


1989

World-Views and the Epistemic Foundations Of Theism

Joseph Runzo
Chapman University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/religious_studies_articles

 Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), [Comparative Methodologies and Theories Commons](#), [Other Religion Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Runzo, Joseph. "World-Views and the Epistemic Foundations of Theism." *Religious Studies* 25.01 (1989): 31-51.
DOI:10.1017/S0034412500019703

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Religious Studies at Chapman University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Religious Studies Faculty Articles and Research by an authorized administrator of Chapman University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact laughtin@chapman.edu.

World-Views and the Epistemic Foundations Of Theism

Comments

This article was originally published in *Religious Studies*, volume 25, issue 1, in 1989. DOI: [10.1017/S0034412500019703](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412500019703)

Copyright

Cambridge University Press

JOSEPH RUNZO

WORLD-VIEWS AND THE EPISTEMIC FOUNDATIONS OF THEISM¹

Epistemological issues have inevitably been perennial issues for theism. For any claim to have insight into the nature and acts of the divine requires some sort of substantiation. And the appeal to faith typically made to meet this demand is often unconvincing. This raises a fundamental question: what *could* constitute proper grounds for theistic belief? In attempting to answer this question, we will need to address the underlying epistemic issue of what justifies commitment to any world-view.

Tertullian proposed the provocative if enigmatic notion that, at least regarding the Christ-event, 'just because it is absurd, it is to be believed', and a key element of Augustine's theology is his admonition to the faithful to 'Believe in order that you may understand; Unless you shall believe, you shall not understand.' In the High Middle Ages, the debate over the primacy of reason or revelation found a champion of the *via media* in Thomas Aquinas. With the shattering of unified church authority in the West during the Reformation and the resultant rise of the emphasis on the powers of human reason in the Enlightenment, we find Locke, Hume, Kant, and others espousing the view that 'if we distrust human reason, we have now no other principle to lead us into religion'.² At the one extreme are fideists, at the other evidentialists. On the one side the view that it is a grave error to allow reason to supplant faith, and on the other that faith without evidence is blind and, so, intellectually disreputable. As is often the case with radically opposed views, both sides have something important to say about the proper foundations of theism.

In this paper, I will argue that faith and reason form two mutually essential epistemic foundations of theism. For while faith without evidence may be no more than a pacifier for the mind, requiring conclusive evidence for theism *apart* from faith is an invitation to mental anorexia.

¹ Earlier versions of this paper were presented at Cambridge University and King's College, University of London. I wish to thank those faculties for their helpful discussion. I am especially indebted to Bill Alston, Brian Hebblethwaite, Phil Quinn, Bruce Russell, and Keith Ward for their insightful comments. Support for this paper was provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities through a Summer Stipend Fellowship.

² David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Pt. I.

I

The question, 'What constitutes *proper* grounds for religious belief?', can mean several different things. First, we might be asking a theological question, or we might be asking an epistemological question. Thus, we might be asking what would constitute *religiously* adequate reasons for religious belief – e.g. scriptural authority, personal revelation, adhering to the *magisterium* of the church. In contrast, we might be asking whether religious belief is epistemologically justified, justified when judged strictly in terms of its cognitive status. I am concerned here with the 'proper' grounds for religious belief in the latter, epistemic sense. I will make a brief comment at the end about considerations of theological adequacy for religious belief.

Second, at the outset we need to distinguish between two senses in which a belief might be epistemologically justified: one can epistemically evaluate either the *process* by which beliefs are acquired, or the *person* acquiring the beliefs. One way to assess the epistemic status of beliefs is in terms of the likelihood that the belief is true given the means by which the belief was acquired. On this approach, sudden hunches and desperate guesses are epistemically weak, while conclusions drawn from carefully controlled chemical analysis are epistemically strong, because the latter and not the former are based on belief-forming procedures (doxastic practices) which are generally favourable for producing true beliefs. However, the epistemic status of beliefs can also be assessed *normatively* in terms of the *believer's* intellectual obligations. In this sense, a person is epistemically justified in a belief if he or she has not violated any intellectual obligations. On this sort of assessment, a person who makes a wild guess at the answer to a problem in chemistry is not justified (even if he is right), and the careful, painstaking chemist is justified (even if she is mistaken), because we know full well that wild guesses are unlikely to produce correct answers in chemistry, while the chemist has no reason to think that her careful scientific methodology is likely to produce incorrect results. Or, to contrast the two senses concomitantly, a child's *belief* while at Disneyland in the existence of Mickey Mouse may not be epistemically justified, since a fantasy setting is not an appropriate context for the reliability of standard doxastic practices. But the *child* may be epistemically justified, having no reason not to trust what are otherwise reliable sources of knowledge – his parents' word, his perceptions, etc.

In this paper, I will be primarily concerned with the normative epistemic justification of theistic belief – namely, with whether the believer *ought* to hold the beliefs he or she does. Our central question then is not, what would make the *beliefs* of the theist epistemically justified, but what would make the *theist* epistemically justified in his or her beliefs?

II

This is a trenchant problem because all too often theists appear to be building a Chartres for the mind on cognitive sand. This enables an Ambrose Bierce satirically to define faith as 'belief without evidence in what is told by one who speaks without knowledge, of things without parallel'.¹ And serious scepticism about the cognitive value of apparently unsupported religious belief has led to evidentialist approaches to theism.

An evidentialist might attack the theist as being insufficiently justified in his or her beliefs. Or an evidentialist might defend the theist on the grounds that their belief *is* justified according to evidentialist standards. In either case, the evidentialist holds that to be epistemically justified, the theist's beliefs must be rational, and to be rational they must be supported by evidence.² *Prima facie* this requirement seems reasonable.

There are two ways of trying to rebut the evidentialist account of theistic belief. One way is that of the fideist: namely to deny the evidentialist's assumption that it is proper to use reason to judge faith statements. We will consider that line of approach later. Another way is to accept the evidentialist's assumption that faith statements are subject to rational assessment, but to deny the epistemological principles on which evidentialism is itself based. This is the tack which Alvin Plantinga pursues in the powerful attack against evidentialism which he has recently developed. An assessment of Plantinga's position will provide a helpful entry into the wider question of the epistemic foundations of theism.

Plantinga suggests that 'classical foundationalism' is the principal basis for evidentialism. He argues that classical foundationalism is incoherent, and hence that the evidentialist account of religious belief should be abandoned.

