformed epistemologists understand it.

This critical attack on the reformed epistemologists' appeals to religious experience depends on drawing the distinction between the two methods for individuating mental and perceptual states: the narrow individuation of such states and the wide individuation of such states.⁶ As it turns out, neither of these two methods for the individuation of perceptual contents is adequate for the satisfaction of the tasks that religious epistemologists have set for themselves. In the case of narrow individuation, this is true because the appeal to religious experience cannot possibly do the job that the religious epistemologists want it to do. In the case of wide individuation, this is because the appeal to religious experience begs the question against the atheist. In any case, this critical project will begin with an examination of the appeal to religious experience presented in Pargetter's 1990 article as it is perhaps the most clearly stated and sophisticated instance of the type of appeal to religious experience referred to above. The criticisms raised against Pargetter's version of the appeal, however, should, with only minor modification, be easily applicable to those offered independently by Alston and Plantinga, and frequent reference shall be made to their work in order to clarify the basic concepts involved in the reformed epistemologists' project.

2. PROPER BASICITY

In his 1990 article Pargetter claims that,

It is clear that people, and many other kinds of sentient creatures, have perception- and belief-forming mechanisms which respond to various external and internal stimuli. The response to such a stimulus typically involves both the experience and the formation of one or more beliefs. We commonly accept that the beliefs are caused by the experiences, but the actual mechanism need not concern us. We certainly have counterfactual dependence of the belief(s) on the experience, so we will do no harm in maintaining the causal connection. We normally have no control on the formation of the belief(s) (the reason for the qualification shall be made clear in a moment). *The warrant or grounds for the belief we take to be experience. It would seem rational for the person to hold the belief(s) because of the experience.*⁷

As a result, Pargetter holds that there are certain beliefs that are rational to hold, but the rationality of these beliefs does not depend upon their relations to any other beliefs. These sorts of beliefs are rationally and non-inferentially held. Such beliefs are supposed to be rational to hold simply in virtue of the perceptual states that caused them. These beliefs are termed *properly basic*, and much of what Pargetter is doing in this article is aimed at the explication of this concept.⁸

For our purposes here let us suppose that a given belief system, B_i , is composed of a set of atomic beliefs b_n and a specification of the lattice of relations R_k which hold among those beliefs. Consequently, a belief system is completely specified by a set-theoretic statement of the form, $\{b_1, b_2, \dots, b_n\} \cup \{R_1, R_2, \dots, R_k\}$. This formalism will be useful for our purpose here as Pargetter suggests that as wholes belief systems vary with respect to their rationality, and that this variability in rationality depends on the component beliefs of such total systems. This I take it amounts to the rather plausible and simple claim that certain systems of belief are more rational to hold than others, and Pargetter suggests that our assessments of the rationality of whole belief systems may involve pragmatic criteria like survival value, usefulness, the production of happiness, etc., as well as logical criteria such as coherence, consistency, simplicity, etc.⁹ To this end Pargetter introduces the notion of the "fitness" of belief systems, and this idea is cashed out roughly in terms of the overall survival value that a belief system has with respect to the believer who instantiates that system, and he draws a strong connection between the survival value of a system of belief as wholes and the rationality of belief systems as wholes.¹⁰ So, Pargetter's claim amounts to an assertion that there are certain evaluative dimensions, say $\langle X, Y, Z, \dots \rangle$, relevant to rationality and external to belief systems along which we might compare the relative merits of alternative belief systems, and he stresses the analogy to biological evolution in claiming that,

What needs to be noted is that these holistic features cannot be identified with any particular internal requirements on the beliefs that make up the system. Two different systems of beliefs could be equally rational even

though their component beliefs and the internal relationships between them are very different. Perhaps there is a most rational belief system when truth and belief coincide, but once we move away from this, various systems of beliefs could be equally rational. This again is analogous to two organisms being equally fit in an environment with very different phenotypical bases for their fitness.¹¹

