Katherine Dormandy
Department of Christian Philosophy, University of Innsbruck

Disagreement and Religious Practice

1. Introduction

Disagreement between community worldviews – or what I'll call *maps of reality* – abounds. Many communities, such as religious or political ones, welcome this situation as an opportunity for dialogue or cooperation. But for others it gives rise to what I'll call the *competition worry*: You regard your community's map of reality as competing with other communities', and you worry that members of your community may switch allegiance.

Why harbor this worry? One reason is epistemic: you are concerned that disagreement with epistemic peers from other communities provides strong evidence against your community's map. Another reason is affective: you worry that members of your community may find alternative maps of reality more attractive. Whatever reasons motivate the competition worry, some communities respond positively, by doing their best to understand and meet members' needs. But others respond in a way that I will argue is problematic: by developing practices aimed at *entrenching* members in the community's map – that is, nudging them to be unwilling, or even unable, to filter reality through any alternative map. Entrenching practices might for example discourage significant interactions with outsiders or their ideas, or may deploy manipulative rhetoric to create an "us-versus-them" mentality.

This chapter discusses how *religious* communities might develop entrenching practices in response to the competition worry. Religious practices do not generally aim to entrench. But those that do, I'll argue, are problematic even by the lights of those religious communities that employ them. For entrenching practices undermine another central aim that many other religious practices have. This aim is to *secure religious knowledge*. Religious knowledge is an important part of many religious maps, assuming that there is a religious reality to be known and that the community map captures it in an epistemically appropriate way. There are at least three types of religious knowledge: knowledge-*that* certain propositions about religious matters obtain, knowledge-*how* to engage with God, and *personal knowledge* of God. Securing this religious knowledge is an aim of many religious practices. But this epistemic aim, I'll argue, is undermined by religious practices that have the entrenching aim discussed above. Is there a different response to the competition worry that does not promote entrenchment? I argue that there is.

Section 2 gives an account of religious maps of reality and their relationship to religious practice. Section 3 discusses three forms of putative religious knowledge that religious practices can generate. Section 4 discusses the competition worry, and section 5 discusses the response provided by entrenching practices. Section 6 presents an alternative response.

2. Religious Maps and Religious Practices

The epistemology of disagreement commonly focuses on disagreement over beliefs and knowledge-that. But religious disagreement is best understood through a broader lens. Religious beliefs are often intertwined with a person's practices, self-understanding, communities, and putative relationship to God; this is why competition can be worrisome. So I will zoom out beyond beliefs and knowledge-that, incorporating other aspects of a person's map of reality, including other forms of knowledge.

I'll suppose that there are two things that make a map of reality religious. First, its *content* makes reference to a reality that transcends the material; for simplicity I'll focus on God. Different religious maps make these references with varying degrees of literalness, which the map may make explicit. Second, the map has an important *function* for community members, perhaps contributing to their sense of identity, community belonging, or existential security.

Here are some components of a map of reality as I'll understand it.[1] Perhaps the most familiar are *beliefs*, or your assent to the truth of particular propositions. Some beliefs are *religious*, pertaining explicitly to religious matters (e.g. that God exists, that community members celebrate a certain holiday thus-and-so). Others, often neglected in religious epistemology, are *auxiliary* beliefs (Wynn 2017; Dormandy 2020a); these do not pertain directly to religious matters, but are taken either to epistemically support religious beliefs, to follow from them or be made probable by them, or to be background assumptions against which entailment or support relations get off the ground. Examples include beliefs about metaphysics, empirical science, politics or economics, or epistemology.

Maps of reality also include *concepts*. These are the categories that structure some but probably not all of our perception (Vetter and Newen 2014), such as the concept *table* that enables me to perceive a four-legged, flat-surface object as a table. A person's map typically has a *self*-concept, or set of categories for thinking of oneself, and religious maps have a God-concept. Maps also include *values*, or preference orderings of things we care about. One might prioritize family over career, or the social safety net over the national debt. Maps include *representational experiences*, such as your sensory experiences, and *memories of them*. (These may take conceptual form.) Representational experiences, alongside certain of your beliefs, constitute your *evidence*, which we'll understand as what a person legitimately relies on in epistemic reasoning.

