

Practical and Epistemic Justification in Alston's *Perceiving God*

Faith and Philosophy 25:3 (July 2008)

John Turri
Huron University College
john.turri@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper clarifies and evaluates a premise of William Alston's argument in *Perceiving God*.¹ The premise in question: if it is practically rational to engage in a doxastic practice, then it is epistemically rational to suppose that said practice is reliable. I first provide the background needed to understand how this premise fits into Alston's main argument. I then present Alston's main argument, and proceed to clarify, criticize, modify, and ultimately reject Alston's argument for the premise in question. Without this premise, Alston's main argument fails.

1.

This section presents the main argument of *Perceiving God*, along with minimal necessary background. Alston's thesis is that putative

perceptions of God often justify beliefs about God. A subject *S* has a putative perception of God when *S* has an experience *e* in which it seems to *S* that God appears to *S* as Φ . If, based on *e*, *S* forms the “M-belief” that God is Φ , then *S* has a justified belief that God is Φ . An M-belief is a belief that God is Φ , which is based on a putative perception of God. (I will often substitute ‘*q*’ for the proposition that God is Φ .)

Alston adopts a reliabilist theory of justification, which entails that justified beliefs are reliably produced. Thus, M-beliefs could be justified only if putative perceptions of God reliably indicate that God is Φ . In turn, this entails that M-beliefs could be justified only if God exists, for God could be Φ only if God exists. The stakes could hardly be higher: if Alston’s argument succeeds, then he will have established that God exists.¹

In order for *S*’s M-belief to be justified, it must be reliably caused, but *S* does *not* have to be justified in believing that it is reliably caused. However, in order for Alston to convince us that *S*’s M-belief is justified, he must convince us of the second-order claim that *S*’s M-belief is reliably caused.

A doxastic practice is a habit, or cluster of habits, of forming doxastic attitudes with certain contents, when in certain circumstances. For instance, the doxastic practice of Sensory Perception is (roughly) the habit of forming the belief that *p* when you have a sensory experience as of *p*. There is also the practice of Christian Mystical Perception (CMP), which for simplicity we can say is the practice of forming M-beliefs.

Those brief remarks put us in a position to appreciate Alston's main argument.²

1. If CMP is a socially established doxastic practice, then it is prima facie practically rational to engage in it.³ (Premise)
2. If it is prima facie practically rational to engage in CMP, then it is prima facie epistemically rational to regard CMP as a reliable doxastic practice.⁴ (Premise)
3. If it is prima facie epistemically rational to regard CMP as a reliable doxastic practice, then if CMP both exhibits significant self-support and is not demonstrably unreliable (because of either massive internal inconsistency or pervasive conflict with some other, more firmly established doxastic practice), then it is unqualifiedly epistemically rational to regard CMP as a reliable doxastic practice.⁵ (Premise)
4. If it is unqualifiedly epistemically rational to regard CMP as a reliable doxastic practice, then it is epistemically rational to infer that an M-belief that q entails that q is likely true.⁶ (Premise)
5. CMP is a socially established doxastic practice.⁷ (Premise)
6. It is prima facie practically rational to engage in CMP. (Modus Ponens: 1, 5)
7. It is prima facie epistemically rational to regard CMP as a reliable doxastic practice. (Modus Ponens: 2, 6)
8. If CMP both exhibits significant self-support and is not demonstrably unreliable, then it is unqualifiedly epistemically rational to regard CMP as a reliable doxastic practice.

(Modus Ponens: 3, 7)

9. CMP both exhibits significant self-support⁸ and is not demonstrably unreliable.⁹ (Premise)
10. It is unqualifiedly epistemically rational to regard CMP as a reliable doxastic practice. (Modus Ponens: 8, 9)
11. It is epistemically rational to infer that an M-belief that q entails that q is likely true. (Modus Ponens: 4, 10)
12. Therefore, an M-belief that q entails that q is likely true.¹⁰ (By rational inference, 11)

Up until the last step, the argument is valid. The last step is not, strictly speaking, valid, but I will not quibble with it, because the inference nevertheless appears persuasive. Rather than dispute the logic of the argument, I will argue against premise (2).

It will be important later that we understand Alston's target audience. He aims to "provide anyone, participant in CMP or not, with sufficient reasons for taking CMP to be rationally engaged in."¹¹ The argument just reviewed is intended to answer an "external question," to wit, "Why should we," the community of epistemologists and other interested parties, "suppose that this whole way of forming and supporting beliefs is at all likely to give us true beliefs about reality?"¹² We will not specifically address the "internal question" of whether CMP is coherent and self-supporting.