He then proceeds to stress that a belief system must be made more rational by the addition of a belief generated by perceptual experience, if that belief is to be regarded as properly basic. However, if a belief is to be properly basic there also must be no defeaters with respect to that belief and the justification of that belief must not depend upon any other belief. As a result, given that there are no defeaters with respect to a belief, b_{n+1} , and that this particular belief is not justified on the basis of any other belief, such a belief is properly basic if and only if $\{b_1, b_2, b_3, \dots, b_n, b_{n+1}\} \cup \{R_1, R_2, \dots, R_k\}$, or B_2 , is more rational to hold than B_1 , $\{b_1, b_2, \dots, b_n\} \cup \{R_1, R_2, \dots, R_k\}$, on holistic criteria $\langle X, Y, Z, \dots \rangle$. We should be careful to note that the addition of b_{n+1} to B_1 may result in more or less radical changes in the elements that are members of B_1 and so the comparison of B_1 and B_2 may be rather more difficult than this simple schematic indicates.¹² Pargetter is rather silent on the issue of this sort of belief revision, but he notes that the introduction of religious beliefs may have rather deep and wide-spread effects on the composition of a given belief system.

2.1 Perception, Special Acuties and Community Agreement

Pargetter begins his discussion of religious experience *per se* by noting that there is a special problem that arises in cases where there are disagreements about existential claims in light of perceptual variation across individuals. The normal suggestion is that in such cases appealing to inter-subjective community agreement can circumvent problems concerning the existential import of experiences, but this unfairly biases the issue in favor of the majority. Pargetter claims that these problematic ambiguities concerning community agreement about perceptual acuity and existence claims can be solved by appealing to his "holistic" sufficiency condition for proper basicity. In short, we can ignore the issue of community agreement about perception and focus rather on the issue of when the adoption of a belief makes a belief system more rational. If we do so, then, regardless of the size of the partitions into which the community is divided on the basis of some variation in sensory ability, we are warranted in claiming that a belief is properly basic and hence rational to hold if that belief makes one's whole belief system more rational.

In order to motivate this strategy Pargetter considers the case of taste sensitivity with respect to the substance phenol. The general population happens to be partitioned into two groups with regard to tasting phenol. One group, the minority, reports that phenol tastes bitter, while the other, the majority, reports that it is tasteless. The natural question to ask is then whether or not phenol is really bitter. Can we simply assume in this case that

the majority is correct, and that phenol is not bitter? Surely we should not respond in this naïve manner. We do not, and should not, automatically impugn the claims of those who are sensitive to phenol because the majority of us are not sensitive to this property of phenol. What, in this case, we should believe is that phenol is bitter and there is some difference in the sensory modalities of the two groups, and, as it turns out, there are many cases of minorities that possess special sensory acuties that we take to be accurate even though the majority may not possess the ability to detect such properties. For example, expert wine tasters can detect the levels of tannic acid ($C_{76}H_{52}O_{46}$) in wine while no novice could detect this at all. Problems can arise, however, when we try to account for such differences. It may or may not be the case that the individuals in the different partitions have different experiences because they have different sensory modalities, but, nevertheless, the size of the partitions tells us nothing about which partition is having sensations that are veridical. Given Pargetter's account of proper basicity and how it can be used to address perceptual variation we are now in a position to turn our attention to the issue of religious experience.

2.2 God, The Force, and Religious Experience

In order to avoid any confusion it will be useful to consider the following passage from Pargetter's article, particularly as it serves as the foundation for his main argument. Pargetter tells to us that,

Luke Skywalker did not know about The Force until he met Obi-Won Kenobi. Obi-Won, a Jedi Knight, knew of The Force by direct experience. His belief was grounded in his feeling of The Force. Perhaps this had not always been the case—he had been trained by Yoda, the Jedi Master—and this is the sort of result such training can have. But Luke believed in The Force on the testimony of Obi-Won, a testimony he was rational to accept given the kind of system of beliefs this gave him. He was able to explain and make sense of so much he saw about him: the lives and powers of Obi-Won and Yoda, the struggle between the Emperor and the rebels, the history of his own family. It gave him direction and survival potential, and he found a new meaning and purpose to life.

