PUSHING EPISTEMOLOGICAL BOUNDARIES: THE EXPANSION OF THE

EPISTEMOLOGICAL TRADITION WITHIN THE WORK OF WILLIAM ALSTON

by

NATHAN DOUGLAS SEGARS

(Under the direction of Dr. Randolph Clarke)

ABSTRACT

William Alston has set himself squarely among the most prominent figures in philosophy and contemporary epistemology. In the work that follows I shall be investigating whether his most recent work in epistemology might not place him closer to those thinkers, specifically Ludwig Wittgenstein, from whom Alston has always made an effort to distinguish himself. I begin by tracing Alston's steps through his earlier work in epistemology and justification theory in particular. In those early steps we notice many features of Alston's thought that figure largely in our study. Those features are drawn out more clearly by setting them against the opposing viewpoints of other philosophers. As the investigation continues, we shall arrive at the crucial problem for Alston: How can we present a defense of our beliefs that doesn't involve circular support? We shall be looking at three attempts Alston might make at solving this problem. The first is a weak one that he discards himself. The second attempt begins to take Alston into the domain of those thinkers like Wittgenstein mentioned before. The third attempt is my own construction from scattered hints and pieces left by Alston, which I believe can be formulated into a proposed solution to the problem. Even this last attempt takes Alston closer to the camp of philosophers he has tried to avoid. By way of hammering this point home, I demonstrate ways in which Alston and Wittgenstein are found to be more similar than Alston might want us to think. The final conclusion is that Alston's commitments from his earlier work in epistemology have led him to the connections between himself and philosophers like Wittgenstein when dealing with the problem of finding non-circular support for one's beliefs.

INDEX WORDS: Philosophy, Epistemology, Justification theory, William Alston,
                        Ludwig Wittgenstein

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INTRODUCTION

Epistemology and especially justification theory have been hot topics within philosophical journals and around philosophy department water coolers for the last forty years or so. Among those pushing these discussions along into ever more interesting territory has been William Alston. Although it was not his initial interest in philosophy, epistemology and epistemic justification have become the areas most readily associated with his name. His contributions to the heated debates within justification theory have presented veterans of epistemology with more challenging opposition while they have inspired newcomers to enter a field that might otherwise have faded into the background of philosophical endeavors. In what follows, I shall lay out a good portion of Alston's labors in the area of epistemic justification theory. In doing so, it will become clear that his efforts have had an enormous effect on epistemological thought contemporary to those efforts as well as on the discussions subsequent to his writings. While lasting value might not be gained simply by an overview of Alston's contribution to epistemology, I shall be suggesting that pushing his ideas to their ultimate conclusions leads his work into areas he might not have wished. In particular, our study will show that Alston's dedication to the defense of a certain stance on epistemic justification ends up pushing him toward a position more and more similar to the likes of Ludwig Wittgenstein. This similarity comes even though Alston claims a strong separation from such positions all throughout his writings. In the end, I believe this unintended turn by Alston actually leads to the possibility of more fascinating work in the field of epistemology.

Our course leading to these observations will begin, as was stated, with a look into Alston's actual view on issues concerning epistemic justification. In chapter one, we shall be distinguishing his position from those who would place strict and heavy requirements on those who would have justified belief. In addition, even though Alston

may succeed in defending justification on a lower level than those who would make such requirements, the end of chapter one leaves Alston with the challenge of dogmatism that motivates our later chapters. Those distinguishing marks between Alston and other theorists become more important in chapter two. Alston's externalism on justification comes to the fore as it is set at odds with pure internalism. Chapter three leads us to the major difficulty facing Alston as a result of trying to clear up the challenge of dogmatism. It will be discovered there that any attempt to show the support for our beliefs ends up in what he terms as the problem of "epistemic circularity." The need to display our justification as a result of the challenge of dogmatism lands Alston face to face with the question of how to avoid circular support in making that display.

How Alston grapples with epistemic circularity constitutes the remainder of the dissertation. The end of chapter three gives an initial, but weak, advance toward dealing with the problem. However, the fourth chapter centers on Alston's most concerted effort to combat epistemic circularity with his doxastic practice approach to epistemology. After examining that approach through the eyes of several critics, we shall find that even the attempt is not successful. In this chapter we begin to see Alston's tendency to favor ideas similar to Wittgenstein in their attention to the practical rather than the purely epistemic. Chapter five brings to a head the difficulty before Alston in the form of a dilemma: Either Alston falls to epistemic circularity, or he gives way to a pragmatic form of epistemic evaluation that adheres to a less than realist notion of truth.[1] Since his own advertised solution to epistemic circularity fails, I take it upon myself to construct another answer form his early position on justification, his work with doxastic practices, and his ideas on a new theory of epistemic evaluation. As this progresses, it becomes more and more clear that Alston is leaning toward the practical side. This suspicion is finally solidified in chapter six where I demonstrate the deficiencies of the distinctions between Alston and the person identified with the practical position on epistemic evaluation, Wittgenstein.

Though Alston denies the kind of affiliation I propose between himself and Wittgenstein, his own words take him down that path. In the end, we shall find that Alston definitely leans toward the second horn of the dilemma stated above. His association with Wittgensteinian ideas leads him there. By way of conclusion, I shall show that what brings Alston to this point is a position he takes at the very beginning of our study. It is his commitment to externalism that appears to seal his fate from the start. While this may not be the direction he had intended, I believe that his direction works to define the landscape before any current epistemologist. In addition, it opens new avenues of thought and discussion that may be taken up for years to come. Following Alston's work is always enlightening. His insights into current debates are both helpful and motivating. His work as a pioneer in epistemology is inestimably valuable. In this present case, even where his trail blazing is unintentional, nevertheless, it ignites important fires that ensure the productive future of epistemology and justification theory.

CHAPTER ONE

Of the competing views on the subject of epistemic justification made popular in the last thirty years, perhaps the most frequently and dramatically attacked and defended is foundationalism. Since many of the earliest specific formulations of epistemological systems appear to have been foundationalist in nature, e.g. Reid, Descartes, Aquinas, etc., the theory has a long history of critics. In recent times, however, that criticism has intensified as the field of epistemology, and especially justification theory, has enjoyed a resurgence of attention since the middle to late 1960s.

In response to these late criticisms, William Alston has been on the forefront of the defense for foundationalism. In our initial chapter, we shall focus on some examples of Alston's work in this arena, noting whether his forays into the field are effective or whether they miss their mark. In particular two recurring objections raised against foundationalism will be represented, the first by Bruce Aune and the other by Frederick Will. While this could offer an interesting study in itself, our purpose in making these observations will be to notice the results of Alston's moves in two areas. The first is the over-all effect that Alston makes in the world of epistemology by the kind of defensive arguments he makes. Secondly, I shall place the observations from the first area in a more practical setting. I have chosen for that setting the field of religious epistemology as it is a central concern in much of Alston's work. In this second area, then, we shall see whether Alston may have provided the epistemic foundations of religious claims. Foundationalism has been one of the justification theories of choice for theistic philosophers of the analytic sort, and any work done in its defense could be taken as a defense for their cause. This being accomplished, I hope it will be more obvious how the work of Alston in the arena of epistemology at large can be taken as valuable within a more defined field of play such as religious epistemology.

I

To begin, something should be said about justification theory within today's contemporary epistemology and just how foundationalism fits into the scheme. Justification has been widely accepted as one of the criteria necessary to attain the status of knowledge along with true belief. A subject must have possession of a belief that is a candidate for knowledge. That knowledge-candidate must be in fact true. It is held that nothing that is false can actually be known, for knowledge is ipso facto a claim for a certain belief's being true. But there must be a further aspect in claiming knowledge beside these two.[1] While a belief may be contained somewhere within a person's catalogue of beliefs and may be actually true, there needs to be some appropriate account present to the believer's situation as to how her belief is held on the basis of an appropriate ground. I could form the belief that the Chicago White Sox are a strong contender for the pennant this year, and that belief may well be true. But if I acquired that belief based on my approval of their uniforms or solely from the authority of team statistics from 1918, the belief's claim to knowledge becomes weaker. It matters what the reasons, the justification, for a belief are when we are concerned with knowledge.

Understanding that justification is a necessary condition for knowledge claims does not settle things. In fact, the debate only just begins at this point. The problem is: what counts as justification? How *is* a belief justified? What kind of a situation is required to confer justificatory status to a belief? In answer to these questions many theories and versions of theories have been offered as the fundamental structure for justification. One of the more prominent of these theories has been foundationalism. The attraction to this view has been largely based on its apparent success in surviving what has been called the "regress argument".[2] A version of that argument would run as follows:

> When discovering whether a subject has reasons to justify her belief that *p*, she
> must be justified in the beliefs that act as her reasons justifying the belief that *p*.

But each of those beliefs must itself be justified by other reasons which must also be justified by further reasons, and so on. In order that the belief initially in question may be justified, we should ask how these different chains of belief-reasons must be formulated. There are four possibilities.

(1) Each chain is ended by a belief with no justification.

(2) The original belief that *p* reoccurs later in the chain.

(3) The chain of belief-reasons does not end, but goes on infinitely.

(4) Each chain of belief-reasons ends in a belief that requires no other belief for its justification.

If (1) is the structure, no justification can be transferred anywhere within the chain. Where a belief depends on it reason-belief for justification and that belief is not itself justified, the first belief cannot be justified.

If (2), a circle has been formed. Whether that circle be small or large, there can still be no justification conferred on the original belief. To suggest that the original belief is justified would be to say that the belief that *p* is the reason for itself.

If (3), at whatever point we seek to discover whether the subject's belief that *p* is justified, we shall still be dealing with a reason-belief that is in need itself of justification. Without that justification, it cannot deliver justification for any beliefs that depend on it as their reason-belief. So, the belief that *p* would be without justification.

If (4), then every belief along the chain can receive justification based on the justificatory status of the belief which ends the chain of reasons. The original belief is indeed justified because the regress of reasons is ended with a belief-reason that is justified without the need of further belief-reasons.

Therefore, the only availability for the justification of the belief that *p* is a belief structure whereby a subject's beliefs are justified by their eventual basis upon a belief that is justified without the necessary aid of further reason-beliefs, a foundational belief. And this structure of justification is called foundationalism.[3]

Through this argument we can notice several important features of foundationalism. First is the distinction between beliefs that stand in need and those that do not stand in need of other beliefs for justificatory support. Alston frames this as a distinction between beliefs that are mediately and immediately justified.[4] A mediately justified belief might be one that is not obvious by its own light. The belief that the White Sox will be in contention this year is clearly not one that is justified without the reliance on other beliefs that would aid it. I would have to have beliefs about the kinds of things that make a baseball team good. I would have to have the belief that the White Sox have those features. I would need beliefs concerning how the other teams in the league fare in regard to those good-making features of a team in order to compare them

with the White Sox. The original belief here is mediately justified because its justification depends on whether the beliefs it is based on are justified.

Specific examples of immediately justified beliefs are more difficult to nail down. One type of belief that is usually forwarded as a candidate for immediately justified belief is experiential belief. It is claimed by some that a belief such as "I am being met with visual experience of the color red" is immediately justified. It is argued that whatever is needed to justify such a belief, it cannot be another belief. It would be hard to imagine what kind of belief could be said to justify it. One might say that the belief that "other times I have been met with experience like this, it has been a red color-experience" could be used to justify the earlier belief. But others return that even though it *could* be used to justify the former belief, it is not *necessary* for the belief's justification.[5] These immediately justified beliefs are the foundational beliefs upon which all of our other (mediately justified) beliefs depend for their ultimate justification.

A second important part of foundationalism seen in the above argument is how these foundational beliefs are said to provide justification. Returning to our White Sox example, that belief may be mediately justified by supporting beliefs of the sort I mentioned. However, those belief-reasons stand in need of justification themselves. If we took one of those, for example the belief that the Indians won't be as strong this season as they have been in recent years, we would see that it could not be claimed as an immediately justified belief. So, we should be able to find belief-reasons that support this secondary belief, if it is in fact justified. Eventually, so foundationalism claims, these belief-reasons would go back to a belief(s) that is (are) immediately justified. Thus, the chain of backward belief-reasons would end.

The part of interest at the moment, though, is how this immediately justified belief must be related to the other beliefs in a way to provide justification to the rest of the chain. It should be obvious that if the belief held to be the end of the chain is not justified, then none of the subsequent beliefs can be justified, either. Beside this is the

Factor that unless the beliefs further up the chain are related to the foundational belief in the correct way, they cannot acquire the justification made available by that immediately justified belief. One author describes the situation as though the beliefs were connected by pipes, and the justification would be the water that flows through those pipes.[6] The justification (water) must have a source, and this source may be identified with the immediately justified foundational belief. Also, in order for the other beliefs to have access to the justification (water) provided by the foundational belief (source), they must be connected in a way that allows the justification (water) to flow to them without mishap. They must be, in some way, based upon the immediately justified foundational belief. It must be the ultimate reason for a subject to hold any subsequent beliefs.

A final characteristic to note is that foundationalism requires only that justified beliefs *be* justified, not that they *be shown to be* justified. The confusion between these two is something that Alston has spent much time trying to expose.[7] While it might seem clear that one should be able to show the justification for a belief held, Alston is quick to point out that it's not necessary for one to *show* that one's beliefs are justified in order for those beliefs to actually *be* justified.[8] In the regress argument, this stance can be seen. In order to be a viable immediately justified foundational belief, it is not true that the belief must be able to be shown as immediately justified. This point will feature largely as we continue.

At this point, we should be well positioned to approach Alston's work in defense of foundationalism. We shall take a look at two criticisms of foundationalism with which Alston spends some time. The first is that of Bruce Aune in *Knowledge, Mind and Nature*[9] and is dealt with in Alston's article "Two Types of Foundationalism." The second is from Frederick Will's *Induction and Justification*[10] and is handled in "Has Foundationalism Been Refuted?" by Alston. Through this pair of defenses I hope to eventually show how Alston has made significant contributions to the changing face of

contemporary epistemology. As this chapter closes, I shall make an effort to show how this is borne out in the more specific areas of religious epistemology.

<center>II</center>

Bruce Aune deals with foundationalism in the earlier part of his work in an effort to clear the field of competing views. In his obection to foundational theories of justification there are three major points of contention. I shall deliver these one at a time, allowing the response from Alston to be given directly after each criticism. I should note that I shall not be observing any new points beyond what Alston himself has already brought out in discussing Aune's remarks. For all practical purposes I am merely laying out a detailed exposition of Alston's work with "Two Types of Foundationalism." I do so with the hope of highlighting the more important aspects of foundationalism that Alston makes clear. Only then may the other goals I have laid out for this chapter be met with any success.

The initial criticism from Aune that Alston brings to light is one that has troubled traditional theories of foundationalism for some time. The question at hand is whether there can actually be any of the sort of beliefs which are able to do what Alston, as the representative of foundationalism, would ascribe to immediately justified beliefs. If it can be shown that such beliefs do not exist (or at least, not enough of them), then the most fundamental tenet of foundationalism is under-cut and the theory fails. In his description of these supposed "immediately justified" beliefs – or as he calls them, "intrinsically acceptable premises"[11]– Aune presents them as beliefs which are indubitable and infallible. By indubitable he means much the same as what Descartes sought in his *Meditations*, a belief that is accepted without the possibility of doubt. So in ascribing indubitability to immediately justified beliefs, Aune is saying that foundationalism holds those beliefs to be beyond the possibility of doubt. An infallible belief is one whose truth can never be altered by any influence or circumstance. It will

always be true no matter what. According to Aune, immediately justified beliefs, as infallible, are understood by foundationalists to retain a positive truth value no matter what circumstances prevail. They are beliefs that can be clearly seen by the believer as true within themselves. A belief that is both indubitable and infallible, then, is obviously one that would be an excellent candidate for immediate justification.

It should be made clear just how this is meant to be a criticism against foundationalism. While it is obvious that a belief that had both of these traits would be an easy pick for one that is immediately justified, it is not obvious just how many of these beliefs might exist. It might even be the case that none of them exist. Certainly any belief touted as indubitable and infallible would come under heavy scrutiny and would likely not be accepted as such by many. Even if we did allow that there were such a belief that existed as both indubitable and infallible, perhaps even more than one, it would almost surely not be able to act as a foundation for all of our beliefs. The kinds of beliefs that we might argue as indubitable and infallible could not have the right kind of relationship with our entire body of beliefs in order to bestow justification upon all of them. Recall the example of the water pipes. If the pipes aren't connected, the water will not be able to get down the line. If beliefs can't be connected in the right way, justification will not be able to be acquired from the immediately justified belief. There would be some beliefs that did not get their justification from those foundational beliefs.

Hence, our problem: If immediately justified beliefs must be indubitable and infallible, foundationalism allows for at most a very small number of justified beliefs. Since there are very few indubitable and infallible beliefs, at best, the number of justified beliefs would only be among those with the right relationship to those that are immediately justified. For those who would criticize foundationalism on this point, this is taken to differ from the number of our beliefs that we usually take to be justified in actuality. If foundationalism can't account for how the beliefs we understand to be justified come to be justified, then there must be something wrong with foundationalism.

Alston makes rather short work of this problem. He refers to his simple definition of foundationalism which does not require that the immediately justified beliefs be indubitable *or* infallible.[12] All that is stipulated there about these immediately justified beliefs is that they be "sufficient to generate chains of justification that terminate in whatever indirectly justified beliefs he has."[13] Looking back to the regress argument, we can see that there is no further requirement tendered against foundational beliefs except that they be able to support the beliefs that depend on them for their justification. Immediate justification does not imply indubitability or infallibility.[14] This is of course in no way meant to suggest that indubitability and infallibility would be unfavorable for a foundational belief. It's just that a belief may do the job of an immediately justified belief without one's recognition that it is beyond doubt or even beyond the possibility of falsehood. At the same time, this doesn't really answer the question of exactly what it takes to be immediately justified. For our concerns, though, we need not be sidetracked by that issue. It is only important that we see what is *not* necessary for immediate justification. Being immediately justified does not depend on any of the belief's features other than its ability to contribute to the foundational structure.

The second problem that Aune points to is a little more subtle. It is similar to the suggestion made in describing immediately justified beliefs as indubitable wherein the belief appears to one as being beyond doubt. He presents the foundational beliefs as being accepted by foundationalists as something whose truth is evident simply by being stated or considered.[15] Foundational beliefs being "intrinsically acceptable", as Aune terms it, would imply that they are immediately recognized as true merely in being claimed. Aune's problem with this is that there is no claim or belief that is self-evident in its truth simply by virtue of being stated or believed. The standard example of the possibility of such a belief would be that granted by perceptual experience. The criticism is that beliefs from sensory experience are themselves subject to inference from other

sources. They may be elementary to some degree, but even these elementary beliefs may depend for their acceptability on other elementary beliefs.

Take the belief that there is something green within one's visual field. There do not seem to be many ways that one could be mistaken in accepting that belief as true if indeed something green appears visually to her. However, there are many underlying beliefs that could contribute to one's arrival at the belief. There is the subject's belief that she is not hallucinating. The belief that this instance of green matches other instances of green met with before, that conditions allowing accurate perception are present, and that there is no deceptive force at work might all be involved in such a simple perceptual belief. There may even be more beliefs that could come into play in producing even this elementary sensory belief. If all of this inferential work lies behind the supposedly intrinsically acceptable belief, then it could not be immediately justified. There must be a justification in accepting what the foundationalist is advertising as immediately justified. Therefore, since supposedly foundational beliefs seem to be dependent on other inferences or beliefs for their own justification, foundationalism's reliance on immediately justified beliefs falls short.

In response to this challenge, Alston makes note of an important distinction. The qualities Aune expects from intrinsically acceptable beliefs are not the same as what Alston is ascribing to immediately justified beliefs. A foundational belief does not necessarily have to be beyond inference from others. It only has to be able to act as a foundation without resorting to the support of those inferences. A particular belief's possibility of being inferred from other beliefs does not mean that the belief cannot act as the end of a chain of justification. Alston describes this difference as the distinction between self-justification and direct justification.[16] For a belief to be self-justified, the belief must be directly justified and the believer is also required to be justified in inferences that support that belief. Its designation as a "self-justified" belief comes from its ability to successfully supply the inferences needed to support itself. The requirement

of the justification of inferences is an additional feature of self-justified belief over and above simple directly justified beliefs like perceptual beliefs. A self-justified belief may be a directly justified one, but a directly justified belief need not be a self-justified one. An immediately justified belief might not include the requirement of having supportive inferences in order to be a directly justified belief. It is not *necessary* for a belief of this kind to need outside assistance for its justification. Alston would certainly focus on immediately justified beliefs being directly justified without the further requirement of their being self-justifying beliefs.

In another place Alston makes the same point by stating that immediately justified beliefs may be "over-determined" in their justification. [17] That sensory belief spoken of before stands as a good example. It is certainly true that the inferences that might be called upon to further support the belief offer important assistance in providing that support. However, Alston's point is that the belief doesn't *need* those inferences in order to *be* justified. He would contend that the visual belief does not depend on those inferences for its justification. While those inferences would even further determine its justification, it would be over-determined in that justification. Beliefs like the one mentioned may have sufficient justification in its immediacy even though there are other inferences available. Hence, the second criticism of Aune's raises a strong point to any formulation of foundationalism that might require foundational beliefs to be recognized as self-justifying beliefs, but it loses its force against Alston's understanding of a simpler foundationalism. This is what Alston terms as his "minimal" foundationalism. [18]

The third criticism garnered from Aune's piece draws the larger part of Alston's fire in the article "Two Types of Foundationalism". It strikes a t the very idea that immediate justification is available at all. Just as we saw Aune suggesting that foundationalism requires that a person be justified in the inferences leading to an immediately justified belief, he continues along the same path but in the third person.

> On the contrary, common experience is entirely adequate to show that clear-headed men never accept a claim merely because it is made, with regard to the peculiarities of the agent and of the conditions under which it is produced. For such men the acceptability of every claim is always determined by inference.[19]

What is being examined for its acceptability is the claim of some other person in defense of a belief that she has claimed. And we ("clear-headed men") are supposedly limited in our acceptance of any such claim by inferences. That is, we do not accept a belief as justified based simply on a personal report.

If we put this in the context of our perceptual example once more, we see Aune's point. Rather than being met with my own introspective belief that there is something green within my visual field, I may meet some other subject who claims to believe that there is something green in her visual field. In cases such as this, it seems fairly obvious that we might need additional information before being justified in accepting her claim to be having a visual experience of green. Surely Aune is right to say that we would not usually buy into such a statement without having some other cache of background beliefs about the person in question, the situation of which the person is speaking, the reliability we can have in taking this person's word, and so on. Testimony is a thorny issue in epistemology which may or may not have the possibility of offering foundational beliefs,[20] but regardless, Aune does not seem to be off target on this particular point.

Alston's problem for Aune, however, is that he is not careful to distinguish between the epistemic claims of another and the claims that might be associated with our own introspective beliefs. These epistemic claims Alston calls "higher-level beliefs."[21] Their "higher level" is derived from the epistemic position in which they are found. When some other subject makes a belief-claim, the higher-level formula would take it that we are justified in believing her claim only if we believe that she is justified in believing the claim. This secondary belief of "believing that one is justified in believing" is the higher-level belief. For epistemic beliefs such as testimonial reports of personal experience, Alston agrees that a higher-level belief is required for justification.

This is not the case for all beliefs, however. Where I am the one claiming to have something green in my visual field, Alston avers that there is no need for a higher-level belief in order for the belief to be justified. I don't have to believe that I'm justified in believing that I am experiencing the color green to be justified in believing that I am having that experience. The more simple justification is all that is necessary. I may simply *be* justified in believing that I see green. It is this more simple level of justification that comprises the entirety of what immediately justified beliefs must have, as well. They are justified on a more basic, lower level. The higher-level belief, the "iterative" belief, would be a viable candidate for an immediately justified belief should that higher-level belief be so justified, but it is not necessary that an immediately justified belief be justified on this iterative level.[22] There is nothing in the regress argument given above that would confine foundational beliefs to those of the higher level. Aune's criticism, therefore, misses the mark for Alston's presentation of foundationalism.

The attempt by some[23] to refute foundationalism based on the higher-level requirement for immediately justified beliefs is foiled by this insight. To stipulate that in order to be justified, an immediately justified belief must gain support from a justified belief held at a higher, iterative level is to deny that those beliefs are immediately justified. They couldn't be immediately justified because they would depend on the presence of that higher-level belief in order to be justified. This would mean those beliefs could not act as foundations. Alston's distinction between simple and iterative foundationalism heads off the attack. Their difference lies in what is attributed to the foundational beliefs.