2.

Let us inquire into the supposed connection between practical and

epistemic justification. Let me first note that in the following discussion ‘justification’ and ‘rationality’ are used interchangeably, primarily because Alston himself slides back and forth between the two. To begin with, Alston clearly distinguishes epistemic from practical justification:

For one to be *epistemically* justified in holding a belief, as opposed to *prudentially* or *morally* justified is for it to be a good thing, *from the epistemic point of view*, for one to believe that *p*. We may think of the epistemic point of view as defined by the aim at [sic] maximizing the number of one’s true beliefs and minimizing the number of one’s false beliefs.¹

Epistemic justification, then, is concerned with truth, whereas practical justification is primarily concerned not with truth, but with prudential and moral considerations—e.g., with how well a belief contributes to our success, happiness, rectitude, and so on.² Given the inescapable difference between practical and epistemic justification, Alston must concede that there is no conceptual entailment from the former to the latter.³ He also concedes that the practical rationality of participating in a doxastic practice is not even evidence for its reliability.⁴

There is good reason to deny that practical justification provides evidence for reliability. Happiness might demand believing what is false. Perhaps some unremarkable people can be happy and successful only if they falsely believe that they possess stunning

looks, an incomparable intellect, or devastating charm. Or to take a more relevant case, due to their inability to cope with the stressful prospects of mortality and death, some people might come to practice a certain religion because it promises everlasting life, and they are much happier as a result. To take an actual case, pecuniary self-interest no doubt perpetuated the belief among many 19th century slaveholders that black people were inherently inferior, naturally fit for slavery, indeed improved by the institution of slavery. We could multiply examples *ad nauseum*. The main point is that it is at least as plausible to assume that socially established doxastic practices persist because they make people “feel good” as it is to assume that they persist because they produce mostly true beliefs.

Given that we all agree that practical rationality is not evidence of reliability, it may come as a surprise that Alston nevertheless accepts premise (2), and urges us to accept it, too. I devote the remainder of this paper to clarifying and evaluating his main argument for (2), what we may call “the argument from pragmatic implication.”

We begin by distinguishing judgment from commitment. If I judge some doxastic practice α “to be rational[,] I am thereby committing myself to the rationality of judging α to be reliable.”⁵ I do not actually thereby judge α to be reliable, but only commit myself to the rationality of supposing it to be. What does that mean? It means that, were the question to arise, it would be irrational for me to disbelieve that it is reliable or suspend judgment on the matter. In such a circumstance, if I have any epistemic attitude toward the

proposition < α is reliable>, it must be that I judge that α is reliable, on pain of irrationality.

Alston likens this to Moore's Paradox.⁶ Something would be seriously wrong with Jones were he to sincerely utter, "It's raining, but I don't believe it is." The following propositions are logically independent:

13. It is raining (here, now).

14. I believe that it is raining (here, now).

(13) is logically consistent with the negation of (14). Nevertheless, it is plainly irrational for Jones to simultaneously assert (13) and deny (14). Call this a "Moore-paradoxical utterance." While a Moore-paradoxical utterance is surely infelicitous, it also suggests an epistemic defect. Something has gone seriously wrong with Jones if he can express his belief that it is raining, while at the same time disbelieve that he has the belief just expressed.⁷ How could he be so disconnected from the very belief that he presently gives voice to? Alston believes that "this is just the situation we have with α is rational and it is rational to take α to be reliable."⁸

Are the two cases similar? No. Moore's Paradox raises a problem about an odd pair of beliefs, suggestive of epistemic failure, and which simultaneously cannot be expressed felicitously. Alston's case presents neither symptom. Consider:

15. It is practically rational to engage in α .

16. I believe that α is reliable [or: α gives rise to mostly true beliefs].

Assenting to (15) while denying (16) does not suggest an epi-

stemic failure. Neither does it strike me as odd or infelicitous. We as observers can concede that α is a long-standing, socially established, widely accepted doxastic practice, and that people in certain circumstances can have overwhelming practical reason to participate in α . Indeed, let us suppose that for them to shirk α would be grossly negligent from the standpoint of practical reason. How does this relate to whether the resulting α -beliefs are appropriate from the *epistemic* point of view? As far as I can see, it is irrelevant. Perhaps α prescribes hasty generalization or prejudicial bias, yet neither procedure appears likely to generate true beliefs.