In time, with training as a Jedi Knight by Obi-Won and Yoda, Luke too could feel the power of the Force. He sensed disturbances in it, and gained knowledge and power directly from it. His belief then too was grounded in experience, and rationally so. There was no relevant defeater for such a belief for Luke, and his belief system, including such a basic belief, had all the required holistic features of rationality in a fairly rational community. Han Solo was a skeptic about The Force, and his belief was always warranted by beliefs based upon the testimony of others. But his resulting belief system was made more rational by accepting the beliefs based on the testimony of Luke, Obi-Won, and Princess Leia.¹³

Pargetter draws a parallel between the scenario illustrated in this passage and the typical reformed epistemological understanding of our epistemic situation with respect to belief in God, and he deploys the conceptual machinery introduced above to this end. As a result, it shall be important for us to understand what Pargetter has to say specifically about the proper basicity of religious beliefs on the above criteria. Pargetter appears to think

that the Star Wars example is structurally and conceptually isomorphic to actual cases of religious belief both of those who have religious experience, those of us like Luke Skywalker, and of those who have only testimonial access to such experiences, those of us like Han Solo. The principal conclusion he draws is that the belief systems of *both* types of persons are made more rational, on holistic criteria, by accepting belief in the existence of The Force as properly basic, and, *mutatis mutandis*, for the existence of God *even if most of us are more like Han Solo*.

In order to make this claim more plausible Pargetter attempts to deal with some anticipated counter arguments based upon his account of proper basicity. First, Pargetter attempts to deal with the claim that there are defeaters with respect to our taking the belief that God exists to be properly basic in normal situations (i.e., those which do not involve, for example, hallucinogenic drugs, bad scallops, etc.) and he refers the reader to Plantinga's considerations of these putative defeaters as sufficient to defuse such worries.¹⁴ Pargetter does, however, briefly consider two more unusual potential defeaters more specific to the case at hand and he rejects them both. The first such defeater, that there is a, "general sophisticated intellectual belief in the community that God does not exist,"¹⁵ is rejected roughly because it is not clear that we ought to accept the conclusions of such arguments unless they make our systems of belief more rational to hold on criteria $\langle X, Y, Z, \dots \rangle$. As such, the status of this type of potential defeater is subsumed and rejected by appeal to the issue of holistic evaluation.¹⁶ In a similar vein Pargetter considers a more specific putative defeater that is often brought to the forefront of the discussion of the rationality of religious belief, the problem of evil. Pargetter claims that the problem of evil is *not* a defeater in this case, and he does so by appealing obliquely, and briefly, again to work which he and Plantinga have presented elsewhere.¹⁶ It is not all clear that Pargetter's answer to this problem is entirely adequate, but as this matter is rather peripheral to the main issue addressed here such worries can be ignored.

Pargetter also, however, considers responses founded upon the variations in experience that are alleged to obtain between those who are sensitive to religious perception and those who are not. Pargetter refers back to his general considerations with respect to the issue of the plasticity of perception, and he is careful to note that there are certain problems with regard to its application in the case of religious perception. Between the cases of the minority who claim to have direct religious experiences and the difference Pargetter notes in the taste sensitivity of phenol among the general population there is an important difference. Specifically, Pargetter readily admits that it is unlikely that there are any differences between the believer and the non-believer with respect to the distal stimuli acting on them. Furthermore, he readily admits that the believer and the non-believer have the same perceptual and belief forming mechanisms, and this fact should give us pause in claiming that such mechanisms are really different in the domain of religious perception. As a result, we are forced into

a dilemma with respect to giving an explanatory account of how and why the alleged difference in perceptual ability arises.

