

IS “GOD EXISTS” A “HINGE PROPOSITION” OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF?

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ABSTRACT. There are parallels between certain responses to local epistemological scepticism about religious belief and an influential reply to radical epistemological scepticism. What ties both accounts together is that they utilise, either implicitly or explicitly, a “hinge” proposition thesis which maintains that the pivotal beliefs in question are immune to sceptical attack even though they lack sufficient epistemic grounds. It is argued that just as this strategy lacks any anti-sceptical efficacy in the context of the radical sceptical debate, so it offers no defence against a localised scepticism regarding religious belief either. What the defender of religious belief should do, it is claimed, is re-examine the manner in which a commitment to the doctrine of epistemological internalism underlies the sceptical attack.

1. Parallels between radical scepticism and scepticism about religious belief.

Few commentators now expect there to be an uncontentious *a priori* defence of belief in the existence of God.¹ In itself, this need be of no major concern since many of our most cherished beliefs—from a general belief that, say, democracy is conducive to human happiness, to a more mundane belief in the fidelity of one’s spouse—are in a similar predicament and seem no less rightly held for it. Unlike many of our other beliefs that lack *a priori* support, however, it is often alleged that belief in the existence of God could never be epistemically supported in an empirical manner either. In this respect it is held to have certain properties in common with other propositions that are more obviously scepticism-prone.

Compare the following two arguments:

One cannot acquire a non-circular empirical warrant² for one’s belief that there exists an external world because whatever empirical evidence one adduces to support this warrant will only be evidence fit for the purpose provided one already *assumes* that one is warranted in believing in the existence of an external world.

One cannot acquire a non-circular empirical warrant for one’s belief that God exists because whatever empirical evidence one adduces to support this warrant will only be evidence fit for the purpose provided one already *assumes* that one is warranted in believing in God’s existence.

Suppose that one argued, *à la* G. E. Moore,³ that one’s belief in the existence of the external world is warranted on the grounds that one possesses sufficient empirical evidence to warrant one’s belief in an everyday proposition (such as “I have two hands”), which, if true, would entail the existence of the external world. The sceptical claim would be that such a line of reasoning is invalid because it is

question-begging. One's putative warrant for belief in the everyday proposition itself *presupposes* that one is entitled to assume the existence of an external world, since without this presupposition the empirical grounds that one is able to offer to support the everyday proposition are inadequate. If there is an issue as to whether one is warranted in believing in the existence of the external world, then one will not resolve it by adducing empirical evidence in support of the existence of one's hands, since if there were no external world then this 'evidence' would point in a different direction entirely. What is supposed to be unique about cases like this is that there are no independent means by which one could come to acquire the requisite empirical support for the belief in question. Whatever evidence one adduces to support one's belief in the external world will, or so the sceptic argues at any rate, itself presuppose an epistemic entitlement to believe the very proposition which is at issue.

Similar considerations are often held to apply as regards belief in the existence of God. The sceptic in this arena will argue that whatever (empirical) evidence one adduces to support a warrant for this claim—such as divine revelation or religious authority—will only be evidence fit for the purpose provided one already assumes that one has a warrant for belief in God's existence. If, for example, one were unconvinced of God's existence, it would achieve nothing to be told that divine revelation was a source of empirical evidence which warranted belief in this proposition. And since, as with the radical sceptical case, there are held to be no independent non-circular means of acquiring a warrant for belief in God's existence—no way to acquire it without adducing evidence which already assumes an epistemic entitlement to one's belief in the existence of God—so the sceptic about religious belief will maintain that such a belief is *unwarrantable*.

Both arguments thus claim to illustrate that the 'basic' propositions in question are not in the market for adequate epistemic support. The only substantive difference between the two arguments is one of scope. Whereas the former has the potential to call the majority of our beliefs into question—whether we believe in God or not—the latter merely attacks a significant portion of the beliefs of a person who has the requisite religious beliefs.

I shall examine the sceptical efficacy of this style of reasoning below. First, however, I want to consider an influential, yet *concessive*, response offered to the radical sceptical argument by some distinguished commentators, among them Peter Strawson, Crispin Wright, and Hilary Putnam.⁴ By the lights of this proposal, the workings of the sceptical argument itself are not challenged, merely the sceptical conclusion of that reasoning—that it follows that there is something (epistemically) amiss about belief in the contested proposition (e.g., concerning the existence of the external world). Instead of following the sceptic into thinking that since these basic propositions are necessarily beyond the ambit of epistemic support then they should be doubted, the proponents of this thesis instead turn the tables and argue that it is *because* these propositions are necessarily beyond the ambit of such support that they *cannot* be coherently doubted. That is, that in some sense to be specified, the legitimacy of belief in these propositions is a necessary prerequisite of a coherent rational inquiry. The sceptic is thus accused of misconstruing the true nature of our epistemic practice by demanding epistemic support everywhere, regardless of whether the propositions believed perform this pivotal role.