(15) and (16) are neither conceptually, evidentially, nor otherwise related in such a way that one cannot, from the epistemic point of view, justifiably believe (15) and deny (16). Likewise, nothing prevents one from felicitously expressing both those beliefs in the same breath.⁹

This demonstrates that (15) need not commit an outsider to (16). Hence, Alston fails to satisfactorily answer the external question.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Alston might have a point to make regarding a slightly different question, a “quasi-external” question: why should we suppose that engaging in α will make it epistemically irrational *for the participants* of α to deny that forming beliefs within α is likely to result in true beliefs?¹¹

Alston suggests an answer to the quasi-external question.

It is irrational to engage in α , to form beliefs in the ways constitutive of that practice, and refrain from acknowledging them as true, and

hence the practice as reliable, if the question arises.¹²

If one cannot engage in α and refuse to admit that the practice is reliable if the question arises, then in judging that the former is rational one has committed oneself to the latter's being rational....¹³

It is the insiders, the participants of α , who are bound by the pragmatic implication.¹⁴ So the analogy with Moore's Paradox should consist of the following propositions:

(15') It is practically rational *for me* to engage in α .

(16) I believe that α is reliable [or: α gives rise to mostly true beliefs].

But there is no pragmatic implication here either. Suppose Smith recognizes that he has overwhelming practical reason to engage in α , thus assenting to (15'). Now suppose that the canons of α make no pretension to reliability. The guiding epistemic principle of α is to believe in accordance with the available evidence. Yet the canons of α also caution that we have no evidence whatsoever that believing in accordance with the evidence is robustly truth-conducive. That is considered a "para-evidential" question. In other words, we have no evidence that evidence is reliable, so we should suspend judgment on whether α is reliable. Accordingly, Smith denies (16).¹⁵ Yet Smith is not thereby epistemically irrational. Indeed, according to the epistemic standards of the practice he has

most practical reason to engage in, α , he has come to the appropriate conclusion.

Alston might respond that justification entails reliability, so Smith could not consistently believe that he was justified in denying (16) while engaging in α . But this assumes that Alston's preferred reliabilist concept of justification applies across doxastic practices. However, this response is unavailable to Alston, for it explicitly contradicts his view that there are no universal, inter-practice epistemic standards.¹⁶

Thus far we have concentrated on arguments that would make epistemic conclusions fall out from considerations of practical rationality.¹⁷ This is apparently what Alston intends to prove, and indeed needs to prove in order for his argument to have any bearing on whether observers or participants of α should, from the epistemic point of view, believe that α is reliable, and thereby conclude that first-order α -beliefs are reliably produced. But at the end of his argument for premise (2), Alston makes a baffling comment. He entertains the same basic criticism of his view as I have been making, to the effect that he has "not shown that it is rational in an *epistemic* sense that α is reliable." Alston responds,

This must admitted. We have not shown the reliability attribution to be rational in a truth-conducive sense of rationality, one that itself is subject to a reliability constraint. But that does not imply that our argument is without epistemic significance. It all depends on what

moves are open to us. If ... we are unable to find noncircular indications of the truth of the reliability judgment, it is certainly relevant to show that it enjoys some other kind of rationality. It is, after all, not irrelevant to our basic aim at believing the true and abstaining from believing the false, that α and other established doxastic practices constitute the most reasonable procedures to use, so far as we can judge, when trying to realize that aim.¹⁸

This response either misses the point or begs the question. First, when he claims, “it is certainly relevant to show that it enjoys some other kind of rationality,” what does he mean by ‘relevant’? The question is whether practical justification is relevant to epistemic justification, so merely asserting that it is begs the question. Second, when he states, “they are the most reasonable procedures to use, so far as we can tell,” what does he mean by ‘reasonable’? We granted for the sake of argument that they are the most *practically* reasonable, but Alston was supposed to show us that this affects what is most *epistemically* reasonable (i.e., truth-conducive, reliable). Presumably, he isn’t simply reiterating what we have already assumed; otherwise, what is the point of making the argument? He apparently believes he establishes something more. If that something concerns epistemic rationality, then he begs the question.

The most one can get out of Alston’s discussion is something

like the following principle.

17. IF it is practically rational for *S* to *both* engage in α *and* suppose that if it is practically rational to engage in α , then α -beliefs are reliably produced and thereby epistemically justified, THEN *S* is practically rational in believing that α -beliefs are reliably caused and thereby epistemically justified.