> Simple Foundationalism: For any epistemic subject, S, there are *p*'s such that S is immediately justified in believing that *p*.

> Iterative Foundationalism: For any epistemic subject, S, there are *p*'s such that S is immediately justified in believing that *p* and S is immediately justified in believing that he is immediately justified in believing that *p*.[24]

For the latter of these two, the criticism from Aune would apply in full force. The former escapes.

The simple or minimal foundationalism that Alston touts avoids the dangers of higher-level requirements by claiming that a belief may be immediately justified without a subject recognizing it, i.e. without having to believe that the belief is immediately justified. The affront to foundationalism from Aune declaring that foundational or immediately justified beliefs are impossible because of their dependence on other beliefs for justification has been turned back. The distinction between iterative and simple foundationalism demonstrates that while the first may be subject to the problems raised, simple foundationalism avoids those difficulties. The understanding that a belief that there is something green in one's visual field may be immediately justified has withstood these objections. This status of immediate justification need not depend on the subject continuing to give reasons or display support for the belief. It is important for us to remember that the justification of a belief does not necessarily depend on our defense of it. Some beliefs, like simple perceptual ones, may be justified purely at the point of their inception. This is Alston's position in "Two Types of Foundationalism", and that position manages to save foundationalism – in the guise of simple or minimal foundationalism – from the challenge of Aune.

<center>III</center>

We move now to the work against foundationalism by Frederick Will in *Induction and Justification*. Though some of Will's criticisms are similar to those of Aune, there are two in particular which Alston addresses that present somewhat different potential problems for foundationalism. Will targets what he holds to be foundationalism's misguided proposal of immediately justified beliefs, or "first cognitions" as he calls them, which are totally independent and incorrigible. It will be discovered how the problems Will deems that this causes for foundationalism bear a resemblance to Aune's attacks, but

the supposed features of foundational beliefs that Will discusses move a little beyond the scope of Aune. Hence, they require individual attention. We shall examine both of these criticisms and Alston's responses to them in turn.

Beginning with Will's criticism of foundationalism's immediately justified beliefs as being too independent, we find him making statements that recall to mind Aune's difficulty with immediately justified beliefs as beyond inference. Will also speaks of the need for any belief of any kind to be the result of a much richer background of assumptions and practices than foundationalism seems to suggest. He accuses goundationalism of forgetting that when such a belief is held, "one is participating in a practice that extends, and depends for its success upon conditions which extend, far beyond the subject as an individual human being."[25] His contention is that any belief, even a basic perceptual belief, "involves the employment and sound working of a vast array of equipment and resources extending far beyond any individual and what can be conceived to be private to him…."[26] The beliefs which foundationalists advertise as immediately justified are presented here as highly dependent beliefs. Will is claiming that all beliefs have a basic dependence on other inferences or beliefs prior to their being justified. Therefore, foundationalism is false.

Essentially, this sounds like a recapitulation of Aune's theme. We are once again met with the charge that foundationalism has no immediately justified beliefs because the candidates for that kind of belief are all dependent in some manner on other sources for their support. But Will is a little more forthcoming than Aune. He develops a kind of Modus Tolens argument that may be expressed in this way.

1. If foundationalism is true, then there are a sufficient number of immediately justified beliefs which can be established as logically independent from any inference.
2. If these beliefs are established as logically independent in this sense, they are also incorrigible.
3. If there beliefs are incorrigible in this way, they are also infallible.
4. There are not a sufficient number of infallible beliefs.

5. Therefore, there are not a sufficient number of incorrigible beliefs.
6. Therefore, there are not a sufficient number of logically independent beliefs.
∴7. Foundationalism is not true.[27]

There are many items for Alston to take issue with in this argument. The first two have to do with the idea of the independence of immediately justified beliefs. The last we shall consider is the response to foundational beliefs as incorrigible.

To begin, Alston makes use of one of the distinctions we have already mentioned, that between *shown to be* justified and *being* justified. Will states that immediately justified beliefs "can be established" as independent.[28] That would assume that one can show this to be the case. In other words, we must be able to "establish" that the justification of an immediately justified belief is independent of any inferences. We would have to be able to show the justification of the belief in order to do this. This is to ask more than is required by the regress argument which would only demand that the belief actually be justified whether it is shown to be or not. Will's argument may not suffer for that slip, however. The premises could be changed accordingly and still retain their effectiveness.

1. If foundationalism is true, then there are a sufficient number of beliefs which are logically independent from any inference….

Alston points out an initial confusion, but the force of the argument remains with a change in the wording.

To demonstrate a more fatal flaw in the argument, Alston must concentrate on whether logical independence is truly a mandatory feature of immediately justified beliefs or not. In answer to this, Alston shows that such a requirement is still problematic. The claim from Will is that immediately justified beliefs must be completely independent. Otherwise, he argues, they could not perform the task of a foundation. But even though we have revised the premises of his argument to exclude the reference to "establishing" a belief's independence, Alston might argue that the notion of showing justification still lingers. How could Will's point stand, the point that

the apparently foundational beliefs are actually dependent, without showing whether they are dependent or independent? If we are accusing a "foundational" belief of being in need of support from other beliefs, we would have to demonstrate how that support is necessary. In order to expose this supposed fault of foundationalism, Will must also expose the justification of the foundational beliefs. Their justification must be shown. The distinction between being/shown to be justified would still be at work.

In response to this last point, Will might point out that it doesn't matter if we are demanding to be shown the justification of foundational beliefs so long as it is not required of the subject herself. The demonstration of justification could be shown by another person other than the believer. We may grant him that point, but Alston continues on to point out an additional absurdity that makes this last issue irrelevant.

> I don't see what sense can be attached to showing or establishing p without adducing some grounds q, not identical with p. If when asked to show that p I simply reiterate my assertion that p, I have clearly not *shown* that p; this follows just from the concept of showing. Even if my belief is self-justifying, so that nothing outside the belief is required to justify me in holding it, what follows from that, if anything follows concerning showing, is that there is no need for me to show that p is true; it certainly does not follow that I *can* show that p just by asserting that p. So the requirement that it be possible to establish that p without dependence on other cognitions is a self-contradictory one.[29]

What Alston is getting at is that it makes no sense to talk of establishing or showing the justification of a belief which is immediately justified. In the case of these foundational beliefs, though they are justified without support from any other beliefs, to cite the very belief in question as the source of its justification gets us nowhere. There is the possible rejoinder that this is exactly Will's point, that you can't show immediately justified beliefs to be justified. He could respond that Alston is proving the case against himself by suggesting that immediately justified beliefs cannot be shown as justified. But this is to once again forget the distinction between *being* justified and being *shown to be* justified. Alston continues in the passage quoted above to say that the "claim to *be justified* otherwise than by relation to other cognitions, does *not* entail that the claim is

'logically independent' of all other possible cognitions".[30] Those "other possible cognitions" may be related to the foundational belief, but they are not needed for the belief to *be* justified. The basic point, of course, is simply that proving that a belief is justified is not a requirement for simply *being* justified.

It's important to stress the fact that Alston brings up again the point raised against Aune's second objection to foundationalism. Alston does not reject the idea that immediately justified beliefs *could* receive support from other sources. He simply states that the secondary support is not necessary. Any additional support leads the foundational belief to be over-determined in its justification.[31] Those extra grounds could well be called on to *strengthen* the justification. They are just not necessary for bringing that justification about. Premise 1 of the argument given above is shown to be false. The criticism against the undue independence of immediately justified beliefs falls by the way. We turn now to the second and third premises of Will's argument.

The question of incorrigibility recalls our attention to the relation of truth to an immediately justified belief. An incorrigible belief is one whose acceptance is rationally incontrovertible. Such a belief could not be discarded or revised by any reasonable thinker. Incorrigibility has often been linked with foundational beliefs because of their important position as the basis for all subsequent belief. The trouble that Will finds with admitting such beliefs is that they entail infallibility, or so he claims.

> Since incorrigibility without truth is a dubious merit for any set of truth claims to have, since incorrigible error is of the worst kind, and since the aspiration to truth of any item in the corpus of human knowledge is taken to depend upon these alleged incorrigible claims, they must, in their splendid isolation, be incorrigibly true.[32]

For a claim or belief to be "incorrigibly true," he argues, is simply for it to be infallible, to be incapable of falsehood. And as we have seen before, even if there are such beliefs, there cannot be enough of them to do the job needed from foundational beliefs.

There are two things that Alston would pinpoint as mistaken in this discussion. The first is that the claim that incorrigible beliefs entail infallible ones is not the case. He indicates that Will even admits as much in the very passage quoted above.[33] He states that 'incorrigible error' is the worst kind of error. In other words, there is such a thing a s incorrigible falsehood. It is indeed a serious fault to hold erroneous beliefs as incapable of rejection. Anyone would agree that this is true. But it does not follow from this that an incorrigible belief must be an infallible one. Accepting a false belief as incorrigible is possible. Hence, premise 3 fails.

Lastly, Alston deals with the notion that immediately justified beliefs must be incorrigible. It would certainly seem to be the case that a foundational belief, to run with the metaphor, needs to be one that is firmly rooted in place so as to bear the weight of the structure balancing above it. However, looking back to the characteristics outlined by the regress argument, there does not seem to be any necessity tied to the retention of foundational beliefs. As long as a belief is in fact justified without the need of support from other beliefs and is able to confer justification to the beliefs that depend on it, that belief will be an immediately justified belief.

> This in no way implies that the set of immediately justified beliefs changes from moment to moment *only* by adding new members. Items can also drop out, whether by refutation or otherwise.[34]

When we discover such a belief to be false, we can discard it along with the mediately justified beliefs built upon it. And this is surely something that occurs. While it is difficult to remove foundational beliefs, the discovery of falsity may lead us to take up the arduous and disturbing process of removing large portions of our structure of belief. This feature of expendability frees foundationalism from a commitment to incorrigibility. Hence, premise 2 is false.

Minimal foundationalism has been defended by Alston from those who would refute the foundationalist position altogether. By focusing on the difference between

showing justification and being justified, Alston has refuted the criticisms charging immediately justified beliefs as being unable to demonstrate their justification. The distinction between epistemic levels of justified belief has contributed much in the way of skirting past the challenges against foundational beliefs as relying on support from other inferences for their justification. While higher-level, iterative beliefs would certainly be nice to have, their availability is not necessary to an immediately justified belief's being justified. In the next section, we shall spend some time noticing how these two important distinctions have affected the foundationalist's position and epistemology at large.

IV

There are obvious benefits that are afforded foundationalism through the work of Alston that we have noted so far. He has made it clear that although there may be some versions of foundationalism, perhaps those that espouse incorrigibility or infallibility requirements, which are subject to severe criticism, there is a type of foundationalism that may survive the barbs of detractors and retain the features essential to a foundationalist theory. Those features are understood to be the ones that would successfully provide an escape from the regress of justification described in the regress argument. Alston's minimal, or simple, foundationalism asks only that the foundational beliefs bringing an end to the regress of justification be immediately justified and able to confer justification to those beliefs which depend on them for evidence. The question we must ask at this point is whether such a simple form of foundationalism can still do the same work that foundationalism is meant to do. Alston is careful to ask this very question of himself at the end of "Two Types of Foundationalism" as he reflects on the prospects for the efficacy of this work. We shall focus our attention on what is said in that passage as well as the reaction of others to what is said there.

As Alston assesses the viability of the minimal foundationalist's position, he raises an important issue. If simple foundationalism allows that a belief may be

justifiedly formed without that justification being available for scrutiny, wouldn't the subject be guilty of arbitrarily taking on foundational beliefs devoid of any commendation?[35] The worry is that reducing the more important part of justification to the lower level would allow for an irresponsible dogmatism. Those immediately justified beliefs are understood to be justified without appropriate, careful consideration, it seems. Alston has even argued that showing them to be justified would be self-contradictory.[36] What this seems to allow is the possibility of naming any belief whatsoever as immediately justified and refusing to defend it on the basis of Alston's arguments for simple foundationalism.

In an attempt to resolve this problem, Alston reaffirms his claim that a person *could* use the support offered by a mediately justified higher-level belief, although that support is not *necessary* for justifying the immediately justified belief. The higher-level belief in this scenario could provide reasons for an immediately justified belief being understood as justified that are adequate enough to allay the accusation of dogmatism.

> Therefore, for any belief that one is immediately justified in believing, one *may* find adequate reasons for accepting the proposition that one is so justified.. The curse (of dogmatism) is taken off immediate justification at the lower level, just by virtue of the fact that propositions at the higher level are acceptable only on the basis of reasons.… [A] believer will be justified in believing *that* he is immediately justified in holding [belief] *b* only if he has *reasons* for regarding that principle [of the structure and aspects of justification] as valid and for regarding *b* as falling under that principle. And if he does have such reasons, he certainly cannot be accused of arbitrariness or dogmatism.[37]

The question of dogmatism on the lower level is said to be taken care of by mediately justified beliefs on the higher level.

One may be easily confused by the loop-de-loops being performed in this explanation of bi-level justification and the exoneration of dogmatism on one level by justification on the other. How does the fact of the higher-level belief's justification affect whether the lower-level belief is accepted arbitrarily or not? If the lower-level belief's innocence on the charge of dogmatism is intimately tied with activity on the

higher level, does this indicate a greater dependence on the higher-level belief than was earlier described by Alston? Wouldn't that make the lower-level belief something less than immediately justified? These and other questions make us wonder just how successful a project Alston has here. To examine these questions more closely we shall give attention to how they are treated by David Shatz in his article, "Foundationalism, Coherentism, and the Levels Gambit."[38]

Shatz uses this passage of Alston's to try to demonstrate how foundationalism is subject to the circularity it sought so diligently to avoid. The is another example of a critic arguing against the success of immediately justified beliefs to be able to perform as billed. The focus is shifted a bit, though, to zoom in on minimal foundationalism's potency as a theory of justification. Through the course of his article, Shatz proposes some evidence for an immediately justified belief's justification coming from inferential sources. In the above passage, Shatz believes he has found evidence that Alston is using higher-level beliefs as the source of justification for the more basic, lower-level ones. If that is the case, then lower-level immediately justified beliefs would be receiving justification from some other belief. Thus, immediately justified beliefs would not only be non-immediate, they would also be caught in a system of circular justification. Let's see how Shatz proceeds.

When Alston goes through his maneuvers to evade dogmatism on the lower level, he falls back on non-dogmatic higher-level beliefs to do so. As he says, "[T]he absence of reasons for *b* (lower-level belief) is 'compensated for' by reasons for the correlated higher-level belief."[39] Where *b* is the lower-level belief, the belief that on is justified in believing *b* would be the "correlated higher-level belief." Shatz understands this to show that the lower-level beliefs are depending on the higher-level ones for their justification in this situation. In fact, it becomes clear that the means of escape from dogmatism in this instance seems unavailable to Alston unless their relation in terms of justification is as Shatz describes.[40] Alston appears to be mapping out the means of justifying a lower-

level belief on the basis of reasons provided by higher-level beliefs. Shatz points to Alston's claim that there would seem to be no better reason for accepting the lower-level belief than those afforded by the mediately justified higher-level belief.[41]

There are two clear problems here for Alston if Shatz is right about this. The first is that immediately justified beliefs are in fact not immediately justified. If those beliefs are being justifiedly formed based on the support given them by beliefs of any sort whatsoever, then they are clearly not immediate in terms of their justification. The criticisms of Aune and Will turn out to be true by Alston's own admission. Secondly, and as a result, the justification delivered to the lower-level beliefs in this instance will be subject either to vicious circularity or an infinite regress. The higher-level belief corresponding to the initial lower-level belief is conferring justification on that lower-level belief. But where does the higher-level belief's justification come from? We can easily assume that a necessary part, if not all of it, would come from some other lower-level belief.

Imagine, for instance, a person is accused of being dogmatic in believing that minds exist. In response, suppose she provides a defense for her belief that minds exist. Her defense produces the belief that she is justified in believing that minds exist, the corresponding higher-level belief of the original lower-level belief. This is taken by Shatz to be her justification for the lower-level belief. Her justification for this higher-level belief will likely come from those beliefs that made up her defense for the belief that minds exist. One might be her belief that thought demands the existence of mental substance. But since this belief nor any other belief can be truly said to be immediately justified according to Shatz, this belief must also either be justified by another lower-level belief or its corresponding higher-level belief. As this line continues on, either we must return to the original lower-level belief we started with as a support-belief, or the chain of justifying beliefs continues to infinity. Either way, the result of taking away the

possibility of immediately justified beliefs, subjects us to problems Alston found

important to avoid in the regress argument.

Shatz presses this point as he continues his case against foundationalism. In this

passage we find Shatz' own presentation of the problem we were noticing above.

> Suppose $B1$ [a higher-level belief] is used to justify (J) [the belief that if the
> lower-level belief has the appropriate justificatory feature, it is immediately
> justified] and then B (the lower-level belief). If S holds $B1$ without reasons, he
> will be dogmatic, and so he will want to construct a mediate justification for $B1$.
> But we saw earlier that this mediate justification will have to appeal to $B2...Bn$
> (other higher-level beliefs). If S holds these without reasons, he will be dogmatic,
> and so he will want a mediate justification for them. But we saw that if the
> justification for these beliefs trickles down to $B1$ and then to B, the resultant
> chain will be circular. Now if our original concern was that S held B
> dogmatically that charge will not be removed by appealing to some other belief
> that is held dogmatically. What will be needed is [sic] reasons for the latter
> belief, reasons for those reasons, etc., all of which will trickle down to the original
> belief B.[42]

Here we have a higher-level belief that is being assumed as acting as a part of the

justification for its corresponding lower-level, supposedly immediately justified, belief.

The supposition is that other higher-level beliefs supplying justification to the higher-

level belief in question will have to receive their own justification from the initial higher-

level belief at some point in this long chain. If that is the case, then eventually the

original, corresponding lower-level belief will have to stand in the gap to complete its

own chain of justification. And this, while not urgently circular, is still problematically

circular. As a matter of fact, it resembles the position of the coherentist where a

particular belief's justification, to put it in overly-generalized terms, is dependent on the

justificatory status of one's entire network of beliefs. And coherence is exactly what the

foundationalist has traditionally rejected as a part of justificatory theory.[43]

Does Alston's position stand in as tough a spot as Shatz thinks? We should go

back and be careful of exactly what Shatz is attributing to the relation between lower-

level and higher-level beliefs before we pull the curtain down on simple foundationalism

forever. Recall that there is a difference between creating justification and strengthening

justification. We saw Alston explain that even though immediately justified beliefs could call on other support to further establish their status as foundational beliefs, that extra support leads to an over-determination of justification. The extra help is not necessary. Perhaps the same idea comes into play in the situation brought out by Shatz.

It is true that beliefs claimed as foundational may turn to other beliefs, even their own corresponding higher-level beliefs, for aid in solidifying their place in one's structure of belief and in avoiding dogmatism. But it seems that Alston could easily argue that though such aid is helpful in escaping the charge of dogmatism, it is not necessary for acquiring a justified status for the belief. Making sure that a belief is not held dogmatically does not affect whether the belief is in fact justified, Alston would claim. In short, it is not clear that being justified is the same as and involves the same ingredients as being free of dogmatism. Why couldn't a justified belief be held dogmatically? From Alston's words, it would appear that he believes such a possibility could occur. He talks of having "reasons for accepting an immediately justified belief."[44] That would imply that the belief's status as immediately justified is prior, both chronologically and logically, to having possession of reasons for accepting it. The whole discussion arises from the worry that there might be dogmatically-held immediately justified beliefs. And while that would be unattractive and intellectually blame-worthy, it would not preclude the beliefs from being justified in actuality.

Shatz is wise to this possible move, however. His response is that whether the justification is created or strengthened, the criticism of circularity still applies. Either foundationalism is making use of an insupportable circular structure of justification, and hence, fails, or it is admitting the efficacy of coherence for conferring justification.[45] The admission that a circular form of justification might be called upon for such an important task as bolstering a belief's defense against dogmatism is surely a compromising step for foundationalism. Further, there are good reasons to believe that coherence *is* able to create justification.

> Suppose we hold all the same beliefs we hold to now (so that our beliefs are surely coherent) but have all along been systematically deceived by an evil genius. In this case, I think, our beliefs would be justified, though false and unreliable...; and this implies that coherence suffices for justifiedness while reliable formation is not even necessary.[46]

Shatz is rejecting the idea that coherence cannot create justification and is holding foundationalists like Alston accountable for admitting the need for coherence in conferring justification.

What Shatz misses here is that the implication he cites is not a logical entailment. There is nothing about the situation given above that would necessitate that coherence is a vital part of the justification involved in beliefs formed via a Cartesian demon. If a person would be justified in the beliefs held in such a state, it could just as well be a result of those beliefs coming from a foundationalist structure. A belief might be understood as immediately justified in this situation for its being automatically and universally accepted as justified without room for serious doubt. The fact that the beliefs form a coherent unit may be a welcome addition to that picture, but simply because the beliefs are justified and are part of a coherent whole, it does not mean that coherence created that justificatory status. The concurrence of two features does not automatically make one a necessary or sufficient requisite for the other. And even if one's beliefs did form a coherent unit, that feature would not necessarily mean that the coherence provides justification for those beliefs that are not immediately justified. The fact that they cohere may simply be the happy and even expected by-product of a well-established foundationalism. Once again, the point must be made: Extra help is nice to have, but foundational beliefs do not need the aid of coherence in order to actually be justified.

What this means is that a foundationalist structure in a world subject to Shatz' deceptive genius would be based on false beliefs. But as we saw earlier (p. 18), Alston is perfectly amenable to the chance that foundationalism might result in such a circumstance. It is not the most favorable of circumstances, but as foundationalism's

main concern is with justification and not truth, it is a possibility. What Alston can agree on with Shatz is that this example would not afford an example of knowledge since the truth of belief is necessary for such a status.

This leaves us with one final question in regard to minimal foundationalism's ability to avoid dogmatism. This one I believe Shatz does well to ask of Alston. How can a belief that allows no other belief to offer it assistance in justification be held any other way than dogmatically? Isn't a belief held without reasons, by definition, a dogmatically-held belief? The whole purpose of introducing the distinction between higher and lower-level beliefs is to show that justification can be attained on the lower level. The higher-level beliefs are not necessary for justification on the lower level. Alston even states that in many cases, a subject may be justified in a lower-level belief without having the capacity for acquiring higher-level beliefs.[47] Not only might one not have access to the reasons for holding a lower-level belief, the subject might not even have the *ability* to formulate those reasons. This can be most clearly seen for beings of lower sentience with whom we might still associate the ability to know things, e.g. dogs, lower primates, children, etc.[48] Even among normally functioning adults, though, this may be the case. As a matter of fact, these beliefs may occur more often than we might realize at first.

> We frequently take ourselves to know things with respect to which we have no such capacity. I often suppose myself to know that my wife is upset about something, where I would be hard pressed to specify what makes it reasonable for me to believe this. The same goes for much of our knowledge about history, geography, and physical regularities.[49]

It's not altogether clear just what beliefs Alston has in mind which might fit into this category, but that may not be necessary to make our point as long as it is obvious that there are beliefs like this.

While Alston is dealing with the question of justification in the above passage, his words there may be easily translated to our present discussion. We often attribute

knowledge to individuals who would not be able to advance any justification for the beliefs constituting that knowledge. Alston claims that this is unnecessary for justification, but what about the problem of dogmatism? Holding a belief without any recognition of support is to hold it dogmatically, is it not? If the lower-level beliefs are released from the charge of dogmatism by virtue of the success of the higher-level beliefs as reasons, what can be said about the individual who cannot form the higher-level beliefs, much less any reasons for them? As Shatz puts it on page 106 of his article, "*Ex hypothesi* these reasons [for the higher-level beliefs] are not in the hands of the person holding the lower-level belief; how, then, does their mere *availability* remove the charge of dogmatism?" The fact that there are reasons out there that a subject could appeal to if she were able, is that enough to absolve that subject of dogmatism?

There are two reasons one might raise for rejecting this possibility of absolving someone of dogmatism who had no access to reasons for her belief. For one, an objector could state that we would not ordinarily describe such a situation to be an avoidance of dogmatism. Simply because there are reasons available for a belief does not preclude an individual from holding that belief dogmatically. I may believe that Ozzie Smith was the best shortstop to play the game. There are certainly plenty of good reasons to accept this belief, but suppose I am completely unaware of them. I might simply believe that Smith is the best because he is the only shortstop I've ever known by name.[50] Certainly this does not constitute a reasoned belief simply because there are reasons to be had. Dogmatism is only avoided when those reasons are put into application.