First, then, what is foundationalism? In general, a foundationalist argues that while some of our beliefs are held on the basis of other beliefs, some of our beliefs must be held immediately, and not based on other beliefs. For otherwise there would either be an infinite regress or a vicious circularity within our beliefs. Paradigm examples of these foundational, or *basic* beliefs, are given: e.g. ' $1 - 1 = 0$ ' and 'I have a headache'. A normative thesis is then added explaining what makes a belief *properly basic*, i.e. a belief one can hold *as* basic without violating fundamental epistemic principles. And, finally, the foundationalist argues that what makes it *rational* to hold a belief

¹ Bierce, Ambrose, *The Devil's Dictionary*.

² An excellent account of evidentialism and its historical background is given by Nicholas Wolterstorff in his Introduction to *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 5-7, and his article, 'Can Belief in God Be Rational If It Has No Foundations?', in the same volume, pp. 136-40. However, Wolterstorff sometimes writes as if evidentialism inherently undermines theism, referring, e.g. to 'the Evidentialist's Challenge to Theism'. But Locke, and contemporary philosophers like Richard Swinburne, defend theism precisely on evidentialist grounds.

is that it is either itself a properly basic belief, or that it is appropriately based on a set of beliefs which themselves either are or eventually lead to properly basic beliefs.

What makes a belief *properly* basic? Obviously we cannot properly believe just anything without support from our other beliefs: my belief that $1 - 1 = 0$ is a properly basic belief; if I had a dream and came to believe that I am (unwittingly) as musically talented as Beethoven, that belief would not be properly basic for me, even if it were true. The classical foundationalist view, as Plantinga delineates it, is the conjunction of the ancient and medieval variety of foundationalism with modern foundationalism. On both versions, self-evident propositions are properly basic. To this, ancient and medieval foundationalists add propositions which are 'evident to the senses'; modern foundationalists add propositions which are incorrigible – experiential beliefs about which we cannot possibly be mistaken, such as beliefs about our current, conscious mental states. Hence, a classical foundationalist is anyone who holds the following principle, call it *CF*:

CF – a proposition *P* is properly basic for *S* at time *t*, if and only if *P* is either self-evident, evident to the senses, or incorrigible, for *S* at *t*.

Plantinga attacks this criterion, *CF*, for proper basicity by arguing that it is self-referentially incoherent. He suggests that *CF* is itself basic within the classical foundationalist's noetic structure.¹ But then *CF* would have to be properly basic on the criteria given in *CF*. *CF* is obviously not evident to the senses, and, Plantinga suggests, it is neither self-evident nor incorrigible. Hence classical foundationalism is self-defeating. There are several difficulties with this line of reasoning. One point to note is that classical foundationalism is not the only possible epistemological basis for evidentialism. As an alternative, an evidentialist could take a coherentist position. (Recently, Plantinga has addressed coherentism as a basis for an evidentialist objection to theism.)² Yet even if theistic belief can be properly basic on some alternative account, classical foundationalism still must be considered as the typical and perhaps most promising basis for evidentialism.

However, two other, more significant points expose an important under-

¹ See Alvin Plantinga, 'Is Belief in God Rational?', in *Rationality and Belief*, ed. C. F. Delaney (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), p. 25, and 'Reason and Belief in God', in *Faith and Rationality*, p. 60.

² In general, I do not think that coherentism is viable. But even taking coherentism as a basis for the evidentialist objection to regarding theistic beliefs as basic, I think Plantinga rightly suggests that 'the question is whether the theist's belief in God can plausibly be thought to cohere with his corrected doxastic system. Could a theist be such that if he were an honest and careful truth seeker, unmoved by greed, fear, anger, lust, desire for comfort, and their like, he would still believe that there is such a person as God, and believe that this proposition has greater chance of being true than any of its competitors? ... there seems ... not the slightest reason to think that he could not'. ('Coherentism and the Evidentialist Objection to Belief in God,' *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment: New Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright [Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986], p. 133.)

lying issue. One problem with Plantinga's assessment of classical foundationalism is that the classical foundationalist might *not* hold *CF* as basic. The foundationalist might have reasons for *CF*, even if those reasons are not expressed. Or, to give reasons, the foundationalist could invert the order of reasoning I suggest above as a defense of foundationalism and construct reasons for *CF* on the basis of paradigmatic examples of beliefs which are taken to be properly basic and are either evident to the senses, incorrigible, or self-evident. In either case, *CF* will not itself be basic, and so need not be properly basic.

On the other hand, even if *CF must be* basic for the classical foundationalist, Plantinga has not shown that the position is self-referentially incoherent. For how do we know that *CF* is not self-evident for the foundationalist? To see the force of these last two points, let us look at Plantinga's own account of the epistemic status of religious beliefs.

III

While rejecting the evidentialist account of justified belief primarily by arguing against classical foundationalism, Plantinga himself defends a broadly foundationalist notion that theistic beliefs can be 'properly basic'. There are several stages to Plantinga's argument. First he holds that belief in God is basic for the believer:

the mature believer, the mature theist, does not typically accept belief in God tentatively, or hypothetically, or until something better comes along. Nor, I think, does he accept it as a conclusion from other things he believes; he accepts it as basic, as a part of the foundations of his noetic structure. The mature theist *commits* himself to belief in God; this means that he accepts belief in God as basic.¹

More specifically, Plantinga argues that certain sorts of beliefs, for which the theist need not have any reasons, about God's relation to the world, can be *properly* basic. The sorts of beliefs Plantinga suggests as properly basic are, e.g. 'God has created all this'; 'God disapproves of what I have done'; 'God is to be thanked and praised'.² The beliefs, if true, will in turn entail that God exists. Finally, Plantinga supports the proper basicity of these beliefs by arguing that they are comparable to ordinary perceptual beliefs, memory beliefs and beliefs ascribing mental states to other persons, which are clearly properly basic and for which we have no reasons.³

¹ Plantinga, 'Is Belief in God Rational?', p. 27. Sometimes Plantinga seems to be arguing, as here, that belief in God's existence is itself (properly) basic. As we shall see, he comes to hold the view that the belief that God exists rests on other theistic beliefs which are themselves properly basic.

² Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God', p. 81. Cf. 'On Taking Belief in God as Basic', *Religious Experience and Religious Belief: Essays in the Epistemology of Religion*, ed. Joseph Runzo and Craig K. Ihara (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), pp. 12-13.

³ Plantinga, 'On taking Belief in God as Basic', pp. 10-14.