Maps also include *emotions*, which I'll assume have representational content (Fredrickson 2001; whether they count as evidence is controversial). And maps include *associations* – between different concepts, or between concepts and emotions (e.g. Rolexes with Ferraris, or with envy; Holroyd and Sweetman 2016). Associations create unconscious links between certain parts of our map and others. Finally, maps contain *models*, which are representations (perhaps in various sensory modalities) of how things function or are disposed to change given certain input, and which we draw on in practical or theoretical reasoning (Elgin 2017). Take for instance your model of your bicycle, or of your friend's emotional states. If a model is complex enough to include each component of a map listed here, it may count as a mini-map of a specific phenomenon or object.

These components of our map, plus others not mentioned, join up to create *meaning* for us. I do not mean just linguistic meaning, but rather a holistic big picture or frame for ori-enting ourselves in the world and making cognitive and affective sense of things (Heintzelman and King 2014). Meaning differs from objectual understanding (i.e., from grasping a phenomenon or a body of information; Carter and Gordon 2014) in three ways.

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[1] Leaning on psychology, I use the map metaphor more broadly than its coiner (Korzybski 1931).

First, meaning has no factivity constraint, since you might make meaning totally divorced from reality (Korzybski 1931). Second, for this reason meaning need not (though it may, to the extent it mirrors reality), have any epistemic value beyond making subjective sense of things. Third, meaning goes beyond merely cognitive engagement, incorporating evaluations and emotions as described above. Meaning-making generates an interpretive context for our experiences. For example, take two people's experiences of a boss's unwanted advances, one in 1950 and the other today. The 1950 person may frame this as flirtation and blame themselves for not taking it humorously, whereas the contemporary person frames it as sexual harassment (Fricker 2007). We make meaning in different ways. For example, we might reason consciously from evidence to a conclusion; we might feel something strongly; or our experiences might already, by the time they reach our awareness, have meaning built in for us through pre-conscious processing (Chabris and Simons 2011).

Some components of maps can fulfill epistemic conditions, giving us knowledge. Below we'll be concerned with three types of knowledge. One is knowledge-that, arising when *beliefs* fulfill epistemic conditions (specifically truth and justification or safety). Another is knowledge-how, arising when our concepts and models are accurate enough for acting and we can make accurate meaning of the action. Finally there is personal knowledge, which involves a 2nd-personal representational experience paired with a concept and a model.

Where do religious maps come from? They can arise organically over generations, where community maps present a template from which individual members' maps may diverge (Dormandy 2018a). They can also arise from deliberate cultivation. Enter religious practices. We may understand a *practice* roughly as a type of activity performed repeatedly in certain contexts, with a built-in, sometimes definitive, aim that may or may not be harbored explicitly by the people performing it. Religious practices include, for example, prayer, liturgy, storytelling, group professions of faith, regulating activities such as eating or celebrations, or doing good for others.

Religious practices have many aims, but one is to *secure religious knowledge* (Coakley 2009, McGuigan and Kallenberg 2017). I'll discuss below how they do this for the three forms of knowledge just mentioned. But in general they do so by *immersing those who perform them in the religious map*. That is, religious practices nudge us, the more we perform them, to employ the religious map as a filter for meaning-making. Immersion in a map of reality is not the same as entrenchment. You are immersed in a map to the extent that you can perceive and navigate reality by means of it. Entrenchment entails immersion but goes beyond it: you are entrenched to the extent that you are unwilling or unable to perceive or navigate reality by means of any other map. You cannot be entrenched in more than one map simultaneously. But you can be immersed in more than one simultaneously, for example if you inhabit multiple communities; this comes with the ability to perspective-shift (Wylie 2003). Everyone is immersed in at least one map; this is how our limited minds filter complex information.

There are four ways in which religious practices immerse us in a map. The first two are cognitive. First, religious practices immerse us from the "bottom up". They generate new experiences, for example through rituals or teachings, and open new imaginative possibilities (Kidd 2014). Second, they provide ready-made frames, from the "top down", for making meaning of the events we experience in performing the practices (Vetter and Newen 2014); think of liturgically re-enacting stories, reciting creeds, or interpreting religious texts (Coakley 2009; McGuigan and Kallenberg 2017).

The final two ways in which religious practices immerse us in the religious map capitalize on the influence between maps and behavior: Third, performing a practice inclines you

toward a favorable view of it and thus of the associated map (Festinger 1957; Harmon-Jones 2019). We do not like to think of ourselves doing things we don't stand by. Fourth and conversely, viewing a practice and associated map favorably inclines you to keep performing the practice (Festinger 1957; Harmon-Jones 2019). This is why Pascal encouraged people to attend church: it would incline them gradually to believe (Cottingham 2005).