This leads us to the second reason for denying the suggestion that dogmatism might be escaped by Alston simply by the existence of reasons for a belief whether acknowledged or not: Alston admits as much. Just after explaining that the reasonableness of the higher-level beliefs gets the lower-level beliefs off the hook of dogmatism, he makes use of a supposition for that reasonableness. He states that a subject could not be guilty of dogmatism if she in fact "does have such reasons."[51] This

would assume that the subject actually has access to and could present those reasons should the belief be challenged. But this is just what Alston has said we are many times without; not only without the reasons on the tip of our tongue, but often even without the *ability* to find the reasons.

So here is the source of trouble for Alston and his minimal foundationalism. It is clear that it offers foundationalists more breathing room in respect to the ever-present houndings of the critics. However, the question of dogmatism raises a possible incongruity within Alston's thought. In one place he speaks this way.

> …[T]hink of knowledge as the exclusive possession of critically reflective subjects, where being "critically reflective" essentially involves the tendency to ask, and the *capacity* to answer, questions as to what it is that justifies one's beliefs or makes them reasonable… But it seems clear that none of us satisfy that antecedent condition with respect to all our beliefs, and that many human subjects, and all lower animals, satisfy it with respect to few or none of their beliefs.[52]

His implication, of course, is that excluding all these people from being capable of knowledge and even a great deal of our own beliefs from being knowable by us is untenable. Yet in another place, he assumes that a believer will have this capability.

> Here, according to the critic, the foundationalist must hold that the most I can (properly) do is simply *assert f*, several times if necessary and with increasing volume. And again this is dogmatism. But again simple foundationalism is committed to no such thing. It leaves something for the arguer to do even here, viz., try to establish a higher-level proposition that he is immediately justified in believing that *f*.[53]

What are we to make of this difference? In the first case, Alston is claiming that there are beliefs that are accepted as "reasonable" where the subject is *unable* to look for the justification behind them. The second instance, however, shows us that dogmatism is avoided by simple foundationalism because of the *ability* of individuals to continue to search out the reasons for their beliefs. On the one hand, he denies that many are able to discover reasons for their beliefs. On the other, he affirms it.

Dogmatism, and minimal foundationalism's susceptibility to it, appears to raise serious problems for Alston. It would seem that if Alston is correct about our holding many beliefs as knowledge which are beyond our capacity for justifying, then those beliefs would be dogmatically held. That is, there are some dogmatically-held immediately justified beliefs. And this is not one of those situations that Alston could ascribe as an unfortunate mistake on the part of the believer. It would be something that is uncontrollable by the believer. If we simply form some immediately justified beliefs without reference to any supporting reasons, and if we are not capable of discovering reasons for those beliefs (in the form of corresponding higher-level beliefs as Alston suggests), then we have immediately justified beliefs that cannot be anything other than dogmatic so long as we continue to hold those beliefs. Dogmatism would appear to be an important aspect of minimal foundationalism deserving our attention. This problem with dogmatism reappears in our subsequent chapters.

V

So far, I have only centered my attention on minimal foundationalism in order to notice some objections and cite Alston's responses. Part of my reason for doing that is simply to focus on what minimal foundationalism is meant to accomplish, rather than whether it is able to do so, to map out Alston's movements. The other part is to direct our attention to what I find to be a troubling result of minimal foundationalism, its vulnerability to the charge of dogmatism. There are obvious reasons why dogmatism would be a problem for any beliefs a person might have, but when we turn the discussion to the field of religious epistemology, the stakes may be raised somewhat in the sense that religious believers usually take their beliefs to form a crucial part of their lives.

In the final section of this chapter, I turn our attention to the realm of religious epistemology as a means of showing just how Alston's minimal foundationalism plays out on a more real-life front and whether it may present any particular problems on that

level. Even though the contributions might not be apparent on the surface, I believe the connections between standard epistemology in this case and religious epistemology can be fairly easily traced. The problem of dogmatism, however, invades the belief systems of foundationalist theists just as it does any minimal foundationalist. The difference is that for the theist, the charge of dogmatism may strike at the very heart of what the believer builds her world around.

It might be guessed that foundationalism is a popular view among religious epistemologists.[54] The reliance on immediately justified beliefs as a support for subsequent beliefs would seem to mirror many people's understanding of how a body of religious knowledge is structured. There are two possibilities for how this could be played out. For one, the belief that God exists and has certain features appears as a foundational belief.[55] Any inferred beliefs which follow, e.g. that God created me, that God cares for the world, that God is pleased with those who follow His will, etc., would depend on these initial, immediately justified beliefs for their own justification. The second form would accept simple perceptual beliefs of some sort as immediately justified. These beliefs would lead, by some inferential means, to the belief that God must exist.[56] Either way, Alston's work with minimal foundationalism could be seen as beneficial to the cause.

Part of the mystery that has always surrounded religious believers is their adherence to a belief for which they seem to have little evidence. They claim to know that God exists as well as a host of other things pertaining to God and His relationship with the world. The problem has been matching up this supposed knowledge with a philosophical understanding of what knowledge is. If knowledge is defined as any belief that is, at least, both true and justified,[57] how can a case be made that religious belief meets these criteria? Supplying the evidence that would justify a person in such a belief has had a troublesome and controversial history. There seems to be nothing that is unqualifiedly accepted as establishing the justification of religious beliefs.

This is where Alston's minimal foundationalism steps in. The difficulty of not being able to give one's justification for a religious belief disappears with the introduction of the distinction between showing justification and being justified. One might hold a religious belief that is in fact justified without being able to deliver an account of the justification for that belief. The level distinction allows that a person may be justified in holding a religious belief without having to believe that she is justified in holding the belief. This would mean that, for example, even though no sufficient reasons can be provided by a believer by way justifying her belief in God, that person may still be justified in so believing. Or variously, one may be justified in believing that she has been met with some experience of God without being able to detail how that justification has come.

The assistance given to the foundationalist theist is clear. A claim for the rationality of religious belief seems to make itself more readily defensible thanks to Alston's work with minimal foundationalism. However, the problem of dogmatism darkens the hopes of gaining any great advantage in the pursuit of defending religious belief as rationally held. If minimal foundationalism is unable to fully escape the charge of dogmatism on the lower level, the beliefs that are held dogmatically as immediately justified and any beliefs supported by them are put in a dangerous position. We have already seen how this problem arises for minimal foundationalism. There are some beliefs which we simply have without any recourse to supportive reasoning. If those beliefs are justified, they would seem to be justified beliefs that are dogmatically held. In other words, they are beliefs held without any supportive reasoning but happen to be justified without our recognition. The question for us is whether foundational religious beliefs are the kinds of beliefs that Alston spoke of when he was describing beliefs that are accepted without the possibility of discovering their justifying reasons.

Recall Alston's claim that a large body of our beliefs may be held without access to any reasons for holding them.[58] But would a person's religious beliefs fit into this

category? It is certainly arguable that they would be. Take our two possibilities for the foundations of religious belief. If we accept the belief that God exists to be an immediately justified belief, what reasons can be called upon to support it? The same may be asked of the experiential beliefs taken as immediately justified which one might use to infer the existence of God. First of all, the fact that they are taken to be immediately justified might answer the question for us. Seeking support for what is supposed to be able to stand on its own would tend to hint at a need for support. However, it might be the case that, as we have noticed before, *extra* help could be found for what is sufficiently supported without that extra help. This is what we are looking for. In both cases, it seems that the support via higher-level beliefs is past one's ability. The dialogue concerning the possibility of one's holding a justified belief that one is justified in believing that God exists has been long and heated. There does not seem to be enough agreement to suppose that such a belief could be justifiedly held.[59] As for the experiential beliefs, we all tend to take our perceptions as evident without reflection. The more we do reflect on those perceptions, the less we find of which we can be sure. I believe I see two people walking toward me, but the more I question my justification for taking that sense perception as accurate, the more I am apt to doubt it. These examples of foundational beliefs would appear to be just what Alston was thinking of when he spoke of acceptable lower-level beliefs beyond the scope of further support.

This being the case, it appears those religious beliefs are opened up to the charge of dogmatism. For both, their initial acceptance seems to be rather non-reflective, and to suggest that their justification should be defended by the believer would likely elicit a rather confused response. As these beliefs are taken as immediately justified, the call for justification would seem unnecessary to the believer, but further, it is beyond her ability to provide. And this is just what Alston identifies as dogmatism.[60] The foundationalist theist, thanks to Alston, escapes the difficulties presented by those who would disparage foundational theory for its ability to produce justification, but this escape only leads to

more trouble. Being justified in one's religious belief without being able to show it does satisfy the criterion of justification, but only at the expense of religious dogmatism. And by Alston's own admission, an "aversion to dogmatism" should be the attitude taken up by careful thinkers.[61]

What is left to say of this apparent mistake of Alston's? Should we simply take it that Alston is committing the foundationalist theist to mere dogmatism as the basis of all her tenets of faith? I think it may be more complex than this. Certainly, we can see there is much to be concerned about in what we can see of Alston's work so far. I want to suggest, however, that this is only the beginning of a much larger picture for religious belief. What Alston has recognized here is a central feature of many of our fundamental beliefs, not only religious ones. They *do* tend to be held unreflectively. We *do* appear confused when they are challenged. It is as if these beliefs simply are a part of how things are, the way our lives are lived. As we continue through our study of Alston's work, I believe we shall discover this idea taking a more and more solid shape. The details will come into higher relief with each step we take along the way. We find in this instance that lower-level beliefs are being defended for their possibility of attaining justification without any reflective work being done by the believer. Though this leads us to the problem of dogmatism, we find that Alston believes it to be an acceptable type of belief formation. Our next inquiry will move this issue a bit further along this same vein. We find that the distinction between higher and lower-level requirements open into the debate between the conception of justification as an internalist or externalist project.

CHAPTER TWO

Alston's work against the unnecessary higher-level requirement for justified

belief is actually only the surface of a deeper, more contentious problem in epistemology.

By exposing the problems latent in those theories that would place higher-level

constraints on epistemic justification, Alston is actually doing battle against an important

component to on side of the internalism/externalism debate in epistemology. An

internalistic understanding of justification has been taken, at least tacitly, to be a central

part of the criteria of knowledge for hundreds of years. Its most basic formulation could

be expressed as the conception that justification is a matter of a belief's relation to the

internal states (psychological dispositions, beliefs, knowledge, etc.) of an individual

subject. Whether I am justified in believing that there is a chair supporting me at the

moment is a matter of what internal support I have available in some specific manner

within my cognitive framework at this certain time. Internalist justification, generally

construed, is about the support readily recognizable by the subject as support.

The externalist position is fundamentally opposed to this. Where the internalist

speaks of internal states or dispositions being available to do the work of justification,

externalism holds that justification is a matter of how a belief stands in relation to the

actual state of things.[1] Here, my justification in the belief that the chair is beneath me can

depend solely on that belief's arising from my external cognitive contact, in this case the

actual instance of perceptual contact with the chair, in the right fashion.[2] The heat of the

debate, then, falls on the issue of *how* one is said to be justified.

In this chapter we shall chronicle Alston's defense of the externalist position

against versions of extant internalism without losing the important concerns which

internalism raises. We shall locate two major criticisms used by Alston to reject all of the

attempts at purely internalist justification on the playing field. For both of these, there

are serious responses by staunch internalist thinkers which challenge the notion that externalism wins the day. Alston's answer to these will show that he may be willing to give some ground to the internalist. The question will be whether his compromise indicates a move toward compatibilism between externalism and internalism or the exposure of a mistake in how the debate has been viewed by the combatants.

As in the first chapter, we shall use the area of religious belief as a background for viewing how our findings fit with practice. The upshot for religious epistemology will be quite similar as with the rest of the epistemic theorizing world. If Alston can successfully dismantle internalist understandings of justification, any theory which seeks to justify religious beliefs on the basis of such a view will inherit the difficulties along with all the rest. Likewise, the possibility of some compatibilist view would have an effect on how religious epistemology, as well as epistemology in general, is approached. We shall focus on one example in particular, that of Nicholas Wolterstorff.

The hope of this chapter, in conjunction with the first, is to show how the idea of epistemic justification has changed under the guidance of Alston's watchful eye. Alston, along with other externalist thinkers,[3] has moved an age-old tradition out of its bed of broadly-accepted ease into the world of controversy and debate. The push is to bring epistemic justification closer to the realm of everyday, real-world knowledge rather than the sterile, overly-strict concepts of certainty and infallibility which had crippled epistemology for so long. At the close of this chapter I shall try to give some frame of reference by which we can assess this progression. And more interestingly, I shall look forward to the assumptions which must be affirmed or denied in order for the strategy to succeed.

I

In tracing Alston's position in respect to internalism and externalism, the most natural place to turn is his article "Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology."[4] As

mentioned above, however, the roots for much of what occurs in those pages may be found in various earlier forays into the area. I shall follow the course of discussion found in "Internalism and Externalism" with reference to these other works where they provide more helpful explanation and insight. For the sake of space I shall avoid discussing some of the internalist positions introduced by Alston which he dismisses with no real controversy.

Alston presents a fundamental distinction in the internalist camp between views that appeal to the support *within* a subject's internal perspective for justification and those that point to the support that is *accessible* to the subject's internal perspective. The first set of positions is referred to as "Perspectival Internalism" (PI),[5] and the second as "Access Internalism" (AI).[6] The basic difference is that the latter version of internalism broadens the scope of what may be available to justify a belief while the former limits possible justifiers to only those found within the believer's cognitive framework at the time. For both of these, there are sub-positions which may be advanced. We begin with possible formulations of PI.

Version of PI may be the most prevalent in the family of internalist positions. Its attractiveness derives from certain widely-held intuitions concerning epistemic justification. First there is the general internalist criterion that a subject must have some level of recognition of the support conferring justification to a belief. If a person holds herself as justified in accepting a belief but cannot give us any indication of why that is so, we tend to disregard her claim at justification for the belief. For PI, this recognition of what does the justifying of a belief is delimited to the arena of one's cognitive states or beliefs that are immediately present to the subject's reflection.[7] This means that when asked to defend her claim that a belief is justified, the subject has the supportive evidence ready at hand. Notice, further that there is a normative idea tied to justification for PI. Having justification is an evaluative notion. If a person acquires or retains a belief even though she has no justification readily available to her, PI would cite this as a failure to

meet an intellectual obligation. Specifically, Alston finds that versions of PI tend toward a deontological understanding of responsibility in terms of justification such that: justification holds so long as I am not irresponsible, as far as I am reasonably able to tell, in holding a belief to be justified.[8] The part of this formulation of justification requiring that it be "as far as I am reasonably able to tell" speaks to the believer's perspective. My "reasonable ability," though admittedly vague, is added because it would be impossible to search one's entire internal perspective for every single belief that one may have. This clearly brings the requirement of an extra level of belief whereby we may be justified in the original belief. The understanding behind this is that our reasons for a belief must be in use in a proper and responsible way.

The volume of beliefs involved in such a search would be staggering. I could spend a lifetime making sure that my belief that sugar is sweet is not irresponsibly held. Have I reviewed the scientific evidence closely enough? Have I had sufficient experience with sugar to be able to come to that belief? Clearly, justification can't be this difficult. If there is nothing within my reasonably available perspective which would overturn my reasons for believing that p or show me to be irresponsible in believing that my belief that p is justified, then I am at least prima facie justified in believing that p.

Even this less stringent way of coming at justification runs into rough spots, though. The claim of irresponsibility for a belief held against the evidence or without sufficient evidence seems to turn on a fairly commonsense understanding of justification. Since it is easily accepted that justification is a normative concept, one might assume that it entails some level of intellectual obligation. Here is where the deontology comes to the fore. But Alston is careful to point out that there is a fundamental difference in the ordinary understanding of justification (especially in terms of moral justification) and epistemic justification.[9] The major difference cited between the two is the principle of "ought implies can". If I am to be held responsible for something I should have done on normative principles, this principle claims that it must be the case that I could have done

it. When it is not possible for me to do something, I cannot be required to do so by normative principles. This idea has been accepted by many to fit with the realm of moral action where my decisions to do one thing or another are subject to scrutiny. This is because we usually judge our actions to be under our voluntary control. Where I have voluntary control over something, I can be held responsible for exercising, or not exercising, that control. When we move this into the epistemological realm, however, there is room to wonder whether the concept of responsibility over voluntarily controlled actions is applicable.

The PI conception that we have described seems to assume that believers have some direct voluntary control over what they believe and what they don't, much like our actions in the moral realm that we are believed to have direct control over. The famous example of W. K. Clifford's ship owner is often given as intuitive support for this. [10] The ship owner believes his ship will reach its destination safely even though he has decisive evidence that it is not sea-worthy enough to make the voyage. Here, even if the ship does reach the harbor without incident, Clifford finds it obvious that we would hold the ship owner responsible for acquiring such an ill-supported belief. What this assumes, on the basis of "ought implies can", is that we must be able to believe or withhold belief at will. In this case, the ship-owner is wrong for accepting such an irresponsible belief because he could have done otherwise. But there is phenomenological evidence presented by Alston which would suggest that this may not be possible.

> Can you, at this moment, start to believe that the United States is still a colony of Great Britain, just by deciding to do so? If you find it too incredible that you should be sufficiently motivated to try to believe in this, suppose that someone offers you $500,000,000 to believe it, and you are much more interested in the money than in believing the truth. Could you do what it takes to get that reward?… Can you switch propositional attitudes toward that proposition just by deciding to do so? It seems clear to me that I have no such power. Volitions, decisions, or choosings don't hook up with anything in the way of propositional attitude inauguration, just as they don't hook up with the secretion of gastric juices or cell metabolism. [11]

Try as hard as you might, it seems that belief is just not something you can force yourself to take on. Alston also tries to imagine how one could will a perceptual belief into being.[12] If I am met with certain perceptual information, I have very little to decide about what I shall believe. Having an experience of a car elicits the belief that I am experiencing a car no matter what I may try to do to withhold it. Experiential beliefs come to us automatically, unbidden by our will.

It might be argued that these examples are of cases in which there is no real crisis as to what one should believe. This is not always the case. There are many situations in which we find ourselves not knowing what we should believe. Isn't there voluntary control exercised in settling the matter in these instances? Alston counters this by claiming that although there is a clear volitional act of decision-making in such cases, it is not a decision concerning belief.

> The general [deciding how to approach the enemy with no strategic information] chooses to proceed on the working assumption that the enemy forces are disposed in such-and-such a way. The religious convert to whom it is not clear that the beliefs are correct has chosen to live a certain kind of life, or to selectively subject himself to certain influences.[13]

These acts of will are over what state of affairs will be the basis for any resulting belief-production. It's not a direct production of belief by will, but a direct voluntary choice of the ground for that belief.

This last example leads us into and additional consideration for the deontological conception of epistemic justification. Alston's initial illustrations spoke to the impossibility of direct voluntary control over belief. But there are other ways on might exercise control over what is believed.[14] If I have enough time and dedication, I might commit myself to a successful change in propositional attitude. Many people experience favorable results when they "learn to like" something or somebody. This suggests a conscious effort at changing one's beliefs. The fabled act of brainwashing might be an

example of belief-control. For the sake of putting PI in the best light, Alston turns to an indirect voluntary control understanding of its deontology.

Allowing for the possibility that one might be able to avoid the irresponsible acceptance or retention of beliefs by indirect voluntary control, the PI conception of justification is modified such that: a subject is justified in a belief at a certain time so long as the acquisition of that belief is not precipitated from an irresponsibility toward an intellectual obligation.[15] Being 'precipitated' would involve resulting from some action which led to the belief coming to be or being retained. Hence, the indirectness of the voluntarism. Even though the problems of direct voluntarism might be avoided by this maneuver, PI may not be any better off.

One of the central defining features of internalism given above was that a subject must have some level of awareness of the reasons conferring justification to the target belief (the belief under discussion). Under the direct control version, PI clearly stands firm on this aspect. There, a belief was understood to be justified so long as a believer can find no evidence reasonably within her perspective that the belief is held irresponsibly. Having it 'within her perspective' means that there is some cognitive awareness of the countervailing evidence. But on the new construal of justification above, given to avoid the problems of direct voluntary control, this cognitive awareness seems to be lost when belief acquisition and retention is under only indirect voluntary control. One could be fully in accord with this second formulation of justification of belief under indirect voluntary control and not be aware of where the support came from.

Imagine I have a belief that my hammer is in my toolbox although I can't remember why I believe that. Further, what I don't remember is that I found a hammer earlier that day and asked around until I was sure that it was my hammer and not someone else's, and I placed it in my toolbox myself. My belief will be justified by this modified version of PI, but that justification will not be a part of my perspective.[16] The

perspectival part of PI is lost when we try to help it avoid the problems of an overbearing deontological constraint of direct voluntarism.

The PI theorist might object that a perspectival addendum could be added to the second formulation. However, if that is done, PI would allow too much to count as justified.[17] For instance, if all it takes for a belief to be justified is that, so far as one can reasonably tell, the belief is not the result of some intellectually irresponsible action, there are any number of things I could justifiably believe. An illustration of this is Alston's novice philosophy student who reads Locke, pours herself into it trying to carefully decipher everything that is said, and still comes out with the belief that Locke holds truth to be depend on each individual's opinion.[18] Though the student has done everything reasonably within her power, within her perspective, she ends up with this misguided belief about Locke. And PI would have that belief held as justified.

What is troubling about this, beyond its extreme permissiveness, is that PI loses a connection with what is often called the truth-conducivity of justification. It is generally understood that the central aim of justification is to avoid false beliefs and maximize the acceptance of true ones. If this last version of PI is accepted, however, that goal seems to have been given over in too many cases. The example of the Locke student shows that non-truth-conducive grounds would have to be understood by PI as producing a justified belief. Also, we can easily imagine a situation in which a belief might be denied justification even though it does arise from truth-conducive support. Alston's example is of a believer accepting the word of a colleague, taken to be reliable, in vouching for some other individual.[19] However, if the believer did her homework, she would have found that the colleague is widely understood to be an unreliable source of information in most cases. Here, the subject's perspective would show the belief to be the result of an irresponsible lapse on her part, and hence, unjustified. But unbeknownst to most people, that colleague is in fact highly reliable in situations like the one involving the information about the other person. Therefore, the subject would be believing on highly truth-

conducive support, but PI would describe that belief as unjustified. This constitutes too loose a relation between justification and truth-conducivity for a viable concept of justification as Alston sees it.

One final problem with PI connects us with the work done in our first chapter. We have already spent some time outlining the problems of adopting a higher-level requirement for justification. But a higher-level requirement seems to be crucial to the PI concept of justification. The justifier, the support for a belief, is such that it must be cognitively available within the subject's perspective. It is a standard tenet for internalists that a believer must have some possible cognitive connection to the justifying grounds supporting a belief for it to be justified. For a PI internalist, this connection would include some degree of awareness of a supporting belief within one's perspective. This does not mean that PI would require a believer to be justified in believing that she is justified in believing that *p* before she could be justified in believing that *p* or anything so demanding as that. At the same time, PI does tend to suggest that before a subject can be justified in believing that *p*, she must at least *have* a belief or set of beliefs that she is justified in believing that *p* and be able to tell whether she is irresponsible or not for having that secondary higher-level belief or set of beliefs. Remember our introduction into PI versions of justification: justification holds so long as I am not irresponsible, as far as I am reasonably able to tell, in holding a belief as justified.[20] This is certainly making justification work through an access to the higher level. Therefore, PI is placing a kind of higher-level justification requirement within the believer's perspective.

Since this is ground that has already been covered for the most part, a quick restatement of the difficulties should suffice to remind us of Alston's take on this particular feature of internalism. We have seen him take two basic approaches to the rejection of higher-level requirements. The first involves the practical impossibility of such a constraint on an ordinary understanding of knowledge and justified belief. It seems highly unlikely that some cognitive beings would be able to satisfy such a higher-

level requirement though we would still attribute justified belief and even knowledge to them.[21] A dog appears to know many things about its environment, but certainly might not have the capacity for framing that knowledge to the extent that it could identify the justification for that knowledge as is suggested by the higher-level requirement of PI. And this argument can be extended to include young children and even mentally-deficient adults. Not only that, but *anyone* would be at a disadvantage, considering the number of beliefs one would have to recognize with her perspective, under PI's conception. For each belief I currently have, I would also have to have cognitive access to every belief's justification. Even if I am capable of such a thing, Alston doubts that we are in such a state with a large portion of our beliefs.