For instance, consider (to use Plantinga's examples) the beliefs 'I see a tree', 'I had breakfast this morning', and 'That person is angry'. In the usual case, these are not the sorts of beliefs which we hold on the basis of other beliefs. As I gaze out of my study at our crape myrtle, I immediately form the belief that I see a tree; as noon approaches, and I think back to my last meal, I immediately form the belief that I had an omelet for breakfast; as I am confronted by the Dean exhibiting the contorted face and raised voice of anger behaviour, I immediately form the belief 'That person *is* angry': these are properly basic beliefs. Being justified in believing that one sees a tree, had breakfast or that someone is angry, does not depend on having other beliefs as reasons – e.g. that objects with reddish bark and crenulated pink flowers are crape myrtle trees; that there were two eggs in the refrigerator last night, now there are none; that the Dean normally has a pallid pallor, not the blood-infused countenance which now confronts me. Similarly, the argument goes, a theist in prayer, or one awed by the precipitous ten thousand foot eastern wall of the Sierra Nevada, can properly believe, without inferring this from other beliefs as reasons, that 'God is to be thanked' or that 'God created all this.'

Despite these proposed parallels, it might still seem implausible, just as the evidentialist suggests, that theistic belief could be *properly* basic if the theist *really has no reasons* for his or her beliefs. This objection might rest on a confusion. We should not confuse having reasons for a belief, *B*, with having reasons for the belief *that B is basic*. We *should* expect reasons for the higher level epistemological belief *that* a certain belief is basic. But what we are considering here is only the claim that we should not expect reasons of someone, whose theistic beliefs are basic, for why they hold those beliefs.¹ Even more important, to say that one does not need reasons for basic theistic beliefs is not to say that these beliefs are *groundless*.² Perceptual beliefs, memory beliefs, and beliefs ascribing mental states to others are themselves only properly basic when grounded in the appropriate circumstances: looking directly out of the open window at our crape myrtle; bringing to mind my memory of my most recent meal; being sharply attentive to the Dean's behaviour. So too, theistic beliefs can be rationally justified – properly basic – precisely when the experiential circumstances under which they are acquired constitute sufficient grounds for basicity. And in fact a claim like 'God is to be thanked and praised' *is* typically based on experiential

¹ Plantinga himself does not deny that there could not be adequate reasons for those theistic beliefs which an individual takes as basic, only that there need not be adequate (or any) reasons for fundamental theistic claims. He thinks that some version of the Ontological Argument provides adequate reasons for belief in God's existence. (See *The Nature of Necessity* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974], ch. X, especially pp. 213–17.) Against this, I argue below that the theist must have basic theistic beliefs which are based on faith and *cannot* be based on reasons.

² See e.g. Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God', pp. 78 ff. and 'On Taking Belief in God as Basic,' pp. 12 ff.

grounds. Thus, a monotheist attending services in King's College Chapel, Cambridge, might bring this claim to mind upon hearing the choir, the words of the liturgy, gazing upon the soaring, transcendent fan vaulting, and so forth.

IV

Monotheistic beliefs can be properly basic: one can be epistemically justified in holding theistic beliefs as basic, with no further beliefs as reasons, as long as one has appropriate *grounds* for those beliefs. But whereas Plantinga, for example, offers a primarily negative defence for holding that theistic beliefs can be basic, by attempting to show that 'there is nothing contrary to reason or irrational in so doing',¹ I think it can be shown *why* the theist can have appropriate grounds for holding some theistic beliefs as basic, and thus it can be shown why some theistic beliefs are *properly* basic. Moreover, this explanation will show that it is not only epistemologically proper but necessary for some theistic beliefs to be basic. Thus a strong positive defence of the proper basicity of monotheistic belief can be given. At the same time, though, this defence will indicate not only why the evidentialist position *per se* fails, but why the evidentialist's argument is initially plausible.

To start, consider again Plantinga's method for supporting the proper basicity of theistic beliefs. He first suggests that certain sorts of beliefs *are* properly basic for the theist, and then uses those beliefs as paradigms of properly basic beliefs to determine general criteria for proper basicity.² Now as Plantinga himself acknowledges, different people will have quite different beliefs that they take to be properly basic:

there is no reason to assume in advance that everyone will agree on the examples. The Christian will of course suppose that belief in God is entirely proper and rational; if he doesn't accept this belief on the basis of other propositions, he will conclude that it is basic for him and quite properly so. Followers of Bertrand Russell and Madelyn Murray O'Hare may disagree, but... the Christian community is responsible to *its* set of examples, not to theirs.³

The crux of the matter is that a belief is properly basic only *for* some individual or community of individuals. Put another way, a belief is only properly basic *relative to* some system of belief, some particular world-view.⁴ In the first place, a proposition will not even be a candidate for belief unless, in Jamesian terms, it is a 'live option', and a potential belief cannot be a live option unless it is at least semantically meaningful to the individual in question, meaningful on *their* conceptual schema. In the second place, even

¹ Plantinga, 'Is Belief in God Rational?', p. 27.

² Plantinga, 'Is Belief in God Properly Basic?', in *Nous*, (1981), 50.

³ *Ibid.* p. 46.

⁴ I will use the term 'world-view' to denote all the cognitive elements, including beliefs, but also concepts, laws of logic, and so on, which the mind brings to experience.

among beliefs which are live options for the same group of individuals, what is a *basic* belief for one individual may be a non-basic belief for another individual in the group. Consequently, a procedure like Plantinga's for defending the proper basicity of theistic beliefs, by first identifying certain theistic beliefs as properly basic, is restricted on two counts: it purposively ignores those outside the theistic world-view for whom the theist's basic beliefs are not properly basic, and it does not account for those ostensibly *inside* the theistic schema who would deny that the particular theistic beliefs which are identified *are* properly basic beliefs.

In general, these limitations were already evident in the way classical foundationalism was assessed. As part of his argument that classical foundationalism is self-referentially incoherent, Plantinga suggests that *CF* is not self-evident but that it must be basic for the classical foundationalist. Many will agree with Plantinga that the classical foundationalist's principle *CF* is not self-evident. But on Plantinga's own account that is irrelevant. For what we must ask is whether *CF* is self-evident and so properly basic *for* the foundationalist. Similarly, whether or not the foundationalist holds *CF* on the basis of other beliefs will depend on the structure of the individual classical foundationalist's world-view. On Plantinga's own account, these are matters which cannot be settled *a priori*, but rather inductively, on the basis of what in fact are properly basic propositions for the individual. And insofar as it turns out that classical foundationalism is self-referentially coherent and accepted on its own grounds, theistic beliefs like 'God created all this' will not be properly basic *on that view*.