Immersion in a map can yield insights that we would otherwise miss. For example, if your map includes love for someone, you will be sensitized to charitable explanations of his behavior that others may overlook (Jollimore 2011). Similarly for religious maps: certain realities can only be perceived or understood from the inside (Cottingham 2005; Kidd 2014; McGuigan and Kallenberg 2017). In immersing people in religious maps, religious practices can thus exercise a crucial epistemic function for the religious community.

I'll discuss three sorts of knowledge that religious practices, by promoting immersion in a map, can provide (section 3), and then we'll see how this knowledge can be undermined by practices that, in response to the competition worry, *entrench* rather than merely immerse people (sections 4-5). The upshot will be two different aims of religious practices – an epistemic aim and an entrenching aim – that are at loggerheads. I'll suggest a way out.

3. How Religious Practices Yield Putative Religious Knowledge

There are three forms of putative religious knowledge that religious practices can arguably help generate: knowledge-*that* certain religious claims hold, knowledge-*how* to engage with God, and *personal* knowledge of God.

Knowledge-that. This is characterized by a belief that is true and justified (or safe), and anti-Gettiered. Religious practices can promote some of these conditions. They can generate *beliefs*. They do this bottom-up by creating experiences, and top-down by providing a frame for making meaning of them. Religious practices can also *justify* beliefs. On an internalist framework, justificatory factors reside within the mind; religious practices can generate these. They can yield evidence, and can cultivate responsibilist epistemic virtues such as attentiveness to spiritual features of reality (Cottingham 2005; Wynn 2005). On an externalist framework, justificatory factors reside outside the mind. Because of this, not all religious practices can provide justification, but at least if the world cooperates, some plausibly can. Religious practices might in the right circumstances reliably cause true beliefs (Plantinga 2000b), or cultivate externalist virtues such as keen spiritual perception (Alston 1991, Greco 2017).

Knowledge-how. Religious practices can arguably yield knowledge-how. General accounts of knowledge-how are controversial, so I'll limit discussion to the sort that religious practices are argued to yield,[2] knowledge-how to engage with God (Coakley 2009; Wettstein 2012; Cuneo 2014, 2016; McGuigan and Kallenberg 2017). This is argued to be non-propositional. On Cuneo's account (2014) this involves "grasping or apprehending" a way of acting (372), to a certain "threshold of completeness and accuracy" (373), under a certain conceptual description, so that when you act competently in accord with that knowledge, you successfully perform the act in question.

How do religious practices yield knowledge-how to engage with God? Through learning-by-doing. Just as you learn how to play the piano by practicing the piano, you can learn how to engage with God – including honing your concept and model of God himself[3] – by performing religious practices (Cuneo 2016). Practicing the piano trains you to play the piece

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[2] These views mostly concern liturgy, but I assume they apply to religious practice generally.
[3] I use the male pronoun by convention; on traditional religious maps God is "neither male nor female".

you are practicing, but also to play the piano and understand music generally. Similarly, performing religious practices can train you to engage with God in specific ways (e.g. by praying) but also to relate to him generally, for example to know how to address him or recognize his communication back (Cuneo, *ibid*.). Thus religious practices can yield knowledge-how to engage with God, which you can acquire when you perform them.

Personal knowledge of God. Personal knowledge is standardly argued to be non-propositional, knowing the person rather than (merely) information about him (Stump 2010; Talbert 2015; Lauer 2014; M. A. Benton 2018). It is argued to arise from second-personal experiences of interacting with him (Stump 2010, Talbert 2015). I suggest that our map represents it by a concept and a model of the person. Personal knowledge admits of degree. The smallest degree, bare acquaintance, can be had from a fleeting encounter. Knowing someone *well* is more challenging; you do so to the extent that you meet the following three conditions (Talbert 2015): (i) You have had numerous recent interactions with him. (ii) Those interactions reveal his character. (iii) You have the skills to unconsciously uptake cues from such interactions – a non-trivial matter given the emotions involved in some personal relationships, and, we may add for God's case, when the other party is non-physical.