Where in the case of the phenol tasters, and related similar cases, we typically hold—and *can often discover*—that there is a variation in the perceptual mechanisms involved which accounts for the variations in perception, in the case of those who have religious experiences, we do not seem to be able to identify *any* variation in sensory capacities, or any other sort of experiential capacities, to account for this difference. Alston emphasizes this aspect of Christian perception and he claims that unlike garden-variety perception,

Religious experience does not put us in a position to make predictions about the divine, despite the persistent claims of the apocalyptic groups. God, so far as we can tell from our experience, does not operate in accordance with any regularities discernable by us. We are not able to anticipate God's punishment or forgiveness, the granting or withdrawing of His grace. No more are we able to anticipate where, when, or under what conditions He will enter into a human being's experience. Hence we are not in a position to devise checking procedures, to specify what experiences some other subject would have under certain conditions if what the first subject reported of God is correct.¹⁸

So our position with regard to theoretically understanding the causal account of what goes on in Christian perception is unusual to say the least. The advocate of the appeal to religious experience is seemingly committed to accepting as veridical certain perceptions that not only are not explained but that cannot be explained.¹⁹ The unintelligibility of God's motives and his activities suggests not only that we do not have, but also perhaps *cannot have* a theory that explains the difference between religious experience and ordinary experience. Similarly, in considering two persons, *A* who has religious experiences via mechanism S_A and *B* who does not, Pargetter asks,

[But], is it true that we have no reason to doubt the reliability of *A*'s relevant perceptual mechanisms S_A ? For unlike the case of the perceptual experiences considered earlier, aren't we ignorant about the mechanism by which *A* has her theistic experiences? We may have no reason to doubt that *A* and *B* differ in their modular delivery mechanisms, the sensory organs, which are responsible for normal perceptual experiences, but why do we think that the same mechanisms are responsible for *A*'s "God experiences," and if they are not, then isn't it the case that we know nothing about the mechanism in *A* which is responsible?²⁰

Pargetter responds that there are two reasons why we should not doubt the veracity of S_A which gives rise to *A*'s religious beliefs. First, even if *A* and *B* are physically type identical, it seems as if the modality of S_A might be non-physical (perhaps like some religious form of E.S.P)—particularly given the alleged content of the beliefs involved, and, second, there is no reason to claim that the beliefs formed *require* a special type of sensory input.²¹ However, if all this is true, then it looks as if we are in trouble concerning how to account for such experiences.

Pargetter suggests that, as a solution, we might appeal to perceptual skills like those possessed, for example, by expert wine tasters. In particu-

lar, he attempts to motivate an analogy between perceivers like *A*, and, for example, the Jedi Knights in the Star Wars example, both of whom undergo training which allegedly alters their sensory receptiveness and acuity. The gist of this discussion is again aimed at pointing out that the issue of holism is the real issue here. Pargetter claims that,

These brief discussions seem to demonstrate that variation in experience, that is, some people having the experiences while others do not, does not *itself* constitute grounds for *A* adopting a defeater for a belief grounded in her direct experience. Maybe, on careful examination, particular details will warrant *A* accepting a defeater, but this should not be presumed without the provision of such details, and there is no reason in advance for adopting a defeater on the basis of variation in experience. Thus if *A* is to be denied proper basicity for her belief in God grounded in experience, it must be because that belief leads to a system of beliefs which does not score well on a holistic evaluation of rationality as a system of beliefs.²²

Furthermore, Pargetter claims that *B*, and those of us like *B*, should accept *A*'s claims about the proper basicity of *A*'s belief in God based upon experiences, unless *B* has some defeater with respect to *A*'s testimony. However, the ultimate arbitration of whether or not *B* should accept a particular putative defeater, should he become aware of it, is dependent upon the holistic evaluation of the rationality of the belief system which results from *B*'s acceptance of the belief in the existence of God on the testimony of *A*, conditioned on the rationality of his belief system *sans* that belief.

With these considerations put to the side we can now move on the heart of the issue, that of the holistic evaluation of belief systems. The issue of holism is obviously central to Pargetter's argument for the proper basicity of the belief in God based upon religious experience, and Alston makes a similar point. Alston claims that,

The tough problem is to determine whether we are justified in conceptualizing our experience in these terms. Does the Christian God really exist, and does He do such things as reveal his will to people, whether to me or to someone else.²³