Specifically regarding theism, to see the limitations of an account such as Plantinga's against external criticisms, consider how world-views which are alternatives to theism will have to be assessed. A-theistic beliefs (whether religious or non-religious) and agnostic beliefs will have exactly the same *prima facie* claim to proper basicity *vis-à-vis* the relevant world-views, as theistic beliefs will have on the world-view which the theist holds. Turning to internal criticisms, two observations should be made. First, it is implausible to suppose that, within the enormous spectrum of traditions comprising monotheism, the same set, or even very nearly the same set, of beliefs will be properly basic. Monotheists are diverse as Ramanuja, Al-Gazali, Maimonides (or the authors of the *Zohar*), Thomas Aquinas, and Schleiermacher do not hold the same basic theistic beliefs. And narrowing the scope of theism further will not help. For example, Christianity alone is a richly varied set of overlapping traditions; there is no such thing as 'the Christian world-view' – more so, there is no single set of beliefs which constitute 'the' one definitive set of basic (much less properly basic) Christian beliefs. Second, no matter how theism is construed, even if 'theism' is narrowed to some strand of Christianity, say Calvinism or Thomism, *which*

theistic beliefs will be *properly* basic beliefs will depend on the circumstances and particular world-view of each individual within the tradition in question.¹

V

What we are looking for, then, is a broader epistemological theory which offers a reply to evidentialism but explains *why* theistic beliefs are properly basic, and so accounts for these external and internal objections. Now, since we have a surer understanding of the epistemic status of our everyday sensory beliefs than we do of religious beliefs, one approach would be to consider more closely how the proper basicity of theistic beliefs might be comparable to that of ordinary perceptual beliefs. A major proponent of this approach is William Alston.

Alston argues for the strong thesis that religious experience can provide direct justification for theistic beliefs about how God's nature and activities manifest themselves in the lives of humans. These 'manifestation' beliefs which Alston focuses on, that 'God will provide for his people', that 'God speaks to us through the Bible' and so on, are the same type of theistic belief which Plantinga regards as properly basic. First considering ordinary sense perception, Alston argues that we are *prima facie* justified in our sensory beliefs if those beliefs arise from perceptual experiences which seem to us to present the fact that is believed. That is, we are justified insofar as we have no adequate reason for supposing that our beliefs formed in this manner on the basis of sense perception, are unreliable. Alston then argues that religious beliefs about God's manifestations, formed on the basis of religious experience, are similarly justified – justified unless there is sufficient reason to believe otherwise. In the case of religious experiences, the experiences of others but also scripture, tradition, and so on, would provide potential reasons to believe otherwise.²

Alston concedes that religious experiences, as a basis for belief formation, are commonly thought to be discredited *vis-à-vis* ordinary sense experiences because the former, unlike the latter, (1) offer no standard checks for accuracy, (2) offer no basis for the prediction of future events, (3) are not found universally among normal adults, and (4) are objectified by different

¹ For instance, in 'In Search of the Foundations of Theism', (in *Faith and Philosophy*, 11, 4 [October 1985]), Philip Quinn points out that propositions like 'God made all this' could start as properly basic, entailing that God exists, and then the theist's noetic structure evolve such that 'God exists' becomes properly basic and propositions like 'God created all this' are believed on the basis of entailment (pp. 478–9).

² See e.g. Alston, 'Christian Experience and Christian Belief,' in *Faith and Rationality*, pp. 112–13. Terrence Penelhum argues for a qualified version of this type of argument, which he calls a Parity Argument in *God and Skepticism: A Study in Skepticism and Fideism* (Dordrecht, Boston: D. Reidel, 1983), see esp. Ch. 7.

conceptual schemas.¹ Against this Alston contends that (a) there is no reason to think that features like (1)–(4) must be criteria of reliability for *every* doxastic practice, and (b) we should actually expect (1)–(4) to be absent from religious experiences. For theistic experiences putatively involve a being who is so ‘wholly other’ that humans are unable to grasp the regularities of His behaviour or to achieve more than the sketchiest idea of His nature, and who additionally places limitations on when His presence will be evident.

The crucial element in these suggested differences (1)–(4) between perceptual and religious doxastic practices is actually (4), the effect of differences of conceptual schema on experience. True, the ‘wholly otherness’ of God could, in part, explain (2) – why past religious experiences provide little predictive understanding of God’s actions. But features (1)–(3) of religious experiences most fundamentally stem from *differences* among the conceptual schemas of those who have religious experiences. As we shall see, such differences of world-view, not only among the world religions, but *within* each of the world religions, are the underlying cause of (3) – the lack of universality of religious experiences – and explain (1), the absence of standard checks for the accuracy of experiential religious truth-claims.

First, the manner in which perceptual beliefs vary among perceivers is more like variations in religious belief than Alston allows. Consider scientific beliefs, which once appeared potentially the most reliably invariant of our experiential beliefs. Norwood Hanson argues that all seeing is ‘theory laden’ and that the scientific observation of an entity *X* is ‘shaped by prior knowledge of *X*’, and Thomas Kuhn builds a persuasive case that scientific paradigms are not only constitutive of science, ‘they are constitutive of nature as well’ such that scientists with incompatible world-views literally ‘live in different worlds’.² On this account, different scientific views do not just result in different interpretations of the same data available to all inquirers, differing theories actually result in differing observational data.

The same effect of world-views on the ‘data’ of experience can be seen in cases of common perception. One person hears the two great opening chords and first motif in the cellos from the *Eroica*, another hears ‘some orchestral music’; one savours a vintage port, another tastes a heavy, sweet wine; one person stands at streamside and sees the delicate cast of a no. 16 Pale Morning Dun on a 5X tippet, another watches someone waving a fishing pole back and forth. What we perceive is inextricably determined, in part, by the conceptual resources we bring to our experiences. The musically illiterate, gustatorily impoverished or athletically allergic not only cannot experience in the same way, but cannot experience the same *things*, as the

¹ See Alston, ‘Religious Experience as a Ground of Religious Belief’, in *Religious Experience and Religious Belief*, p. 44, and ‘Plantinga’s Epistemology of Religious Belief’, in *Alvin Plantinga*, ed. James Tomberlin and Peter Van Inwagen (Dordrecht, Boston: D. Reidel, 1985), pp. 306–8.

² Norwood Hanson, *Patterns of Discovery: An Inquiry into the Conceptual Foundations of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), p. 19 and Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 109 and pp. 115–16.

aesthete and the educated. Standing in the Place de la Concorde in Paris today, a newly arrived Australian bushman could not perceive what you or I would perceive. And even in the same culture, four-year-olds do not see the same world forty-year-olds see.