Religious practice can deliver putative personal knowledge of God. You can encounter and communicate with him through liturgy (Cockayne 2018), prayer, spiritual exercises (Niederbacher and Thorer 2017), or as Mother Teresa remarked, through those you minister to (Kolodiejchuk, Brian 2007); he communicates to you through emotional or mental insights. Storytelling practices help you imaginatively grasp what it is like to be in his presence and perhaps to perceive his presence through the story (Stump 2010). These practices too deliver bottom-up content and top-down frames for making meaning of that content.

So religious practices can deliver putative knowledge-that certain religious claims are true, knowledge-how to engage with God, and personal knowledge of God. They can thus play an important role in securing the epistemic credentials of important parts of a community's religious map.

4. Religious Disagreement and the Competition Worry

Religious maps proliferate. Many have large-scale principles in common, such as the value of charity or the belief that the universe has purpose. But most are incompatible with each other in significant ways,[4] a situation that we may call *religious disagreement*. For example, Christians believe that Jesus of Nazareth was fully human and fully divine; Muslims believe that he was fully human and a prophet; Jewish people believe that he was fully human and enjoyed no divine inspiration. Space prohibits an extended account of disagreeing maps of reality, but the following remarks are in order (Dormandy 2020b).

Beliefs disagree when they are logically incompatible. *Concepts* disagree when you take a given concept to refer to one set of things and I to different set. *Models* disagree when we have logically incompatible predictions, or significantly different probability estimates, of what something will do given certain input. As for *values*, these disagree weakly if we care

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[4] Religious pluralists argue that the beliefs of all major religions are true, despite their apparent contradictions (Hick 1989; Harrison 2006); this would mean there is no religious disagreement, at least about beliefs. For counterarguments see (Netland 1986; Plantinga 2000a). But even if religious pluralism were true, it would not follow that the other components of religious maps are compatible (see below). Moreover, religious pluralism *itself* would still disagree with many religious maps (Dormandy 2023). *Pace* religious pluralism, religious disagreement remains alive and well.

about different things or prioritize them differently, and strongly if I disvalue something that you care about. Representational *experiences or memories* disagree to the extent that they portray reality in mutually exclusive ways. As for emotions, these disagree to the extent that their representational contents are incompatible, or that you think my emotion does not fit the situation. *Associations* do not portray things in any particular way and thus cannot disagree as such, but they can generate beliefs, experiences, or emotions that disagree. Large-scale *meanings*, to the extent that they can be summarized propositionally, can be more or less compatible, depending on how many of their components disagree and how important they are in the meaning-making system.

The proliferation of disagreeing religious maps gives rise to the competition worry. For encountering people with alternative maps can undermine your satisfaction with your own. This might happen in two ways. The first is epistemic (Pittard 2019; Benton 2021). You realize that some people whose maps disagree with yours are your epistemic peers. That is, they enjoy epistemic advantages that are qualitatively similar to yours (Lackey 2014), concerning (for example) the information and the causal processes that gave rise to their maps, or their epistemic virtues. Even if your precise advantages differ from theirs (perhaps you have more life experience whereas they have more analytic skills), the very fact of this difference suggests that the other person may have insights that you lack (Dormandy 2023). There are two epistemic challenges in the vicinity. Both are apt to be more worrying to the extent that the disagreement concerns central aspects of your map, as opposed to peripheral ones (Dormandy 2020b). One epistemic challenge confronts the accuracy of your map. The *more* epistemic peers there are whose maps disagree with yours, the lower the statistical probability (all else equal) that your map is the most accurate. The second epistemic challenge confronts the reliability of the processes that produced your map. There is little reason, independent of your map itself, to think that these processes were more reliable than those which brought about your peers' maps. These concerns seem to recommend lowering your confidence that your map is accurate (Gutting 1982; Quinn 2000; McKim 2001; Feldman 2007).[5]

The second way in which disagreement might undermine your satisfaction with your map is *psychological* (Plantinga 2000a). This can happen even if those who disagree with you are not your peers. First, your map may have downsides for you. It may frown on certain activities, such as pursuing a certain career, eating certain foods, or having certain relationships. Second, you may perceive alternative maps, or the communities espousing them, as having upsides that your map or community lack – such as allowing activities that your community frowns on, or making meaning in ways that resound with you emotionally. Third, you may find yourself psychologically shaken, if not epistemically, by the dissonance arising from the sheer existence of other meaning-making systems (Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski 1991; Harmon-Jones 2019).

