

1993

# A New Parity Thesis

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## Recommended Citation

McLeod, Mark S., "A New Parity Thesis" (1993). *Rationality and Theistic Belief: An Essay on Reformed Epistemology*. Paper 14.  
<http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/rationality/14>

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## [ II ]

## A New Parity Thesis

One goal in this chapter is to suggest and explore a new parity thesis in terms of its appeal to holistic principles, Reid's credulity disposition, and the theistic nonlawlike externalism introduced briefly earlier. A second goal is to consider two potential rejoinders to the position developed here. In Sections 1–3 I concentrate on the first goal; in Sections 4–6 I deal with the second.

## 1. Interpersonal Practice and the New Parity Thesis

Many of the concerns uncovered in the discussion to this point grow out of two issues. The first is that according to both  $PT_A$  and  $PT_{PI}$  epistemic parity exists between theistic beliefs that are about an epistemically unique, spatiotemporally nonrooted individual—God—and beliefs about epistemically unique but spatiotemporally rooted things. The second issue is the confirmation of justified beliefs. Just what constitutes confirmation, what role does it play in justification, and do theistic beliefs have it?

Taking these in order, the first issue suggests that perhaps a successful parity thesis is to be found in beliefs that parallel one another more closely—in a comparison between beliefs about God understood as an epistemically unique, spatiotemporally nonrooted individual and beliefs about other individual entities akin to God in just that way, that is, epistemically unique and spatiotemporally

nonrooted. Humans fit the bill here, and something to which Alston alludes can help us get started in our thinking about a new parity thesis. In wondering whether there is some way CP “proves” itself, as PP does with all its “payoffs in terms of prediction and control of the course of events,” Alston calls attention to another epistemic practice:

interpersonal perception, our awareness of other persons as persons. There is controversy over whether to regard this as an autonomous practice or simply as a department of perceptual practice, but I shall adopt the former view. That is, I shall suppose that we have a practice of objectifying certain ranges of our experience in terms of the presence, condition, characteristics, and activities of other persons, and that this practice can no more be justified from the outside than any of the others we have been considering. It is, in a way, intermediate between PP and CP. In particular . . . its internal self-justification is not so purely in terms of predictive efficacy as is PP. To be sure, by perceiving what we do of other persons we are thereby enabled to anticipate their behavior to some extent, and this is of pragmatic value. But persons are notoriously less predictable than things, and the value of this practice for our lives is not restricted to that payoff. To compensate for this relative unpredictability there is the possibility of entering into communication, fellowship, competition, and so on with other persons. And, most basically, that is what this practice enables us to do.<sup>1</sup>

Alston notes that this practice is intermediate between CP and PP. He does not say in detail exactly in what regard this is true. He would, I am sure, include the fact that persons are less predictable than things and that God is even less predictable than we humans. But I believe there is another important distinction to which Alston does not call attention but toward which I have been aiming. The practice through which we generate Christian theistic beliefs is a practice that has, as its central focus, a single epistemically unique spatiotemporally nonrooted individual—God, and his desires, thoughts, and actions. God is the only member of his kind. Interpersonal perception does not have as its focus the solitary member of a kind. Here I wish to distinguish between interpersonal perception, as the practice through which we generate beliefs about per-

1. Alston, “Christian Experience and Christian Belief,” pp. 131–32.

sons qua persons, and another practice through which we generate beliefs about persons qua epistemically unique individuals. Alston's discussions do not make such a distinction, but it is precisely this failure that leaves his position open to the background belief challenge. The practices that generate beliefs about individuals qua epistemically unique spatiotemporally nonrooted individuals require background beliefs for the formation of their deliverances, and thus all such practices are noninferential mediated practices (or perhaps, if some are inferential, then simply mediated).

As Alston notes, there is debate about whether interpersonal perception is an independent practice or a subpractice of PP. Like that, one might debate the existence of independent practices that generate beliefs about epistemically unique objects and suggest that they are subpractices of broader practices. So, for example, the practice that allows us to come to know Tom versus Tim, and Jack versus Tom, and so forth, is really a subpractice of interpersonal perception, the practice that allows us to generate beliefs about persons qua persons. I treat them as independent practices.

I suggest that some of the practices that generate beliefs about individual things qua epistemically unique spatiotemporally nonrooted individuals are on the same level as CP. These practices are more parallel to CP than they are to PP. Let us call the practice that allows us to generate beliefs about persons qua persons "interpersonal perceptual practice" and the practice that allows us to generate beliefs about persons qua epistemically unique individual persons "unique person practice." What kind of beliefs does interpersonal perceptual practice generate? Interpersonal perceptual practice is closer, I think, to religious practice than to PP. Whereas PP gives us fairly clear and specific sortal beliefs—that thing is a tree, for example—religious practice does not. Religious practice's deliverances, recall, are somewhat vague and general recognitions of a reality beyond the physical and the (humanly) personal. Interpersonal perceptual practice, I suggest, gives us (more or less) general beliefs about the realm of the humanly personal. It is interpersonal perceptual practice that allows us to recognize that we are in the company of personal beings rather than merely physical things. It is a difficult practice to describe, or to individuate, for we almost always engage in unique person practice when we engage in interpersonal perceptual practice. Whenever we form beliefs about per-

sons based on experience, we pick out individual persons (either by proper names, indexicals, or unique descriptions) and not just the reality of the personal. Nevertheless, our ability to pick out the personal from the nonpersonal seems necessary for us to pick out the individual person.<sup>2</sup>

Given this distinction between unique person practice and interpersonal perceptual practice, and continuing with Alston's concern with rationality, a new parity thesis can be suggested:

Parity Thesis<sub>New</sub> (PT<sub>N</sub>): Under appropriate conditions, engaging in CP and engaging in unique person practice have, for S, the same level and strength of overall rationality.

There is no extension to beliefs, for overall rationality, as we have been using the term, is a metaepistemological notion applicable only to the evaluation of practices.

Why suggest parity only between CP and unique person practice and not either unique physical object practice or memory beliefs about epistemically unique things? In the latter case, as I indicated earlier (Chapter 9, Section 2), memory beliefs are formed by a conceptual-reading practice. There appears to be no parallel to unique person practice or CP. Although we do have memory beliefs about epistemically unique individuals, it is not clear that they are generated or justified in a way different from memories about anything else. Perhaps this is because the kind of experiences attached to memory beliefs is always internal to the rememberer.<sup>3</sup> As to the former, it seems to me that, because of the regularity of physical objects and the intimate connection between this regularity and the spatiotemporal nature of these objects, a practice for the generation and justification of beliefs about unique physical objects is best understood as a subpractice of PP. Unique physical object practice turns out, thus, to be a conceptual-reading practice. The identification of epistemically unique physical objects seems to rely in im-

2. Consider a young child's ability to tell the difference between a stuffed, grey toy cat and a real grey cat—or science fictional androids who are supposedly conscious or alive and the confusion this engenders for legal cases against the androids.