So the real issue is whether or not we are justified in confronting the world and our experiences thereof in terms of the Christian belief system. In accord with Alston,²⁴ however, this claim is not merely taken to be the commitment to some mere explanatory idiom, but rather it is a claim about the warrant for a particular ontological or metaphysical commitment. In most cases such warrant is allegedly based on direct perceptual experience of the world, and it is uncontroversial that such experiences must, in fact, be both possible and such that they can be individuated from other types of experience if we are to accept commitment to the existence of the objects of such perceptions as epistemically warranted. That is to say, there had better be good reasons to believe that there really are such objects and that there are really perceptions of them if we are warranted and, more importantly, *correct* in accepting such beliefs as rational. The real importance of this issue is manifested in Pargetter's account of how

we evaluate or judge the rationality of a belief system that includes the belief in God's existence relative to one that does not, and it seems to suggest that the real issue is whether there really are the things that this religious ontology suggests. As those who make appeals to religious perception are, by the very nature of such appeals, *ipso facto* committed to the existence of the relevant religious entities the ontological issue is an acute one for reformed epistemologists.

However, at best, Pargetter leaves us with a promissory note here, as we are left largely in the dark concerning just what is to be included in our holistic set of criteria $\langle X, Y, Z, \dots \rangle$. As Pargetter simply puts it,

A's claim for proper basicity for her belief in God, grounded as it is in her experience, will ultimately depend on the holistic evaluation of the system of beliefs for that *A* has with this belief compared with that which she would have if she rejected this belief.²⁵

and,

What holistic evaluation comes to is to consider the survival potential, meaningfulness, usefulness, cohesiveness, explanatory potential, contribution to general well-being, and so forth, of the two competing systems of beliefs for each of *A* and *B*. And of course there is the contention, common among theists, that the theistic belief system is clearly advantageous in these regards.²⁶

Consequently, we see that Pargetter's appeal amounts simply to the claim that, on some largely unspecified set of holistic criteria of theoretical, or belief, evaluation, the addition of the beliefs which are constitutive of a Christian belief system, or constitutive of a belief system which incorporates, e.g., The Force, to a belief system results in one that is more rational—more fit-than one without them.²⁷ Notice, however, that there is a certain tension between the pragmatic and logical aspects of these criteria. It might be the case, as Pargetter seems to indicate, that beliefs which would be defeaters with respect to our taking a belief to be properly basic in a logical sense seemingly can be ignored on pragmatic grounds provided that the resulting belief system is more rational on the whole with respect to $\langle X, Y, Z, \dots \rangle$. But, this simply amounts to the claim that believers can always protect favored beliefs even when they are false or even contradictory, but assessing this response depends on our having a specified set of criteria and a system by which they can be weighted relative to one another. In any case, we can now turn our attention to the evaluation of Pargetter's main appeal to religious experience.

3.0 Wide and Narrow Perceptual Content.

Consideration of this justificatory appeal shall begin, as noted in the introduction, with a consideration of the coherence of the notion of religious perception in terms of the narrow/wide content distinction as it applies to perceptual states. As McGinn,²⁸ and others, have pointed out we can apply this distinction to perceptual states as well as higher order cognitive states such as beliefs, for example, to beliefs regarding natural kinds. This dis-

tion finds its origin in Putnam,²⁹ but Block makes it particularly clear in the following passage.

One can think of narrow and wide individuation as specifying different aspects of meaning, narrow and wide meaning. (I am not saying that narrow and wide meaning are *kinds* of meaning, but only aspects or perhaps only *determinates* of meaning.) Narrow meaning is "in the head," in the sense of this phrase which it indicates supervenience on physical constitution, and narrow meaning captures the semantic aspect of what is in common in utterances of (e.g.) (1) [I am in danger of being run over] by different people. Wide meaning, by contrast, depends on what individuals outside the head are referred to, so wide meaning is not "in the head." The type of individuation that gives rise to the concept of narrow meaning also gives rise to a corresponding concept of narrow belief content.³⁰

This particular distinction between aspects of meaning arose with the causal theories of meaning proposed originally by Putnam and Kripke³¹ with respect to natural kind terms. Putnam's initial claim was that meanings, at least of natural kind terms, just are not "in the head." In fact, for Putnam, no parts of the meaning of such terms are in the head. That is to say, that the assumptions of methodological solipsism are wrong. Instead, meanings are determined by causal chains traced back to entities in the world external to the subject in question. In any case, what the view amounts to is that psychological states do not determine extensions.³² The upshot of this preference for theories of wide content, or wide meaning, is that the relevant states in question are individuated by appeal to entities external to the believer or perceiver. Consequently, two such states are different if the objects that caused them are different. For example, the perception that a dog is speaking to me is to be individuated from the perception that a policeman is speaking to me because one was caused by a dog and the other by a policeman.