Both epistemic and psychological factors can undermine a person's satisfaction with her religious map. They can do this even if her own map is all she knows. After all, simply knowing *that* one might believe differently, or simply being dissatisfied with your map, e.g. because you feel frustrated by it, may be enough to foment discontent. However, being aware of alternative maps can turn an inchoate dissatisfaction into something more precise and pressing. On the one hand, you may know enough about alternative maps to recognize their problems and thus stick with your own map. On the other hand, however, knowing about an alternative map in detail may make it a live option for you (James 1921), rather

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[5] For views criticizing this conclusion see (Plantinga 2000a; Bergmann 2015, 2017).

than an abstraction or a no-go. Compare: If you have only tasted vanilla, it is less likely to occur to you to be discontent with it, at least in more than an inchoate way, unless you know that there are alternatives, and even more if you know there is such a thing as chocolate that might taste very nice. Awareness of alternative maps need not produce discontent with your own. But it could, and it can provide oxygen to any discontent already smoldering. It is because awareness of alternative maps has the potential, in certain circumstances, to facilitate discontent with your own map that some religious communities regard them as competition.

There are various possible motivations for the competition worry. One is concern for community members who stray. If you think, as religious communities understandably tend to, that your map is the best suited for navigating religious reality, you may worry that such people risk harming themselves and setting a bad example for others. Another motivation might be desire for control, as community members exposed to alternative maps may become harder to influence. A third might be concern for the community's survival should too many people leave it.

I'll turn to a response that some religious communities give to the competition worry.

5. Religious Practices that Entrench

It is not unusual, though by no means universal, for religious communities to respond to the competition worry by developing religious practices that aim to entrench people in the community map. Recall that you are entrenched in a map to the extent that you are unwilling or unable to perceive or navigate reality by means of any other map. You might not realize that alternatives exist, you might realize they exist but not understand them enough to regard them as live options, or you might regard them negatively.

Entrenchment in a map inoculates you against events that might otherwise challenge your satisfaction with it or your commitment to it. Some examples of potentially challenging events include receiving significant evidence against your beliefs, discovering that an abuse coverup in your community and recoiling emotionally from aspects of the community map that you suspect facilitated it, or encountering admirable people who espouse alternative maps. In response to potentially challenging events, there are at least three strategies that an entrenching practice might deploy:

Avoidance. The practice discourages you from experiencing events that you might perceive as challenging. For example, the community might nudge members not to socialize with outsiders.

Trivial meaning-making. In case you do experience an event you perceive as challenging, the practice nudges you use your religious map to make meaning of it, where this meaning downplays its challenging aspects. For example, a religious map might describe the event using euphemistic or spiritualizing language.

Unconditional loyalty. In case you experience an event you perceive as challenging and are unable to use your religious map to make meaning of it in a way that satisfies you, the practice nudges you to remain loyal to your map nonetheless. For example, a community's liturgical practices might promote faith in things that seem unreasonable.

Following are three examples of entrenching practices and the strategies they deploy.

Socially Insulating Practices. Some practices limit community members' exposure to outsiders and thus to alternative maps. Take for example community events that limit time for outside relationships, or the injunction to marry only other believers (for example

because they share important values). Social isolation may be a side effect rather than the aim of such practices, but the entrenching effect is the same.

The main entrenching strategy here is *avoidance*, at least of potentially challenging events outside the community. But socially insulating practices also deploy the *trivial meaning-making* strategy, since cleaving to your community and its map limits your meaning-making tools. And they deploy the *unconditional-loyalty* strategy. For social insulation promotes an "us-versus-them" mentality (Cassam 2020; Montell 2021). This makes it more difficult, psychologically and practically, to find alternatives to your community if you did want to, making you more likely to keep peace with your community map.

Manipulative rhetoric. A community might use manipulative rhetoric to entrench. It might seed public discourse with unspoken assumptions, emotion-laden terms, or repeated associations between words and concepts (such as green-haired people and aggression) apt to infiltrate people's maps unconsciously, by bypassing their conscious reasoning (Stanley 2015, Cassam 2020; Montell 2021). Or it might habitually use bespoke language, referring to everyday things in community-internal ways. Although bespoke language is sometimes important for communication (consider academic terminology), it can obfuscate rather than clarify (e.g. the euphemism "White Night" used by in the Jonestown cult to describe mass suicide; Montell 2021).