3. Plantinga has some interesting comments about the role of experience in memory; see *Warrant and Proper Function*, Chapter 3.

portant ways on the spatiotemporal web that is part and parcel of the world picture of PP, as well as on the predictive nature of PP. Another way to state this point is that this subpractice does not seem to be independent of PP and its requirements in the manner in which CP is independent of religious practice, or unique person practice of interpersonal perceptual practice. CP and unique person practice seem, in short, to be noninferential mediated practices and therefore entirely self-contained in terms of their belief content. We have seen this with CP: the Christian content seems to be wholly internal to that religious tradition and is communicated through authority and the credulity disposition. I submit that unique person practice functions in roughly the same way. Our coming to learn the names of people, and hence to identify and reidentify them, is entirely internal to the authority of others, the credulity disposition, and certain social relationships conditioned by these first two factors. Accordingly, if our unique person practice beliefs are justified, it is through holistic considerations and not experiential ones (more on this below). I think, then, that  $PT_N$  stands the best chance of being true, rather than a parity thesis in which CP is paired with unique physical object practice or a practice generating memory beliefs about epistemically unique individual things.

One final point needs to be clarified. In Chapter 5, Section 2, I argued that one could rank epistemic practices within the subclass of nontrivially self-supported practices. This could be done, I said, on the basis of the closeness of the cognitive connection between experience and belief (the issue of conceptual-reading vs. noninferential mediated practices). I also called attention to Alston's claim that one might rank practices from a cognitive point of view because of features such as predictive power, and I raised the issue of the relationship between these "cognitive attractions" and what I argued above are the epistemically important roles of the background beliefs. One might raise the following question: if conceptual-reading practices are epistemically and not simply cognitively superior to noninferential mediated practices, then why cast  $PT_N$  in terms of rationality rather than justification? Briefly, it seems to me that Alston's characterization of the relationship of the justification of beliefs to doxastic practices is correct, and, although we have an intuition about the epistemic superiority of conceptual-

reading practices over against noninferential mediated practices, this intuition rests in the cognitive attractiveness of the former over the latter. At the end of the day, the best way to get at these rankings, even though they have an epistemic justificatory component, is to discuss them in the metaepistemological framework of rationality, with its internal *judgments* that the practices are more, or less, reliable. In addition to this point, I believe that, although the distinction between conceptual-reading and noninferential mediated practices is an epistemically important one, the epistemic advantage of the former over the latter does not remove the latter from being reliable or justified.

$PT_N$  has, then, at least one advantage over the others we have considered. It does not fall prey to a disanalogy in regard to the need for background beliefs. Both CP and unique person practice are noninferential mediated practices. The obvious question to ask, however, is why this is an advantage, since I have already argued that the appeal to background beliefs seems to force the Reformed epistemologist into either natural theology (or other inferential evidence provision) or an infinite regress of justifications, in either case calling the Reformed epistemology project into question. The best response to this issue is seen in the move to certain holistic considerations that seem to be required by noninferential mediated practices or at least such practices that strongly rely on their background beliefs. I have hinted at certain aspects of these holistic considerations. In the next section I make them at least somewhat more explicit. Natural theology or arbitrariness are not the only options for CP's background beliefs.

## 2. Comportment and Confirmation

Beliefs are not held individually; they are held in complex groups. The web of belief is intricate. The relations between one belief and another, and between beliefs and experiences, are not easily untangled. This complex of beliefs and experiences might be described in terms of beliefs more or less "fitting" well together, "cohering" well together, or, as I say here, "comporting" well together. The example of remembering eating breakfast this morning provides an illustration of what I mean by comportment. But,

before looking at the example, some observations are in order. First, consider the more traditional models of foundationalism such as those that emphasize self-evidence or incorrigibility as the criterion for proper basicity. On such models a person would, under normal circumstances at least, not attempt to confirm a properly basic belief. After all, a basic belief has the advantage of being so well grounded that no other belief is more firmly grounded. Thus, not only is there supposed to be no need for further justification or confirmation, no such justification or confirmation is even possible. To which beliefs would one appeal? Properly basic beliefs are considered certain or unassailable in terms of their epistemic justification. No other belief or set of beliefs could provide assurance of justification for a properly basic belief, because no other belief is more firmly justified. On such models properly basic beliefs are considered to have a privileged epistemic status.

With weaker models of foundationalism, Plantinga's included, basic beliefs do not hold such a special status. They can be challenged, and one may then wish to appeal to other beliefs to shore up the status of the belief in question. Returning again to the discussion of the confirmation challenge, recall that Grigg claims that, although we constantly have outside sources for confirmation of such beliefs, this shoring up does not provide justification. He is correct, if justification's only source is experientially grounded. Here Grigg seems to be wary of the danger of letting beliefs slip from a properly basic status to an inferential status. But if confirmation provides holistic grounds for justification, and Plantinga's account of coherence systems is correct (i.e., given that coherence provides justification, all justified beliefs in coherent systems are properly basic),<sup>4</sup> then the beliefs in question can remain properly basic even though other beliefs are involved in their justification. Putting this concern into Alston's language, such beliefs could be justified by coherence relationships but not be mediated inferentially. Furthermore, confirmation need not be understood in a strictly predictive manner. Instead, we may simply appeal to the fact that under most circumstances the paradigm beliefs comport well with the rest of our experiences and noetic structure.

4. See Plantinga, "Coherentism and the Evidentialist Objection to Belief in God," pp. 123–26.

What does it mean to say that a belief comports well? Return now to the breakfast example. Even on the weaker foundational models one would not, in most circumstances, worry about confirming one's belief that one ate breakfast this morning. It is a memory belief and under typical conditions can be legitimately taken to be properly basic. Although I may rely on the fact that the practice that generated this belief—memory—is validated by many other sets of circumstances and beliefs, I do not typically *set out* to confirm my memory beliefs or to validate the practice from which they come. But suppose I have the belief that I ate breakfast this morning and then come home to discover that there are no dirty dishes in the sink. This bit of information may be disconcerting, for I know that this week my wife is away on one of her research trips, my son is with some friends, no one else has a key to my condo, I never wash the dishes in the morning because they are few (being aware of our current drought, I do not wish to waste water in a half-empty dishwasher), and so forth. Now, to discover a lack of dirty dishes at least generates a certain amount of wonder; why are there no dishes in the sink? Here we have a lack of comportment between belief and experience (or the belief generated by the experience)—a lack of confirmation, as it were.