But this is no different in kind from the differences in the religious perceptions of the theologian and the theologically naive, the Shiite fundamentalist and the Dutch Calvinist fundamentalist, the first-century Christian and the modern Anglican – or for that matter of the naturalist and the theist. So while they do differ, religious experiences and ordinary perceptual experiences are no different in *kind* in terms of their objectification by different schemas (feature [4]) and, consequently, their lack of universality (feature [3] in Alston's analysis). For in general, to experience *X* is to experience *X* as something *Y*, whether what one is experiencing is a religious or a non-religious state of affairs.¹ And the possibility of experiencing something *as Y* is determined by the percipient's conceptual resources. That is to say, all experience is conceptualized by the percipient's world-view. This is why religious experiences are not universal, why even people in the same tradition often have quite different religious experiences, for even here there will be considerable variation among individuals' conceptual resources. And this is why the theist but not the naturalist might well experience nature *as* the creation of God, an experience which could then ground the basic belief that 'God created all this'.

Second, the salient role of differences of conceptual schema can also be seen if we consider the underlying epistemic issue, most directly raised by (1), of the justification of our beliefs. Generally, perceptual beliefs appear more justified than religious beliefs. After all, so the argument goes, typically any 'normal' observer can *check* the perceptual claims of another person. In contrast, we are usually told that the experiential religious claims of another can be checked, if at all, only if one understands those religious claims *from the perspective* of the tradition in question. So to check the monotheist's experiential claims effectively, one must at least entertain theistic assumption about how God might be manifesting Himself. Such a checking procedure is circular. But this circularity does not tell against the epistemic justification of religious truth-claims.

The truth-claims of every doxastic practice can only be assessed by assuming the basic reliability of the practice. Thus for perception, I can only check the reliability of any particular perceptual belief by checking it against other perceptual beliefs, thereby assuming the general reliability of my doxastic perceptual practice.² Even a doxastic practice like theoretical

¹ I give an extended argument for this analysis of perception in 'The Propositional Structure of Perception', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, xiv (July 1977) and 'The Radical Conceptualization of Perceptual Experience', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, xix (July 1982).

² Alston makes a similar point – but does not draw the general conclusion I do about the role of conceptual schemas – in 'Religious Experience as a Ground of Religious Belief', pp. 41–2, and 'Christian Experience and Christian Belief', pp. 117–18.

physics cannot be checked by assuming the reliability of only *other* doxastic practices, such as perception. Phenomena postulated by theoretical physics – e.g. black holes, the weak and strong atomic forces, or the ‘big bang’ – can only be checked on the basis of the assumed reliability of both the more general theories of physics in which these specific theoretical entities are embedded, and the assumed reliability of the theorized relationship between perception and the specific as well as the more general theories being employed. And, since different theories result in different observational data, there are no *neutral* perceptual data against which to check the reliability of a scientific theory. The reliability of our beliefs, then, can only be assessed internally to the relevant doxastic practice(s).

The reason for this is that the only access which one has to a particular subject matter, whether objects of sense perception or of religious experience, is, by definition, *one's own* relevant doxastic practice. And this holds true even when one attempts to check the reliability of beliefs *intersubjectively* and not just *innersubjectively*. For the agreement or disagreement of others with our beliefs is only meaningful if we share concepts with them about the object of belief and about the proper procedures for checking those beliefs. (Thus, the notion of a ‘normal’ observer is relative to a world-view – according to their own world-views, an Australian bushman and a French historian are each ‘normal’ perceivers as they stand in the Place de la Concorde, yet their perceptions are very different.) And once again, because of the essential connection between our world-views and the nature of experience, theistic belief is no different in kind here, in its epistemic justification, than perceptual or memory belief.

There is a further point. Even the relatively high-order epistemological issue of the justification of our doxastic practices themselves is indelibly tied to our world-views. Individual beliefs derive their justification from the doxastic practice in which they are embedded. A person is justified in conforming to a doxastic practice, in turn, if he or she has no adequate reasons for thinking that their belief-forming practice is unreliable. As a result, an individual's world-view, whether religious or non-religious, affects the epistemological justification of their beliefs in two ways. (a) The very nature of experiences which must provide the adequate grounding for belief will be in part determined by the individual's world-view. And additionally, (b), the individual's own world-view will in part determine *via* experience whether there are any reasons *against* supposing that their world-view itself incorporates acceptable doxastic practices. Clearly then, epistemic justification is person-relative, varying from world-view to world-view, for the theist and non-theist alike.

Where does this leave us? One is justified in holding theistic beliefs as basic beliefs *if* one has adequate *grounds* for one's beliefs. And religious experience could serve as grounds for theistic beliefs as basic beliefs. But as we now see,

that will depend on the acceptability of the theistic world-view itself. Since the adequacy of religious experience as grounds for religious belief is relative to the individual's world-view, to show that the theist is epistemically justified, one must show how conforming to a theistic world-view could be justified *vis-à-vis* alternative world-views with their attendant, contrasting experiences as grounds for belief.

VI

When *is* one justified in accepting a theistic, as opposed to some other, world-view? So far the discussion has assumed that the theist's beliefs involve truth-claims about a divine reality, for which the theist is either epistemically justified or not. Perhaps this is a mistake. We can avert the problems of epistemic justification, as well as any evidentialist challenge to theism, if we simply deny that it is proper to use reason to assess religious statements.

In this vein, D. Z. Phillips has argued that 'knowledge of God is not theoretical knowledge: it is not a matter of coming to know more *about* anything'.¹ Thus, Phillips holds that disputes about God between believers and non-believers are not 'over matters of fact' and that 'to say that religious pictures must refer to some object... that they must describe matters of fact... distorts the character of religious belief'.² And Don Cupitt has argued that 'so far as we can tell, there is no objective personal God', and thus that 'there cannot be any religious interest in any supposed extra-religious reality of God'. Cupitt concludes, 'It follows that religious language is not descriptive or metaphysical but intensely practical.'³ Phillips offers a *descriptive* analysis of religious language: if religion is properly understood as it is typically practised, we will see that reference to a transcendent, supernatural God is actually extraneous. Cupitt offers a *stipulative* analysis of religious language: we ought to reinterpret religious discourse to eliminate traditional reference to an external, objective deity, and instead emphasize religious values and spirituality. But while reaching different views about the nature of traditional religious discourse, both Phillips and Cupitt hold that theological realism impedes or distorts true religiosity and argue for a non-cognitivist understanding of religious language.

A clear strength of these non-cognitivist approaches is their emphasis on religious spirituality over against excessively rationalistic religion. Yet however important it may be to emphasize religious values, a non-cognitivist theism constitutes a different world-view than a cognitivist theism. Elsewhere

¹ D. Z. Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer* (New York: Schocken, 1966), p. 60. See also *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry* (New York: Schocken, 1971), p. 29.