But (17) does not serve Alston's purpose. Replacing premise (2) with it would severely restrict his options. We could never get to the conclusion that M-beliefs are likely true. We could not even get the conclusion that participants of CMP are epistemically justified in believing that M-beliefs are likely true. The most we get is that they are practically rational in believing that they are epistemically justified in believing that M-beliefs are likely true. This conclusion, however, has no bearing on the epistemology of M-beliefs.

I conclude that premise (2) of Alston's argument is false. No suitable replacement suggests itself. The main argument of *Perceiving God* fails.¹⁹

¹ William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). Unless otherwise noted, citations refer to this work.

¹ Fully and formally spelled out, the reasoning in question would proceed as follows:

- a. Religious experience provides, to the subject undergoing it, justification for believing that God manifests himself. (Premise)
- b. Religious experience provides, to the subject undergoing it, justification for believing that God manifests himself ONLY IF religious experience is a reliable indication that God manifests himself. (Premise—from the reliabilist theory of justification)
- c. Religious experience is a reliable indication that God manifests himself ONLY IF God exists. (Premise)
- d. Therefore, religious experience provides, to the subject undergoing it, justification for believing that God manifests himself ONLY IF God exists. (Hypothetical Syllogism: b, c)
- e. Therefore, God exists. (Modus Ponens: a, d)

Several quotes from Alston indicate this line of reasoning:

If putative perception of God can serve to justify beliefs about God's perceivable qualities and activities, that tends to show that this putative perception is the genuine article.... We have to stop short of the claim that the perceptual justification of perceptual beliefs *entails* that the experience is genuine perception. I may be perceptually justified in believing that there is a lake in front of me even if I am a victim of a mirage and no lake is being perceived. But this is just an isolated incident that occurs against the background of innumerable cases in which perceptual justification involves authentic perception of the object. It strains credulity to suppose that an entire sphere of putatively perceptual experience could be a source of justification for perceptual beliefs, while there is no, or virtually no, genuine perception of the objects involved. Therefore, if putative experience of God provides justification for beliefs about God, that provides very strong support for supposing that such experiences are, at least frequently, genuine perceptions of God.... [This all] depends on whether the concept of justification involved exhibits 'truth conducivity', that is, on whether my being justified in believing that *p* entails that it is at least likely that it is true that *p*. Those who use a

non-truth-conducivity conception of justification will, naturally enough, deny that the fact that sense experience provides justification for beliefs about physical objects is a good reason for supposing that putative sense perception of physical objects is often the real thing.... But if, on the other hand, our conception of justification does exhibit truth conducivity, as mine will, the argument does go through. If being based on putative perceptions of X renders beliefs about X likely to be true, it must be that, in general, such experiences are in the kind of effective contact with facts about X that render them genuine perceptions of X. (pp. 68 – 9)

I want to address people who antecedently reject [the assumptions that people genuinely perceive God and that God exists] as well as those who accept [those assumptions]. Thus I am conducting the discussion from a standpoint outside any practice of forming beliefs on the basis of those alleged perceptions. And so far as I can see, the only way of arguing, from that standpoint, that people do genuinely perceive God is to argue for the epistemological position that beliefs formed on the basis of such (putative) perceptions are (*prima facie*) justified. If that is the case, we have a good reason for regarding many of the putative perceptions as genuine; for if the subject were not often really perceiving X[,] why should the experience involved provide justification for beliefs about X? This reverses the usual order of procedure in which we first seek to show that S really did perceive X and then go on to consider what beliefs about X, if any, are justified by being based on that perception. But we can proceed in that order only if we are working from within a perceptual belief-forming practice. The question of the genuineness of the alleged perception can be tackled from the outside only by defending the *epistemological* assumptions embedded in the practice in question. Thus the case for the reality of the perception of God will emerge from the book as a whole, most of which is one long argument for the thesis that certain kinds of beliefs about God can be justified by being based on putative perceptions of God. (p. 10)

I have been speaking in terms of epistemic justification, rather than in terms of knowledge, and the focus will be on the former rather than the latter. This is partly because I can't know that God is loving unless it is true that God is loving, and the latter in turn implies that God exists, something I will not be arguing in the book, except by

way of arguing that some beliefs about God are justified. (p. 2, emphasis added)