How can this lack of comportment be explained? There are many ways, no doubt, but one example suffices. Although I do remember eating breakfast this morning, what I had forgotten is that I woke up late and therefore merely stopped for a doughnut on the way to work rather than taking time to cook. This explains the lack of dishes in the sink, and now the complex of my noetic structure confirms the original belief. The lack of comportment I discovered initially as I found the sink barren of dishes is explained by reference to other factors. The important thing to note is that my belief is related in detailed ways to my other beliefs and experience and that these relations provide a certain kind of confirmation. Also important is that one cannot tell ahead of time which (set of) belief(s) will be problematic in the face of new experiences or beliefs that lack comportment with present beliefs.

Given this somewhat broader understanding of confirmation, the theist can suggest that she has what I call comportment among her theistic beliefs, or at least comportment similar enough to that found for beliefs delivered by unique person practice to allow the

move from that comportment to the status of being nontrivially supported (in Alston's sense). From there she may legitimately claim that many of her theistic (or Christian) beliefs are properly basic or immediately justified. I believe there is comportment for PP's and interpersonal perceptual practice's deliverances as well. These constitute nontrivial self-support for those practices. Comportment for CP and unique person practice's deliverances plays dual roles, however. Not only does it provide nontrivial self-support for the practices, but it provides justification for the beliefs in question. This is necessary for the deliverances of CP and unique person practice, for they do not have the advantage of being experientially justified as do the deliverances of PP, interpersonal perceptual practice, religious practice, and unique physical object practice.

### 3. Examples

I think the best evidence for these claims is to develop a set of examples of unique person practice beliefs and CP beliefs that comport well with other beliefs and experience, within their respective frameworks. That, at least, is the approach I take here.

First consider unique person practice and its deliverances. Our use of proper names for individual humans is in many ways philosophically problematic. What do we do when we pick someone out of the crowd with such utterances as "Stan went over there"? Is "Stan" to be understood as a definite description or a proper name? What is the nature of reference? What about extension, or intension? Fortunately, here we need not worry about these issues. I want simply to call attention to certain epistemic considerations that come into play with our everyday use of proper names in perceptual contexts. Note, first, that when one learns to pick out, perceptually, a unique individual person one either has to be introduced to that person by the individual in question or by someone else. One is told (by an authority) that "this or that individual" is "so and so"—that person by the tree wearing the bright orange shirt is Stan (or, in first person, "I am Stan"). Our credulity disposition is activated at the very introduction of the name and the link to its referent. Is there some independent vehicle for checking this information? Maybe one could attempt to verify the information

by checking the government records, but here one still relies on authority. Once the name is learned—once the person is epistemically baptized with the name—we can only appeal to memory or other "reintroductions" to access the information. Where do beliefs thus generated get their justification? The best one can do is appeal to that initial learning situation and the trust we have in the source. Wherein lies that trust? The credulity disposition, as noted above, is modified as we mature epistemically. We learn to trust others, but only with discrimination. In particular, some people are bad with names. It is in circumstances in which one believes one's sources not to be good with names that one's belief that that Stan needs confirmation—at least explicitly. And so we listen to others' identifications of the person in question and in particular note the extent to which the belief (or its near relatives) is socially embedded. Once we have the belief that Stan is such and such a person, then we learn to use and apply the name in appropriate contexts. In particular, we learn how Stan (typically) looks or acts: that he has certain features (a young face for his middle-fifties, and slightly stooped shoulders) or that he is habitual in certain ways (his office door is always closed when he is working inside, he is friendly with David but he greatly dislikes Sue). It is this complex of associations, physical and social, along with other background information (such as that Stan is back from vacation) that allows unique person practice to generate beliefs such as "Stan is coming down the hill." But suppose I know that Stan said he would not be back in town until the 20th and it is only the 15th, and the figure I see, although it has stooped shoulders and a characteristically youthful facial appearance, is laughing and talking with Sue? Then unique person practice does not, except when not working well, generate the belief "Stan is coming down the hill." In short, we learn to generate beliefs about epistemically unique individual persons—and are justified in holding these beliefs—only if they comport well with other beliefs and experiences.

In short, justification of unique person beliefs is holistic in these ways. First, no experience itself (qua phenomenon) gives us beliefs about persons qua epistemically unique individuals. There is always reliance on authority and credulity. There is, then, some kind of experience that is the source of belief, but the experience itself does not justify beliefs generated by it. Second, such beliefs either

fit or do not fit with our other beliefs and experiences. They either comport well or they do not (there is, of course, a continuum here). When they do, they are justified.

What of the deliverances of CP? Theists, in particular Christian theists, do not hold their religious beliefs as free-standing beliefs. Much as humans hold more ordinary beliefs in complex patterns and with more or less loose relationships to experience, theists organize their religious beliefs in patterns that entangle beliefs one with another as well as with experience. For example, the belief that God loves me is often connected to beliefs about God's providential care for me. Beliefs about God's providential care may well be related to beliefs about God's gracious activity in molding my character, to beliefs about the activity of God through the loving actions of others, or to beliefs about God's meeting my needs, emotional and otherwise. Furthermore, these beliefs may well be entangled with some of my experiences.

Consider this. The pastor of a church believes that God cares for her and her church deeply, but the pastor is discouraged about the progress in her parish. New converts are not coming into the faith, the parishioners are not as active as they ought to be, and the like. Suppose, however, a parishioner who has not been active is counseled by the pastor. This is the beginning of an education in the meaning of Christian service and in the meaning of sharing the gospel. The parishioner begins to serve and to share. Eventually, through the work of this parishioner, the parish begins to grow, people begin new relationships with God and other people, and so forth. Over a period of time, the discouragement wanes, the pastor is renewed. She has, it appears, had confirmation that God does, indeed, care for her and her church.