The alternative position, known loosely both as methodological solipsism or meaning holism, claims that meanings are in the head, and that they are determined by the conceptual role a term or state plays in the cognitive architecture of an individual belief system. In effect, this position, in its pure forms, remains silent about the entities external to the believer or perceiver. As a result, the system, or lattice, of beliefs "in the head" of the subject need only be empirically adequate with respect to one's perceptual data rather than true in its fullest sense.³³ In any case, such states are individuated by reference to the conceptual scheme of that individual. With respect to perceptual states this position says that a perceptual state is a state internal to the perceiver, and it is an instantiation of a perceptual concept whose content is *determined* by the role of that concept in the conceptual scheme that the perceiver holds. As a result, for those who hold such theories, perception is radically plastic and state contents are not determined or individuated by their causal history or by their relation to anything external. On this notion of perceptual content perceptions are *interpreted*, at the base level, as being of such-and-such a type as determined by the conceptual scheme of the perceiver. As such, they do not in any way assume or imply the external existence of the objects mentioned in the content of such perceptual states

independent of the concept under which that object falls, and, thus, typically such theories preclude the possibility of simple, direct, verification of the external existence or properties of the putative external objects. This preference for narrow content implies that perceptual states are individuated by the concepts that they fall under. Thus, the perception that a dog is speaking to me is individuated from the perception that a policeman is speaking to me because the first involves the perceiver's concept of dogs and the second the perceiver's concept of a policeman.

Now we can ask what this distinction implies for appeals to religious experience of the sort presented by Pargetter, Plantinga and Alston, and it is clear that regardless of which side of the distinction the advocate of the appeal to religious experience falls on they are in trouble. As this distinction-including various hybrid forms-exhausts the field of theories of content and the individuation of contents, such theorists like those we have been considering must opt for one or the other approach and so they face the horns of a troubling dilemma. In the case in which the advocate of the appeal to religious experience adopts the former position, the preference for individuation of perceptual states via wide content,³⁴ it seems that we ought, at least in principle, to be able to give a causal account of the content of a religious perception, but, as we have seen, according to Pargetter and Alston in particular this possibility is radically suspect. We have a theory that covers and explains cases in which we form true perceptually grounded beliefs like, that a policeman is speaking to me, but what about a theory that explains religious perceptions? What would a theory of religious perception be like? As we have seen in the discussion of the relativity of perception, both Pargetter and Alston recognize this deficit, and they ignore what many see as a requirement for our accepting as warranted the products of a perceptual modality, viz. that we have a theory of how that modality works. We have detailed causal theories, e.g., of visual perception,³⁵ and they serve as well confirmed explanatory theories that explain how the beliefs formed on the basis of these modalities are justifiably taken to be veridical. That we do not have, or perhaps cannot have, such a theory of religious perception seems to be a powerful defeater of the claims for the proper basicity of any religious belief. In fact, it seems to be a good indicator that it is the case that there are no good reasons to believe that there are direct religious perceptions *per se*. The claim to the contrary is unwarranted with respect to our background theories and meta-theories. Furthermore, if the advocate of the appeal to religious experience adopts the wide approach without such a theory or some other proof to support his claim for the existence of God, then he simply begs the question against the atheist. In fact, without an account of the details of the mechanism of religious perception, the claim that there are religious perceptions whose content includes God's workings is blatantly question-begging in an especially troubling manner-it simply rules out the possibility of giving an explanation of the mechanisms which might give us reason to accept that there are religious perceptions.