The second problem is more formal. Requiring a subject to pass this higher-level criterion for a belief within her perspective leaves open the possibility that PI may be subject to the regress objection.[22] To be justified in believing that *p*, I must also be responsible in believing that I am justified in believing that *p*. But in order for the PI internalist to take me as being responsible in that regard, I shall have to have a further belief to that end, i.e. the belief that I am responsible in believing that I am responsible in believing that I am justified in believing that *p*. That further belief will have to be responsibly acquired, as well. And so on. In the case of PI, for every belief I have, there must be another higher-level belief that contributes to and affirms the corresponding lower-level belief's justification. But this only introduces another belief in need of the appropriate higher-level support on an even higher level as conditioned by PI. The end result, as Alston puts it, is that one can't have a justified belief "without simultaneously being justified in all the members of an infinite hierarchy of beliefs of ever-ascending level."[23] If that is the case, it would appear that justified belief is well nigh impossible.

With all these blows against PI, Alston turns to a more promising version of internalism in AI. On this view, the internalist features of epistemic responsibility in the form of deontology and the necessity of a subject's cognitive awareness of a belief's

support remain, but they are loosened a bit. Recall that for the AI theorist, it is not necessary for a believer to actually have the support for a proposed belief "on hand" within her perspective. All that is needed is that the justifier be accessible should the subject give the appropriate attention to discovering it. This moves the justifier out of one's perspective and into more open cognitive territory. The hope is that by loosening the availability requirement of the justifier, the objections facing PI might be avoided.

In some cases, this seems to work. The first problem we just saw that Aslton had with PI was that it would deny the presence of justified belief in those without the cognitive abilities to frame higher-levels beliefs of those in whom the abilities were not at work. This would many times include even the brightest of us. But AI allows it to be within a subject's ken to discover the reasons or support for whatever belief is currently held. It is not necessary that the subject have those reasons before her in the more immediate sense that PI supposes. However, there are features of AI that are shared with PI and prove troubling according to Alston.[24] There is still the deontological aspect of internalism involved. A believer would be judged intellectually irresponsible for a belief held when there is some access available to a distressing level of counter-evidence. Also, the higher-level requirement plays an important role in how AI may be understood. Even thought the level of cognitive awareness has been lowered to that of accessibility, there may be reason to think AI cannot avoid the criticism brought against PI in this regard.

We shall forego looking at AI from the viewpoint that it does not escape the problems raised against PI. There is no reason to think, from what I can tell, that AI stands in any better a position in terms of the voluntary control problem for its deontological commitment, for example, than does PI. Alston points out, however, that AI may be able to escape the regress problem in terms of higher-level justification. We shall explore this further in a moment. Beyond these considerations, there are other reasons to wonder whether AI offers a conception of justification that can be any more fruitful than its PI cousin. The chief concern revolves around the question of AI's

position relative to internalism. Is AI a true internalist view? If we suppose that some fashion of indirect voluntarism in terms of believing can be hammered out without any problems and AI can avoid requiring an infinite regress of justified beliefs for one particular belief to be justified, have we arrived upon a successful internalist conception of justification?

Alston answers in the negative because such a position loses its internalistic features in the very process of evading the problems we noticed PI to exhibit. On the formulation given for AI above, a person would be justified in believing that *p* so long as the evidence for *p* is at least accessible to the subject. This takes AI away from the internalist criteria for justification by allowing that the subject might have no direct awareness of the justifying evidence's presence. Suppose the justification for my belief that Derek Jeter is an excellent short stop would be easily recognized if I were to give it adequate attention. The AI theorist might allow that such a belief would be justified. But if that is true, then justification doesn't depend on my awareness at all. In that case, I would not be able to supply a higher-level account of the belief's justification if asked. This would be in opposition with a central tenet of internalism. On the other hand, requiring that the accessibility be so direct that it is immediately aware to me on reflection would severely limit what beliefs can be taken as justified, as we've noticed already.

An intermediate stance of "reasonably immediate accessibility" (R I-AI) is offered to attempt a happy medium between the two extremes above.[25] But Alston's trouble with even a mediating position is that the deontological conception involved might still include a level of voluntarism that is too direct. In this AI case, one would be held responsible for the formation of beliefs conflicting with the evidence reasonably within her immediate access. This still assumes too much control over belief formation for Alston. The give and take involved in a deontological internalist view seems to be that if the higher-level requirement is avoided, an unacceptable level of voluntarism remains.

But if internalism tries to steer clear of voluntarism, it still retains problems of restrictions on justification which are too loose or too strong.[26] If internalism is to have any success at all, Alston claims that the deontological conception will have to be given up.[27] The result is an AI position which identifies justification with the justifier being reasonably immediately accessible on an evaluative, rather than deontological, conception of epistemic normativity. With the deontological conception given up, RI-AI at least has the possibility of avoiding the higher-level requirement without binding itself to a problematic voluntarism.

Alston believes that this move retains the normative intuition involved in justification while not limiting it within the over-bearing constraints of traditional internalism. It is commonly understood that the ability to supply adequate evidence for any particular belief puts one in good normative standing in regard to belief formation. A belief that cannot be shown, and has no possibility of being shown, as justified by the subject places her in an intellectually blame-worthy position. Alston cites the presence of such normative practices throughout the history of the inquiry into how we acquire and retain beliefs.[28] If RI-AI is to satisfy this epistemic compunction and present an acceptable version of justification, it will have to do so from outside the deontological camp. As a candidate for such a position, Alston offers what he terms a "reliable indication" view with internalist constraints.[29] What marks this view as externalist is its appeal to the reliability of the ground of a belief in determining what is to be considered as justified. The internalist constraints include a view from the subject's perspective to check for any over-riding or defeating evidence[30] that work against the prima facie justificatory status of a certain belief.[31] Also, there is the internalistic RI-AI concern for the accessibility of the ground used as a justifier.

The assurance against over-riders and defeaters is something externalism might be willing to accept so long as prima facie justification remains a matter solely fixed by the external factors in belief-formation. The RI-AI notion of accessibility might not receive

so quick an approval, and so we should briefly show how Alston believes it to fit with his externalist conception of justification. RI-AI requires for a justified belief that its ground be the kind of thing that is "normally accessible". While this is clearly a matter of degree, Alston explains it such that the justifier "must be the sort of thing whose instances are fairly directly accessible to their subject on reflection."[32] Depending on the subject's situation and environment, the degree of accessibility required will vary. One thing to note is that this requirement does not call on deontology to motivate it. The normativity involved in this situation is located in the kind of ground which leads to the formation of the belief, not the direct action of the believer. If the grounds are adequate (generally truth-conducive), then the belief may be understood to satisfy any normative demands.[33] Hence, the problem of voluntarism associated with deontology is bypassed.

The regress problem of higher-level requirements is also avoided. Here the adequacy of the ground can be seen to come into play once again. The higher-level requirement gets internalism into trouble because justification is constantly pushed to the next level of belief. If a belief can be justified only if its corresponding higher-level belief is justified, then one is stuck with the infinite line of levels depending on their justification from another level, which depends on its justification from another level, which…. But Alston's proposed version of RI -AI allows the reliable indication for a belief's justification to come, not from some higher -level belief, but from the state of things which that belief represents. When a justifier stands in the appropriate relation to the target-belief, I need not believe that it does so for the target-belief to be justified. I might simply have the appropriate contact with the justifier. For this contact Alston calls on the use of other psychological states beside belief, e.g. experience[34], that might fit the bill of "appropriateness."

> If my belief that Jones is having a party is based on my belief that there are a lot of cars around his house, then just as I would ordinarily cite the *fact* that there are a lot of cars around his house as my reason for supposing that he is having a party,

so I would think that my reason is an adequate one because the former *fact* is a reliable indication of the latter one.[35]

Also,

> Consider, for example, the familiar situation in which I recognize something or someone on the basis of subtle perceptual cues I am unable to specify, even on careful reflection. Here it seems correct to say that my belief that the person before me is John Jones is justified, if it is, by virtue of being based on a visual experience with such-and-such features, where the experience's having those features is crucial for its providing justification.[36]

The adequacy of the ground in these cases is found, not in any higher-level belief, but in the state of affairs in the world and the experiential contact gained from it. These make for very weak internalist conditions, but Alston does make it clear that this sub-belief recognition or awareness must be a part of the justification of belief. The bottom line, in reference to the regress problem, is that the regress comes to a stop when it escapes the realm of belief. In the latter example, experience grounds the belief and ends the chain of justification. In the former, it is the actual state of the world – "the *fact* that" – underlying the corresponding beliefs that grants an adequate ground. The need for justification is taken care of by a connection with actual fact. RI-AI on an evaluative (rather than a deontological) conception of justification appears to open epistemology to internalist concerns like having a ground that is "normally accessible" without compromising the externalist position as represented by these last observations. It is still clearly externalistic, but it has just the internalist twist to lead Alston to call it "An Internalist Externalism."

II

Having some idea of the concept of justification which Alston believes to be viable, we should spend some time now in discussing some opposition to his view. Even though Alston seems to give some ground to internalism by allowing his externalism to have some internalistic elements, it is easy to imagine that the traditional internalist will

not be pleased with Alston's conclusions. In this section, I shall take from the literature three criticisms of an externalist-dominated epistemology. The first will be from Laurence Bonjour in an earlier article advocating the superiority of internalism. Although this work predates the work of Alston that we are dealing with, it should allow us to get a clearer picture of Alston's position framed against standard objections to externalism. Roderick Chisholm takes Alston to task for misrepresenting internalism as expendable. We must ask, in regard to this, whether Alston's RI-AI is internalist enough. The last criticism will be represented by Dan Crawford and James Sennett who attack Alstonian externalist combination theories for their failure to recognize the importance of internalist contributions. The ability (or inability) of RI-AI to handle this opposition will determine what we can say about it from the perspective of religious epistemology.

Bonjour's specific target in "Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge"[37] is the reliabilism of Alvin I. Goldman.[38] We have already distinguished Alston's RI-AI as a reliable indication view from more common reliabilist positions. However, both Alston and basic reliabilism adhere to the claim that justification is determined in some sense by the reliability of the belief-forming process leading to the belief in question. We shall see whether Alston's extra conditions will cause the barbs thrown by Bonjour in the direction of reliabilism to miss.

Bonjour offers a now-famous counter-example to basic reliabilism in the person of his unknowing clairvoyant.[39] The idea is that a clairvoyant might form the coincidentally true belief that *p* and not be aware that the belief is the result of her reliable belief-forming process of clairvoyance. If she continues to hold the belief, it seems to Bonjour that she will be believing irresponsibly. A belief that comes simply from one's head without any indication of proof reflectively available to the subject could certainly not be in the category of justified belief. We would openly question the person who formed the belief in such a situation. The key for Bonjour in this case is that even though the belief-forming process is a reliable one in terms of truth-conducivity, the

subject has no internal awareness that the process stands in such a relation to truth. Without internal awareness, such a belief can't be justified.

Bonjour asks us to imagine how we could respond if given the choice from the perspective of an outside observer. If we are met with two people, bother strangers to us, who push opposing beliefs about a given situation, whether they have evidence for their respective beliefs will make a difference as to which person we put our money on. Surely we would be loathe to give much credence to a person who can offer no justification for her belief when another can display a defense for the opposing belief.[40] If we agree with Bonjour on this point, he believes that we have all the more intuitive reason to reject an externalist concept of justification. In fact, the examination of this last example leads Bonjour to posit a dilemma for the externalist.[41] When faced with two opposing potential beliefs, one of which arose from an unbeknownst clairvoyance and the other from clearly delivered – though false – evidence, the decision of which to adopt puts the externalist in a hard spot. If the first is taken, The subject is being unreasonable in acquiring a belief which is both unsupported, as far as the subject can tell, and even counter to the evidence available. If the latter is taken, the subject is unjustified on externalist grounds. The belief coming from a reliable belief-forming process would be rejected in favor of a belief coming from a process that does not have as good a relation to truth-conducivity. So the externalist is either unreasonable or unjustified in this case.

We shall ignore all of the language in Bonjour that leads him into some rough water for his adherence to a deontological view of justification.[42] Also, there are many points where Bonjour's appeal to the necessity of the subject's awareness leans heavily on the higher-level requirement.[43] Beyond these charges which we have already seen Alston bring against internalism in general, Bonjour seems to make some particular mistakes in regard to his objections to externalism. And where it does bring up real concerns for externalism, we shall find that Alston's RI-AI may easily answer them.

I shall begin with this last objection and work back to the initial clairvoyant example brought against reliabilism.

The dilemma posed to the externalist is that the position is untenable because it leads either to an unreasonable belief-adoption or to the acceptance of an unjustified belief. While it is true that on the fundamental understanding of reliabilism only the belief that is from a reliable process is the justified one, the more savvy reliabilist will surely take into consideration counter-evidence. If there is no recognizable evidence in support of the former belief and the only available evidence indicates the latter belief, we might expect the latter belief to be taken on.[44] And this would be the case even if that evidence were false, though unknown as false by us. What this involves is checking the over-riders and defeaters that might obstruct a belief from retaining a prima facie justification. We have mentioned Alston's acceptance of this criterion and even classed it as one that is in line with internalist requirements. But we also presented it as a criterion that is open to the externalist without giving any significant concession to internalism. In fact Bonjour, himself, grants that the reliabilist might be allowed to cite such a criterion, and he does so before setting up the current dilemma.[45] So even by Bonjour's own lights, the reliabilist has the means of avoiding the dilemma. When there is conflicting evidence to a belief under examination which appears to outweigh the truth-conducivity of the process involved in belief-formation, the belief under examination would not be justified on Alston's view.

On the intuitive level, the fact that the externalist would agree with the internalist in betting on the belief with obvious evidence rather that the non-evident, reliably-produced belief does no damage to externalism. To opt for the belief that seems to have the bulk of evidence on its side does not confer justification on that belief. To suggest that it does is to assume that internalism is true. One may form a belief simply in regard to available support, but justification would not necessarily be conferred on that belief. Whether the belief is indeed justified may be determined by the ground or evidence

which actually supports it. Of course, this tends to assume the truth of externalism by speaking of "actual support" as opposed to support within reach of the subject, but the point is that we cannot assume that a belief that is taken on reflection is therefore justified. Justification is not so defined. Bonjour's intimation that an externalist's bet o n the belief that has the available evidence would demonstrate a victory for internalism prematurely assumes that one cannot be justified without being aware of it.

Returning to the initial example of the clairvoyant believer, a simple reliabilist view would certainly have to swallow Bonjour's criticism. It does not appear that we would consider a person to be justified in believing something against the evidence based on clairvoyance unless we were aware of the reliability of the clairvoyant process. But what if there were no counter evidence available to suggest the falsity of the belief gained through clairvoyance? What if one simply arrives upon a belief without knowing where it came from and that belief is actually formed by a reliable process of clairvoyance? Should we assume outright that the belief is unjustified? On what basis? Bonjour seems to suggest that such a belief could not be justified because it is not recognized by the subject as justified.[46] But that is only to say that externalism is false because it's not internalism. The only point of hesitation in this case is the question of intellectual responsibility. The believer is acting irresponsibly in accepting a belief when there is no recognizable support for its justification.[47]

Two things can be said in response. The first is that Alston's distinctions between being justified and showing justification, as well as being justified in believing and believing that one is justified in believing, both come into play here. Bonjour repeatedly talks as if what matters is whether a person can display her justification. This is his main point of attack in the clairvoyance examples. In the case we have just been dealing with, the issue does not seem to be over whether one is actually justified in a belief, but whether one is being responsible in believing the belief to be justified. The question asked by Bonjour is, "Is the clairvoyant acting in a reasonable fashion by taking her

belief to be justified?" In other words, is she justified in believing that she is justified in believing that *p*? This is a clear example of what we saw Alston argue against in chapter one. The requirement of a higher-level belief's involvement in justification is clearly evident here.

I won't take the time to rehash Alston's argument again. Instead, I shall focus on the response that RI-AI seems to give to Bonjour's claims against externalism. First of all, we noticed above how the consideration for over-riders and defeaters should be taken into account when speaking of justification. Alston adds this to the requirements for RI-AI for just the kinds of situations that Bonjour brings up. Secondly, even though there is an answer, on principle, to Bonjour's challenge to the rationality of taking a belief not known to be the result of a reliable process to be justified, Alston internalistic externalism may be more charitable in its solution. We noted earlier that one of the reasons motivating Alston to pursue some version of an internalist idea of justification is that we do hold ourselves and others responsible, in some way or another, for what we come to believe. It is this intuition that brings Alston to suggest that there be some level of accessibility to the ground of the belief in question. This accessibility is not the same awareness that Bonjour thinks is necessary for justification,[48] but it does allow for some standard of accountability to be involved in belief-formation. If a certain level of accessibility is not present in a certain situation, then justification cannot be ascribed to the belief in question. Of course, the reliability of the ground is still important. As a matter of fact, justification is determined by it.[49] But by connecting that ground with psychological states, as we noticed earlier in Alston, that ground may easily be the kind of thing that is accessible to the subject. Therefore, a belief formed outside of a subject's accessible psychological states stands to lose any chance at justificatory status. Hence, Alston retains externalism in the face of Bonjour's objections while allowing something to assuage the internalist as well.

Another, more recent attack on externalism is brought forward by Roderick Chisholm. He claims that there is no way to avoid certain aspects of internalistm no matter how externalistic a theory may be. Although Alston introduces some features of internalism into his view, perhaps they are not enough to satisfy Chisholm. We shall focus our attention on Chisholm's critique of externalism in "The Indispensability of Internal Justification."[50] There, he claims that either externalism is empty in its description of epistemic justification or it must make use of internalist requirements.[51] We begin with Chisholm's assessment of externalism as empty with an eye to whether Alston's RI-AI might be guilty. Then we shall question the internalist features Chisholm suggests as necessary additions to any externalist view. His proposed supplements to externalism, I believe, will be shown to be too restrictive.

By "empty," Chisholm means that nothingh appears to be necessary for definitive knowledge according to the externalist conception of justification beyond merely true belief. His charge is that externalism loses any effective distinction between justification and truth by only requiring that the belief be true according to present fact in order to be justified.[52] Chisholm states that it is generally understood that a belief must be true for it to be a candidate for knowledge, and making justification equivalent to truth offers nothing to epistemology. Therefore, externalist justification should either be changed, by adding internalist requirements, or discarded. Chisholm's target in the argument is externalism's emphasis on truth-conducivity. By making justification depend on the truth-conducivity of the ground, Chisholm believes externalism sets itself up for a fall.

He presents a "representative principle" of justification and examines it in reference to the charge of emptiness. Basically, Chisholm states, the reliabilist claims that a belief is justified if the "process by means of which *S* was led to believe *p* is a process which generally leads to true belief."[53] Chisholm takes this to show that the reliabilist is thinking that if a process produces a true belief, it must have been a reliable process. Hence, that belief is justified. Hence, true belief equals justification.

> If *S* has acquired a true belief, then once again, no matter how bizarre the situation may be, he has followed some procedure which is such that following that procedure always leads to true belief.[54]

What he is drawing out here is that when one has a true belief, the process leading to it must have necessarily been such as to produce true belief. But this merely means that a belief is justified if it is true. Having a reliable process is being equated with having a true belief, and so, the same is the case for justification and true belief. They become the same thing.

Is Alston's RI-AI guilty of this melding of truth and justification? There are two reasons why I think we can respond in the negative to this question. The first is that Alston, as well as most other externalists, would not agree with the formulation of justification presented by Chisholm. In particular, Alston's addition of constraints such as the over-rider/defeater criterion and the reasonable accessibility to the psychological states acting as the justifier qualify what belief might actually be justified. RI-AI recognizes that justification is not so simple as Chisholm's representative of externalism (process reliabilism) suggests. The second reason is that even the externalist view Chisholm uses for demonstration, as simple as it is, is not guilty of equating truth with justification. It is important that the qualifier "generally" is used to describe the success of a reliable process leading to truth in Chisholm's formulation of reliabilism. That is the part which gives the process its reliable nature. It "reliably" leads to true belief. One thing that reliabilists often point out about this "general" success in producing true beliefs is that the ascription of that success should not be granted to the process based only on its ability to produce a true belief in a single instance.[55] In fact, a process might be reliable even though it has produced a false belief or two, and may do so again! The idea is that a process could have a kind of track record. Its reliability would be based upon what the extent of its success might be over a certain span of time and trial. Those processes that would produce true beliefs 97% of the time may be considered as reliable or "generally"

truth-conducive. But 3% of the time, that process would be producing false beliefs.[56] The bottom line is that justification according to reliabilism does not always guarantee truth. So while there is always a connection between justification and truth for reliabilism in the form of truth-conducive processes, 'justified' does not necessarily refer to the same thing as 'true belief." For the reliabilist approach, a belief may certainly be false and justified.[57]

Regardless of whether Chisholm misrepresents externalist ideas of justification, we might still have trouble accepting his rendition of internalist requirements for justification. His suggestion is that a belief is justified if and only if the 'process by means of which S was led to believe p is one which is such that it is evident to S that that process leads to true belief."[58] The part that makes this internalist, of course, is the stipulation that the truth-conducivity be recognized by the subject as such. We ought to wonder here about the specific understanding of 'evident' in use. Chisholm delivers.

> We could replace "evident" in (R3) [the name for the above formulation of justification] by 'knows", and say that the process is one which is such that S knows that it generally leads to true belief. If no externalistic explication of knowledge is added, then, once again, we have a definition that combines internal and external concepts.[59]

For p to be evident to the subject is the same as saying the subject knows that p.

When we parse this understanding out, it looks as if we are back in familiar territory. If knowledge is taken to be true justified belief (or at least that), then this knowledge that the process is conducive to forming true belief would involve justified belief. That is, one could be justified in believing that p only if one is justified in believing that the process by which one came to believe that p leads to true belief. We have heard this refrain before. The problems of higher-level requirements hang overhead. This leaves us to question Chisholm's claim that he has hit upon a successful notion of epistemic justification that "combines internal and ex ternal concepts."[60] This merely borrows the externalist idea of truth-conducivity and internalizes it. Even if we

allowed that Chisholm had found a compromise between the two positions, we should notice how the compatibilist view might work. For a belief to be justified, it would have to be formed by a truth-conducive belief-forming process and the subject would have to know that it was. How often does this happen? I believe we would be hard pressed to find more than a handful of justified beliefs, if that, available to any subject. Chisholm's internalist requirements are simply too stringent.

One thing that Chisholm's work is an indication of is the popularity just after the publication of Chisholm's and Alston's articles of searching for ways to combine external and internal aspects of the concept of justification.[61] We shall investigate two such attempts, take note of their differences from and criticisms of Alston, and point out potential difficulties they might have. The central question will concern the viability of importing aspects of either internalism or externalism into the other. Can it be done at all? If so, how much is too much?

Our first excursion into this question comes from Dan Crawford's work in "On Having Reasons for Perceptual Beliefs: A Sellarsian Perspective."[62] The value of Crawford's work for our purposes is his effort toward compatibilizing externalist and internalist features into one theory. His work toward this goal will help us in refining our understanding of Alston's attempt. Crawford proposes a strong internalist position with certain external descriptive elements factoring into justification for our ordinary perceptual beliefs.[63] An encapsulated version of his view might be as follows:

> For S to be justified in a perceptual belief that p, there must be some other belief(s) which S is aware of as evidence for p, in accordance with appropriate objective stipulations, and S must be justified in believing the other belief(s).[64]

With the inclusion of the criterion for "appropriate objective stipulations," Crawford believes himself to have included enough of an externalist flavor to his definition of justification to comprise a successful combination of the two opposing views. For example, in the instance of a perceptual observation belief those objective stipulations

might include such things as the situation in reality being normal in terms of the lighting, positioning of the object perceived, the proper functioning of the senses in use, the tendency of former perceptual beliefs like the present one being a good indication of their object's presence, etc. [65]

From what we have seen already in Alston's rejection of different versions of internalist constraints on justification, it should not be too difficult to imagine how he would respond to Crawford's proposal here. Of those possible responses, Crawford takes on two of the more powerful ones. He begins with Alston's accusation that internalist constraints like those described above are beyond the ken of ordinary believers. Crawford's take on justification includes the higher-level requirement that a subject retain the belief that she is justified in believing. The formulation above demands that one be justified in believing a supporting belief and that the supporting belief provides sufficient evidence for the target-belief. Remember that Alston points out that one stumbling block for higher-level requirements is that they tend to exclude many from the ranks of justified believers, e.g. non-human thinkers, some children, certain adults, and even any adult where a belief is accepted non-reflectively.[66] Crawford does not find this objection tenable.