A further example. Christians and Jews believe that the dove is a symbol of the renewal of the world. Noah sent out a dove when he tested to see if the waters of the great flood had subsided. The dove was sent out three times. On the first it returned not having found a place to rest. It returned from the second carrying a newly sprouted olive leaf to Noah. On the third it did not return. Noah then knew the waters had abated. And for the Christian there is an additional layer of meaning: the dove is also a symbol of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus came to John the Baptist to be baptized, "the spirit, descending as a dove," came to rest on Jesus (John 1:32, NASV). These symbols are entwined in the minds of many Chris-

tians by the belief that the Spirit is both the Comforter and the Creator, the one who encourages and the one who renews the world. The Spirit, the dove, is thus considered the one who renews discouraged believers. Now suppose a Christian, holding a set of beliefs such as those described, becomes discouraged. He is questioning whether God really cares for him. As he walks out among the trees of the church grounds, a dove descends and alights on his shoulder. The bird rests there for four or five minutes, as the Christian considers his plight, his commitments, his God. Could this dove's activity be taken as confirmation that God does indeed care? As the dove wings its way back toward heaven, the Christian feels his burdens lightened and a sudden rush of joy fills his heart; he is emotionally and spiritually renewed. Although the link may be weak from the point of view of a nontheistic web of belief, for the Christian holding a full-blown set of theistic beliefs this event would be very strong confirmation that God does indeed love and care for him.<sup>5</sup>

There are clear parallels to our beliefs about individual humans. Suppose I am discouraged by a disagreement I have some morning with my wife. On arriving at work later that day, I find some freshly cut blue flowers in my office. Knowing that the first flowers I ever gave my wife were blue, that they have become a symbol of faithfulness and love for us, that many if not most people would not give flowers to a man, I believe that these flowers came from my wife. I cease being discouraged, believing that all is well with our relationship.

A final example. Suppose a committed Christian—call her Rebecca—believes that God calls some people to leadership. In fact, Rebecca believes that God wants some believers to be in leadership, in particular academic leadership. Suppose further that after prayer Rebecca has the impression that God wants her within the halls of academia. Thus motivated, she acts in ways consistent with

5. A series of events similar to these happened to my pastor, Curtis D. Peterson. On reading part of an earlier draft of this essay, Burleigh T. Wilkins noted that my pastor was lucky that the dove wasn't a turkey vulture! But what would such an event have meant for the Christian? Perhaps nothing, or perhaps it would have been understood as one more bit of evidence for the evil in the world. How Christians respond to such evil can itself be part of the web of belief and experience which, when taken together, provides confirmation for the Christian worldview. Compare the stories of Job and Habbakuk from the Hebrew testament.

this impression; she asks her academic advisers about her suitability for further graduate work. She is encouraged to, and does, apply to several of the best graduate schools. In the midst of this endeavor, Rebecca maintains her cautious skepticism. She thinks acceptance at these schools quite unlikely. As human beings are wont to be, she is not particularly self-assured.

To complicate matters, Rebecca is married to another graduate student. She is concerned that her marriage remain strong, for as a Christian she believes God is unhappy with broken relationships and, in particular, broken marriages. In this regard, she is concerned that her husband's career not be adversely affected by her plans coming to fruition. Finally, suppose Rebecca is also concerned that she not go further into debt to pay for her education. She is thus inclined to pray that, if God truly wishes her to attend graduate school, he confirm her rather tentatively held belief that she should go to graduate school in order to be eventually enabled to work within academia. Specifically, she asks God for the following two things. First, if she is to attend one of these graduate programs, God must provide sufficient funds so she can avoid further debt. Second, if she is to attend, her husband's career ought not to be hurt.

In light of the first request, three things occur. First, Rebecca is admitted to four of the five Ivy League schools to which she applies. Second, three of the four schools that grant her admission provide financial support. Third, two of the three schools offering support provide very large financial packages, one covering three years of tuition and living expenses, the other covering four years. This appears to be confirmation that God wants Rebecca in graduate school and, by extension, that he wants her in academic service. As to the other request, Rebecca's husband, having not yet finished his Ph.D., is offered a one-year teaching post (an event, given the job market of recent years, that is nigh unto a miracle in itself!). This offer is quite unexpected and certainly furthers his career more quickly than were he not gaining teaching experience. Rebecca's attending the graduate school of her choice seems to be open at this point and her belief confirmed.

The web of Rebecca's belief system is complicated; the experiences she has and beliefs she later forms comport well with the belief that God wants her to serve within the halls of academia. This case and the earlier two (and others that can be generated

easily) seem close enough to cases of unique person practice belief and unique person practice experience comportment to allow the move to proper basicity or justification for Christian theistic beliefs; one's engaging in such practices is rational and nontrivially supported.

Furthermore, unique person practice and CP are parallel in more than the comportment of their deliverances with other beliefs and experiences. They also have quite parallel self-support in terms of relational development. As Alston notes, CP receives nontrivial self-support from the fact that its participants develop spiritually. In short, they mature and develop in their relationship to God. Unique person practice allows us to develop similarly in our relationships to other people. Alston claims that it is interpersonal perceptual practice that does this. More likely, I believe, it is unique person practice, for in most cases our relational skills develop only where we know, more or less intimately, other people. Interpersonal perceptual practice, as I characterized it, is not the practice that allows us such intimacy. But there is no hard and fast rule here. Interpersonal perceptual practice can perhaps generate beliefs such as "humans are the types of beings who suffer when in pain" even when I have no names attached to them, and hence no intimacy. I can still feel impelled to provide aid and thus become more relationally sensitive. Parallel to this, religious practice may make us more religiously sensitive, but it is only the intimacy allowed by CP (or other practices, e.g., Buddhist practice, Hindu practice) that provides for deep spiritual and relational growth.

In short, these sets of beliefs and experiences, when the beliefs and experiences are taken together, seem to provide some reason for one to think that the Christian theistic beliefs in question are true (or at least as much reason as in unique person practice cases, given that there too confirmation comes from within the very practice from which the original belief came), even though the situations and circumstances are not predictable. They thus give the theist some reason to take her beliefs to be properly basic or immediately justified, even though the experience that provides for their genesis does not function in a justificatory manner. It is, of course, important to remember that comportment is not (typically) consciously inferential. When it is, then the beliefs generated are not basic or immediate.

#### 4. The Anything-Goes Challenge

The critic is likely to raise a challenge to  $PT_N$  that is related to the confirmation challenge. She can claim that the problem with these examples is that, although it may be true that the suggested beliefs comport well with other beliefs held by the Christian or theist, just about any experience or belief can be taken to comport well with such beliefs. The theist can twist and turn to make any beliefs or experiences fit. The important question, the critic continues, is this. What exactly does *not* comport well with the theist's beliefs? Let us call this the "anything-goes challenge."