In support of this thesis, proponents of this stance tend to cite the following impressionistic passages from Wittgenstein's final work, *On Certainty*, which concern the illusive notion of a "hinge" proposition:

[...] the *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend upon the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn.

That is to say, it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are *in deed* not doubted.

But it isn't that the situation is like this: We just *can't* investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put.⁵

That is, that there are certain "hinge" propositions the truth of which one must presuppose if one is to coherently conduct an epistemic evaluation. Since they are presupposed in that evaluative inquiry, however, they cannot themselves be coherently subjected to epistemic evaluation. It is thus no surprise that they are both rightly held and yet lacking in any direct epistemic support.⁶

The chief advantage of such a proposal is that it appears to offer a compelling rejection of scepticism. No wonder that the sceptical debate has seemed so intractable when, all along, we have failed to recognise that these propositions play this "hinge" role. The strategy is, however, fatally flawed.

Take the argument proffered above concerning our belief in the external world. The problem is that if it really is the case that the hinge proposition in this example—'There exists an external world'—is unwarrantable, then it would appear to follow that our belief in the everyday propositions which assume a warrant in the hinge proposition—such as 'I have two hands'—are also unwarrantable. After all, it is a central component of the hinge proposition thesis that there is nothing actually wrong with the sceptic's argument as such, only with the conclusion that is drawn from that argument. We are thus still lumbered with the original problem of how one can have a warranted belief in an everyday proposition when this warrant presupposes that one has a warranted belief in a hinge proposition, a proposition which is held to be unwarrantable. As it stands, then, the hinge proposition response to scepticism is a complete non-starter.⁷ In essence, the problem is that the sceptical argument demands either a dissolution or an *epistemic* response, when all the notion of a hinge proposition provides is a mere *pragmatic* reason for retaining belief in the contested proposition.

2. Responses: the appeal to radical scepticism and Quietism.

One might think that if this style of anti-scepticism is inadequate as regards radical scepticism, then it must be even more futile when applied to a local scepticism about religious belief. After all, although it is at least plausible that belief in an external world is methodologically necessary for all coherent

epistemic evaluation, the same cannot be said for belief in the existence of God, which is clearly an optional matter. One does, however, find traces of the hinge proposition thesis in two sorts of anti-sceptical strategies that are adduced in defence of religious belief. On the one hand, we find some commentators arguing for a hinge proposition thesis as a means of supporting the claim that there is nothing unique about the ungrounded nature of religious belief. Accordingly, they attempt to deflect a local scepticism about religious belief by placing the onus back onto the debate about radical scepticism. On the other, there are those who take the more Quietist line that, in some sense to be specified, a commitment to certain basic religious propositions—including, perhaps, ‘God exists’—is what gives a religious discourse its substance. As a result, or so the thought runs, one is misconstruing the nature of religious practices by requesting an epistemic grounding to the basic beliefs of that discourse.

One of the most famous examples of the first sort of anti-sceptical tactic can be found in John Henry Newman’s lectures on religious belief,⁸ texts of which were, interestingly, a major influence on Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty*.⁹ In essence, Newman’s approach to the problem of scepticism about religious belief was to argue that local scepticism about religious belief is unfounded because one has equal grounds to be sceptical about *all* belief. It is thus irrelevant to make a *specific* charge against religious belief on the basis that it is posited upon certain pivotal ungrounded beliefs (such as in the existence of God), when there is nothing unique about religious belief in this respect. Rather, we should recognise that *all* belief is based upon ungrounded presuppositions, and therefore discharge the pervasive thought that there is any epistemic difference in kind between, say, scientific belief and religious belief. Here is Newman:

None of us can think or act without the acceptance of truths, not intuitive, not demonstrated, yet sovereign.¹⁰

However, since, as we have just seen, there is no defensible hinge proposition thesis available as regards radical scepticism, it follows that this strategy of deflecting local scepticism about religious belief onto a global scepticism about belief in general provides, at best, a *Pyrrhic* victory. Although it may take the pressure off the particular problems facing the project of justifying religious belief, it does so at the cost of thereby endorsing a wider scepticism about belief in general.¹¹

Significantly, however, this is not merely an antiquated position to hold as regards the epistemic justification of religious belief. A common claim made in the contemporary literature concerning the epistemology of religious belief is that rather than meeting the sceptical challenge we should instead reconfigure our conception of the epistemological landscape to make room for the supposedly “non-epistemic” virtues that religious belief is held to possess.