Appealing to the authority of internalist Wilfrid Sellars, Crawford explains that on his own internalist understanding of justification given above, Sellars would believe anyone capable of having justified belief with the right practice and guidance. He doesn't find anything overly-sophisticated about a belief accepted with the ability of the subject to point out the evidence justifying the belief. What I believe Alston would find interesting in his defense is that he admits that the sufficient reflection required does not come naturally and might even be fairly difficult to pick up.

> It is true that many – perhaps most – ordinary perceivers would need some tutoring in the business of finding their perceptual grounds, for they surely are not right on the surface of consciousness. But for all that, it could be maintained that

all of us could, with proper guidance, follow Jones' lead and give expression to our grounds.[67]

The question that comes to mind is: How do we assess the beliefs formed *before* we have been coached in how to locate our evidence? Does this mean we have no justified beliefs before we have learned how to find our justification for them?

It appears here that we have to *learn* how to know things.[68] Surely that is not how knowledge works. We might grant that people *can* provide evidence for their beliefs. This doesn't mean they always have to in order for their belief to be justified, though. It doesn't mean that they have to be *able* to, either. This has been Alston's point.

Crawford believes that "ordinary perceivers do appreciate that their perceptual beliefs are based on (adequate) evidence."[69] They can give the epistemic history of their beliefs. They can offer some explanation for why the evidence on which a belief is based constitutes adequate support. More importantly, they can tell each other when a belief is not well supported, when it's unjustified. There are two things I believe Alston could point out here. The first is just a restatement of the original objection. This is an irresponsibly optimistic appraisal of ordinary epistemic prowess. When I form the belief based on perceptual experience that my wife just pulled into the driveway, I acquire it completely unreflectively. And I would most likely not reflect on it at all if I did not think to use that belief as an example here. Does that mean I could not be justified in that belief? Do I actually not know my wife to be in the driveway? And what of those that are in the situation Crawford described earlier, the un-tutored? They have no access to that kind of knowledge?

Beyond this, Alston could point out that this presentation of justification only comes after the fact in most cases. Crawford gives a couple of illustrations of people reflecting on the environment surrounding the belief in question. This reflection could occur some distance of time after the belief is initially formed. I could form the belief on Monday night that I saw two people in a red car on Monday night, but I might not get

around to reflecting on that belief, or it might not occur to me to do so, until Thursday afternoon. Based on Crawford's internalist/externalist combination, assuming I hadn't entertained any other beliefs that might act as evidence for the belief in question, I could not know that I saw two people in a red car on Monday night until three days later. And we could revise this example to put years between forming a belief about something and knowing it. Or we could show that those beliefs formed which I never get around to reflecting on, I never come to know. Granted, this is not the usual course for our beliefs. They are usually heavily influenced by one another, but we can certainly imagine this situation without too much of a stretch. To say that ordinary perceivers have justified beliefs all the time based on Crawford's view of justification, holds the justification for the beliefs to be significantly removed from their actual formation *in all cases*.[70] But this doesn't seem to parallel what we mean when we say we knew something to be the case. If asked whether I *knew* there were two people in a red car on Monday night, I would with all confidence answer in the affirmative. I don't just know it now. *I knew it then*, as well. It seems that the initial objection from Alston still has some force.

The more serious objection to Crawford's attempt to combine externalism and internalism is that it does not allow for any real contribution from externalism. Perhaps, then, we should not be so heavy-handed on the first problem and grant our pardon should Crawford be able, with Sellars' help, to avoid this second problem. Here is Crawford's formulation of how externalist features are at work in justification.

> Put simply, the idea is that *S* only begins to have observational knowledge – and justified pb's [perceptual beliefs] – when he becomes aware of his evidence for those beliefs, that is, recognizes the conditions in which they are likely to be true. *S*'s observational knowledge and the epistemic beliefs on which it is based both come into being at once. Thus it can be allowed on this view that *S*'s pb's are indeed grounded in prior experiences,...but that these experiences, to which *S* later appeals in support of his epistemic beliefs, were not instances of observational knowledge when they occurred.[71]

The first part of this passage reaffirms what we have just discovered about the gap between the acquisition of belief and knowledge. There is some amount of time required, even if it is only miniscule, between a person having beliefs and becoming "aware of his evidence for those beliefs." What is of importance to the externalism problem is that Crawford is here saying that the support-beliefs for justifying perceptual beliefs were not in place at the time the perceptual beliefs were formed. I refer to "support-beliefs" because if one is becoming aware of evidence for a "pb" after the fact o f perception, as Crawford suggests, then that evidence cannot be the perception. The perception is gone, and all that is left is one's memory of it. But this is not a belief "grounded in experience." Instead we are referring to internal states, specific ally memory beliefs.

Lurking behind this move is the danger that Crawford may actually be falling toward the regress problem we noticed for internalism. A perceptual belief becomes observational knowledge when the subject comes to an awareness of the evidence for the belief. By "evidence" here, Crawford can only mean something like those supportive memory beliefs that come after the fact of perception since one clearly cannot "re - perceive" something. This memory belief would be the belief that the expe riential situation that is the object of the perceptual belief did in fact occur. In other words, the subject must have possession of the belief that her perceptual belief is justified before the perceptual belief can actually be justified. Since it is a higher-level evidence belief that the perceptual belief's justification is grounded in – the belief that the perceptual belief is justified – in order for it to provide sufficient support to the perceptual belief by Crawford's earlier definition of intern alist justification, the subject must also be justified in believing the evidence belief. This justification can't come from the external source of the experience itself because that would make it a perceptual belief, and Crawford has already stipulated that justified perceptual beliefs are separated from the initial experience by the certain span of time needed until a subject "becomes aware of his evidence of those beliefs." What is required of the subject is another, even higher,

higher-level belief: the belief that she has evidence of the justification of her belief that she is justified in her perceptual belief. And so on…. If Crawford could work into this cycle beliefs that are justified without the need of higher-level support, then the never-ending spiral of levels would come to an end. The question of whether one is justified would not depend on a chain of higher-level beliefs which must be justified as well. The only other alternative for a support-belief of a perceptual belief, and what Crawford thought he could provide, is a firm connection to experience in order to end the chain of justification. But he has undercut that track by the gap we noticed above between the acquisition of belief and its being justified. Once Crawford places chronological distance between actual experience and observational knowledge, there is no connection to that experience except through some kind of internal psychological state like memory belief.

The fishy smell accompanying this move is no coincidence. It should be of some concern that the support-beliefs for the perceptual beliefs may also have been unjustified at the time of their formation in the course of the activity of justification.[72] This should be clear especially in light of what we have just observed about Crawford's gap between belief-formation and belief-justification. Only after the belief is internally reflected upon is it viably accepted as a justified belief. The same would be true of any belief that is used for support of a perceptual belief. Though the support-belief was unjustified at one time, it must be currently justified in order to act as a support for the belief presently on the table. The problem comes in when we realize that the only way the support-belief could be justified is through the support of another belief or by its connection to the original experience. The latter of those choices would make the belief a perceptual belief making it subject to the stipulations already set up by Crawford.

Let's imagine a situation like the one Crawford is addressing. Suppose I form the belief that the traffic light ahead of me at time *t* is green. How might I be said to be justified in that belief? According to Crawford, I must be aware of the support, acquired under normal conditions, that I possess for that belief and I must be justified in

countenancing that support. In order to be aware of that support, I must be aware of something beside the perception itself. What I am aware of would seem to have to be the belief that the perception was accurate; it is a support-belief. That is, by countenancing the supporting evidence, I believe that I am justified in believing there to be a green traffic light ahead of me at time t. In reflecting so as to make myself aware of my justification, I reflect on the status of the perceptual belief in order to justify it. That is, I think to myself, "Yes, the light before me was the color I have always associated with 'green' and it was located in the customary context of a traffic signal." But wha t Crawford suggests is that since that simple perceptual belief was unjustified until I reflected on it, it confers some kind of objective grounding which allows the process to escape any regress of justification.

But look back at our support-belief. The belief that *the light before me was the color I have always associated with "green" and it was located in the customary context of a traffic signal* is itself in need of justification. How is that to be justified? It cannot be self-evident because we are talking about the support-belief for a *perceptual belief*. We are all aware the evidence for perception is anything but self-evident. Crawford's intention seems to be that my support-belief is sufficiently tied to the original experience so as to make it justified. If it is justified based on my perception, though, that would make it a perceptual belief, and Crawford has stated that perceptual beliefs are justified by other beliefs which are evidence for perceptual beliefs. We are led into a never-ending cycle. The point is that, on Crawford's account, I don't use the primary, unreflective, raw experience of the light to justify my belief that there is a green traffic light in front of me. What I use is the *justified* belief in the accuracy of that experience. What status the perceptual belief had before the activity of justification was begun has no bearing on the situation at all because justification for the perceptual belief came only through the awareness of the justified support-belief. This is, so far as I can tell, a universally accepted feature of mediate justification. Whenever the support-belief was

first acquired, it must have been justified in order to be able to bring about the justification of the perceptual belief. The regress problem lives on for Crawford.

It appears that the combination view supplied by Crawford, via Sellars, is too internalistic to escape damaging problems. We turn now to the candidate provided by James Sennett. The specific features of internalism and externalism that he tries to bring together are epistemic, rational responsibility from the first and the truth-conduciveness of the latter.[73] He finds both aspects to be important goals for an epistemic theory to achieve and angles to include both.

> Therefore, I suggest that there are two different goals lurking behind the goal of finding truth – the internalist goal and the externalist goal. The internalist goal is *to discover and "do" whatever it takes to contribute appropriately to finding truth.* The externalist goal is *to identify conditions under which truth conduciveness obtains.* The internalist goal is to uncover how one may contribute to the epistemic goal of finding truth. The externalist goal is to uncover what it is for an epistemic agent to succeed in properly connecting with truth.[74]

In the respect that both of these goals are crucial to justification – or "rationality" as Sennett terms it on p. 648 of his work – Sennett believes they must both be a part of a viable theory of justification.

Our task, once again, is to determine whether such a combination is possible without slipping into certain dangers. The identification of two epistemic goals, it should be understood, are not meant to be both involved in justification necessarily, but in achieving knowledge. As a matter of fact, Sennett claims that only one of these goals might be involved in the justification of a belief.[75] The goal of internalism, specifically, is taken to be the crucial goal when it comes to justification while externalist goals are important only when it comes to the ascription of knowledge. Hence, the compatibility being offered is on different levels. Internalism works on the level of justification while externalism works in the production of knowledge. Both goals constitute necessary conditions for knowledge, but only the internalist goal can be both necessary and

sufficient for justification.[76] But what about the details of this internalism in regard to justification? How does it match up with Alston's critici sms against internalism?

Sennett gives a rather strong internalist criterion for the justification of belief. In comparing his own view to the internalism of Richard Foley,[77] he presents an internalism that resembles the PI view described by Alston.

> According to Foley, B is rational for S just in case there is an argument for B such that its premises are uncontroversial for S and S *would, on proper reflection*, consider the argument likely to be truth preserving. My account is somewhat stronger, I think, in that I want to put emphasis on what S *actually* "does" in confirming B for herself, not on what she *would* "do."[78]

This implies that the justification (understanding Sennett to mean "justification" when he says "rationality") for a person's belie f must be something that is within the subject's perspective as not only a possible defense for the belief, but an actual, subjectively rehearsed, defense for the belief. For me to be justified in believing that there is a keyboard before me, I must have consciously examined that belief and considered it to most likely be true. The belief must pass this defense in order to be considered justified, and only then can I continue on to the externalist goal in determining the belief's status in regard to knowledge.[79]

We shouldn't have to take up the familiar Alstonian refrain, delivered so often already, in response to such a strong internalist view. Both the practical impossibility problem and the regress hang over this position. Perhaps the interesting thing to gain from Sennett's proposal is the different tasks involved for the externalist and internalist criteria. Sennett believes that by showing the two epistemic goals to be functioning on different agendas, the controversy over which is the correct way to view epistemic justification might disappear. Sennett's attempt at this seems to fail in making it too difficult for the two goals to work together. If it is necessary to fulfill the internalist criterion before being evaluated on the externalist criterion, it appears that the job will

never get done. Internalism's priority fails to allow the externalist criteria room enough to do its work, thus making the theory too internalistic to be successful.

Interestingly enough, Alston makes a similar suggestion at the end of "An Internalist Externalism."[80] There he points out that there is an oft-ignored distinction between evaluations of the ground or support of a belief and evaluations of the adequacy of a ground or support of a belief. The criterion he comes up with from an AI perspective has reference to the first instance while externalist constraints would fit with the latter. His weak internalist requirements are meant to ensure that the ground of a belief is appropriately close to the subject's awareness in order to allow the availability of justification. Whether that ground is in fact adequate is determined by its relation to external factors like truth-conducivity. This is where the externalist portion of the justificatory formula comes from. Both Alston and Sennett seem to be pointing to different offices of internalist and externalist criteria in the pursuit of knowledge. They both attribute the confusion present in much of the externalist/internalist debate in epistemology to a failure to recognize these distinctions they indicate.[81] The differences between them, however, demonstrate how one might be a more successful try at a theory mixing aspects of internalism and externalism than the other.

We've seen already that Sennett's distinctio n is between the internalistic operator for justification and the externalistic for knowledge. But if the first fails to get off the ground, knowledge will never be available.[82] Alston places both of the roles played by internalism and externalism within the scope of justification. Both the AI and externalist constraints must be met for a belief to be justified. This leaves all of the evaluative features of knowledge within the range of justification where Sennett's view would have added a new normative aspect to knowledge in addition to justification, i.e. the relation of the belief to objective factors. Since justification doesn't seem to be accomplished with these external factors, it appears unnecessary to suggest some extra-epistemic criteria besides justification. What should be realized is the need to admit an externalist criterion

to the definition of justification in order to give a more successful definition of justification.

Another related difference between Alston and Sennett's attempts at combination is that Alston's position leans to the externalist side while Sennett frames his view squarely within the internalist camp. There is no justification or knowledge without the internalist requirement being met – "vacuous" though it may be. And that internalist requirement is a rather heavy, perspectival one. Alston acknowledges the need for internalist concerns in epistemic justification, but he wisely pulls back from the dangers we have seen to plague most internalist positions. By allowing only a weak internalist contribution, Alston finds his way around the regress and practical impossibility problems that Sennett and others are left to fight with. The prominence of externalist over internalist concerns seems to offer a better understanding of epistemic justification.

<center>III</center>

We shall take a brief look, in this section, at where the course of these observations just made leave us in terms of some of our more critical beliefs. We shall again take religious belief as our example. What effect does a justification theory like the one given by Alston, which favors externalism to a slight contribution frominternalism, have on how we can approach religious belief-claims? To begin, I shall take an example from Nicholas Wolterstorff to show that a religious epistemology which relies too heavily on internalism falls to the difficulties we have been discussing. The weaknesses discovered with Wolterstorff's view will lead us to discover just what must be the case if the RI-AI externalist position of Alston is to hold water. The assumptions found necessary to Alston's view will direct us in how we should proceed in upcoming inquiries in later chapters.

Wolterstorff offers a critique of reliabilism similar to that given by Bonjour. As we look at his criticisms, his positive view on justification will begin to present itself.[83]

The problem Wolterstorff focuses on is the old charge against reliabilism that a person may have a justifiably-held belief that is produced by a less than reliable process.[84] The situation in mind is of a person who reflects on all the information available to her with all the attention we could ask, but the belief being examined was produced by an unreliable process. The reliabilist would label the belief as unjustified while Wolterstorff takes it as intuitively clear that since the internal work is done by the subject, the belief is justified. On the flip side, just as Bonjour suggested, Wolterstorff has trouble with reliabilism's claim that a person could form a justified belief by means of a reliable process without "properly" reflecting on that belief.

Reacting to this weakness, as he sees it, Wolterstorff continues on to offer his own criterion of justification, or "rationally-held belief" as he terms it, which might be described as a negatively critical criterion. Instead of judging what support we have for accepting a belief, as many internalist views suggest, he states that what beliefs we have, from whatever source, are innocent (justified) until proven guilty.[85] This means that we should examine the evidence of already-held beliefs in order to see what beliefs we currently hold ought to be discarded, not what beliefs we might be able to take as justified among our collection of beliefs. That is, evidence may only have a negative effect on already-held beliefs. And since Wolterstorff claims that we received beliefs from many other dispositional sources than just our reasoning faculty of inference, we might have many beliefs that are justifiedly-held, though not produced by inferential reason.[86] More on this point and what is meant by "dispositional sources" in a moment.

We move on to see that this criterion operates from a very strict view of epistemic obligation. Not only do we use evidence in a negative fashion, it is our responsibility to give attention to counter-evidence whenever we are in a position to do so. As he puts it, "[S]ometimes a person ought to have adequate reason to give up some one of his beliefs when in fact he does not."[87] On the other hand, he believes there are times when a person discards a belief on the basis of some reason when she shouldn't have. Perhaps there is

further evidence that should have been explored before counting that belief out. What is different about this position and earlier deontological views is that the voluntaristic force is not being put on the formation of belief, but on the scrutiny of evidence after the belief is already formed. Wolterstorff does not seem to be advocating the direct voluntarism we rejected before in regard to belief-formation. And even so, justification does not depend on this epistemic obligation. The belief is taken immediately as justified in a prima facie fashion. The injunction to continue to watch the evidence may be similar to Alston's warning that an eye must be given to possible over-riders and defeaters.

With all of this in tow, we can look at a formal presentation of his criterion with all the aforementioned qualities represented.

> A person S is rational [justified] in his eluctable and innocently produced belief
> B*p* if and only if S does believe *p*, and either:
> (i)   S neither has nor ought to have adequate reason to cease from believing *p*,
> and is not rationally obliged to believe that he *does* have adequate reason
> to cease; or
> (ii)   S does have adequate reason to cease from believing *p* but does not realize
> that he does, and is rationally justified in that.[88]

This criterion is supposed to designate a person who has a belief, a religious belief perhaps, and is justified in having that belief. By "eluctable," Wolterstorff means a belief that is not forced upon a subject beyond her control; one that she does not have to continue to believe.[89] By "innocent," he has in mind that the belief cannot be formed as a result of undue or inappropriate prejudices. Therefore, a person will be considered justified in believing something as long as she does not have, or should not have under her present circumstances, the epistemic equipment or evidence to defeat such a belief by offering adequate reasons for the belief's dismissal. Evidence only plays a negative role in the retention of beliefs.

Let's move this to the arena of religious belief. How does this view play out for religious epistemology? He imagines a person who has received strong evidence, to her mind, against the possibility of God's existence.

> Perhaps a theistic believer who is not of any great philosophical sophistication has heard a lecture of Anthony Flew attacking religious belief, and perhaps he finds himself unable to uncover any flaws in the argument.… It would appear that if this believer has puzzled over the arguments for a reasonable length of time, has talked to people who seem to him insightful, and so on, and still sees no flaws in the argument, then he is no longer rationally justified in his belief – *provided of course, he does not have evidence in favor of God's existence which counterbalance these*.[90]

The addition of this last clause is a little confusing. It appears that with the search through the evidence related to an individually-held belief, an immediate internalism approach is being forwarded. By that, I mean something akin to Alston's description of PI views. But notice that Wolterstorff's addendum here says, not that the subject should be able to produce favorable evidence, but that the subject should *have* the evidence. First of all, this shows that there might actually be some room for positive evidence for the production of beliefs for Wolterstorff. But more to our point, this sounds very close to what Alston calls Access Internalism (AI). The evidence need not be readily available on the surface. As long as the subject has some kind of access to the evidence supporting the belief, the belief may be justified.

One difficulty in assessing this view is that Wolterstorff doesn't give us any clues as to in what sense a person must 'have' this evidence. Alston speaks of 'reasonably immediate access' in his explanation, but there are different levels of access that one might think to be appropriate to justification. Without specifying this, it is hard to say whether Wolterstorff is in agreement with Alston on this point or not. There are further features of Wolterstorff's view, however, where we can be fairly certain of a difference between the two.

We have seen that Wolterstorff takes on a deontological approach to belief criticism. He claims over and over that we are obligated in certain respects to hold the right kinds of beliefs in the face of the evidence. We also saw that this was not the kind of deontological view that would place him in the camp of the direct voluntarists. I

mentioned his claim that there are other dispositional attitudes that may act as the source for belief-formation besides that of inferential reason. This places the voluntarism involved in Wolterstorff's position on a different level than direct voluntarism. The voluntarism involved here comes in where one can choose which dispositional standpoint from which to approach a situation.[91] These "dispositions" that he assumes we have so much volitional authority over are more or less the broad contexts out of which we form and criticize our beliefs. So in the process of retaining or dumping beliefs, the choice involved is that from which disposition the beliefs will be approached and evaluated. Beliefs are always based within the context of some disposition of belief organization and evaluation. It is our job, apparently, to place the ingredients of belief formation into one of a choice of these dispositions. This is less than a direct voluntarism for belief precisely because we are not choosing to form or retain beliefs, but whether to submit our beliefs and their formation to challenges. The choice involved is not about which belief to keep, but which disposition to countenance.

Let's imagine an example in an effort to get clearer on Wolterstorff's dispositional view and its particular use of voluntarism. Suppose I am spending time with a good friend when my eye catches sight of what appears to me to be a black Lexus passing on the street beside us. At the same time my friend says, "That was a nice Infiniti. It's hard to tell one apart from a Lexus, though." Here, Wolterstorff believes I have a choice. I can allow either the belief disposition of my own vision or the belief disposition of a good friend's testimony to form my belief concerning the object that has passed beside us. It is my choice of the dispositional attitude from which the belief will be formed that I have some obligation to, not the actual belief formation itself. Presumably, there is a more appropriate disposition from which I am obligated to situate my belief formation. It is my responsibility to recognize this and choose well. In this particular case, we might imagine that I side with my good friend since I respect his discrimination and intelligence and do not wish to give cause for any friction within our

Friendship. However, once this choice of dispositions is made, the course of belief-formation leaves my control. The disposition chosen delivers the specific belief through its own mechanism.

This brings up all kinds of questions. If we turn to a situation where a theistic believer has evidence against God's existence, which disposition should be taken up to evaluate her belief that God exists? How can one determine which disposition she is under the influence of in a given situation? Can there be discourse between these dispositions? Must a belief be justified under all dispositions or only one? It's telling that Wolterstorff's point that we can choose different dispositions by way of retaining or dismissing certain beliefs is couched in terms of obligation. Not only does our responsibility prescribe for us when a belief is rationally held, it also prescribes what sort of disposition would be more appropriately used in forming or criticizing a belief. If reason is what is important in a given situation, then we should be *disposed* toward rational belief formation in that case. But Wolterstorff proposes that other ends may determine the responsibility we have to certain beliefs in certain contexts.

> …[T]hough a given belief represents inadequate governance with respect to the goal of getting more amply in touch with reality and is, accordingly, a nonrational [unjustified] belief, it represents *adequate* governance with respect to some other goal. Further, it may well be that governance with respect to that other goal has priority over governance with respect to getting more amply in touch with reality.[92]

So not only can we choose different dispositions, in some cases Wolterstorff believes we *should* choose different dispositions than those that produce rational belief. We are so obligated in some cases.

The application of this principle should be obvious for religious belief. With this obligation motivating us, there may be times when we should retain our beliefs in the face of strong evidence to the contrary even though it would mean categorizing the beliefs as unjustified under usual, rational circumstances and dispositional points of

view.[93] Since we may be under more urgent obligation to the will of God than to the directives of reason, we would have a responsibility, in that case, to forego the obligation to reason for the sake of obedience to God. This would in turn result in very different kinds of beliefs, as the disposition chosen is the mechanism in which beliefs are formed. It becomes clear that the obligation driving the choice of dispositions is not an epistemic obligation necessarily. But it does have very important epistemic results.

With a fuller understanding of Wolterstorff's dispositional approach, I think Alston's response becomes clear. On the surface, say where both Alston and Wolterstorff are operating within the same dispositional framework, they tend to agree about certain internalist factors involved in justification. However, the deontological problems which Wolterstorff eludes on the level of belief-formation come back to haunt him on the dispositional level. The assumption is that we form beliefs based on the disposition we are working out of. And the disposition that should be in use is determined by our responsibilities to the values and goals of our various dispositions. In other words, we are obliged to use the *right* disposition in a particular situation. Putting aside whether we buy Wolterstorff's notion of the function of dispositions in belief-production or not, we should see that he is claiming that we have direct control over what disposition is in effect. There is direct volitional control over dispositions. We may have initially been tempted to think that the movement of direct volitional control from the level of belief to that of dispositions might save Wolterstorff, but perhaps not.