The anything-goes challenge introduces some new issues into the discussion which merit attention. Perhaps the challenge is correct. The disanalogy is not that theistic beliefs do not comport well with other beliefs and experiences but that they comport too well. Perhaps theistic noetic structures can be manipulated to fit whatever facts come along, whereas nontheistic structures cannot. The anything-goes challenge is a kind of arbitrariness challenge. It is reminiscent of the challenge brought against theists by Antony Flew in the now famous discussion "Theology and Falsification." There Flew challenges the religious believer thus: "What would have to occur or to have occurred to constitute for you a disproof of the love of, or the existence of God."<sup>6</sup> Now, Flew's challenge is intimately tied to the question of the falsifiability of theological assertions, but we can avoid that issue to concentrate on another. If we rephrase Flew's challenge in terms of the present discussion, it can be understood in this way: just what set of beliefs and experiences would lead the theist to conclude that there is a lack of comportment within the theistic noetic structure?

Considering Basil Mitchell's parable given in response to Flew's challenge sheds some light on this issue:

In time of war in an occupied country, a member of the resistance meets one night a stranger who deeply impresses him. They spend that night together in conversation. The Stranger tells the partisan that he himself is on the side of the resistance—indeed that he is in command of it, and urges the partisan to have faith in him no mat-

6. Antony Flew, R. M. Hare, and Basil Mitchell, "Theology and Falsification," in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (New York: Macmillan, 1955), p. 99.

ter what happens. The partisan is utterly convinced at that meeting of the Stranger's sincerity and constancy and undertakes to trust him.

They never meet in conditions of intimacy again. But sometimes the Stranger is seen helping members of the resistance, and the partisan is grateful and says to his friends, "He is on our side."

Sometimes he is seen in the uniform of the police handing over patriots to the occupying power. On these occasions his friends murmur against him: but the partisan still says, "He is on our side." He still believes that, in spite of appearances, the Stranger did not deceive him. Sometimes he asks the Stranger for help and receives it. He is then thankful. Sometimes he asks and does not receive it. Then he says, "The Stranger knows best." Sometimes his friends, in exasperation, say "Well, what *would* he have to do for you to admit that you were wrong and that he is not on our side?" But the partisan refuses to answer. He will not consent to put the Stranger to the test. And sometimes his friends complain, "Well, if *that's* what you mean by his being on our side, the sooner he goes over to the other side the better."<sup>7</sup>

Mitchell's parable is rich in insight and deserves fuller treatment than I give here. I wish to concentrate on only one facet. The partisan has some experiences that do not comport well with the rest of his Stranger beliefs. When the Stranger is in the uniform of the police and turns over members of the resistance to the enemy, the partisan wonders about the loyalty of the Stranger. One might even imagine a slightly different—but more existentially powerful—parable in which the Stranger appears to be turning over the partisan himself to the enemy. Surely neither of these events comports well with the partisan's commitment to the Stranger's being "on our side," just as the theist's commitment to the love of God may not comport well with the appearance of God's giving the theist over to evil. But in neither the Stranger nor the God case does the believer hurriedly give up the belief in question.

This brings to light an important fact. Although it is true that some things may not comport well with a given theistic structure, this seems equally true of nontheistic structures. If we take a naturalistic (read: the physical universe is all there is) worldview to be a competitor of the Christian worldview, we discover that not all the

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 103–4.

“facts” always fit. Suppose we take the scientific theorizing of the naturalist to be (roughly) parallel to the theologizing of the Christian, and then take scientific methodology to be a subpractice of PP. I do not mean to conflate science and naturalism here. Rather, I am relying on what appears to be the temptation, and indeed practice, of many naturalists to take science as the best approach to the discovery of the most general truths about “all that is.” On this kind of naturalism, PP, scientific methodology, and the scientific theorizing that go along with them take on the role of being the primary, if not the only, means of obtaining truth. Insofar as the naturalistic worldview provides control over what will or can be taken to be factual or meaningful, metaphysics reduces to the results of science. Accordingly, science can be construed as essential to naturalism in a way that it is not to theism. But I do not mean to suggest that science and naturalism are identical, nor that science has no home within a theistic worldview.

With this framework understood, consider the problem of anomalies in scientific theorizing. What does one do when one’s theory conflicts with some newly discovered data or when one’s confirming experiment fails to confirm? Or what happens when one’s naturalistic science runs up against an apparent miracle? Something has to be given up, but it is not always clear which belief (or beliefs) ought to go. Sometimes it is hard to tell, and the best policy is to wait. This is, indeed, what the naturalist does. Likewise with the theist, at least on occasion. There are things that engender a lack of comportment with a theistic noetic structure, and it may appear to the anything-goes critic as if the theist can take anything to comport. But this is not the theist’s special problem. The theist learns to live with some of that lack of comportment, as does the naturalist.

Mitchell rightly recognized a similar thrust behind Flew’s challenge and hence raised a question of his own parable: when does it become silly for the partisan to continue to believe in the Stranger? We can paraphrase the question and ask at what point it becomes silly for the theist to modify her noetic structure so that any experience or belief comports well. Such a point exists, or at least so it seems. Plantinga, for example, admits that counterevidence against theistic belief may lead one away from theistic belief. Ultimately, then, not just any and all beliefs or experiences can be made to

comport well with theistic beliefs. Although one must admit that some theists may be irrational and allow anything to comport well with their theistic beliefs, we need only consider a believer who is closer to being a model of rationality. The anything-goes challenge, I claim, does not apply to her.

Which beliefs and experiences can and which cannot be made to comport well with the rest of one’s noetic structure must be decided on an individual basis. But it seems that the critic who accuses the theist *in general* of taking just any and all beliefs and experiences as comporting well with her noetic structure is wrong. Suppose Rebecca, after her prayer, had not received financial aid. Suppose further that her husband did not obtain a job. Could she have incorporated these events into her noetic structure and maintained it as well-comporting? Do these experiences and beliefs continue to fit with her belief that she should go to graduate school? Possibly. Suppose Rebecca also believes that God is testing her faith; she understands these new circumstances as God’s means of encouraging her to fulfill her commitment of faith to him in some other way. As noted in Chapter 10, one of the cautions mature Christians often urge on the younger is that requested confirmation not be of a predictive variety. The premedical student who asks God to help him do well on the entrance exams fails to get the kind of confirmation he wishes. A caution against expecting too much, however, does not mean that God never provides.