Manipulative rhetoric deploys the strategy of *trivial meaning-making*. Language structures our concepts, beliefs, and models. These in turn structure our experiences and memories top-down and can trigger emotions; all these things feature in meaning-making. Manipulative rhetoric thus nudges people to make meaning in terms of the community map instead of in other ways. Another entrenching strategy here is *unconditional loyalty*. Language demarcates group membership, binding members together and isolating them from outsiders not conversant in it (Montell 2021). Separation-through-language impedes relationships with outsiders and thus raises the psychological and practical costs of defecting to alternative maps.

Echo-chamber explanations. Many religious communities have practices of giving explanations for potentially challenging events. For example, suppose your community's map contains the beliefs that the evidence for God is strong, and that God wants everyone to believe in him. Encountering thought-through nonbelievers may therefore challenge your map: surely thought-through people would appreciate strong reasons for God. Your community might conclude that the reasons for God are weaker than you thought, or it might explain thought-through nonbelief, for instance with a theological doctrine saying that, actually, people need divine intervention to appreciate the evidence for God. There are thought-through nonbelievers because God has simply not decided to intervene for them (Wainwright 1995; Plantinga 2000b).

Using your map to explain challenging events is not entrenching in itself. On the contrary, any epistemic endeavor must explain anomalies. But sometimes explanations are *echo-chamber explanations*: they aim less to deliver understanding than to ward off challenge (Nguyen 2018). Such explanations often involve poor reasoning, such as clichés, dichotomous thinking, or are offered without considering realistic alternatives (e.g. that there really is strong evidence against God from some reasonable vantage points). But echo-chamber explanations also arise when you deploy an otherwise good explanation without checking the details of the case. For example, because you assume a priori that any given nonbeliever has not received divine intervention, you may take their individual reasoning or experiences less seriously than otherwise (Dormandy 2021b).

Echo-chamber explanations deploy the strategy of *avoidance*, insofar as they preempt genuine engagement with potentially challenging events. But their signature strategy is *trivial meaning-making* (Nguyen 2018; Dormandy 2023). First, they explain away such events. Second, they may influence your perception top-down so you are to less likely to experience an event as challenging to begin with. Take for example the existence of horrendous suffering, i.e. suffering for which we can imagine no greater good that would justify God in allowing it. This is often perceived as a challenge for a theistic map (Rowe 1979). But some may not perceive such suffering as challenging, because they are confident that there must be some greater good even if they cannot imagine it.

These are just some examples of entrenchment-promoting religious practices. Far beyond merely immersing people in the religious map, they nudge people to be unable or unwilling to perceive or make meaning of reality by means of any alternative map. Entrenching practices, though by no means universal, are a fairly common response to the competition worry about religious disagreement. But they have a problematic upshot: they undermine the other aim of many religious practices, to secure religious knowledge.

6. Entrenching Practices Undermine Religious Knowledge

Entrenching practices undermine religious knowledge by habituating us to perceive and make meaning in biased, simplistic, and thus possibly misleading ways. Practices that use *avoidance* strategies, because they habituate us to overlook potentially challenging events, promote selection bias in our evidence, impoverish the selection of concepts and models available to us, and narrow our range of insight-generating emotions. If we do perceive potentially challenging events, practices deploying *trivial meaning-making strategies* habituate us to underplay the difficulty they may pose for our map, to explain them away, or to condition us to be emotionally sanguine about them.

Should a challenging event trouble us despite these two strategies, practices deploying the *unconditional-loyalty* strategy nudge us to stick to our map anyway. This in turn nudges us to re-deploy the first two strategies, wearing down our resistance so they eventually work better for us. As we saw, performing a practice inclines you toward a favorable view of it and the associated map, and viewing a practice and the associated map favorably inclines you to keep performing the practice. Thus acting in accord with your map is apt to habituate you to overlook potentially challenging events, or to not perceive them as challenging at all.