On the other hand, if the advocate of the Pargetter-type appeal adopts

the narrow content approach to the individuation of perceptual states,³⁶ then he radically weakens his claims regarding the justification of existence claims concerning the objects of such states. In fact, in doing so the reformed epistemologist undermines his claim that there are direct religious perceptions at all. In such cases, perceptions are more properly regarded as being conceptual interpretations-or explanations-of perceptions that may or may not have real correlates. Perceptions of the world construed "as if" God existed, or, more properly, "as if" God were speaking to me, just cannot do the job that the reformed epistemologists require of them. Such concepts may not be concepts of things or properties instantiated in the world, and presumably we do not just want *any* description of the phenomena but rather we want the correct one, the true one. In the case of the solipsistic approach to content individuation, we would need some independent argument or evidence for the grounding of the belief in the existence of those particular external objects rather than those implied by some alternative conceptual scheme, and, as we have seen, this is explicitly antithetical to the avowed program of the reformed epistemologists.³⁷ If this were the case, then such beliefs could not be properly basic as they would depend upon other beliefs for their warrant. Consequently, it seems that the advocate of this type of appeal *must* adopt the first tactic, the wide content approach to the individuation of perceptual states, in order to maintain the coherence of appealing to direct perception that does not require appeal to other beliefs, and as we have seen that approach is deeply problematic as well as it begs the question against the atheist in a radical manner.³⁸

In any case, it seems then that there are very good reasons for thinking that we have a defeater with respect to the claim that the belief in God's existence is properly basic. It seems quite reasonable to suspect that on any acceptable specification of criteria $\langle X, Y, Z, \dots \rangle$, which we should again note Pargetter does not explicitly provide, there is a defeater for the claim that belief in God's existence is properly basic. The fact that there is no background theory of religious perception counts strongly against the rationality of holistic belief systems that include such beliefs. I take it that this would apply *mutatis mutandis* to any putative sensory modality which lacked a theoretical explanation of its mechanism, take, for example, our disparagement of the case of E.S.P. and "spooky" action-at-a-distance. Furthermore, recalling the Quinean maxim "no entity without identity," there is then no good reason to believe that there are religious perceptions because they cannot be properly individuated from those perceptions that are not religious. If this is the case, then it is surely improper to claim that such religious perceptions are properly basic.

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NOTES

1. I employ the term "appeal" here rather than the term "argument" in order to avoid being accused of making a straw man of the reformed epistemologists' posi-

tion. This is important as they claim that they are not offering an argument to the effect that belief in God's existence is justified. See especially William Alston, *Perceiving God*. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 3.

2. Roger Pargetter, "Experience, Proper Basicity, and Belief in God," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 27 (1990): 141-165. Reprinted in R. Douglas Geivett and Brendan Sweetman, ed., *Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

3. Alvin Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Properly Basic," *Nous* 15 (1981): 41-51; "Reason and Belief in God," in Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, ed., *Faith and Rationality* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983); Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

4. William Alston, "Religious Experience and Religious Belief," *Nous* 16 (1982): 3-12; "Christian Experience and Christian Belief," in Plantinga and Wolterstorff (ibid.); *Perceiving God* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

5. It is, however, somewhat unclear from his "Experience, Proper Basicity, and Belief in God" whether Pargetter, in particular, actually endorses this sort of appeal. Nevertheless, Plantinga and Alston most certainly do so, and Pargetter's presentation of the appeal is by far the most sophisticated, strong and well-worked out version of the appeal. As such it is the target of choice for those who oppose this aspect of reformed epistemology.

6. Specifically, the criticism of the arguments from religious experience raised here will depend heavily upon the narrow/wide content distinction with respect to mental and perceptual states that Putnam, Kripke, McGinn, Block, and others have employed to great effect in various contexts. See Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning'," *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, v. VII (Minneapolis, Minn.: The University of Minnesota Press, 1979); S. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972); Colin McGinn, *Mental Content* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1989); Ned Block, "Holism, Hyper-analyticity, and Hyper-compositionality," *Mind & Language* 8 (1993): 1-25; "Advertisement for a Semantics of Psychology," in Stephen Stich and Ted Warfield, eds., *Mental Representation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1994).

7. Pargetter, *ibid.*, 151.

8. Pargetter's concept of properly basic belief is very similar to both Plantinga's concept of properly basic belief (see Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?" "Reason and Belief in God," *Warranted Christian Belief*) and Alston's concept of M-belief (see Alston, *Perceiving God*).