But there are some things that Rebecca could not incorporate, at least not in any simple way. Suppose her husband becomes quite ill and she is needed at home. Or suppose it becomes clear that Rebecca’s attending graduate school will indeed bring her marriage to an end. Depending on how deeply rooted her commitments to marriage are and perhaps on how deeply entwined her beliefs about marriage are with Christian beliefs, she may be unwilling to understand these new events as comporting well with her belief that God wants her to attend graduate school. Clearly she is wrong about something, and given the hierarchy of beliefs she has within her noetic structure, it would seem that her belief that God wants her in graduate school is the one that should be given up. Not just anything comports well with a theistic noetic structure.

If the anything-goes challenger is persistent, she might press again. She might suggest that, with enough alterations in the the-

ist's noetic structure, Rebecca can make these beliefs comport. She may need to alter her understanding of God in some radical way—maybe God is really evil and intent on destroying her marriage. At this point the defense can rest on two points. First, such a radical modification of Rebecca's noetic structure seems to destroy the claim that it is theistic or at least that it is specifically Christian. To demand this much of one's noetic structure in order to retain one's commitment seems somewhat disingenuous. Second, if theistic structures face the problem of radical noetic modification to protect a cherished belief, a similar point is true of nontheistic noetic structures.

This last point can be fleshed out. R. M. Hare's contribution to the "Falsification and Theology" discussion can help here:

A certain lunatic is convinced that all dons want to murder him. His friends introduce him to all the mildest and most respectable dons that they can find, and after each of them has retired, they say, "You see, he doesn't really want to murder you; he spoke to you in a most cordial manner; surely you are convinced now?" But the lunatic replies, "Yes, but that was only his diabolical cunning; he's really plotting against me the whole time, like the rest of them; I know it I tell you." However many kindly dons are produced, the reaction is still the same.<sup>8</sup>

Clearly the lunatic is prepared to take any experience to be consistent with his belief that the dons want to murder him. Nothing will stand in his way.

The lesson to be drawn from this parable for the anything-goes challenger seems to be that the reading of a set of beliefs and circumstances can vary widely and that the possibility of such a wide variety of changes in one's noetic structure is not limited to theists. One can always attempt to add explanatory epicycles to one's beliefs in order to hold on to them. When should one add epicycles? That varies with the circumstances and with the depth of ingression of the beliefs involved. How many and what kind of epicycles can be rationally added is a function of how deeply entrenched the beliefs are in one's epistemic structure and how much other evidence is connected to the beliefs. These issues cannot be decided independently of looking at a given noetic structure.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 99–100.

If the picture presented here is correct, the anything-goes challenge is met. Not just any data can be made to comport well with one's theistic noetic structure, at least for the model rational theist. There comes a point beyond which it is silly to add explanatory epicycles to one's noetic structure. Furthermore, just as one can move beyond being a model rational theist, one can move beyond being a model rational nontheist. There is nothing unique about theistic noetic structures, at least in this regard.

##### 5. Religious Plurality Revisited

A second challenge to  $PT_N$  depends again on the existence of diverse religious epistemic practices. The critic might challenge  $PT_N$  in the following way. There is an important difference between unique person practice and CP. Those who engage in unique person practice with particular persons do not generally disagree about the existence or the characteristics of persons with whom they do not (but others do) engage in unique person practice. And those others can come to engage in unique person practice with the persons with whom the former engage in it without giving up all previous involvements. But among the beliefs involved in CP is the belief that there is only one God and that that God has certain characteristics. Therefore, one cannot engage in CP and, for example, Jewish practice or Muslim practice or Hindu practice. Thus, the decision to engage in CP implies the decision not to engage in any of these other particular religious practices. But those who engage in CP typically do not merely refrain from engaging in these other practices. They also claim that these practices are based on (or essentially involve) false beliefs. But there is no analogy to this in unique person practice. In short, to engage in CP I must hold that there are false beliefs involved in the religious practices of others, but to engage in unique person practice with my colleagues I do not have to hold that there are false beliefs involved in the interpersonal belief-forming practices of other people. Nor do I have to hold that people engaged in unique person practice with those with whom I do not engage in it are all somehow badly mistaken about the existence or characteristics of those with whom they engage in unique person practice. If it is said that adherents of different religions are not involved with a different

deity but instead have different beliefs about the same deity, then one should still have to ask why one should think that distinctively Christian beliefs about this deity are correct. The presence of this feature in CP (and presumably in other religious practices as well) raises the specter of arbitrariness again. The same sorts of confirmation available to Christians who engage in CP would be available to Jews who engage in Jewish practice and to Muslims who engage in Muslim practice. And it is likely that confirmations actually occur in the lives of people engaging in Jewish practice and Muslim practice in roughly the same quantity and quality as the confirmations that occur in the lives of those who engage in CP. But some beliefs essential to each of these practices seem to contradict each other, so they cannot all be true. For example, either God reconciled the world to himself in Jesus or God did not, so either Christians or Jews are wrong on this matter. Why then engage in CP rather than Jewish practice, Muslim practice, or Hindu practice?  $PT_N$  turns out not to be true, since there is a kind of arbitrariness involved in engaging in CP that does not exist when one engages in unique person practice. Let us call this challenge the “religious plurality challenge.”<sup>9</sup>

There are several issues involved in the religious plurality challenge to  $PT_N$ , but perhaps the central one is that anyone engaging in CP must claim that those who engage in other competing religious epistemic practices have false beliefs. In short, there are inter-practice contradictions. This criticism has similarities to the challenge of religious diversity to the parity thesis between PP and CP which is the straw that breaks the camel’s back in Alston’s discussion. Recall that, according to Alston, the challenge of religious plurality to the rationality of engaging in CMP (CP) arises in the following way. Even if the perceptual beliefs we have about God do not conflict themselves, the practices forming such beliefs are still subject to serious conflict by virtue of the associated belief systems. Given the rich diversity among religious doxastic practices, only one, if any, of the practices can be reliable. Why suppose it is CP? There are many reasons internal to CP, but we seem to need

9. The source of this criticism is an anonymous reviewer for Cornell University Press. Although not an exact quotation, the previous two paragraphs are a very close paraphrase of a section of the reviewer’s report to the press.

reasons external to the practice, since all the practices presumably have internal reasons.