Consider, for instance, Nicholas Wolterstorff’s commentary on the following episode from the life of St. Augustine.¹² Augustine hears a child chanting “take and read, take and read”—(“*tolle lege, tolle lege*”)—and takes this as an indication from God that he should pick up his copy of St. Paul’s

epistles and start reading them. Augustine thus has a belief that God is speaking to him through the child, a belief which, moreover, is, according to the argument above at any rate, only warranted provided he already has a warrant for his belief in the existence of God. Whilst noting that the traditional sceptical argument against religious belief will fixate on this ‘presuppositional’ component of Augustine’s reasoning, Wolterstorff makes no explicit counter-response. He does not, for instance, argue that Augustine is indeed warranted in believing in God, or claim that his belief in God’s agency can be warranted in the absence of a warranted belief in God. Instead, the strategy that Wolterstorff advances is to simply reject what he terms the “Doxastic Ideal”, a conception of the epistemic project which he believes underlies the sceptical argument. This is the (seemingly truistic) demand that all belief that is not supported by adequate empirical or a priori grounds should be subject to epistemic censure. In rejecting this Ideal, argues Wolterstorff, we open up the possibility that our most basic beliefs—and Augustine’s belief in the existence of God in particular—can be rightly held even though they lack specifically epistemic merits. And how does Wolterstorff justify this grand claim? By utilising Humean sceptical arguments in order to undermine our attachment to the thought that beliefs must always be adequately supported by evidence if they are to be rightly held. Accordingly, just like the Newman line of old, Wolterstorff’s underlying point is that basic religious beliefs cannot be considered irrational because of their lack of epistemic buttress when radical sceptical arguments highlight that *most* of our basic beliefs lack such epistemic support. By rejecting the “Doxastic Ideal”, then, Wolterstorff is supposing that the local scepticism regarding religious belief that he cannot answer can be legitimately displaced to the wider epistemological sphere that deals with radical scepticism. As we have seen, however, the very sort of hinge proposition strategy that is required to meet a radical scepticism grounded in this fashion is itself wholly inadequate to the task. Accordingly, Wolterstorff’s ‘reconstructive’ project is doomed to failure.¹³

Examples of the second sort of Quietist anti-sceptical line are, of course, even more common. The most infamous brand of this type of view can be found amongst those aligning themselves with what one might call, broadly speaking, ‘Wittgensteinian Fideism’.¹⁴ Often this position is identified with a certain non-cognitivism as regards religious language which expresses itself in the epistemological arena as the claim that we should not criticise religious utterances on evidentialist grounds because such utterances are not serving a fact-stating role.¹⁵ Instead, they are held to form a defining part of a “form of life” which is regarded as epistemically autonomous from the usual standards of epistemic evaluation.

Again, however, we have a solution to the problem at hand which seems just as sceptical as the original argument proposed. Although one could envisage a coherent non-cognitivist interpretation of certain discourses—humour, for instance—is it really plausible to suppose that we could correctly capture the semantics of religious utterances in this way? After all, if God *does* exist and the religious believer *is* in a direct relationship with God, then how could it be that statements of the form ‘God exists’ were not both true and knowable? Accordingly, adopting this approach is tantamount to directly conceding the core sceptical claim as regards religious belief—that there is some feature

inherent to this type of belief which makes it such that these beliefs can neither be warranted or the propositions believed known. Rather than being a *defence* of religious belief against sceptical attack, then, all this proposal offers is, at best, a tactical retreat.¹⁶

3. Blocking the argument.

The contemporary debate about the epistemic status of religious belief thus owes a great deal to a certain pessimism about the prospects of responding to a local scepticism applied to those beliefs. This pessimism is expressed either directly, by adopting a Quietist stance as regards the nature of the discourse, or indirectly, cloaked in a radical scepticism about belief in general. Significantly, however, such pessimism completely belies the fact that there does exist a very direct way of blocking the sort of sceptical argument at issue.