- ² See esp. pp. 194 and 278 – 279. I find those passages to be most helpful in understanding the book's overall argument, even more so than the "Preview of Chapters" in the Introduction.
- ³ See Chapter 4, esp. pp. 149 – 150 and 168 – 169, for the general argument, and Chapter 5 for its application to CMP.
- ⁴ See Chapter 4, esp. pp. 168 – 170 and 178 – 180 for the general argument, and Chapter 5 for its application to CMP. In Alston's own words, "The final conclusion I want to take from this chapter for use in the rest of the book—for any established doxastic practice it is rational to suppose that it is reliable, and hence rational to suppose that its doxastic outputs are *prima facie* justified," 183.
- ⁵ Chapter 5, esp. the "Conclusion" on p. 225. In the epistemology literature, when speaking of justification, instead of the term 'unqualified', some authors speak of 'ultima facie' or 'all things considered' justification. See, e.g., James Pryor, "There is Immediate Justification," in Matthias Steup and Ernest Sosa, eds., *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology* (Blackwell, 2005), p. 183, and Matthias Steup, *An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology* (Prentice Hall, 1996), p. 40.
- ⁶ Chapter 2, esp. pp. 68 – 69.
- ⁷ Chapter 5.
- ⁸ Pp. 250 – 254.
- ⁹ Chapters 6 and 7.
- ¹⁰ See pp. 10, 68 – 69, 94.
- ¹¹ P. 283. It is unclear whether anything remotely resembling Alston's main argument would be acceptable to "mainline" Christians. Nevertheless, Alston certainly believes that his work could be relevant in the lives of mainline Christians. See the parable of Denise at the very end of the book, wherein Denise, "perhaps inspired by contemporary work in epistemology," is able to rekindle her dwindling faith, rejoin Christ's flock, and reap the salvific blessings of the church.
- ¹² P. 99. The external question is answered in Chapters 4 – 7, from which I have reconstructed what I call "Alston's main argument."
- ¹ P. 72. (I added emphasis to 'morally' because consistency seems to call for it.)
- ² Robert Nozick's experience-machine example demonstrates that considerations of truth do weigh on the scales of practical reason. But this is

accomplished only by holding all other things equal. Consequently, it does not establish that considerations of truth are on a par with those of happiness, prudence, or morality; it only gets truth on the table. See Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Basic Books, 1974), 42 – 45.

- ³ "It is clear that the [practical] rationality of a practice does not *entail* its reliability," p. 178.
- ⁴ "I fail to discern any evidential tie; how could the practical rationality of engaging in SP be *evidence* for its reliability?" p. 178.
- ⁵ In what follows, I substitute ' α ' where Alston uses 'SP'. 'SP' is an acronym for the doxastic practice of forming beliefs on the basis of sensory experiences. Since Alston takes this argument to apply to all doxastic practices, I want the discussion to proceed on the most general level. I also want to avoid letting presumptions regarding SP creep into the evaluation of the argument.
- ⁶ Whereas this is not entirely clear in the body of the text, Alston expresses himself more clearly in notes 51 and 52 on pp. 179 and 180. As a referee pointed out, Alston does not use the name 'Moore' in those footnotes. However, Alston's discussion leaves no doubt that he draws heavily upon what is standardly referred to as "Moore's Paradox," so named after G.E. Moore. Moore originally pointed out that it is exceedingly odd, even repugnant, to say, "It's raining, but I don't believe it is." Alston makes the point utilizing a different conjunction, "My car is in the garage, but I don't believe that it is." Crucially, Alston points out, "This is just the situation we have with *SP is rational* and *it is rational to take SP to be reliable*," and claims that both examples—the one about his garage, and the one about the doxastic practice, SP—are examples of the same phenomenon: "pragmatic implication." In light of all this, my critique in this section fairly relies on important dissimilarities between Moore's and Alston's examples. For an introduction to Moore's Paradox, see *Moore's Paradox: New Essays on Belief, Rationality, and the First Person* (Oxford, 2007), ed. Mitchell S. Green and John N. Williams.
- ⁷ Contrast this with a case where Benny expresses his belief that it is raining, but lacks the belief that he believes that it is raining, because he lacks the concept BELIEF. Perhaps young children and sophisticated non-human animals are in this position. We can understand this—it does not puzzle us—and their failure to have, or express, the relevant second-order belief indicates no epistemic failing on their part. Jones, by contrast, fully possesses the concept BELIEF, and expressly denies that he has

the first-order belief that he expresses in the same breath.

⁸ P. 180, n. 52.