² Phillips, *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 1 and *Religion Without Explanation* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976), p. 150.

³ Don Cupitt, *Taking Leave of God* (New York: Crossroad, 1980), pp. 93, 96, and 164, respectively.

I have argued that theistic language can only be meaningful if it has cognitive content.¹ Be this as it may, as the starting point for Cupitt's view recognizes, theological realism has traditionally been and still remains the standard monotheistic position. Thus we still have the question, which I will continue to focus on, of what would constitute proper grounds for a *cognitivist* theism?

VII

To answer this question we will have to understand the role of faith *vis-à-vis* our world-views. Here we must distinguish between *faith that*, where faith is basically equivalent to the cognitive state of belief, and *faith in*, which is roughly equivalent to commitment or trust. These are not two different types of faith, but rather two aspects of faith, where *faith in* is inclusive of *faith that*. The fundamental notion of faith, *faith in*, denotes a disposition. For instance, to have faith in *God* is to be in a certain dispositional state – namely, to be disposed, under the right conditions, to act in certain ways, such as worshipping or performing a supererogatory moral act, to acquire and/or intensify certain attitudes, e.g. selflessly loving one's fellow creatures, reverence toward God, and (assuming a cognitivist understanding of theism) to acquire certain sorts of *beliefs*, e.g. to have faith *that* God is just, and so on. Overall though, the most fundamental element of the dispositional state of faith *that* is the disposition to experience the world in a certain way. Thus, most fundamental to faith *in God* is the disposition to experience the world 'theistically', to experience the world persistently *as* under God's providence. Faith *in*, then, is a complex dispositional state of commitment manifested in particular actions, attitudes, and beliefs, and essentially involving a type of experiencing-*as*. The strength of this commitment and the fact that genuine faith involves the whole person is marked by Tillich's designation of faith as being *ultimately concerned*.²

Now, having faith *in* entails that the person of faith possesses a particular world-view. First, since it necessarily involves a type of experiencing-*as*, faith *in God*, for example, entails holding those beliefs and possessing those conceptual resources which make a theistic experience of the world possible. Second, faith *in* includes dispositions to believe – e.g. to have faith *that* God has a certain nature, etc. Third, as ultimate concern involving the total person, a person's faith fundamentally delimits how he or she will experience

¹ See *Reason, Relativism and God* (London: Macmillan Press; New York: St Martin's 1986) pp. 175–81, Ch. 7 and pp. 234–6. I argue specifically against Phillip's non-cognitivist view in 'Religion, Relativism and Conceptual Schemas', *The Heythrop Journal* xxiv (1983). In the Hindu tradition, the great monotheist Ramanuja explicitly argues for a cognitivist view of religious language and Hindu scriptural texts. See Julius Lipner, *The Face of Truth* (London: Macmillan Press; Albany: SUNY Press, 1986), pp. 16 ff.

² Paul Tillich, *The Dynamics of Faith*, p. 1. Cf. Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), Vol. 1, pp. 11–12.

and understand the world, thereby reinforcing the individual's current world-view with further, newly acquired, beliefs and concepts.

Consequently, faith can be understood as essentially involving commitment to a world-view. Understood in this broad sense, faith is neither limited to mere belief in specific propositions, nor is it limited to religious contexts. Any person with a fundamental commitment to a world-view has, in the sense in which I am using this term, 'faith *in*'.

VIII

What then justifies a *particular* faith, a commitment to a world-view? Our actions can only be purposive in the context of an organized and stable world. It is our world-views which serve as a 'cognitive map' of the world, providing coherence to the world we perceive, and so guiding our purposive activity. To be rational, therefore, requires attempting to achieve a coherent world-view. But we do not choose world-views primarily on the basis of reason. For one thing, our world-view is first formed on trust within the social context of our childhood. Subsequently, in making alterations in our world-view, since we cannot exchange world-views *in toto*, we always retain – on faith – some portion of our previous world-view. And second, even when we do adopt a major change in our world-view, it is not principally rational reasoning, but *faith*, which decides the issue of which of two world-views, such as naturalism or monotheism, to adopt. We may initially become attracted by a new world-view in the light of evidence which is awkward, or cannot be parsimoniously accounted for, on our present world-view. But we acquire a new conception of the world (sometimes subtly and gradually) primarily on the basis of faith, and only afterwards find what we feel is conclusive evidence and argument to support that choice.¹

The reason we must make the choice of a world-view primarily on the basis of faith and not reasoning, is found in the difference between 'internal' and 'external' questions regarding world-views.² Suppose we want to know whether God, or black holes, exist. We can only pursue such questions by presupposing a world-view on which it makes sense to speak of a black hole or of God. Thus, when we ask whether some specific state of affairs obtains, or is even *possible*, we are asking an 'internal question', a question which must be decided on the basis of some particular world-view (or set of related

¹ This is not to suggest that our beliefs are under our direct voluntary control. Rather, what we have in our power is the choice of actions or attitudes, such as studying information, getting a second opinion, or the willingness to listen to opposing ideas, which then contribute causally to our acquisition of beliefs. Thus, we have the ability to assume an attitude of trust, and to take an ultimate concern in, matters involving certain fundamental beliefs which come to form the foundational beliefs of the new world-view which we adopt.

² On the distinction between internal and external questions see Rudolf Carnap, 'Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology', in *Semantics and the Philosophy of Language*, ed. Leonard Linsky (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1952), p. 209.

world-views).¹ On the other hand, when asking which world-view to choose, we are asking an 'external question' about the acceptability of one world-view against alternative world-views. Now, since truth and falsity and what can serve as evidence in support of a belief, are internal matters about states of affairs, external questions about the acceptability of a world-view cannot be a matter of evidence or of the view itself being true or false. World-views themselves are neither true nor false, only more or less expedient. The choice of a world-view has to be settled on second-order pragmatic grounds – e.g. which view is the epistemically most powerful for acting in the world, which accounts for the most significant and the greatest variety of relevant experiences, and which solves what are taken to be the most significant problems at issue.

Recall that the evidentialist holds that the theist's beliefs must be rational, and to be rational they must be supported by evidence. The first half of this claim is correct; the second half is misleading. Theistic belief *should* be rejected if it is not both internally consistent and a rational choice among alternatives. But there can be no neutral, external evidence for theism itself. And while internal evidence is valuable for determining the appropriate strength of commitment to beliefs already held, or in changing individual beliefs, *within* a system, it cannot provide sufficient grounds for the choice of a world-view. Hence it is misguided to suppose that there *could be* independent, rationally convicting evidence – such as the ontological argument – for theism. Such 'evidence' is simply internal.² As Anselm says of arguments for theistic belief, 'I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand. For this also I believe, – that unless I believed, I should not understand.'³ This is major reason why theistic beliefs can be basic beliefs: the believer does not need evidence for them in part because there cannot be rationally convicting *external* evidence for theistic beliefs.