Regardless of what level it is on, this is just the sort of thing that Alston calls into question for its seeming impossibility. If there are such things as dispositions of belief formation and evaluation and they do what Wolterstorff believes they do, how could we simply switch back and forth among them to adjust to the kinds of belief before us? Depending on the number of dispositions, and Wolterstorff gives no hint in that direction, one would likely have to alter her disposition several times within a matter of seconds to handle all of the beliefs that are formed. Beyond this, taking Alston's cue that our beliefs

come to us without our seeking them,[94] the formation of the belief that I am having a visual experience of purple right now would be somehow predetermined by my use of the dispositional process that would form that belief. So I *would* be in control of what I believe. The control will have just been pushed back a step. This seems different from an uncontroversial indirect voluntarism. Such a voluntarism would involve convincing oneself through a long span of time and effort that a certain way of believing is true or right. In Walterstorff's case, the switches required between dispositions would appear to come too quickly and too often to count as an example of this kind of indirect voluntarism.[95]

Wolterstorff fails to pass muster, under Alston's examination, because of his adherence to a deontological concept of justification. The similarities between the two, however, give us some indication of what it would take for religious belief to be justified for Alston's RI-AI position. We mentioned earlier that Alston takes his position to be a "reliable indication" view, with certain internalist considerations in the guise of RI-AI, rather than a process reliabilism.[96] This means that he focuses on the truth-conducivity or reliability of the particular ground supporting a belief rather than the reliability of a process of belief-formation. This may make a difference when it comes to religious belief. If I form a belief that God exists and cares for me from some kind of mystical experience, the process of formation may not have the track record necessary to be considered reliable. At the same time such a view would be subject to the kinds of questions often put to reliable process positions: How do we define a process? Might there be different kinds of processes requiring different measures of reliability? This tends to leave the question of reliability and hence justification up in the air.

But if the experience acting as a ground for religious belief is adequate in Alston's understanding, i.e. it is conducive to the production of true belief, it is a reliable indication that the belief supported by it is true. This gives a more hopeful light to the issue. As long as no over-riders or defeaters, as was the case for Wolterstorff, are present

and an adequate ground of support for the belief is reasonably immediate to the subject's awareness, that belief would be justified. So if I am met with an unprecedented (from my perspective, anyway) mystical experience that leads me to form the belief that there is a loving God who is Creator of all, and there are no over-riders or defeaters that are currently sufficient enough to dispel that belief, and there is reasonably within my reach the experience as an adequate ground for my belief, then I am justified in having that belief. The same might be true of a religious belief formed through some reasoned inference or taken by some authority. The possibility of justified religious belief is certainly open for Alston's internalist externalism.

<center>IV</center>

We have seen through the course of this discussion how Alston has moved away from the received tradition. After defending foundationalism, he then turns from the classic understanding of foundational epistemology as an internalist defense of individual belief for justification.[97] In directing his attention to the externalist, reliabilist view of justification, we should point out that a certain amount of work must be done on the meta-epistemological level in order for such a position to be successful. Looking at our example of the religious believer with a ground in mystical experience, we can see that there is at least one major assumption helping the wheels to turn. We are led to ask the skeptical question of whether the ground for perceptual belief of any kind, much less mystical perception, can be considered truth-conducive. That is, what kind of support do we have for assuming our perceptual experience to be a reliable indication of truth?[98] Without a defense for this feature, Alston's move away from internalistic justification for his weak internalist externalism is on less than solid ground. Recall that the question dogging Alston at the end of the first chapter was whether dogmatism might remain. Without assurance of the reliability of the ground for a belief, it may be that the belief is held without good reason.

CHAPTER THREE

In this chapter we shall be dealing with a problem for the externalist approach the response to which may lead us in even more questionable directions. If we concede that for example, perception gives us the kind of access to the objects of our perception that we need in order to have those beliefs, we may still wonder whether those beliefs are of the sort that we would consider epistemically valuable. In other words, we have to ask of the basis of our beliefs whether it can be trusted or not. Can we be sure that the sources of our beliefs are reliable, or are we simply forming beliefs without any good reasons behind them? This chapter will focus on the problem facing the externalist in regard to that particular question.

It is an old question that continues to haunt epistemologists today as it has for thousands of years. The problem of skepticism, even now, raises special concern for such theorists as Alston. The question may be simply put: How do you know that you know? Once a handle is gained on that initial question, the hard-line skeptic may appeal to it again and again: How do you know *that*? If no answer can be given, the conclusion is drawn that the knowledge being claimed is only dogma. Here the problem that remained for Alston at the end of chapter one is being resurrected for our examination, once again. Quieting the skeptic has ever been one of the tougher sticking points in epistemology. A form of the skeptic's challenge is brought up by Alston himself by way of assessing his position's standing. The result is what Alston terms the problem of "epistemic circularity," which he argues would face any proposed belief.

In what follows, I shall run through Alston's explanation of what the problem is and why it is of particular force against externalists like himself. We shall observe one possible solution to the problem which he offers only to cast doubt on that solution once again. Along this course, some attention will be given to criticisms brought against

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Alston's battle against epistemic circularity. The contention will be that there is no necessity for such a fight. Once we have delivered a possible response from Alston to that criticism, we shall again spend some time showing how the wranglings with epistemic circularity might affect epistemology in a particular area, religious epistemology being our recurrent example.

<div style="text-align:center">I</div>

We begin our approach with an introduction to the problem laid out in Alston's article "Epistemic Circularity."[1] Recalling the work done in producing a theory of justification, there was an over-all externalist position given by Alston with some weak internalist constraints tagging along. In particular, a kind of reliabilist view, wherein the ground for belief must be a reliable indicator of the truth of the beliefs that arise from it,[2] forms the externalist background for Alston's position. Those beliefs are the results of that ground through some particular process or mechanism of belief-formation closely tied to the ground. The particular process of belief-production must be attached to a truth-conducive ground for it to be possible that its beliefs are justified. What this means is that a process, like one's visual belief-production, must be tied to a ground – visual experience in this case – that is a reliable indicator of the truth of the beliefs the process produces in order for a vision-belief to be available as a justified belief. Without the reliability of the indicator in place, justification can't get off the ground.[3] Since this reliabilist feature is necessary for justification according to Alston, any problems it brings along with it must be dealt with in a satisfactory fashion.

The central question that may be raised, in light of the importance of reliability to Alston's justificatory theory, is whether the claims of a belief-forming mechanism's reliability can be justified.[4] If we take visual experience to be reliable indicator of the truth of the beliefs it produces, are we justified in the claim that vision is reliable? This question has quite a storied past, especially in reference to perceptual belief-formation.

Epistemology through the ages has come up with many variant ways of dealing with the assurance, or lack thereof, associated with our senses. Here again, the problem is placed before us. Certainly there are all sorts of reasons one might appeal to to defend these perceptual belief-forming processes qua reliable processes. It is simply natural for us to take the information given to us by our senses as trust-worthy truth indicators. We accept the beliefs produced by the senses unreflectively in most cases. What should concern us, and what Alston is indeed concerned with, is whether reasons such as these can be accepted as adequate reasons for taking these mechanisms as reliable.[5] If they are not good reasons, they can offer no true support for our senses' reliability no matter how natural they are to us.

In his article, Alston runs through three possible means of offering support for the claim that a belief-forming mechanism may be reliable. He takes as his example the mechanism of sense perception. The reasoning behind this is that sense perception often allows for the more readily accessible illustration, and more importantly, because sense perception is usually taken for granted by people as one of the most reliable – if not *the* most reliable – means of belief-formation. If there is an epistemic problem with sense perception, one can expect there would be no other belief-forming process without the same problem.[6] The mechanisms that require greater amounts of reflection will certainly not be able to clear any hurdles which such a fundamental process finds troubling. For each of the proposed means of defending a mechanism's reliability, Alston uses sense perception as the model.

What is the problem, then? It is just this: The claim for a mechanism's reliability depends itself on evidence provided by the mechanism in question. Suppose we are called to defend the reliability of our senses as legitimate belief-formers. What would we have to appeal to in order to give such a defense? An obvious answer might be to observe the success of sense perception's past deliverances of true belief.[7] Was my eyesight reliable in telling me that the clock reads 2:52 PM? Well, I can check by a

second glance. If upon multiple trials I still acquire the exact same supposed information from the clock, that might lend support to the reliability of my vision (as well as the notion that I need a new clock that isn't stuck on 2:52). Or I could remind myself that my eyes are in good condition and anytime I have used them in the past in similar situations, the information received has been true.

But something is being assumed in both of these instances. Either way we go the same mechanism comes back into play in order to defend its own status as reliable. Doing a double take to make sure my eyes weren't deceiving me the first time still depends on evidence presented by my eyes. There would be circularity involved in showing the reliability of my vision based on further evidence from my vision. In the second case, though it's not as direct in nature, the same problems come into play. If I am to rely on the past success of my visual perception to deliver accurate beliefs, the appeal for the adjudication of that accuracy will depend, at least in part, on my visual perception. The only way I can find out if I was right in believing my eyes when they led to a belief that there is a green car in the parking lot is to use those eyes to reaffirm their ability to tell the truth. I might turn to a neighbor and ask her opinion on the matter, but there again, I would be depending on the reliability of visual perception to prove its reliability. I would be counting on the reliability of my own visual perception in receiving information from the second party, and I would be depending on the reliability of that second party's visual perception. I cannot escape the dependence on visual perception. And this seems to hold true for *any* means of sense perception. Any challenge against perceptual belief would reveal circularity in its defense.[8] We are effectively bound by our senses.

But there are other possibilities of defending the reliability of our sense perception besides just the simple ones discussed already. I mentioned that Alston takes on two others besides this first one.[9] The second appeals to the pragmatics involved in getting along in the world. Our sense perception is successful in allowing us to survive by both

achieving pleasures and avoiding pains with relative ease.[10] Surely this should count as evidence that our perceptual beliefs come from a source that can be understood as reliable. However, it doesn't take much thought to reveal that the only way we discover the success of sense perception in this pragmatic sense is by outwardly observing that success in some form or another. And this observation would depend on sense perception. Hence, the circularity continues.

Perhaps a more novel approach to prove sense perception's reliability is in the form of the Wittgensteinian private language argument where the reliability and similarity of our experiences is necessary since there is a shared language.[11] The point in this argument is that if sense perception weren't reliable, we wouldn't even be able to question its reliability. But since we can, it must be reliable. Alston points out that even this approach cannot escape the circularity. The assumption that there is a common language depends on our experience of such a thing among others like us. Sense perception is required for us to be able to even posit that there is a common language, so the driving assumption in the argument makes use of the very faculty we are trying to defend.

It's important to notice that this is epistemic circularity rather than logical circularity. Alston spends some time making this difference clear.[12] Of course logical circularity occurs when an argument makes use of what is to be shown in support for its own case. If the argument were made that visual perception is reliable because visual perception shows it to be so, that argument would clearly be logically circular. The premise that visual perception demonstrates visual perception to be reliable depends itself on the assumption that visual perception is reliable in what it shows or demonstrates. What Alston suggests is that the situation is different for one who simply forms a belief based on sense perception without any argument being directly accessible. While that belief suffers from some level of circularity, its being formed without the benefit of a recognized argument takes it out of the realm of logical circularity. But since it is a

circularity concerning belief-formation, it is an epistemic circularity. This difference will figure largely in his attempt to show the possibility of justification even with the prospect of epistemic circularity. For the time being, however, the problem of epistemic circularity is that our belief-forming mechanisms have no court of appeals other than themselves by which they may be shown to be reliable. That being so, the beliefs they produce acquire the epistemic difficulties of their producers. When we are seeking to prove the justification of a process of belief-formation and the process cannot be shown as reliable, then the product belief inherits the same justificatory problem.

If this epistemic problem works its way down from our belief-forming mechanisms to the beliefs they produce, one may wonder if any of our beliefs might ever be proved as justified. The skeptic may have won the day. The skeptic who questions the reliability of sense perception at every point might never allow that we can show the justification of perceptual beliefs. Once we lose confidence in the mechanisms that provide all our basic beliefs about the world around us, there seems to be no way to argue ourselves back into an acceptance of those beliefs. An argument of that sort would fall into the logical circularity we noticed earlier.

What the non-reflective believer[13] does in a case of perceptual belief is given a telling description by Alston, and this description opens the way for a possible solution which he will attempt. He states that perceptual beliefs are formed when "I 'practically' assume something like (I) [that sense perception tends to render true belief], assume it 'in practice.'"[14] The assumption that sense perception is reliable leads to the circularity attended to above where a belief is taken to be true because it has been presumed that the belief is true. Of interest to us here is the introduction of the qualifier, "in practice." The practicality of the assumption implies that the assumption is not made with direct cognizance or deliberation. That is, the reliability of the belief-forming process has been assumed by the believer, but not in a manner whereby she used that assumption to form the perceptual belief inferentially.

The practical assumption involved in perceptual belief is the very thing which moves our present problem from logical circularity to epistemic circularity. If I were to ask myself upon every occasion wherein my senses were presenting me with a belief whether those senses are in fact reliable, I might very well be guilty of logical circularity in forming any perceptual belief. But that is not the way perception works according to Alston. In his Theory of Appearing, there is at least a part of perception that operates completely without conceptual, reflective background work on the part of the subject.[15] In addition, recall that Alston's theory of justification holds that one may be justified in a belief without ever actually calling that justification up before one's mind. This means the justifying support found in a defense of the belief-forming mechanism as reliable would not be reflectively held by the subject in the form of an argument. This being the case, a simple act of perception makes no use of argumentation on receiving a perceptual belief. Logical circularity poses no threat to non-reflective perceptual belief, then. Epistemic circularity remains the only problem with which we must be concerned.

Before moving on to the initial solution posed by Alston, we should gain some clearer understanding of exactly what the source of this problem is. I have briefly mentioned already that the problem of epistemic circularity is something of a particular problem to the externalist. Perhaps now would be a good time to explain why that is the case and why Alston's combination position of internalistic externalism does not help him in getting past this problem. It is precisely because of an externalist tendency that epistemic circularity, taken as a serious difficulty, arises. Whether it is a reliabilist position or some other take on epistemic theory, if the ultimate source of a belief's justification comes from an external rather than an internal source, the specter of epistemic circularity looms just ahead. When we are depending on something outside the realm of belief as the ultimate source of justification, we can always ask why that external source should be considered as "ultimate." If there is no provision for reasons supporting the external ground as the ultimate source of justification, we can then ask

why we believe it to confer justification. And if the justification of our belief depends on the reliability of that external source or ground, there is a clear problem in affirming the justification of our belief. If we were to adopt internalism, we could simply shift the question to the next level of belief indefinitely. Externalism, however, since it claims an ultimate external source of belief, allows epistemic circularity to pose a serious threat to the process whereby our beliefs may be justified.

II

With a clear explanation of the problem of epistemic circularity behind us, we give our attention to Alston's proposal for a solution. Certainly the actual justification of our beliefs is not at stake here. As has been amply shown to us by Alston, a belief may *be* justified whether or not it can be *shown* as justified. Even so, being aware of the justification of one's beliefs is certainly a good epistemic position to be in. The gravity of the situation should not be forgotten. If I am not aware that my beliefs are justified, even if they actually are, my beliefs may be nothing more than dogma. This was the difficult problem left for Alston by Shatz in chapter one. Alston himself admits that having the justification for one's belief is even better than just having a justified belief. Moreover, without possession of a defense for our beliefs, Alston must be concerned not to leave us holding beliefs dogmatically. In this case, the possibility of being able to claim the justification of our beliefs, even perceptual beliefs, is at stake. If the reliability of a belief-forming mechanism cannot be shown without a demonstration that circles back on itself, any of the resultant beliefs of that mechanism cannot be recognized by the subject as justified on the basis of that mechanism. In response to the skeptic's demands, one could not give a satisfactory answer for one's adherence to the beliefs produced by such practices as sense perception. Alston, though, believes there to be an escape from the skeptic's challenge.

The difference between epistemic and logical circularity plays a vital part in Alston's initial proposal for escape from this problem. We have given attention to his insistence on the fact that perceptual beliefs are not necessarily formed as a result of reflection, much les as conclusions to some inferential work by the perceiver. Since the assumption of sense perception's reliability is "practical," as he terms it, there is no argument involved in a perceptual belief's arrival. According to Alston, epistemic circularity can't prevent "S from being justified in the reasons or…that justification from obtaining antecedently to the justification of the belief in (II)[the truth-tendency or reliability of sense perception]."[16] That is, even though epistemic circularity threatens our ability to demonstrate the reliability of the sense perception process, the beliefs produced may still be justified under an externalist understanding. That the belief is in fact justified is all that is needed.

And this goes hand in hand with what we have observed him say about lower-level justification and the possibility of externalist justification without a subject being aware of a belief's being justified. His earlier work demonstrated in the first two chapters is finding good use in allowing that a perceptual belief might still be justified even in the face of epistemic circularity. Epistemic circularity doesn't affect lower-level justification because the conclusion is a higher-level belief while the lower-level one is being assumed.[17] In other words, the fact that epistemic circularity's problem focuses on a subject's ability to justify the belief that a belief-forming mechanism is reliable has no bearing on the de facto justification of the lower-level belief produced by that mechanism. The mechanism may *in fact* be reliable and may *in fact* have reliably produced that belief before the subject had considered the possibility of demonstrating the mechanism's reliability. In such a case, the distinction between showing justification and being justified is again important to remember. And Alston's externalism allows for just such a justification to be realized since there is no need for the subject to be cognizantly involved in the production of belief or the in the justification process.

Perhaps this could be more easily grasped by illustration. Suppose S comes to believe through the use of her aural senses that there is a fire truck responding to a call somewhere in the area. She hears the sirens outside and recognizes that those particular cadences and warnings are unique to fire engines. Her past experience makes her somewhat of an expert since she is herself a volunteer fireperson and is well versed in the differences between the sirens of various emergency vehicles. Suppose further that her belief is true; there is indeed a fire truck heading to a fire alarm just a few blocks away. If we noticed her demeanor as she heard the siren outside, we might ask out of curiosity what had piqued her interest. She would respond, "There's a fire truck somewhere near." Thus, she will have given verbal and reflective expression to her belief that there is a fire truck somewhere near.

Being the ever-diligent epistemologists that we are, we may imagine that we press her harder on this count. We might continue on to ask how she knows there's a fire truck outside. She would no doubt ask us to listen carefully so that we too might be able to hear the same thing she is hearing. How does she know it's a fire truck as opposed to an ambulance or a patrol car or something else? Here, she would remind us of her history with fire trucks and her ability to discern siren calls and their differences. Still further, we could ask how she knows it was a siren at all. Her simple answer would likely be to cup her hand around her ear and ask, "It *sounds* like a siren. Can't you hear that?" At the risk of being ridiculous – though if our friend knows of our philosophical tendencies, she won't be surprised – we arrive at the crucial question for epistemic circularity: How do you know that what you hear is actually there? Can you be sure that your sense of hearing points to the truth about the world and its sounds, or is it misleading?

It's at this point when people begin to ignore such questions, but they may in fact be the more interesting questions to answer. Perhaps S might answer in one of the ways mentioned earlier which Alston explored and discarded as viable solutions. She might say that her hearing has never been wrong in such circumstances. But that would require

a dependence on her hearing to bear that track record out. Or she might take us outside and show us the fire truck we have been hearing. But this would only push the epistemic circle out a little farther. The appeal to the senses would remain, and the reliability of that visual confirmation would itself be in question and run into the same problem. Any answer she might come up with would, whether immediately or through a slightly more indirect process, arrive back at what had previously been in question.

What Alston wants us to see about this situation, however, is that the justificatory status of S's original belief that there is a fire truck somewhere in the vicinity will not be altered no matter how much trouble she may have in showing her auditory senses to be reliable. Assuming Alston's version of justification is true, if S forms the belief that there is a fire truck in the area based on a reliable ground, i.e. her sense of hearing, and her evidence for the belief is reasonably accessible to her as adequate, then she is justified in that belief. To make a further demand that she be able to defend the reliability of the process whereby she arrived at that belief is an additional requirement beyond that laid out in externalist justification. It may be clear that epistemic circularity continues to plague the effort to give such a defense, but Alston's point is that any defense of this sort is unnecessary for a lower-level belief like S's that there is a fire truck in the area to actually be justified. Operating on the assumption that her hearing is reliable appears to be able to produce justified belief on the basis of that avenue of perception.

As Alston closes out his work in "Epistemic Circularity," he seems to believe that the earlier work we have seen from him helps him past this problem. He claims that epistemic circularity poses no threat to justification so long as a perceptual belief is taken by "practically accepting" an epistemic principle of reliability for perception. [18] That "epistemic principle" of reliability would be something like the following in the case of perceptual belief.

> We and the world about us are so constituted that beliefs about the immediate physical environment that are based on sense experience in the way such beliefs

generally are and that are formed in the kinds of situations in which we typically find ourselves are or would be generally true.[19]

The question that must be asked at this point is whether this dodge opens things up a bit too widely. Although his assessment at this point appears to leave him in a comfortable position, one should do the hands-on work and take a look at just how this would play out. Is the kind of justification that survives epistemic circularity really what we would be ready to accept under practical consideration? To answer this question, we turn again to a particular example for the purpose of checking Alston's ideas for possible leak s.

Our last illustration of the discerning siren-hearer indicated, in a more or less agreeable way, how justification could be seen to apply to a perceptual belief even in the face of epistemic circularity. But what if we altered the case a bit to focus on a different, perhaps less respected, belief-forming process? It is second nature to grant the information received from the senses a close connection with the truth about the world. The same might be said, with some modification for possible error, for the deliverances of our memory or our faculty of inference. Though they don't share quite the regard we have for the five senses in respect to truth, we usually accept the beliefs produced by these means without much thought toward the prospect of their being mistaken. Surely, though, these are not the only processes of which we make use to form our beliefs. There are also other belief-forming mechanisms put into practice daily, e.g. introspection and intuition. If Alston's final assessment in "Epistemic Circularity" is correct, then the same conclusion should follow for these other mechanisms just as it does for sense perception: Epistemic circularity poses no threat to justification so long as a belief of any kind is taken by "practically accepting" an epistemic principle of reliability for whatever mechanism may have produced that belief.[20]

Let us imagine, therefore, a situation reminiscent of Bonjour's counter-examples to externalism in "Externalist Theories in Empirical Knowledge."[21] There is a person, call her Susan, who has formed the belief that one of her co-workers will ask her to marry

him today. Her reason for this belief, the process whereby the belief was produced in her, was the terse prediction found in the horoscope section of her daily newspaper which states that someone who works closely with her would make a romantic proposal this very day. As fate would have it, she has in fact been dating someone from accounting who had been working up the courage the night before to ask for her hand during their lunch hour. He does, and the couple goes on to live happily ever after. Her belief turns out to be a true one.

The issue at interest for us is whether this belief is a justified one. We can apply Alston's test given at the end of "Epistemic Circularity" to see what he would have to say. First of all, let's suppose for the sake of the case at hand that the horoscope predictions of the particular columnist that Susan has read are, unbeknownst to her, a fairly reliable indicator of truth, regardless of whether they would be considered as such by most of us. That would mean that the process is in fact a reliable one. Of course being able to prove that reliability would lead one into an eventual circle.[22] Epistemic circularity is present for any belief-forming mechanism. But from what we have already noticed, epistemic circularity need not worry us so long as an epistemic principle of the mechanism's reliability is 'practically accepted' upon the formation of a belief. And we can imagine that practical acceptance was actually performed on Susan's part. If she has been placing her trust in the predictions of that horoscope columnist for years on end, although she doesn't know that she is reliable, it would be easy to suppose that Susan read her horoscope with a tacit acceptance of its reliability.[23] It appears, then, that Susan's belief that a co-worker will propose today can in fact be shown as justified.

The problem with this, of course, is that the large majority of people would question whether any prediction coming from a person consulting the positions of heavenly bodies has any connection at all with truth.[24] Most would disagree that Susan's belief could in any way be a justified one. It smacks of mysteria and that is not something we connect with our common understanding of epistemically important

features. And yet, Alston has left open the possibility that beliefs which are the products

of horoscopes or reading tea leaves or intense intuition, etc. could be justified provided

that the mechanisms producing those beliefs are in fact reliable ones. This is just the kind

of thing with which Bonjour disagreed about reliabilism. Even Alston himself is not

ignorant of the hole left by his claims at the end of "Epistemic Circularity".