As we have seen, Alston argues that this fact does not dissipate the justificatory efficacy of CP, but it does reduce the strength of justification for CP vis-à-vis PP, and therefore a parity thesis between PP and CP is not forthcoming. Similar points can be made about CP here. CP is not stripped of its rational efficacy because of plurality. But then the religious plurality challenge does not suggest that it is. The criticism is that  $PT_N$  is not true not because CP lacks rationality altogether but because the strength of rationality that accrues to CP is not as great as that which accrues to unique person practice. But exactly why should that be taken to be true?

CP requires that those who engage in it claim that those who do not (but rather engage in competitors to CP) are engaged in a practice based on or essentially involving false beliefs. Unique person practice does not. But what exactly is the problem? Is it that unique person practice has more overall rationality than CP? That is not the criticism, at least not explicitly. But that is what it would take to show that  $PT_N$  is false. Why think that the “arbitrariness” attached to engaging in religious practices shows that the overall rationality is lower than it would be without that arbitrariness? The basic point seems to be that, because of the existence of competitors to CP, engaging in CP is arbitrary. Therefore, as Alston suggests in discussing the justificatory efficacy of CP, even though the existence of these other practices does not dissipate the justification, it does seem to reduce it significantly.

In Alston’s case, however, the comparison is between competing practices—CP, Muslim practice, Jewish practice—and PP, which has no actual competitors. The comparison is between practices taken, so to speak, from the “outside.” What I mean by “outside” is that CP and PP are compared from a sort of neutral point of view. CP, Jewish practice, Muslim practice, and so forth are, taken as individual practices, each supposed to put us into effective epistemic relationship to the Ultimate. Thus each one provides us with competing understandings of the Ultimate. PP has no such actual competitors. It has only possible competitors—the Whiteheadian or Cartesian ways of viewing physical objects as opposed to the Aristotelian way of so doing. Alston suggests that because these are only possible ways of viewing the world, whereas with

the religious practices there are actual ways of viewing the Ultimate, the epistemic status of CP (and its competitors) is lower than that of PP.

But this “outside” view is not the one taken by the religious plurality challenger vis-à-vis  $PT_N$ . Rather, the criticism relies on “inside” features of the various epistemic practices. Although there are no competitors to unique person practice, an important feature of unique person practice is that it can be engaged in with many different people, thus giving us beliefs about many different people. This is not true of CP. There is, supposedly, only one person with whom CP puts us into contact. This, in addition, perhaps, to certain exclusivity claims involved in CP (“No one comes to the Father but through me,” as Jesus says), leads to a denial of CP’s competitors understood as legitimate means of gaining rational beliefs about the Ultimate. With unique person practice the assumption is that when you and I engage in it, if we meet and get to know two different people, I will not suggest that your engaging in unique person practice with Sally rather than Jim, say, is based on false beliefs. This assumption is internal to the practice itself. From this internal perspective, there is no arbitrariness involved in engaging in unique person practice with different people. If you were to meet Jim, as I have, you too would have (justified) beliefs about him. In contrast, if I engage in CP, while you engage in Muslim practice, I will not admit that you are in contact with Allah, nor will I admit that Allah, understood as a being metaphysically distinct from the God and Father of Jesus Christ, exists. These beliefs are internal to CP.

But why does this show that the strength of rationality accorded to CP is less than that accorded to unique person practice? There are many, many human persons with whom we can have social engagement, and unique person practice is a practice designed to allow just that. But there is only one God, according to CP. The religious plurality challenge, as construed above, treats all the competing religious epistemic practices as if, taken as a group, they were like slices of a grand, Ultimate unique person practice, one slice, let us say, being the Christian unique person practice, another the Muslim unique person practice, and another the Jewish unique person practice. This would be comparable to dividing up unique person practice into slices, one being, let us say, the Jim unique

person practice, another the Sally unique person practice, and again, the Frank unique person practice, and yet another, the Mary unique person practice. To get an appropriate analogy between unique person practice and CP, on this understanding, one would have to say that those engaged in the Jim unique person practice are suggesting that those engaged in the Sally unique person practice, Frank unique person practice, or Mary unique person practice are engaged in practices based on or essentially involving false beliefs about Sally, Frank, or Mary. But this is ludicrous. It is part and parcel of unique person practice that one assume that there are many other humans with whom one engages in unique person practice. That is part of unique person practice’s nature. This is not true of CP or, for that matter, of Jewish practice, Muslim practice, or (at least many of) the other religious epistemic practices. It is the reverse of surprising, then, that there are competitors in the field of religious epistemic practices, at least from the point of view of a strict analogy between the “inside” commitments of unique person practice and CP. It simply is not required of us, when we engage in unique person practice, that we make the kind of denials that are required of us when we engage in CP or the other religious epistemic practices. If it were otherwise, we would suspect something amiss in our epistemic conduct of the religious practices.

Perhaps, however, the religious plurality challenger means only to suggest something closer in line with Alston’s evaluation of the parity between PP and CP. Perhaps the criticism is simply meant to claim that the important difference between unique person practice and CP is that, taken from the outside, unique person practice has no actual competitors whereas CP does, and although this does not dissipate the rationality of engaging in CP it does lower the strength of the rationality by lowering the strength of the non-trivial self-support of CP. What is to be said here? If one admits that Alston’s account of the matter vis-à-vis PP and CP is accurate, does the same not hold true here?

The best way to combat this challenge is head-on. There are two steps to so doing. First, the argument relies on the fact that Jewish practice, Muslim practice, CP, and so forth all have, more or less, the same strength of internal support and, furthermore, that there is little if any external support. Recall, as a first step, that Alston takes the worst-case scenario and assumes that there is no external

support for CP over other practices. One thing to do, in response to the religious plurality challenge, is to consider the possibility that there is external support for CP. That, of course, is a tall order and one I do not attempt to fill here. It is, furthermore, one I consider to be an unlikely source of solace for the religious believer. Nevertheless, if it could be shown that there is significant external support for CP which is not matched by other religious practices, that would effectively kill the criticism.