In sum, we hold our world-view(s) principally on the basis of faith, not evidence. The question we are addressing has thus become: when is one

¹ While questions about whether some state of affairs obtains are internal to a world-view, different world-views can share some of the same conceptual resources, and if there is sufficient overlap, the same internal question of truth and falsity, or of possibility or probability, can be asked and assessed within those different but related world-views. See note 2 below.

² This does not mean that an argument for (or against) theism can only be applicable within one world-view. Many world-views will overlap, sharing certain conceptual resources. So a given theistic argument might be coherent within a number of sufficiently related world-views. But it will have no force with respect to world-views not sharing the requisite concepts and presuppositions. This applies to probabilistic arguments for or against theism. J. L. Mackie argues in *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), that the balance of probability lies against theism. And Richard Swinburne argues in *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), that the truth of theism is more probable than not. But truth-claims are only probable *vis-à-vis* some assumed world-view or relevantly similar world-views. Hence probabilistic arguments also have limited force, since assessing the probability of theistic truth-claims is useless against criticism external to the world-views which are presupposed.

³ Anselm, *Proslogium* in *St Anselm: Basic Writings*, trans. S. N. Deane (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1966), p. 7.

justified in accepting a theistic world-view, like any world-view, *on faith*? With this question we have come to the heart of the issue of what constitutes proper grounds for theistic belief.

IX

In his debate with Clifford on the 'ethics of belief', William James notes that 'There are two ways of looking at our duty in the matter of opinion, ... *We must know the truth; and we must avoid error.*'¹ Regarding the second principle, we have already rejected evidentialism, insofar as it is construed in a strict Cliffordian manner, as insisting on always avoiding error to achieve epistemic justification. The first principle, 'seek the truth', can be taken to mean that one is epistemically justified in a belief or doxastic practice, *unless* one has adequate reason to cease believing that proposition or conforming to that practice. This is the view taken by Plantinga and Alston.² I think that, depending on the beliefs at issue, one should sometimes adhere to the more restrictive principle, 'avoid error', and sometimes follow the more latitudinous principle, 'seek truth'.

In the sciences, for example, as well as in many practical, every-day affairs, the wise course of action is to come to believe a truth-claim only when one has sufficient evidence: e.g. the medical researcher should be extremely cautious in claiming to have discovered a cure for leukaemia when the 'cure' is also potentially lethal. But there are special circumstances when one should follow the invitation to 'seek truth', to engage in a leap of faith, and believe without sufficient (prior) evidence. This is the rational course of action when, to use James's terminology, we are faced with a 'genuine option' – i.e. a choice that is conjointly live, forced, and momentous – which cannot be decided on the basis of evidence of argument, and which is potentially self-verifying.³ Put in other terms, when we cannot decide a genuine option on intellectual grounds, the set of basic beliefs we acquire in virtue of coming to believe one side of the option can be a set of *properly* basic beliefs if it is potentially self-verifying. For then one has not violated the fundamental epistemic obligation to pursue truth and not believe just anything.

It is irrational, of course, to choose that side of an option which one thinks one knows with certainty, or with a high degree of probability, to be false. But one will engage in a leap of faith in part because one believes that there is some reasonable probability that one's choice will *turn out* to be correct, despite the evidence currently available. The choice of a theistic world-view

¹ William James, 'The Will to Believe', in *Essays on Faith and Morals* (New York: Meridian, 1974), p. 48.

² For Alston's view, see 'Religious Experience As a Ground of Religious Belief', pp. 35–43. On this view as taken by Thomas Reid and the parallel view of Nicholas Wolterstorff, see Wolterstorff, 'Can Belief in God Be Rational If It Has No Foundations?', pp. 163 and 168.

³ James, 'The Will to Believe', p. 42.

will be a genuine option for those for whom it is a live option. And theistic belief is potentially self-verifying, because if God exists, faith in God makes possible an I–Thou relation with the divine, and makes possible the verification of certain theistic expectations. Accordingly, a leap of theistic faith becomes a rational procedure, if one expects that by so doing one is more likely to come to a satisfactory understanding of the universe, than if one does not act as if theism were true.

Here again we see why an evidentialist account of theistic belief is mistaken. Whenever the fundamental beliefs of a world-view, whether monotheism or Marxism, a moral point of view or an a-moral point of view, *are* potentially self-verifying, a leap of faith is rationally justified. But those fundamental beliefs cannot be verified until one has *already* committed oneself to being engaged in that faith stance, until one is willing, e.g. to take the moral point of view, or to consider the world *as* under the providence of God. In this context, faith *in* is a *pre-condition* for substantiating our beliefs, since verification, like evidence, is internal to the world-view to which one is already committed.

X

This shows that the initial leap of theistic faith can be rationally justified, but could there be grounds for thinking that it is the *best* choice? after all, the leap of faith *against* theism can also be justified, since presumably it too is potentially self-verifying. To answer this, let us consider the kinds of grounds used to make choices among alternative views in the sciences.

If a physicist in the early part of this century were trying to decide whether to accept an Einsteinian conception of space and time, the issue would not be, ‘Is the Einsteinian account true?’ To put the question this way would be to pose an internal question which presupposes the intelligibility of an Einsteinian world-view, for after all, from a Newtonian point of view, the Einsteinian account would appear false. The issue to be addressed is the pragmatic question of whether the new Einsteinian conception seems to solve what are regarded as the most pressing current puzzles, has the greater scope for future explanation, etc.

Similarly, accepting a monotheistic world-view is not a matter of trying to choose ‘the true’ view of, say, the origin of the universe, as contrasted with ‘the false’ view of naturalism. Rather, the appropriate sort of considerations would be whether one thinks that the meaning of life, or morality, or the presence of beauty in the universe can best be explained in terms of the existence of a God. Of course, such valuations will vary according to the individual’s own world-view. But while the evaluation of the degree, or lack, of success of monotheism in resolving those problems will vary, these pragmatic criteria for assessing the acceptability of a theistic world-view will provide general trans-schema criteria – among sufficiently related world-views – for the epistemic justification of the initial theistic leap of faith.