For these reasons, performing entrenching practices is inclined to make you less likely to enjoy the three forms of putative religious knowledge:

Knowledge-that. Because entrenchment disposes us to overlook certain events, and promotes simplistic concepts and models for meaning-making, it makes your beliefs less likely to be true. It also makes them less likely to be justified, at least on most views. Take externalism. Entrenchment makes your cognitive faculties generally less reliable, and less likely to exhibit reliabilist virtues (e.g., you may jump to conclusions). Take internalism, construed first in terms of virtue responsibilism. Entrenchment cultivates epistemic vices such as intellectual arrogance, the tendency to overestimate your cognitive strengths and underestimate your cognitive weaknesses (Tanesini 2021; Dormandy 2018b), which in turn promote further entrenchment. As for evidentialist internalism, if you are aware that you engage in entrenching practices and that these have epistemically bad effects, then this is part of your evidence and thus undermines your justification. Only if you lack this evidence might you be justified on evidentialism – but because your beliefs' truth is still threatened, so is their status as knowledge.

Knowledge-how. Entrenchment also impedes knowledge-how to engage with God. Return to the piano-practicing analogy. You may practice diligently for years, but if you build in faulty technique, you will remain an unskilled player. The same holds for engaging with God. If you practice this skill while entrenched in your map, you are more likely to build in faulty habits. Consider the example of learning how to engage with God through the practice of loving your neighbor. This requires recognizing and responding competently to their needs. Entrenchment will not stop you doing this for simple needs such as a glass of water. But it may do so for more complex needs. Because entrenchment prompts you to superimpose narrow categories on a complex reality, you may fail to perceive what your neighbor needs, or you may be mistaken about how to help, and thus fail to grasp the fitting way to act. Many well-meaning colonialist missionaries, presumably entrenched in their religious maps, stripped indigenous people of their culture and language, even kidnapping their children. And they presumably did so under a faulty conceptual description, thinking that these things promoted indigenous people's salvation.

Personal knowledge of God. Entrenchment makes you less able to have personal knowledge of God (supposing he exists). Practices deploying *avoidance* limit your interactive experiences of God. For example, you will miss it if he reveals aspects of himself through conversation with community outsiders (Dormandy 2018a). And practices of *trivial meaning-making* and *unconditional loyalty* are prone to biasing the experiences you do have, making you less able to perceive surprising aspects of God's character or actions (Dormandy 2021b).

This matters for minimal acquaintance and knowing God well. Concerning minimal acquaintance, you are less equipped to recognize genuine communication from God; think of the Catholic church's persecution of dissidents it later made saints. You also risk believing that something is a communication from God that isn't; many believers have thought fascist leaders were God's emissaries. Entrenchment can be even more detrimental to knowing God *well.* Recall that you do this to the extent that you have numerous and revealing interactive experiences of him, and process these with skills of unconscious information uptake. Entrenchment makes your interactive experiences less fine-grained; it also makes you more apt to read your own assumptions into them, and less skilled at perceiving subtleties. Entrenchment also raises the specter of an inaccurate concept or model of God. Consider the friends of the biblical character Job. They were entrenched in a religious map on which God always punishes the wicked and rewards the righteous. They thus missed the subtler and more surprising aspects of God's character that emerged when Job suggested that God, in letting him suffer horrifically despite being righteous, had treated him unjustly.

A religious-community member who supports entrenching practices might object as follows. Suppose that your religious map is accurate. In this case, entrenchment in it can be epistemically good. After all, even if your map is oversimplified and thus inaccurate about some details, you are still epistemically better off than if you strayed to a less accurate map.

I have two responses. First, the longer and more deeply you are entrenched in a map, the farther that map is apt to stray from whatever accuracy it may have started with. As we saw, our responses to new experiences are influenced by our pre-existing map; if this map is already simplistic and closed to novelty, we will integrate new experiences in a way that strengthens pre-existing oversimplifications. Second, it does not take much inaccuracy for a religious (or indeed any) map to become importantly skewed. Indeed, religious maps themselves often warn against forms of idolatry (i.e., egregious mistakes about God) that easily escape notice. Take the examples of the church's persecution of saints, or the colonialist missionaries convinced that destroying indigenous cultures was God's will. Even if

your religious map starts off generally accurate, entrenchment in it is epistemically problematic.

The objector might suggest instead promoting *limited* entrenchment, for central aspects of the map, while avoiding it for more peripheral matters. This option is better (Dormandy 2020b), but it is still problematic. For any entrenchment arguably cultivates epistemic vices, and once cultivated, it is unlikely that these will operate only selectively on the desired topics.