Recall that what the sceptical arguments we considered above established was that there was no non-question-begging way of *adducing* epistemic grounds sufficient to support one's belief in the contested proposition, and thus that one was neither in a position to know or warrantably believe that proposition. The detractors that we have considered so far have all conceded this conclusion, whilst attempting to modifying their conception of the epistemic landscape such that even propositions that cannot be known or warrantably believed could nevertheless be rightly believed. There is, however, a more straightforward line of response available, which is to simply deny that an inability to adduce non-question-begging grounds for belief in a certain proposition entails an inability to know, or warrantably believe, that proposition.¹⁷

In order to motivate this proposal it is necessary to first make a distinction prevalent in epistemology in general but rarely alluded to in the literature on the epistemology of religious belief. Consider the following *externalist* characterisation of what constitutes our knowledge of contingent¹⁸ propositions:

X knows that P iff X has a true belief in P and X's belief in P 'tracks' the truth of P across a wide range of near-by possible worlds (i.e., where P is true, X believes it; where P is false, X does not believe it).¹⁹

This states that the possession of knowledge that P requires that an agent's belief that P should stand in a certain subjunctive relationship to the facts such that his belief is not only true but that, were circumstances to be slightly different, then it would, to use the jargon, appropriately "track" the truth. What makes this characterisation of knowledge externalist is that it does not demand that the subject should be in a position to reflectively determine that such a relationship has obtained. On the externalist model, then, although the possession of reflectively accessible grounds for one's beliefs would usually be involved in the possession of knowledge—they would, after all, aid one in possessing a belief which was sufficiently sensitive to a range of possibilities of error—such grounds

are not *essential* to the possession of knowledge. In contrast, an epistemologically *internalist* account of knowledge will demand that a further condition be met for the possession of knowledge—that the subject not only have a belief which was sensitive in this way, but that he should also have reflective access to the factors that make this belief sensitive.

It is not my concern here to adjudicate between these two accounts (nor do I have the space to undertake a detailed discussion of their properties), my aim is merely to highlight the impact that this distinction can have on the debate by accepting, without argument, the truth of the externalist thesis.²⁰ In contrast, simply in virtue of unquestioningly taking it for granted that the sceptical arguments outlined above are sound, the commentators we have considered so far have implicitly aligned themselves to the opposing internalist conception of epistemology. That is, they have straightforwardly taken it for granted that where one is in principle unable to cite sufficient reflectively accessible grounds for belief, then that belief is not open to being warrantedly believed, (or, *a fortiori*, the proposition believed being known). The externalist, on the other hand, has the option of conceding that there are certain propositions which play this framework role, and which are therefore not open to being epistemically supported with reflectively accessible grounds, without thereby conceding the sceptical conclusion that they are not known or warrantedly believed.

Let us accept the basic contention that lies behind both the original sceptical attack and the “hinge” proposition story that was advocated as a means of evading that attack, which was that there are certain propositions which in virtue of their relation to other propositions believed lacked sufficient reflectively accessible—i.e., *adducible*—grounds. In accepting this much the anti-sceptic of both camps is forced to concede that belief in either the existence of an external world or of God cannot be epistemically supported in the usual (internalist) way. On the externalist account, the epistemic status of one’s belief in these propositions would thus be dependent upon one having a belief which, despite the lack of sufficient reflectively accessible grounds, nevertheless exhibited an appropriate subjunctive relationship to the facts. On the one hand, if one does, in fact, have a belief in these framework propositions which is sufficiently sensitive to a range of different possibilities of error, then one will possess knowledge of them. There will thus be nothing to prevent, in principle, the possession of knowledge or warranted belief in the non-framework propositions that presuppose that belief in these hinge propositions is epistemically sanctioned. On the other, if one does not, in fact, have an appropriately sensitive belief in these framework propositions, then the doxastic architecture which presupposes a sufficient epistemic status for these beliefs will lack the requisite foundation. Crucially, however, this line of disjunctive response replaces the sceptical thought that there are *a priori* reasons for thinking that one is unable to know/warrantedly believe the contested propositions with a set of *empirical* conditions which must be met if there is to be knowledge/warrantedly belief in these areas. And this is just to say that there is no longer any sceptical argument that needs to be responded to, only the empirical facts (and one must always answer to them).

Consider, for instance, the case of St. Augustine that Wolterstorff cited. The thought would be that if Augustine does indeed have the requisite sensitive beliefs concerning God’s existence, then it

will follow that Augustine does indeed know that God exists, even though he would be unable to adduce non-question-begging empirical support for this claim. And on the supposition that his belief in God's existence is indeed warranted in this fashion, it would then follow that there is no longer any reason to believe that the superstructure of his beliefs that presuppose a warrant for this belief could not be warranted either. If, on the other hand, Augustine lacks a sensitive belief in God's existence, then it will follow that, just as we would expect, his religious beliefs are indeed without warrant.