As a result, theistic faith can be objective. Not only will theistic truth-claims be subject to interschematic checking procedures, but to the extent that theistic faith is pragmatically expedient for the individual, the monotheistic option will have a strong claim to the individual's adherence, since it will then be not only live, but pragmatic *vis-à-vis* the alternatives considered. Of course, such tests for objectivity only apply among world-views which share the relevant concepts. But that is how objectivity functions in any field of inquiry. Thus in the sciences, the checks against proceeding 'unscientifically' only function within scientific world-views: chemists do not, as they should not, consider whether their procedures would be acceptable to an alchemist or an animist. Yet as long as alternative world-views which share the relevant concepts are considered, there will be a strong check on the objectivity of the theist's beliefs.

XI

This is not to endorse some version of fideism, on which faith is preeminent over reason, needing no epistemic justification, and indeed acting as the judge of reason. Rather, faith and reason form two mutually essential epistemic foundations for theism: a reasoned consideration of alternative world-views and potential self-verification will make a leap of theistic faith rational. Once the commitment of faith is made, it is then possible to have religious experiences which can (1) serve as the grounds for *basic* theistic beliefs and (2) can yield evidence for further theistic beliefs providing further justification for one's initial commitment. But as we have seen, faith will not be rational unless it meets trans-schema standards for what counts as warranted belief. In significant matters of faith, not just 'anything goes', and blind faith is no faith at all.

Against this, it might be objected that one cannot judge one world-view, such as theism, in terms of another. For example, D. Z. Phillips holds that world-views are exclusionary, suggesting 'If a people lost their belief in God, belief in God is not "intelligible but false" for them, but unintelligible.'¹ But on this account, those who have never accepted theism would *ipso facto* find theism unintelligible. Yet surely atheists such as Voltaire, Jean-Paul Sartre, or Bertrand Russell can quite properly assess belief in God. So too, Thomist Trinitarians can quite properly assess Muslim monotheism, or to turn to a non-religious context, pre- and post-Copernican astronomers could sensibly discuss the heavens, though they disagreed about whether the heavens were immutable or not. This is possible because world-views are not exclusionary and isolated; though incompatible, they cannot be utterly incommensurate. Because world-views (and concepts) are social constructs, there not only are but must be general trans-schema canons of meaning-

¹ D. Z. Phillips, *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 46. Cf. *Religion Without Explanation*, p. 181.

fulness and justification, as well as specific shared concepts and beliefs, across world-views.

The religious person wants, of course, in some sense to hold the 'right view' about the nature of the universe. And part of what it is to hold the 'right view' is to hold a view that reasonable people with whom one does not currently agree *could* come to agree with. But any positive evaluation one might offer of one's own views about religion which is expected to have general credence *presupposes* the applicability of other world-views to the issues in question. It is not very interesting or persuasive to be told, upon asking the value of holding a particular world-view, that if one only converted to that view one would come to regard it as worthy. Further, any attempt to protect religion from external objections by claiming that world-views are exclusionary would leave even the serious religious person either as a fanatical participant or an uncomprehending spectator *vis-à-vis* religion. For then there would be no way for the religious person both to remain religious and to assess the acceptability of their own world-view. Thus, views which treat religious world-views as conceptually isolated are inherently self-stultifying.

In this manner, a fundamental intuition of the evidentialist, that basic theistic beliefs should have some external support, is correct. And it explains why the evidentialist's position appears *prima facie* reasonable. Theistic truth-claims, like any truth-claims, must be objective in that they are subject to *trans*-schema checking procedures of coherence, comprehensiveness, parsimony, and so on – general demands of rationality which are applied to *all* faith stances, whether religious, or political, or scientific. One can sensibly claim that one's most foundational beliefs are properly basic, that one has no further proof or reasons for these beliefs, but one cannot be rational and claim that it is irrelevant what others might say about the rationality of one's most foundational beliefs.

XII

Theism will be epistemically justified, and theistic beliefs properly basic, only if one has adequate grounds for initial commitment to a theistic world-view. However, as a potentially self-verifying genuine option, if theism is assessed against *trans*-schema criteria for warranted belief, theistic belief can be objective and the leap of faith adequately grounded. But this means that theism cannot be founded on argument or evidential certainty. Is this all we can say about the justification of theism? Where is the sort of absolute certainty which religious faith seems to require? Instead of a full-bodied religiosity, we seem to be left with an intellectualized notion of religious commitment.

As the Duke of Wellington remarked upon being asked by a Russian diplomat whether Beethoven's bombastic *Battle Symphony*, the so-called 'Wellington's Victory', resembled the real battle: 'By God, no,' he replied,

‘if it had been, I should have run away myself.’ If there is no more to religious commitment than being careful that one has violated no intellectual obligations, it is hardly going to be persuasive. Yet just as programmatic music, no matter how skillful, does not replace its subject, religious epistemology does not replace religion. My concern in this paper has been to identify the proper *epistemic* grounds for theistic belief. And what we have raised here is a question about the other sense in which there are ‘proper’ grounds for religious belief, namely what would constitute *religiously* adequate reasons for belief.

As children we were justified in simply holding the world-views and doxastic practices inculcated in us, because we had no adequate grounds for believing that those views and practices were not justified. As adults this is no longer sufficient, for we are in a position to consider alternative views, and we have become all too well acquainted with the shortcomings of our own views. Specifically regarding theism, there is an acute awareness today of the pluralism of the world religions and the sectarian pluralism within each world religion, Christian or Muslim or Hindu. And the informed theist is aware of atheological psychological and sociological analysis of theism as mere illusion, or a human projection, or a destructive addictive, that we find in Freud, Feuerbach, Marx, and others. Aside from these challenges, even inside the theological circle, the monotheist must confront the puzzles and perplexities of the notion of a transcendent God, the idea of the Incarnation, of life after death, and the presence of evil in this life. Two replies are in order.

First, an epistemological point. The whole reason for having any world-view and for attempting to achieve a better world-view, is to provide a unifying conception of the universe for present understanding and future action. Consequently, it will not only be natural but *rational* for the person of mature monotheistic faith to hold the fundamental suppositions of their world-view with utter commitment.¹ Otherwise, our conceptions would be chaotic, and our actions paralyzed by indecisiveness.

The second point concerns the role of values. Ultimately, we retain the world-views we do because our beliefs are confirmed by our own experience and the experience of others, and because they give meaning to our lives and help us fulfil our most fundamental goals. Thus we ultimately retain our world-views – whether monotheistic or naturalistic, Marxist or Capitalist – because of internal considerations about values. For, once epistemically justified, this is the only final justification for any faith we may have.

*Chapman College,
Orange,
California*

¹ An extended argument for this is given in Chapter 7 of *Reason, Relativism and God*.