In summary, entrenchment in a religious map makes that map less likely to contain knowledge. However, a religious community may deploy entrenching practices because they are more worried about competition than about epistemic dangers. In this case, they may take those dangers in stride and my argument will not move them. So I will conclude by offering an alternative response to the competition worry.

7. The Opportunity Response

Recall that you harbor the competition worry when you do not want members of your community to switch allegiance to alternative maps, and you think that epistemic or affective reasons may motivate them to do so. Rather than developing entrenching practices, I suggest that religious communities equip their members, cognitively and affectively, to handle potentially challenging events autonomously.

The idea is this. Cognitively, instead of cultivating a simplistic map, the community trains members in nuanced and critical thinking, and cultivates epistemic virtues such as inquisitiveness (Watson 2015), epistemic humility (Tanesini 2018), and epistemic courage. Affectively, instead of fearing religious disagreement, community members regard it as an opportunity to broaden their perspective. The community does not downplay challenges to their map, but encourages members to grapple with challenges intellectually and emotionally. This requires the ability to accept ambiguity and cognitive dissonance, even welcome them with inquisitiveness (Watson, *ibid*.) as an opportunity for learning. I'll call this the *opportunity response*.

The opportunity response requires a paradigm shift in our attitude to religious disagreement. Instead of the threat mindset, on which religious disagreement is to be feared, the opportunity response cultivates an *opportunity mindset* (Dormandy 2023). This involves curiosity, playfulness, and the intention to learn from disagreement. The opportunity mindset is less psychologically natural than the threat mindset (Harmon-Jones 2019; Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski 1991) and so requires cultivation. But if cultivated, it is a better response to the competition worry than developing entrenching practices.

Why? First, it is nearly psychologically impossible to feel simultaneously inquisitive and threatened, due to the opposing physiological and neural wiring involved (Wolpe 1958; Fredrickson 2001); feeling inquisitive, and more generally positive, can thus counteract the fear associated with the competition worry. A community that is not fearful has little reason to promote entrenchment with its attendant problems. Second, positivity helps us relax and think creatively in response to challenges (Fredrickson 2001; Carnevale 2008; Diener et al. 2015), including challenges posed by religious disagreement. Third, someone encouraged to be inquisitive and more generally positive is better able to find creative responses to religious disagreement for themselves – and thus to own these solutions for themselves. Owning your own solutions is in turn apt to make you more positive toward your community in general (King et al. 2006), making competition less a worry to begin with.

The opportunity response runs counter to the three entrenching strategies. Instead of avoidance, it welcomes novel and even challenging experiences. Instead of trivial meaning-making, it equips people to acknowledge and grapple with making meaning from challenging events. Instead of promoting unconditional loyalty, it is at home with a view of loyalty as something the community must deserve (Dormandy 2021). A community that condescends to members by encouraging entrenchment deserves less loyalty than one that treats members as autonomous adults, values their critical thinking and feeling, and equips them to handle challenges creatively and flexibly.

The opportunity mindset does not defeat the worry about peer disagreement, however. For this arises whenever communities with alternative maps have thought-through and admirable members. But it does put members of your community at least on a par with those others, rather than their epistemic inferiors as they might be if they become entrenched.[6]

One might worry that the opportunity mindset departs from anything recognizable as *religious*. For religion is surely about commitment, the etymology of "religion" stemming, after all, from the Latin word for "to tie" or "to bind", and the openness and curiosity of the opportunity mindset seems incompatible with commitment. In response, I suggest that religion is less a matter of commitment to a *map* than commitment *to God*. Even significant parts of religious maps are revealed by God, these parts mix with a person's map of reality more generally – including the non-religious parts – and are thus invariably influenced by time, culture, and personal factors (Wynn 2017; Dormandy 2020a, 2020b). Emphasizing commitment to a map, instead of to God, thus risks *obscuring* rather than preserving our knowledge about God, our personal knowledge of him, and thus our knowledge how to engage with him. For God, if he exists, explodes human categories anyway and must be allowed to surprise us.

8. Conclusion

I've argued that responding to the competition worry with entrenching practices is wrong-headed. For entrenchment undermines another aim of many religious practices, to secure religious knowledge. Rather than regarding religious disagreement as a threat, a better response is to regard it as an opportunity. Together with training in epistemic and affective skills, this will give community members the flexibility to respond to religious disagreement creatively and autonomously.

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[6] For discussions of other objections against the opportunity mindset, see (Dormandy 2020b, 2021a).

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