   This very problem is raised later by Alston in *Perceiving God*.[25] He presents it in

the case of the reliable fortune-teller. Even though that belief-forming process is

epistemically circular in terms of showing its reliability, by what was said earlier in

"Epistemic Circularity" beliefs formed by that process might be just as viably understood

as justified as those from any other process.   In this later episode, he finds this to be an

unacceptable position on justification. Such mechanisms as fortune telling and crystal

ball gazing must be weeded out if the assessments made by "Epistemic Circularity" are to

carry any practical weight.

   Besides this later observation in *Perceiving God*, we might also recall what

Alston had said about justification in "An Internalist Externalism." His words there show

that his own view of justification would not accept beliefs like Susan's as being justified,

even though his initial solution for epistemic circularity apparently would. Bonjour's

major beef with reliabilism is that it is so externalist that a person might be able to just

make up things to believe without any provocation at all, and those beliefs could be

justified. But Alston didn't seem to be any more pleased with that possibility than

Bonjour. This was one of the reasons why the internalistic features were added to his

externalism. Recall that defeaters and over-riders were to be taken into consideration

before a belief could attain the ultimate justificatory approval. If we apply this

requirement to our present situation, the outcome in terms of justification could be easily

cast into doubt.

   If Susan were to stop and think about all of the counter-evidence to a belief based

on a horoscope, she might not be so quick to form such a high opinion of the belief's

outlook toward truth. If she were to mention to a friend that she believed one of her co-workers is going to propose today and defended that belief by pointing out the horoscope page, the response of her friend would be predictable. One could warn her that many people have placed their faith in such things and suffered inestimable loss, both mentally and physically. Her friend might demonstrate the well-crafted vagueness of the predictions and warn that such things should be accepted with caution. If the friend were particularly well-versed in the area, she might cite cases of charlatanism that have been a recurring theme in the business. The counter-evidence leaves quite an impression.

All of this evidence, while it might not serve to sway Susan's determination, would put a significant dent in a demonstration of her belief's being justified. Granted, the belief could not be said to be automatically precluded from a justified status based simply on this evidence. The nature of examining evidence admits of a process which would be continued perhaps indefinitely. And no matter what contrary evidence we find, a reliable process is a reliable process, and we have stipulated this particular horoscope to be reliable. However, the point would have been made that Susan's unreflective, practical adherence to the rationality of accepting horoscope predictions would certainly not be enough to provide justification for her belief. And it is just this kind unreflective acceptance that Alston's RI-AI theory of justification had taken exception to. In Susan's case, the reasonable access to evidence regarding her belief would seem to count against her. The defeaters and over-riders would likely speak more loudly than her positive evidence. If blind acceptance of the horoscope's reliability is all the evidence she has access to, then we could not show her belief as justified according to Alston's earlier version of justification.

What does all this mean for the problem of epistemic circularity, though? It means the problem is still a problem. Our purpose in bringing up the horoscope example was to show that our understanding of the test given at the end of "Epistemic Circularity" still leaves the matter unresolved for us. Alston's own version of justification doesn't

allow for beliefs like those produced from horoscope predictions to be justified, and yet, it seems that our first cursory examination of epistemic circularity would force us to either accept such beliefs as justified or deny the evident justification of beliefs produced by our most fundamental belief-forming processes. The initial attempt to evade epistemic circularity has led to an unfavorable consequence for theories of justification. It allows beliefs that are formed by what are commonly understood to be questionable mechanisms to have a justified status. If we find it strange to say that beliefs based on information from the farmer's almanac should be considered as justified, then we must recognize that the same defeaters that would stymie the justification of those beliefs might also prove damaging to the attempt to show our more uncontroversial beliefs as justified. If we have been mistaken in understanding Alston's prospect for the survival of justification in the face of epistemic circularity at the end of "Epistemic Circularity," then it seems we must still be concerned about what effect the problem has on all of our beliefs. In the next chapter we shall pursue Alston's final answer for the problem, but for now, we should focus on what the problem does to the field of epistemology and whether it should even be a concern on that front.

III

We've discussed just why the problem of epistemic circularity becomes troublesome in the first place. I mentioned that it is a direct result of epistemic externalism. A simple question that could then be asked now is whether we ought to continue thinking about justification from an externalist standpoint if it only leads to these kinds of difficulties. This is exactly the response with which Markus Lammenranta sympathizes in "Circularity and Stability."[26] Alston makes it clear more than once that the problem of epistemic circularity would not be any problem at all to those for whom a theory like internalism is appealing.[27] Internalism indicates that a well-formed circular belief-supporting structure, though obviously not foundationalist, might be exactly the

kind of thing one needs for justification. The problem standing before the externalist that our belief-forming processes can only be proved reliable by circular support from other beliefs within our reflective access is an expected aspect for the internalist, not an unfortunate one. Alston even admits that there is a distinct temptation to embrace an internalist position on justification in light of epistemic circularity,[28] but he does not think we should ignore the importance of externalist criteria for mechanisms and their beliefs. In contrast, Lammenranta states that there is enough stability within an internalist position to offer a clear, successful criterion for justification without having to enter the fray against epistemic circularity.[29] Lammenranta's article is important to us for two reasons, then. First of all, it gives us a very recent argument for the return to the pure internalism thrown off by Alston, as discussed in the last chapter. More importantly, though, will be Lammenranta's agreement with the objection to Alston's moves which becomes the major focus of the next chapters.

I shall put off the more pressing of the specific criticisms presented by Lammenranta against Alston's view, the latter of our two reasons for addressing Lammenranat's article, until the next chapter. Much of what he has to say in response to Alston has to do with the means by which Alston believes epistemic circularity can be avoided. The overall thrust of his message, however, is to offer a more attractive way around such difficulties as epistemic circularity by way of internalistic thinking toward justification. He agrees with Alston that coherence theories don't offer much hope as a theory.[30] He spends time with some suggestions from Ernest Sosa, specifically the idea that skeptical problems like that found in epistemic circularity can be resolved by a coherence theory of justification with some help from external sources.[31] Lammenranta finds that this brand of coherentism does nothing more to solve the problem than a simple reliability theory.[32] The answer to the problem, he says, is to not see it as a problem at all.

The possibility which Alston calls the "bite-the-bullet" approach, the one he found to be tempting but rejected,[33] is the very one Lammenranta picks up. He believes

we should hold fast to what we have and take the circularity involved as a means whereby our system of beliefs is further strengthened.

> ...[I]f we are initially confident in our beliefs about ourselves and the world, nothing prevents our becoming confident about the reliability of their sources by arguments that uses [sic] those same beliefs as premises. Or if we already are confident of their reliability, these epistemically circular arguments may either increase or decrease that confidence. What we get, if all goes well, is a firm and stable system of beliefs that includes...an "epistemic" perspective to our sou rces of belief and their reliability. This system is stable because by the "epistemic" perspective it includes we are able to resolve conflicts that may arise when we form new beliefs and thereby to preserve its stability.[34]

The idea is that we are simply to go with what we've got. We accept that we are rudderless when it comes to forming beliefs, but we do have mechanisms that form beliefs in which we have a certain level of confidence. The arrival of those beliefs may be the result of processes that lead us to epistemic circularity when we attempt to show their reliability, but so long as the circularity is of the right type, it may only serve to secure the system. This is the "epistemic perspective" which Lammenranta speaks of. Our epistemic perspective consists in the beliefs standing at the core of our knowledge base that cohere together and act as the means of justification for each other and any other of our beliefs that may be inferred from them. This epistemic perspective would necessarily be circular since, as mentioned before, the chain of justification would continue through these coherent beliefs until it had to start again with a belief already appealed to in the chain. The confidence level in our beliefs will be determined by how they square with what our epistemic perspective tells us, whether they fit within the circular system we have.

Clearly, this is an internal process. The system of beliefs is what we are trying to maintain or keep afloat. The only way to evaluate beliefs as justified or not must come from within.[35] Externalist justification hits a never-ending spiral in epistemic circularity by attempting to prove the reliability of a ground, but on an internalist view such as this, epistemic circularity actually becomes a part of the evaluation. The difference is that the

circularity occurs within the "epistemic perspective" of the subject and not in showing the externalist features of a belief-forming mechanism, i.e. its reliability or truth-conduciveness. Once epistemic circularity has been internalized, justification can be a matter of whether the internal epistemically circular arguments for a belief match up with the confidence already present in the current system of belief or epistemic perspective.

There are two things we might imagine to be objected to in such a position. One is weaker than the other, but it leads to the objection that carries the more weight. The first, and weaker, is that this view only *embraces* the problem of circularity; it doesn't *solve* it. The mechanisms of belief-formation get us no closer to justification here than they were able to in Alston's original solution in "Epistemic Circularity." If I believe that the sun has begun to shine outside, I shall still be taking for granted the reliability of a belief-forming process that can only be shown to be reliable by circular means. Hence, the product-belief cannot be non-circularly shown to come from a reliable source. Making this an internalism seems to only magnify the blatant use of circularity. Lammenranta claims that the circularity remaining within the system is no longer vicious as it was for an externalist position.[36] How can that be the case?

Lammenranta believes justification to still be possible simply because criteria for justification from a reliabilist theory are no longer in use. It no longer matters whether a belief-forming mechanism is in fact a reliable one. Internalism has no need to the demonstration of reliability. What matters is whether the products of that mechanism can be found to mesh with the system of beliefs in which a subject already has confidence. In that case, circularity might be considered a good thing if it means the belief under inspection can only be supported by evidence currently within the subject's belief-structure. If this is the kind of thing that makes a belief more or less justified, then circularity becomes a crucial part of the theory. It is actually necessary. If justification can be accepted on this understanding, then we might see how the circularity involved would not be vicious after all. For these reasons, the first line of criticism appears to

falter. However, it serves to flesh out Lammenranta's position as a pure internalism that may be criticized on another front.

We can probably recite from memory all of what we have already seen Alston bring against internalist positions like this one. Of central importance to the question of justification, though, is the relation to truth. If justified beliefs are those that are more likely to lead us toward truth than toward falsity, we should give attention as to how Lammenranta's internalism toward justification stands in that respect.

It would appear that a belief could be justified on Lammenranta's view without having any prospect of leading us to truth at all. The only thing that matters for justification is that the belief contribute, or not be disruptive, to the overall "stability" of the system of belief.[37] It's the internal state of the subject's beliefs that determine whether a candidate belief will be justified or not. This prompts a response similar to that brought against internalism in earlier criticisms we have noticed from Alston and others. Recall that one of the features of a justified belief which Alston felt to be of central importance was the truth-conducivity of the belief's ground. If Lammenranta is right, truth-conducivity is not much of a concern for justification. At the same time, he doesn't think that this poses a bar to a legitimate theory of justification.

Attaining a system of beliefs which is stable, Lammenranta believes, is strictly in line with the pursuit of truth. Truth retains its importance. It is the very thing which pushes us to question what beliefs we have and any new ones that come our way. The fact that many of our beliefs may turn out to be false is not unique to an internalist position like this one.

> It does not really matter whether we are reliabilists, coherentists, or evidentialists. We are very much in the same boat. All we can do in our pursuit of truth is to see that our own beliefs satisfy our standards of justification, whatever they are. And this is a state in which our beliefs, both epistemic and non-epistemic, are in reflective equilibrium, to use John Rawls' term. This is not to say that we must fail in our pursuit of truth. It is just to say that there is no guarantee that the

beliefs in equilibrium are true or even justified. This does not depend on us, it depends on the world.[38]

Once again, we have the internalist stand taken on the idea that justification and truth must be clearly understood as separate things.[39] The means we have for adjudicating among our beliefs are the only things available to us. Whether those beliefs are true or not has been clearly separated from the question of justification.

I must admit, by the way, that I am a bit taken aback by the last two sentences in the passage quoted above. It appears that Lammenranta suggests that ultimate justification is not something that is determined within a subject's system of beliefs. He says just before this that we must look to "our own standards of justification" to see that our beliefs meet up with them. But this seems to run altogether counter to what he is saying just two sentences later. In the latter case, he seems to say that even the equilibrium among our beliefs is not enough to confer justification. But if that's the case, where does justification come into the picture? Is he answering that question in the following sentence when he points us to the idea that "it depends on the world"? If so, what's internalist about that? What good is an internalism toward justification if ultimate justification is placed in the actuality of the world? One might say that Lammenranta only intends truth to be a matter for the world to decide. Perhaps, but this doesn't help us with the confusion over why he suddenly distinguishes the equilibrium of a system of beliefs from the justification of beliefs. This would be a move away from internalism rather than in agreement with it.

Despite being unable to make headway with what appears to be uncharacteristic internalism, we should not lose sight of the question before us concerning truth and its relation to justification. What Lammenranta has done with this supposed notion of justification is remove it from its role as a truth-indicator. One of the valuable traits of justified belief is its position toward truth. If I am justified in believing that tomorrow is the 5th day of the month, I can feel pretty secure in ascribing a high probability of truth to

that belief. This does not mean that justified beliefs are always true beliefs. There is nothing Alston's work that would suggest such a thing. He only claims that to be justified, a belief must be in a good position to direct the subject to the truth of the matter.[40] Lammenranta's justification holds only a loose connection to truth, at best. The only real tie to truth is that the entire process has as its goal the arrival at truth, but he recognizes that there is no guarantee of success toward that goal.[41] And if that is the case, then there is no necessity of a relation to truth simply for a belief to be justified. A belief may be worlds away from the truth and have no chance of pointing a subject in the correct direction, and yet the belief may still be justified. Such a lax reliation to truth is clearly unacceptable for anyone, and certainly for Alston.

If we push this lack of truth-conducivity, we find that it yields examples that are no closer to our intuitive understanding of justification than some of those offered in supposed opposition to reliabilism. Imagine, several years ago, we were equipped with a system of beliefs that were entirely cohesive with each other but they all tended to support the ultra-religious view that the world will end on January 14, 1995. We can imagine that there were all kinds of evidence within that belief system which supported the idea. It all appeared fairly certain from within the belief system. I may have formed the belief, as a result of all this, that I shall no longer exist on January 15, 1995 as I do now. From within this belief system, the evaluation process would have to yield a verdict of "justified." It is epistemically circular, no doubt, but since justification is a matter of "reflective equilibrium," that should not be a problem. Although the belief would have had no real relation to truth at all, it would be justified since it would fit with the overall system of belief at work.

This example may not be foolproof, but it does help us to see the kind of thing that Lammenranta is suggesting. We would be in no more a hurry to agree that this belief is justified than we would the far-out beliefs presented in Bonjour's counter-examples to reliabilism. I believe Alston would be quick to point out that the reason for this is that

the connection to truth is not quite what we expect from justified beliefs. Even though there is always the chance that a justified belief will prove to be false, we usually take it fro granted that a justified belief stands in such a relation to truth that we can be reasonably sure on the evidence available that the belief is true. A characteristic of justification which is fundamentally important to us would be missing if justification of a belief did not indicate anything at all about the truth of the belief in question.[42] Without this feature, we naturally withhold our readiness to accept a belief as justified.

There is one last score to be settled in this particular meeting between Lammenranta and Alston before moving on. We should not forget that Alston's theory of justification as we have seen it in "An Internalist Externalism" has features which do much to distinguish it from a simple reliabilist view. If Lammenranta is concerned that the result of Alston's moves in response to epistemic circularity proves to be nothing more than simple reliabilism,[43] he should be careful to take note of Alston's entire station on the question. As I mentioned earlier, we shall spend more time on Alston's more hopeful attempt to avoid epistemic circularity in the next chapter. Until then, some of what motivates this response from Lammenranta will be hidden. That being said, there is still nothing taken away from the point being made here. However we assess his ability to get around the problem of epistemic circularity, there should not be any doubt that Alston has separated himself from simple reliabilism.

This separation, as previously mentioned, centers o what he terms as the distinction between "reliable process" views and his view of "reliable indication."[44] The latter position is more concerned with truth-conducivity of the ground of a belief than evaluating the process itself in terms of reliability. Moreover, as I have mentioned several times, his position makes use of some internalist aspects to take it further from a simple reliabilism. The addition of a system wherein defeaters and over-riders are considered to work against a justified belief is anything but a simple reliabilism. Add to

that the requirement for the accessibility of the belief's ground, and the position becomes more complex. Simple reliabilism this is not.

I should put a disclaimer on these last statements. We have been noticing a trend in Alston's thought to head toward more simplistic views. He presented a "minimal foundationalism." He speaks of an externalism with weak internalist features. Here, it seems I'm taking him to be heading in the opposite direction. The reliabilism he touts appears anything but simple. So which of these two ways is he really going? If we look closely at his more complex reliabilist view, I think we can still take Alston to be heading toward a kind of simplicity. The reason I say Alston is not a simple reliabilist is because he doesn't fall into the traps that Bonjour thought were so fatal to reliabilism. A simple reliabilism might claim that a reliable method is all that is needed for the beliefs produced to be justified. Alston's position is not so simple as to make such a blunder. He recognizes justification to have a stronger relation to truth than that. Hence, his reliabilism is not simple in that sense. At the same time, Alston is taking great pains not to require anything more of believers than is minimally necessary for them to have justified beliefs. Even in stepping away from simple reliabilism with the addition of internalist constraints, he still maintains as streamlined a theory as possible by keeping those constraints on the weaker side. But all this is a distraction from our main purpose at the moment.

The real question that we are seeing for Lammenranta is whether Alston's view is any *better* than a simple reliabilist position at avoiding epistemic circularity. Again, the answer must be delayed, but even before getting into the mix, we should be able to see the potential advantages Alston has at his disposal. Whether he can present an acceptable navigation around epistemic circularity remains to be seen. But I find it an all too curt dismissal of Alston to state that "it is not easy to see the advantage" of his position, with all the internalist equipment in tow, compared to simple reliabilism. There is far more ammunition involved in Alston's position than merely the question of whether the right

kind of process led to the belief at issue. If simple reliabilism founders in the predicament of epistemic circularity, Alston may continue in search of a way around it with the help of his internalist supplements.

<center>IV</center>

As we conclude this chapter, the problem of epistemic circularity should be seen as evening out the epistemological playing field. One of the important points which Alston believes ought to be gained from our position in regard to epistemic circularity is that there are no belief-forming mechanisms that can claim superiority on this ground. Though it may not come in the direct sense where a judgment of the reliability of a process is dependent on an assumption of the reliability of that very process, epistemic circularity may still lie in the dependence of a process on some other process which does exhibit the circularity in the direct sense. The problem affects them all without respect for any one process. We have been using the example of religious belief to show how Alston's work in each chapter plays out. Continuing that exercise, the problem of epistemic circularity has its own distinctive effect on our view toward religious belief. How it influences religious epistemology is to bring somewhat of a strengthening in confidence. The criticisms brought against religious belief often point to its inability to give supporting evidence outside of its own realm of discourse. But if epistemic circularity pervades all modes of belief-formation, there may be nothing going on here but the pot calling the kettle "black."

Alston takes great care to show that even a basic belief-forming process like sense perception has no stronger a stance in respect to epistemic circularity than any other process.[45] The fact that religious belief suffers from such a problem should not lead us to off-handedly eliminate it from consideration as a possible mechanism whereby justified beliefs could be produced. Alston talks of the possibility of a religious mystical perception which produces religious beliefs of a certain sort. The circularity involved in

taking those beliefs as the results of a reliable belief-forming mechanism is fairly

obvious. We could appeal to natural theology and the theistic arguments, but this may

not get us where we want to go.

> We noted earlier that even if we can prove the existence of the external world without circularity, that conclusion by no means implies that sense perception is a reliable guide to that world. Similarly, even if we can establish the existence and basic nature of God without reliance on MP [mystical perception belief-forming process], how do we get from that conclusion to the informational efficacy of MP? Natural theology operates at too high a level of abstraction to enable us to do this job. The standard arguments for the existence of God give us no reason to think that God is interested in displaying Himself to our experience. And even if He is, how can we make the further step to the very specific conclusion that God is (usually or often) displaying Himself to our experience on those occasions when people are strongly convinced that He is doing so?[46]

Natural theology doesn't really offer any support to the reliability of a mystical

perception process of belief-formation (MP). Even if we could prove God's existence,

this wouldn't have any direct bearing on whether mystical experience could be held as

reliable.

The other possibility of showing a religious mystical perception to be reliable

would be to point to special revelation. But this is clearly circular.[47] Revelation itself is

nothing more than another form of religious perception. One's recognition of the

reliability of religious experience would be dependent on the record of religious

experiences from others or even a subject's religious experience upon coming in contact

with that revelation. The epistemic circle runs very tightly here.

But Alston's point in displaying the failings of mystical perception to demonstrate

its reliability is not to disparage it as a viable source of justified belief. Rather, it is to set

it up as another process which fares just as well (or as poorly) in light of epistemic

circularity as any other. As such, it shares this problem with all other processes, but more

importantly, it cannot be seen as any worse off in showing its reliability than those others

with respect to epistemic circularity, even our most fundamental of processes like sense

perception.

> It was incumbent on me to examine samples of all the promising-looking arguments for the reliability of SP [sense perception belief-forming process], because I was concerned to contest the common supposition that we have sufficient reason to trust SP, but not MP. By showing that any otherwise impressive argument for the reliability of SP suffers from epistemic circularity, I have rebutted this attack…. Hence if the reliability of SP can be (strongly) supported only with circularity, it cannot be claimed to be superior to any other practice, including MP, in this respect.[48]

Since this is the case, religious epistemology has been given an answer for those who would deny its place among other means of attaining justified belief. The inability to prove the reliability of a process beyond a dependence on an epistemically circular process is a problem endemic to all belief-forming processes, not just religious ones.

Alston's demonstration of this point presents a reminder of the tack taken by R. M. Hare in response to the evidential challenge of Antony Flew in a discussion found in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*.[49] It was in the course of this conversation that Flew raised a challenge to the idea of valid, meaningful religious belief much like the one often heard in criticism to the theist. If there is no real positive evidence available to the position and the only means to avoid counter-evidence are *ad hoc*, shape-shifting qualifications, is there anything that could count against theistic belief?[50] The charge put to the theist here is based on the verficationist principle of falsification. The idea is that if there is no possibility by which a claim could be falsified, that claim must be meaningless. Hence, if there is nothing that could prove a belief in God to be false, the claim "God exists as *x*" would be nothing but senseless babbling. This means that if a basis for belief cannot offer situations where it might be challenged like most scientific theory, then it should not be taken seriously. The superiority in this respect of certain methods of belief-formation over others is held as drawing a line between meaningful and meaningless belief-formation.

Hare's rejoinder appears to give Flew exactly what he wants. He immediately admits that there may be nothing that could be offered to sufficiently falsify a theist's

belief.[51] Instead of defending theistic belief against Flew's challenge, he whole-heartedly accepts the criticism that religious thinkers simply build their supporting suppositions on other suppositions, "*bliks*" as he calls them. These *bliks* are nothing more than fundamental belief-perspectives from which we attain a certain view of the world depending on the content of our *blik*. We might make the obvious connection of *bliks* to belief-forming processes.[52] So religious believers are operating on the *blik* that a God of certain sort does exist. He continues on, however, to say that this is not unusual behavior.

> It was Hume who taught us that our whole commerce with the world depends upon our *blik* about the world, and that differences between *bliks* about the world cannot be settled by observation of what happens in the world. That was why, having performed the interesting experiment of doubting the ordinary man's *blik* about the world, and showing that no proof could be given to make us adopt one *blik* rather than another, he turned to backgammon to take his mind off the problem…. [A]s Hume saw it, without a *blik* there can be no explanation; for it is by our *bliks* that we decide what is and what is not an explanation.[53]

The same point we saw made by Alston is again supported. None of our common programs for belief can manage without some kind of internal presumptions at work. Religious belief is no worse off than the rest of them.

The appeal to Hume is a telling one. Hume did much to cast doubt on our supposedly simple ability to connect our experiences and ideas with the world around us. A heavy pall of skepticism was drawn over our ability to know things as a result of Hume's work. The situation he raised is much the same as that facing us in the figure of epistemic circularity. Neither allows us to actually know that we know. In both cases skepticism seems to have the final word when it comes to what we can believe we are justified in believing. As we shall see later, this is not the end of the story for Alston, but neither is it the end for Hare. He still has his *bliks*.

But what are we to think of these *bliks*? Are they the simple solution that Hare makes them out to be? He states that the only reason people like Flew are unable to see any meaning behind the claims of theism is that they don't share the same *blik*. The

criticism cast at Hare's religious belief can be turned directly back on Flew's adherence to verificationist belief, though.[54] This does not mean, however, that just any *blik* is worth having. He says at one point that "it is very important to have the *right blik*."[55] Apparently, one doesn't want to get caught coming from an "insane" or "wrong" *blik*.[56]

How do we know what a "right" *blik* is? What method of adjudication does Hare think should be used? Whatever method is chosen, wouldn't it also be based within the framework of some *blik*? After all, we would have to explain why the *blik* is wrong, and all explanations arise from some kind of *blik*, right? If Hare is correct about the pervasiveness of *bliks*, then it would seem that there is no way to tell what *blik* ought to be adopted and what shouldn't. We are left to our own devices. But if that is true, then I could be as fully justified in beliefs produced form reading the flake-movements in my breakfast cereal as I am those granted by my five senses. No *blik* is unacceptable. They're all fair game.