9. Pargetter, *ibid.*, 157-159. It is useful here to compare Pargetter's pragmatic features with Alston's *Perceiving God* notion of practical justification.

10. Pargetter does, however note that the connection between a belief system's survival value and its rationality is controversial (*ibid.*, 158).

11. *Ibid.*, 159.

12. See P. Gärdenfors, *Knowledge in Flux: Modeling the Dynamics of Epistemic States* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1988). for discussion of belief revision of this sort.

13. *Ibid.*, 160-161.

14. See Alston, "Religious Experience and Religious Belief," 104, for a similar qualification, and Plantinga, "The Foundations of Theism: A Reply," *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986): 298-313. for consideration of these sorts of defeaters.

15. Pargetter *ibid.*, 162.

16. We shall consider this issue in more detail subsequently, particularly, as I think that it is quite important.

17. See Plantinga, "The Foundations of Theism: A Reply," *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986): 298-313; Pargetter, "Evil as Evidence Against the Existence of God," *Mind* 85, 242-245. Pargetter, R. (1982). "Evil as Evidence," *Sophia* 21, 11-15.

18. William Alston, "Christian Experience and Christian Belief," in Alvin

Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, ed., *Faith and Rationality* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 122.

19. This is odd because the reformed epistemologists want to disavow the idea that the perceptual modalities involved are in any way mystical. Rather, they explicitly argue that the perceptual modalities involved in perceiving God are just those ordinary modalities such as vision, hearing, etc. See Alston, "Christian Experience" and *Perceiving God* and Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in particular in support of this contention.

20. Pargetter "Experience, Proper Basicity, and Belief in God," 163.

21. Pargetter (*ibid.*) refers to the example of how we form mathematical beliefs in support of this latter claim.

22. *Ibid.*, 164.

23. Alston, "Christian Experience," 106-107.

24. *Ibid.*, 122.

25. "Experience, Proper Basicity, and Belief in God," 165.

26. *Ibid.*

27. One might be tempted to respond that the vagueness of Pargetter's criteria is not problematic. However, this vagueness is deeply problematic as it serves to obscure the fact that the reformed epistemologist's appeal to religious experience is ultimately question-begging or superfluous.

28. Colin McGinn, *Mental Content* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1989).

29. Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning,'" *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science VII*. (Minneapolis, Minn.: The University of Minnesota Press, 1975).

30. Ned Block, "Advertisement for a Semantics of Psychology," in Stephen Stich and Ted Warfield, ed., *Mental Representation* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 85 (bracketed material added from 84 for clarification).

31. Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972).

32. See Michael Devitt, "Meaning Just Ain't in the Head," in George Boolos, ed., *Meanings and Method: Essays in Honor of Hilary Putnam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

33. See Bas van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) for details concerning empirical adequacy versus truth.

34. This appears to be Plantinga's tactic as supported by his *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

35. See, for example, David Marr, *Vision* (New York: Freeman, 1982) and Richard Gregory, *Eye and Brain*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966).

36. This appears to be Alston's tactic as his 1991 and 1990 indicate.

37. See particularly Alston 1983 and 1991.

38. This last contention, i.e. that the reformed epistemologists should accept the wide theory of content individuation, is supported by much of what Pargetter ("Experience, Proper Basicity, and Belief in God") and Plantinga (*Warrant and Proper Function*) say about perception and knowledge. It seems particularly conspicuous and appropriate in the case of Plantinga given that he is highly sympathetic to epistemological reliabilism that is by its nature an externalist or wide theory of justification. Alston, on the other hand, seems at times to be an internalist about perception as his "Externalist Theories of Perception" indicates, although this appears to clash with what is implied by his claims in his "Christian Experience" (105-110) and his avowed reliabilism in chapter 2 of *Perceiving God and The Reliability of Sense Perception*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993). To put it straightforwardly, Alston's view on the matter of religious perception borders on being internally incoherent. In any case, whatever his view might actually turn out to be it is still either question-begging or superfluous with respect to the appeal to religious experience.