The second step, and to my mind a more promising one, is to challenge one of the central assumptions of the criticism—that Jewish practice, Muslim practice, CP, and so forth all have the same strength of internal support. The critic certainly assumes this to be the case, as does Alston. As far as Alston's case goes, and this is not to belittle its strength, there may be much more to say about the internal support of various religious practices. But to say anything about them in this regard requires a great deal of work on the details of various religions and the epistemic practices in which their practitioners engage. This is a much larger task than I am able to take on. But before the religious plurality challenge can be said to be successful against  $PT_N$ , this work needs to be done. Of course, in an era of pluralism and of extreme religious tolerance, the suggestion that we need to engage in what Paul Griffiths calls "inter-religious apologetics" is going to be controversial.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, it needs to be done. Until it is, the religious plurality challenge to  $PT_N$  cannot be fully evaluated.

I have not done the hard work needed for a full reply to the religious plurality challenge to  $PT_N$ . I have pointed out where the digging needs to start and that is, I believe, enough at least to raise questions about the success of the criticism. In short, it is not obvious that it will be successful. People on both sides need to engage in more work before the grave can be completed.

## 6. Confirmation, Validation, and Rationality

Two final comments about confirmation are in order before we leave the subject. First, in some cases nonpredictive confirmation

10. See Paul J. Griffiths, "An Apology for Apologetics," *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988): 399–420.

of theistic beliefs may be possible only where the theistic belief to be confirmed is a fairly general or broad belief. This is one similarity between (some cases of) nonpredictive and predictive confirmation. The more general is confirmed by the more specific. "All swans are white" is confirmed by the next swan; "All sundogs are formed in conditions C" is confirmed by the next set of conditions and the next sundog; "God loves me" is confirmed by the love of my Christian brothers and sisters empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Second, could we ever validate theistic practice? It was mentioned early in Chapter 10 that, perhaps when one confirms a sufficient number of beliefs delivered by a given practice, the practice is then validated. This suggestion seems to rely on predictive confirmation, for it seems clear enough that what connects the confirming instances and the validation of the practice is an inductive argument that relies on the regularity of the objects about which the beliefs are formed. This is not unlike Alston's appeal to the inductive subargument in his overall justificatory argument for a belief in the reliability of a doxastic practice. Induction, resting as it does on our trust in the regularity of nature, provides grounds for the move from confirming instances to validation only if the principle of induction is assumed (practically, at least) within the practice.

If this model for the relationship between validation and confirmation is correct, then insofar as nonpredictive, compartment confirmations do not rest on the regularity of nature the inductive inference is not possible. We could never have validation of a theistic practice, at least if that validation rests on predictive confirmation. This aligns well with Alston's claim that, if we discovered that God was dealing with us in a predictable fashion, we would have evidence that the theistic practice is unreliable. To expect validation of this type is to expect too much. Perhaps we must be satisfied with nonpredictive confirmation of individual beliefs or perhaps, for many of us, no confirmation whatsoever.

But this is not to say that there is no nontrivial self-support provided for CP. Is there another model for understanding the relationship between the confirmation of beliefs and the validation of practices? I believe so. On the compartment understanding of confirmation, if beliefs and experience fit together well, they are confirmed. One of the beliefs that fits with the rest of the beliefs in a theistic noetic structure is that, although God does not reveal him-

self on demand, he does love us and will provide enough information to allow us to become committed to him. The confirmation I have of certain theistic beliefs occurs when those beliefs are taken together with my entire set of beliefs and experiences. The practice that allows me to move from experience to theistic belief—CP, exaggerated CP, or whatever other practice—is “validated,” in this case shown to be rational, within the broader system of beliefs and experience. I can judge beliefs generated by a practice to be reliable because the belief that it is reliable comports well with my entire (or at least a large part of my) noetic structure; there is nontrivial self-support for the practice. This comportment is exemplified in particular by the relationship between the belief about the reliable nature of the theistic practice and the belief that God loves me and will provide sufficient information for me to commit myself to him.

This is circular but not, I think, in a surprising way. As Alston suggests, our epistemic practices are basic practices. We should not, therefore, hope for a noncircular type of confirmation. Unique person practice and CP seem to be just such circular practices. Since we have no other access to the objects about which we form beliefs besides the practices that generate the beliefs, we cannot appeal to outside, independent information as a source of confirmation.

So, just as the only access we have to the physical world is through perception, perhaps at the end of the day the only access we have to God is through the practice that generates theistic beliefs. Thus the range of practices from PP through unique person practice and CP are nontrivially self-supported. The confirmation of their deliverances relies on the practices that form them, and in turn the validation of the practices themselves—their rationality—relies on the confirmation (predictive or nonpredictive) of the beliefs generated by them. The confirmation challenger might argue that we could have access to theistic beliefs by using a discursive belief-forming practice (natural theology) and that this is what should validate the practice of forming theistic beliefs. But given the lack of success with natural theology (comparable to the lack of success in epistemology with confirming perception's deliverances by reasoning from beliefs about sensations, or from sensations themselves, to beliefs about the external, physical world), it hardly

seems likely that we should turn there to show the rationality of the practice or, by extension, confirmation of beliefs. Furthermore, discursive reasoning is no less a basic practice, on Alston's terms.

Whatever one demands of beliefs about God, one should demand no more of them than that demanded of unique person practice beliefs. Confirmation and validation of an independent, non-circular variety is not available for either unique person practice or CP beliefs. Since an independent check is not available, one should anticipate a kind of circularity in their confirmation. So, there is or can be as much link between basic CP beliefs and other information (which makes the theistic beliefs likely to be true, or at least our taking them as such to be rational) as there is between unique person practice beliefs and other information (which makes unique person practice beliefs likely to be true, or our taking them as such to be rational). In either case, the beliefs can be properly basic or immediately justified: their practices can have rationality and that at the same level. Thus the requirement that theistic beliefs be confirmed and theistic practices validated in the sense that confirmation requires predictive regularity is overly strong. The demand assumes that regularity of the object of belief is a necessary feature for confirmation of belief. In turn, this assumes that justified beliefs can only be formed about objects for which regular, predictive confirmation is possible. But what is necessary for justification is not regularity but trustworthiness or reliability. Alston provides an account of how a practice can be reliable without having a regular object behind it. I have attempted to provide an extension of his account, suggesting that confirmation of some beliefs about non-regular objects may occur. Whether a given belief about a non-regular object is confirmed is an empirical question to be answered by whether one has the appropriate experiences and forms the needed beliefs.

I have suggested a new parity thesis between CP and unique person practice. I have also suggested a sketch of how the beginnings of a holistic framework for a defense of  $PT_N$  could go, along with a defense of  $PT_N$  against two potential criticisms. In the final chapter I suggest another holistic principle in which Christian beliefs may find justification, and I provide a summary of the book's argument.