In this respect, then, religious belief is no different to any other sort of belief where one has to presuppose epistemic support for one's conviction in certain pivotal propositions without being in a position to reflectively determine that this support obtains. The thought would thus be that commentators like Newman and Wolterstorff are at least half-right. There is indeed nothing epistemologically unique about religious belief. It has to answer to empirical conditions just like any other discourse, and, in the most basic cases, it will be impossible to have reflectively-based knowledge that certain initial conditions have obtained. Where these commentators go wrong, however, is in thinking that this is a *sceptical* thought, rather than merely a factor that highlights something about the externalist nature of our epistemological concepts.²¹

This is not to say that there are not important differences between our belief in God's existence and our belief in an external world. As noted above, it may be that belief in an external world is indeed methodologically necessary for a coherent inquiry (even though this claim is not itself sufficient for an anti-sceptical defence) in a way that belief in the existence of God is not. The crucial point, however, is that defenders of religious belief create a far more difficult sceptical problem for themselves by failing to see that there are certain epistemological options available to them.

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Notes

¹ For the sake of simplicity, in what follows I assume standard (Christian) theistic belief.

² By 'warrant' here I have in mind a robust epistemic notion that, when combined with true belief, is sufficient for knowledge.

³ For the 'Moorean' response to the sceptic in this respect, see his 'Proof of an External World', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 25 (1939), which is also reprinted in his *Philosophical Papers* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1959).

⁴ See Strawson, *Skepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties* (London: Methuen, 1985), chapter 1; Wright, 'Facts and Certainty', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 71 (1985): pp. 429-72 and 'Scepticism and Dreaming: Imploding the

Demon', *Mind* 397 (1991): pp. 87-115; and Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

⁵ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (eds.) G. E. M. Anscombe & G. H. von Wright, (tr.) Denis Paul & G. E. M. Anscombe, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), §§341-3.

⁶ I do not mean to suggest by these remarks that I think this is an accurate rendering of Wittgenstein's position in *On Certainty* (if such a thing can be discerned from the text), only that this is the standard reading adduced to him in this regard.

⁷ It is for this reason that proponents of this thesis—and Wright, *op. cit.*, in particular—tend to supplement their hinge proposition account with a denial of the epistemic principle which underlies the sceptical argument—roughly: that if one is warranted in believing a proposition, *p*, and one knows that *p* entails a second proposition, *q*, then one must also be warranted in believing *q*. The sceptic contraposes on this principle when she argues that it follows from our lack of warrant for our belief in the external world and our knowledge that many everyday propositions entail the existence of the external world, that we must lack a warrant for our belief in these everyday propositions as well. The trouble with this proposal is that if one amends the thesis in this way then there is no need to adduce the notion of a hinge proposition in the first place since an ability to motivate the denial of this highly intuitive principle would suffice. Indeed, the strategy on offer here is a close relative of the more famous arguments offered by Fred Dretske, 'Epistemic Operators', *Journal of Philosophy* 67 (1970): pp. 1007-23, and Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), for denying the equally intuitive 'Closure' principle for knowledge. Essentially, this principle states that if one knows a proposition, *p*, and knows that *p* entails a second proposition, *q*, then one knows *q*. A supplementation of this sort does not so much expand on the proposal in question, then, as replace it with a completely different anti-sceptical strategy.

⁸ See Newman, *Sermons, Chiefly on the Theory of Religious Belief, Preached before the University of Oxford* (London, 1844) and *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (1870), (ed.) I. T. Kerr, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁹ See the reference to Newman in the very first passage of that text.

¹⁰ *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

¹¹ For an excellent discussion of Newman's writings in this respect, see Anthony Kenny, *What Is Faith?: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

¹² The text I particularly have in mind here is Wolterstorff's 'Epistemology of Religion', *Epistemology*, (eds.) J. Greco & E. Sosa, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 303-24, but similar remarks are also made in his 'The Migration of Theistic Arguments: From Natural Theology to Evidentialist Apologetics', *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment*, (eds.) R. Audi & W. Wainwright, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 38-81, and his *Divine Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). I focus upon Wolterstorff because he represents a clear example of the kind of thinking that I have in mind. Of related interest, however, is Norman Malcolm's defence of the rationality of religious belief in 'The Groundlessness of Belief', *Thought and Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977) which explicitly runs along the sort of Wittgensteinian lines sketched in *On Certainty*.