⁹ At this point, it might be useful to distinguish my argument from Matthias Steup's critique of Alston. Steup's discussion proceeds by indicating several points where "a skeptic about justification" could object to Alston's argument. Steup faults Alston for the latter's "preemptive" and "unjustified" treatment of the skeptic. In particular, Steup disagrees with Alston's estimation that the skeptic is "irrational." Steup's response involves distinguishing levels of epistemic commitment in order to show that Alston doesn't fully appreciate the skeptic's available resources. (Here Steup's distinction may remind us of a similar distinction made by Keith Lehrer, who distinguishes mere belief from the more reflective and refined attitude of acceptance; see Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990).) See Matthias Steup's critical study of *Perceiving God* in *Noûs*, vol. 31, no. 3 (1997), pp. 408 – 420, esp. pp. 412 – 415 (though I would be remiss if I failed to also direct the reader's attention to the memorable example of the psychopathic killer castaways on p. 417).

By contrast, my discussion proceeds independently of any invocation, evaluation, or defense of skepticism, including the distinction between levels of epistemic commitment. In assessing Alston's argument, I object on grounds that any native speaker would recognize, which is, from my perspective, to the good.

¹⁰ To remind the reader, the external question is, "why should we [i.e., the community of epistemologists concerned with the rationality of religious belief] suppose that this whole way of forming and supporting beliefs is at all likely to give us true beliefs about reality?" p. 99.

¹¹ I call this "quasi-external" because it is a question posed from the outside about those participating in the practice. Strictly speaking, it is different from a question posed from the outside about *the practice* itself. Perhaps this difference does not amount to much in the end, but I'm trying to give Alston every benefit of the doubt.

¹² P. 179.

¹³ P. 179.

¹⁴ This is the other reason I characterize Alston's discussion at the most general level, substituting 'α' where Alston speaks of 'SP'. We all participate in SP, so it is easy to confuse the external and quasi-external questions. Those of us observing (evaluating) the practice also participate in

it. We might easily confuse what we are committed to as *observers* versus as *participants*. Regarding α , this is not an issue.

- ¹⁵ He does not utter 'I disbelieve that α is reliable', for that is not supported by the evidence. Instead, he utters 'It is not the case that I believe that α is reliable'.
- ¹⁶ "Each practice ... carries its own distinctive modes of justification, its own distinctive principles that lay down sufficient conditions for justification, not only prima facie justification but also, though its overrider system, unqualified justification as well." There is no "underlying unity" to distinct doxastic practices. See p. 162, "The Irreducible Plurality of Practices."
- ¹⁷ Philip Quinn criticizes Alston's response to the problem of religious diversity, on what some might think are broadly similar grounds, so I will presently explain how my discussion differs from Quinn's.

Quinn suggests that, upon being confronted with fundamental religious disagreement, instead of "sitting tight" with one's antecedent religious beliefs, as Alston advocates, one might also reasonably adopt a Kantian view of religious belief. A Kantian view of religious belief has it that our culture or psychology deeply affects our understanding of ultimate reality. We can never fully and accurately understand God, as he is in himself. As such, a modest and perfectly reasonable response to the epistemic problem posed by religious diversity would be to prune (or "thin," as Quinn puts it) our theological commitments, so that we are no longer in fundamental disagreement. We could attribute (at least many) disagreements to our respective cultural or psychological differences. See Philip Quinn, "Towards Thinner Theologies: Hick and Alston on Religious Diversity," reprinted in Philip Quinn and Kevin Meeker, eds., *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity* (Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 226 – 243.

Alston himself considers and rejects a proposal along these lines, contending that religious people are decidedly "pre-Kantian in their realist understanding of their beliefs. They think that these beliefs embody true accounts of the Ultimate as it really is in itself and in its relations to the Creation," 265.

My critique operates independently of the problem of religious diversity, and independently of the pre-Kantian/Kantian distinction and its attendant controversy. Accordingly, my critical discussion rests on ground different from Quinn's. My main critical points are aimed directly

at Alston's positive argument for accepting the linkage between practical and epistemic justification, i.e., the argument from pragmatic implication. Quinn's case relies on a controversial characterization of the nature of religious belief, whereas my case relies primarily on what any competent native speaker would, or would not, recognize as an infelicitous utterance.

¹⁸ P. 180.

¹⁹ For feedback and discussions that helped improve this paper, I thank Allan Hazlett, Bruce Russell, Ernest Sosa, an anonymous referee, and the Editor of this Journal.