¹³ In 'Do Religious Beliefs Need Grounds?', *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 40 (1986): pp. 227-37, Terence Penelhum offers an excellent discussion of the manner in which some theists (he focuses on Pascal and Kierkegaard) have attempted to defend the rationality of religious belief by adducing radical sceptical arguments. See also his book, *God and Skepticism* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1983).

¹⁴ For the main texts in this regard, see Kai Nielsen, 'Wittgensteinian Fideism', *Philosophy* 42 (1967), reprinted in *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, (eds.) Steven M. Cahn & David Shatz, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 232-54; and the following works by D. Z Phillips: 'Faith, Scepticism and Religious Understanding', *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), pp. 13-34; *Religion Without Explanation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976); and *Wittgenstein and Religion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993). The Wittgensteinian stimulus to this movement was not, of course, *On Certainty* itself at all (at least not directly), but rather Wittgenstein's lectures that were subsequently published as *Wittgenstein's Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, (ed.) Cyril Barrett, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966).

¹⁵ In a similar vein, in 'Facts and Certainty', *op. cit.*, Wright argues for a non-cognitivist interpretation of the hinge propositions which are at issue as regards radical scepticism.

¹⁶ Though less popular, there are those who interpret Wittgenstein as endorsing a cognitivist theory of religious discourse. See especially O. K. Bouwsma, *Without Proof or Evidence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984).

¹⁷ For a very subtle construal of this point as it applies to the doctrine of Papal infallibility, see John Haldane, 'Infallibility, Authority and Faith', *The Heythrop Journal* 38 (1997): pp. 262-83.

¹⁸ I take it for granted that "God exists" is a contingent proposition. Although there are a number of philosophers who disagree with this point, in arguing in this way it would appear that such commentators thereby commit themselves to the claim that there is an *a priori* defence of this proposition available (if only in principle), so excluding them from the current debate. In any case, those who find this pronouncement contentious should simply understand the following remarks as being conditional on the truth of this claim.

¹⁹ Such a characterisation of knowledge will clearly require further work to make it precise. What is expressed here should only be taken as representing the core elements of the position. For a development of a view of this sort, see Nozick, *op. cit.*

²⁰ For a detailed discussion of the internalism/externalism distinction, see Laurence Bonjour, 'Externalist Theories of Justification', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy, Vol. 5: Studies in Epistemology*, (eds.) P. A. French, T. E. Uehling & H. K. Wettstein, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), pp. 27-52; Alvin Goldman, 'The Internalist Conception of Justification', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy, Vol. 5: Studies in Epistemology*, (eds.) P. A. French, T. E. Uehling & H. K. Wettstein, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), pp. 53-76; William P. Alston, 'Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology', *Philosophical Topics* 14 (1986): pp. 179-221; Richard Fumerton, 'The Internalism/Externalism Controversy', *Philosophical Perspectives* 2 (1988): pp. 443-59; and Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

²¹ One could view the very project of 'reformed epistemology' in terms of this distinction. On the one hand, there are those, such as Wolterstorff, who merely reject the foundationalist paradigm and, in doing so, take certain beliefs out of the arena of epistemic evaluation. On the other, there are those, such as Alston, 'Is Religious Belief Rational?', *The Life of Religion*, (eds.) S. M. Harrison & R. C. Taylor, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), pp. 12-31, and *Perceiving God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), who adopt the more robust course of rejecting not only foundationalism but also the epistemological internalism that underlies it. As a result, the erstwhile 'foundational' beliefs are once more set back in the epistemic arena even despite the fact that they lack the sort of epistemic properties which the classical foundationalist demands. Plantinga, who is probably the foremost exponent of reformed epistemology, is

somewhat more difficult to categorise. In his earlier work—such as ‘Is Belief in God Properly Basic?’, *Noûs* 15 (1981): pp. 41-51; ‘Rationality and Religious Belief’, *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, (eds.) Steven M. Cahn & David Shatz, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 255-77; and ‘Reason and Belief in God’, *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, (eds.) A. Plantinga & N. Wolterstorff, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 127-146—he is largely content merely to argue that there is nothing inherent to the foundationalist model that would exclude the possibility that belief in God could be epistemologically ‘basic’. In more recent work, however—such as *Warrant: The Current Debate*, op. cit., and *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993)—he has been more explicit in his rejection both of foundationalism and the epistemologically internalist paradigm which underpins it.