Hare's notion of *bliks* faces a dilemma. Either he must acknowledge some universal standard of evaluating *bliks* which does not itself depend of a *blik*, or he must allow that there is no means for disqualifying any *blik* one might have the imagination to invent. In the first case, he would be going against his own Humean stance whereby all explanations depend on some *blik* or another. In the latter, we are left with one of those situations which goes against our most elementary understanding of what it would mean to have a justified belief, beside the fact that it would make for a crazy world.

Looking to Hare's *bliks* does not give us much of an alternative to the problem of epistemic circularity. The proposed solution does introduce us to a more internal means of possible escape, however. Though there are difficulties in demonstrating how one belief-forming process (or *blik*) could be shown as more reliable than another, there may be some means by which this idea could be modified to escape both the problems found to trouble Hare and the problem of epistemic circularity. As we continue, we shall see

whether Alston can pull just such a modification off or whether he will be subject to a dilemma similar to Hare's.

CHAPTER FOUR

Our path has brought us to what may be taken as the height of Alston's work in epistemology to this point. All of the previous thought and ponderings we have observed in the first three chapters lead us to the proposed solution before us in this chapter. We have seen Alston deliver a theory of epistemology which is both simple enough to account for our common intuitions concerning epistemic justification and yet refined enough to avoid the pit-falls of over-simplicity. All the same, we find that no theory of justification, no matter how simple and refined (or accurate, for that matter), is able to offer a defense for beliefs that does not fall victim to epistemic circularity. Even the most fundamental of beliefs eventually runs into a circle of justifying reasons as justification is traced backwards to show the belief's source to be reliable. The question that faces us here is just how we can continue to use our belief-forming processes with any kind of confidence if we are unable to find any non-circular support for their reliability. Why should we so readily accept the products of belief-forming processes for which we have no assurance of veridicality? Why take the content of basic sensory beliefs, or any other sort, to stand in any real relation to actual truth?

Alston's solution for this situation has actually been in incubation all along the way. In earlier work in religious epistemology, Alston began to shape the ideas that would later form his more mature view on our ability to accept beliefs as arising from reliable sources.[1] In those and other instances he begins to speak of belief-forming processes as being part of certain *practices* of belief formation and evaluation. These practices are the active mode or perspective from which certain kinds of beliefs rather than others will be formed and wherein those beliefs will be evaluated as justified or unjustified. These practices wherein beliefs are produced come to be described as *doxastic practices*. These may be taken to involve the same belief-forming mechanisms

that we have been discussing all along.[2] These doxastic practices are the contexts or perspectives from which beliefs of a sort unique to the specific doxastic practice will arise and be judged. Where there is the belief-forming mechanism of visual perception, there is also the doxastic practice of visual perception. Just as there is a belief-forming mechanism of logical inference, so there is the doxastic practice of inference. For any belief-forming mechanism we could come up with, there is a doxastic practice that will contain that mechanism as well as a means for evaluating the products of that mechanism. In our present discussion Alston will be turning them to the purpose of supplying a means whereby we might be able to display evidence of our beliefs' justification and avoid dogmatism. As we continue, more refined details about what he believes doxastic practices to be and how they perform will be given.

Throughout Alston's work on this front, doxastic practices (DPs) are most frequently discussed with an eye toward establishing the rationality of religious belief. Because of this, the tie to religious epistemology will be evident through the course of this chapter. I shall begin by tracing Alston's use of DPs as a means for answering the epistemic circularity problem through the literature. The effects of his approach will be evident as it is intended to aid us in solving the epistemic crisis we have found ourselves in. The effects are also evident in the fecundity of his ideas in the work of others. Though Alston's DP idea has produced more philosophical responses than anything else he has written to date, I shall limit our discussion to two main difficulties that recur in the literature involving Alston's DP theory of epistemology. How we handle those difficulties will, in turn, give us some insight as to what kind of outlook we should expect for the future of Alstonian work in epistemology as well as a means of interpreting what we have. This will fuel the proceedings of the final chapters.

Before we begin I should make some comments in order to head off possible confusion. From the earlier chapters, we discovered that a belief may be justified without a subject having that justification handy for display. In the discussion ahead we shall be

talking a good bit about displaying one's support in taking or believing a DP to be reliable. This would appear to be a memory slip. One might ask, "Hadn't we s aid that whether we can display our support or not for a belief doesn't change its justificatory status?" That is, of course, still the case. However, as we have been turning to the examples of religious belief, it becomes painfully obvious that *being* in a certain epistemic situation and *showing* that one is in that epistemic situation are very different things. It does not accomplish much for my religious fervor if I am justified in believing that God exists, but I don't immediately realize how. If that were the case, I might be accused of holding the belief dogmatically. As we saw this problem arise at the end of our first chapter, the importance of providing a solution to epistemic circularity became more crucial for Alston. In the particular field of religious epistemology, dogmatism has its own specific downsides, but dogmatism on any front is certainly not welcome. This is the challenge we saw Alston try to turn away in the last chapter, and we now return to the job that was left unfinished by that attempt.

<p style="text-align:center">I</p>

When Alston began hinting at the DP model for epistemology, it was a matter of distinguishing the religious mode of belief-formation from other standard modes such as sense perception. In those cases, Alston portrayed religious belief-formation to be subject to a domain quite separate from that of sense perception and others.[3] Where beliefs based on sense perception might be justified under a certain set of specific circumstances, beliefs based on one's religious background might have differ ent specifics contributing to their justification. I may be justified in believing that someone is baking cookies based on the information accurately received by my sense of smell. But a belief that God cares for his people may be justified based on a totally different set of ground rules. Again, the belief that there is no real number value for the square root of –1 is determined by wholly other specific criteria. What can account for this difference

between how one belief stands in relation to justification and how another does? The answer comes in a detailed description of how DPs affect epistemology, particularly our ability to see our beliefs as justified since we understand them to come from reliable sources.

Alston's idea for DPs comes from such strange bedfellows as Thomas Reid and Ludwig Wittgenstein.[4] The influence of Wittgenstein is more obvious, partly because he is the more well known of the two. The notion of language-games has become a fairly common concept and seems to find more and more frequent use among philosophers. Its application here is easy to see. A DP is closely related to a language-game. Perhaps DPs should be understood to have a smaller span of influence and activity than language-games. This is because a DP is concerned only with doxastic output while language-games cover a much broader spectrum of activity. That broadness is often referenced by the phrase sometimes used in the place of language-games, "forms of life." By way of explaining more about what DPs are and how they operate, Alston cites four important similarities between DPs and language-games.[5] Like language-games, DPs are legion. There are as many DPs as there are means of forming beliefs. There is sense perception, memory, introspection, arithmetic, religion, imagination, societal custom, tea leaf reading, etc. The list goes on and on, and each of these could be broken down into smaller sub-practices which might have their own sets of criteria for belief-formation and assessment. Secondly, DPs are like language-games in that we become practitioners pre-reflectively. We fall into line with the practice we participate in without signing a membership card. It happens without our realizing it. For the third connection, along with Wittgenstein, Alston sees DPs as being set within larger practices. How we use and are determined by a DP has much to do with the larger contexts of goals and relationships by which we are surrounded. This point of commonality brings us to the last important similarity which is the social-embeddedness of DPs. Our society plays the most crucial role in setting our personal cache of DPs.

Most of these features of DPs and language-games Alston finds within the thought of Thomas Reid, as well.[6] The one exception in Reid's influence, as opposed to Wittgensteinian language-games, is that Reid allows for outside evaluation of practices where Wittgenstein does not. Alston follows Reid's influence on this issue by leaving room for a DP to be altered or even discarded. For Wittgenstein, language-games have a self-contained standard for meaning and appropriateness. Any attempt to criticize the activities of a language-game from outside of that game would be without warrant for those within the criticized game. Alston recoils from such a stance for reasons we shall explore momentarily, but for now, we can see how ideas from both men have influenced Alston.

It's important that Alston convince us that DPs are the correct way to view our epistemic situation.[7] To do so, he describes what he calls the mistake of "autonomism" with respect to epistemology. We are mistaken if we believe that we can take epistemology to be some kind of austere and isolate discipline which enjoys some sort of specialized world where epistemic justification resides and is sometimes accessed by our beliefs through some Platonic participation. This lacks much relevance when it comes to how we form beliefs from day to day, and how we use them to function in the world. Instead, it seems much more likely that when we talk about our epistemic status relative to justification, we are talking from within a certain field of evaluation. This field of evaluation is both the source of the belief in question and the means by which that belief may be justified. As Alston puts it,

> Is it that we have some special access to a realm of being known as "epistemic justification"? That seems unlikely…. When we encounter a formulation of some deeply embedded practice of ours, it naturally makes a strong appeal. As for examples of justified and unjustified beliefs, why do they evoke such widespread concurrence? Again, the most reasonable hypothesis is that the judgments are being made from within widely shared doxastic practices.[8]

There are many things to be said about how these practices work, both individually and in conjunction with others, and these questions will be taken up shortly. What's important

for us to see at this point is that Alston can make a case for DPs being the way things really are when it comes to our actual epistemic situation. This will make for some interesting discussion when it comes to just what the place of epistemic justification is. But that, also, must wait for the time being.

We have a sketchy picture now of what a DP is, but perhaps a better view of it could come from seeing how it is supposed to work. It has been noted that DPs are distinctive methods of belief formation. But how can this be understood to affect the problem of epistemic circularity which led us to take up this subject in the first place? The problem at hand can now be reformulated in the guise of a problem for DPs: How can we be sure that our DPs actually do produce mostly true beliefs? That is, how can we be sure that the DPs we work with are reliable ones? From what we've seen resulting from epistemic circularity in the last chapter, it seems that the only positive defense available to a practice must come from within that practice or from some other practice that is reliant on itself for support. If the only reasons we have for taking a practice to be a reliable one come from that very practice or another practice with only circular support, then what we have is our familiar situation of epistemic circularity. How can a theory which uses DPs help us in regard to the problem of epistemic circularity?

Here is where Alston appeals to what has become known as his "practical rationality argument."[9] It may be seen in two distinct steps. Let's start with the somewhat less controversial one. Here is a simple version of the way it argues.

> 1. All DPs are circular in determining their reliability.
> 2. We must operate within our accepted DPs because there is no alternative.
> 3. Where we have no better alternative, our only prima facie rational choice is to continue in the old DP.
> ∴ 4. We may regard it as prima facie rational to continue in our accepted DPs.

The initial step here is simply to show that we can take ourselves to be prima facie rational in continuing to participate in the DPs that we have always adopted regardless of the problem of epistemic circularity. Nothing yet has been said about being able to take

the deliverances of that practice as reliable. That comes in the next step. But first, we should take a closer look at this argument.

The first premise is nothing more than what we found Alston arguing in our third chapter. It merely presents the unfortunate state of things with respect to epistemic circularity. The next premise is supported largely by the features of DPs noted earlier. We saw then that DPs are both adopted pre-reflectively and a matter of social embeddedness. In both instances, there is the implication that we don't have much say in what DPs we shall begin with as part of our personal stock. Aside from that is the realization that even imagining we could disentangle ourselves from any involvement with DPs, there really is nowhere else for us to turn. If we could revoke all of our DPs as being worthless because of circularity, that would only leave us in the extreme skeptical situation of having to cease believing anything at all.[10] While that position is sometimes theorized, its adoption is unlikely, at best. This, of course, does not assume that we may not throw over one or more of our DPs. This is why the second premise includes the qualifier, "accepted." We are only reinforcing our dependence on operating from within some set of DPs or another. More on this issue below.

This leaves us with the final premise which claims that without better options, our only prima facie rational recourse is to stick with the accepted practice(s) we have always been a part of. I should head off any future confusion by pointing out that this premise assumes some amount of reflection on the part of the subject. One is taking a look at the situation and realizing that her only rational option is to keep playing the cards she has been dealt. Here we might raise an objection against the exclusiveness of rationality suggested for such a position. Why does Alston state that sticking with one's DP is the *only* rational move to make?[11] Certainly there might be understandable hesitation in taking on a life where skepticism and doubt reign supreme, but this would be more of a practical consideration rather than a purely rational one. One clear question for Alston here is what he means by "rationality" in this context. As this question will be central to

a later discussion, I shall save it for that time. At this point though, we might simply the practical point to be one of reasonable behavior, and hence, "practical rationality." If there really is no other skepticism-avoiding alternative to working with the beliefs of a DP, we may take it as practically rational to continue in the DP currently practiced where "practically rational" is understood as described.

For the present, then, we are allowing Alston's first step in the practical rationality argument to pass. There are issues that we shall take up again as their urgency presents itself more clearly. Until then, we can at least be sure of just how Alston believes his argument to work. One feature of this first step we have neglected to comment on is the prima facie nature of the acceptance as rational. As noted in chapter two, over-riding and defeating considerations must be constantly held in mind when it comes to justification. The same is true for DPs when it comes to rational practice. On this front, we might imagine that many DPs could survive the initial test of practical rationality. Based on the argument in this first step, a DP like medium-consultation could be accepted as prima facie rational. If it is a practice that we have always been involved in and it fits the classifications described for DPs, i.e. it is an accepted DP, Alston's argument would commit us to seeing it as rational to form beliefs based on the advice from a medium. The prima facie nature of this rational acceptance, however, is just the point where Alston's position claims to part company with the language-game approach of Wittgenstein.

It was briefly mentioned before that one of the features of Reid's, work which counters that of Wittgenstein, is that there is the possibility of outside evaluation for practices. This is precisely where we find Alston drawing his notion of defeaters and over-riders which might disqualify a DP from its prima facie rational status. There are times, after all, when different DPs come into conflict with one another. In the case of medium-consultation, we could easily imagine that discrepancies would occur between what a medium advises and what some other DP would suggest. Suppose it is the advice

of a medium that I believe that my true calling in life is to be a professional bowler and that I should throw over everything else that I may have worked to accomplish to achieve success in that area. This runs into heavy opposition with beliefs resulting from other DPs of which I am a part. For instance, my sense perceptual DP has produced again and again the belief that I am not a very good bowler. In fact, that practice has left me with the belief that I stink at bowling. Which of these beliefs will win out? If the evaluation of beliefs and practices is only available within the practice itself as Wittgenstein's language-game model would apparently have it, then there can be no outside standard whereby we may conclude either of the beliefs to be faulty.[12]

The only way to escape this situation is to look somewhere beside the practices in question for adjudication. There are three such external criteria that Alston uses to show some DPs to fail in getting past the initial prima facie rationality.[13] The first two have to do with a recurrent and overwhelming inconsistency among the practice's own deliverances firstly, and secondly in comparison with some other well-established (socially embedded) practice(s). In the first case, if inconsistencies continually appear in the products of a DP, it cannot be considered as conducive to bringing about beliefs that are more likely to be true than false. If truth is the goal of belief, then these DPs would be disqualified. In the other case, the same considerations apply, but the results are not as clear. Where two practices produce conflicting beliefs as in the above case of medium-consultation and sense perception, a respect for truth as external to practices makes us realize that one of the beliefs must be wrong. How are we to tell which one is wrong? Alston's advice is to go with the practice that is more firmly established in ourselves and in our community.[14] But this doesn't assure us of making the correct move in respect to truth. It might be that the medium is absolutely right about my bowling prospects. The problem is that our epistemic situation gives us no chance of knowing that. So, all things being equal, the more firmly established practice of sense perception would win out in

determining which of the two conflicting beliefs is to be taken as wrong, and which is to be taken as right.

One other external source of evaluation also indicates a preference for sense perception in this case. A DP may provide significant "self-support" which can be balanced against the self-support of another DP.[15] Self-support basically consists of a history of success among a DP's beliefs. This is different from its being firmly socially established since being firmly established doesn't necessitate success in many of the forms that self-support would. That success might be framed in regard to one's pursuit of truth, the desire for coherence with other well-established practices, achievement of the crucial goals within the practice itself, etc. It is also different from the criterion of internal consistency for a reason also related to the element of a DP's success. The success just described would be used as a comparison tool. A practice that is more successful than its competitor would have an edge. Internal consistency does not require such a comparison for the purpose of narrowing the field of acceptable practices. What is interesting about this last criterion is that it is also subject to the bug of epistemic circularity. Self-support, by definition, is nothing more than reasons granted from the source under investigation. It is a defense for the honesty of the defendant given by the defendant. How does this count as an external evaluation? The answer is not to look at the specifics of the support, but at a practice's ability to even present the support at all. How many DPs can claim the kinds of successes, by virtue of productive and functional belief, that sense perception can? Not many. Comparing the self-support of medium-consultation to that of sense perception would show quite a gap. That should at least count for something.

It's important to note that none of these external criteria give us the decisive answers we might want. Simply because one DP has the edge over another in terms of internal and external consistency and in significant self-support, there is no guarantee that it is the one which gives us the best access to truth. After all, the medium could be right

about my latent abilities while perception only informs me about what I haven't been able to do in the past. Because of this, we might be discouraged about Alston's system of DPs for their lack of assurance. But that's been the name of the game for epistemic reliability all along. What matters for those in our epistemic situation, thanks to epistemic circularity, is that we can reasonably assume to be in the correct relation to truth. While these external criteria can't eliminate the presence of every possible doubt, they can give us very strong indications as to what practice is the most reliable in producing true belief. The advantage Alston sees here, even with the less-than-certain criteria, is that this puts us in better standing with real truth than a language-game approach could. At least in the DP scenario we have *some* access to external standards of evaluation.[16] If we hold truth and meaning to be something that stands outside particular conceptual frameworks, this is an important point to establish. Without it, truth is subject to whatever practice is in use and will change depending on the practice.

We should continue on with Alston's practical rationality argument. The first step was to argue for the prima facie rationality of continuing in a DP just as one always has despite the presence of epistemic circularity. The next step is to make a connection between this more practical move and the possibility of gaining some epistemic support for sticking with our DPs. As we shall find later, leaving this argument wholly within the realm of the practical may lead to problems for Alston. We must bridge the gap between the rationality and the reliability of a practice. Here is a version of the argument which begins with the conclusion of the first argument.[17]

> 1. One may regard it as prima facie rational to continue in our accepted DPs.
> 2. When one regards as accepted DP to be rationally participated-in, the only <u>prima facie rational alternative is to take that DP to be reliable.</u>
> ∴ 3. It is prima facie practically rational to take one's accepted DP to be reliable.[18]

Since we have already seen where his first premise comes from, we can focus on the second as the crucial point for Alston to prove. Before that, however, a word should be put toward just what the significance of the argument is.

Why do we need the second step in the practical rationality argument? Isn't it a worthwhile contribution to show that a DP can be prima facie rationally engaged-in? To suggest that religious practitioners can confidently take their mode of belief-formation to be one that allows rational participation would seem to be a gain in what has always been a controversial field of endeavor. All the same, if Alston were to stop here, we could not make the connection to the epistemic principles for which he is concerned. Reliability as a criterion for acquiring knowledge for a belief is a much more lofty height to reach. If he can connect DPs, and specifically a religious DP, with epistemic reliability in some way, then religious belief from within that particular DP can boast an even higher evaluative status than mere practical rationality and thereby avoid the charge of dogmatism found earlier.

In order to do that, Alston has to give us a reason for accepting the second premise in the above argument. The central claim being made is that if a person can understand herself to be rational in participating in a certain DP, rationality demands that she also take that practice to be a reliable one. For example, if I consider my participation in the visual perception DP to be rational and I deny that the practice is reliable, I am making a claim against rationality. My claim would be that "I am a cognizant and continual participant in a practice I believe to be unreliable." This participation in what is understood to have *rationality*, Alston says, runs counter in terms of its rationality with the claim of a believed lack of *reliability*. One's participation rationally requires that one take it as reliable. The only other alternative, casting off one's DPs, actually *isn't* an alternative. Alston puts this in fairly point blank language when he says that "abstention from all such practices is not a live option; therefore the only rational alternative open to us is to accord prima facie acceptance to all basic socially established practices (regard them as prima facie reliable), pending a demonstration of unreliability, or the invocation of any other disqualifying consideration."[19] This doesn't mean that the practice is in fact reliable. There's nothing

about a practice's being rationally engaged-in that entails its reliability.[20] His case is for the weaker claim that one would only *be rational in taking it* that her practice is reliable.

Imagine this scenario. Smith is concerned about epistemic circularity with regard to her ability to form true beliefs about her surroundings based on sense perception. Taking a look at Alston's first step, she agrees that there really is no rational recourse to the use of the sense-perceptual DP. Rationally, she may continue on forming beliefs as she always has through her senses. That being the case, Alston is in effect asking what sense it would make for Smith to continue to form beliefs as before, to understand that her means of belief-formation are rational, and yet to take sense perception to be an unreliable DP? She's *using* it. She bases thousands upon thousands of simple, yet life-impacting, decisions on the beliefs given by her senses. How could she do this and still question the reliability of the practice she counts on so heavily? Can she honestly continue to drink the water she does, for example, consider it rational to believe that it is water and what isn't? Alston is not saying that it would be impossible to take this attitude, but he is saying that it is practically irrational. At first glance this point appears to be fairly intuitive. Nevertheless, there are those who question the soundness of the claim. In the following section, we shall pick up this proposal of Alston's and submit it for further investigation.

On first blush, however, one can see how Alston could be convinced by what he has shown so far. If one can take herself to be rational in engaging in her DPs, then it does seem to follow that she would also take those DPS to be reliable simply by continually using the practices as she does. But what does this have to with epistemic circularity? Has this actually given us any manner of solution? On the surface of things, it hasn't. We are still functioning in the practices we take on with out any non-circular means of showing our beliefs to be products of reliable practices.[21] But Alston is perfectly resigned to this outcome. Recalling that showing one's reliability or

justification was never as important as it might have been assumed, this is not surprising. Although we can't *show* that our DPs are actually reliable in any non-circular way, what Alston has shown is that we are practically rational in taking our DPs to *be* in just such a situation.

> We have not shown the reliability attribution to be rational in a truth-conducive sense of rationality, one that itself is subject to a reliability constraint. But that does not imply that our argument is without epistemic significance. It all depends on what moves are open to us. If….we are unable to find noncircular indications of the truth of the reliability judgment, it is certainly relevant to show that it enjoys some other kind of rationality. It is, after all, not irrelevant to our basic aim at believing the true and abstaining from believing the false, that SP [the sense-perception DP] and other established doxastic practices constitute the most reasonable procedures to use, so far as we can judge, when trying to realize that aim.[22]

What this means for our particular beliefs is that they may be rationally taken to be prima facie justified since they are the results of DPs that are rationally taken to reliable. In other words, even in the face of epistemic circularity, Alston has given an outlet for subjects to demonstrate their beliefs to have this prima facie form of justification. And this demonstration is available to any beliefs that are the result of a DP that enjoys the status we identified above.

Here, then, we have an explanation of Alston's means for avoiding the problems which his adherence to a primarily externalist epistemology brought upon itself.[23] He ends his practical rationality argument by allowing that one may demonstrate her belief to be prima facie justified based on a DP approach to epistemology. This, at least, is how he ends his argument in 1991. As we watch his thought progress, however, we begin to see the relation to and need for justification alter. Before looking into that, we shall spend some time dealing with two important categories of objections to Alston's practical rationality argument.

II

As I mentioned earlier, the response in the literature to Alston's DP approach, especially where it has application to religious epistemology, has been enormous. To try to account for all of the specific questions and problems raised against Alston's view would require much more time and space that is both available and appropriate for this project. Instead, I shall take the two problems raised by Alston's challengers, which have the more direct influence on his epistemological approach as a whole. As they are somewhat related, we shall find that they lead to the same fundamental question. And this question will direct us to the very heart of understanding Alston's current epistemological position.

The first set of objections refers to the second premise of the second step of Alston's practical rationality argument. There we saw Alston claim that where a person can take herself to be practically rational in engaging I a DP, it would be irrational for her not to take that practice to be a reliable one. The question is whether this apparently commonsensical claim is true. The example of Smith holding herself rational in accepting the revelations of the senses while not being confident that the senses are a reliable source of information tended to give credence to Alston's point. This initial plausibility we might associate with it is put to the test, however.

Alston's first step, the argument for the rationality of remaining with a DP since there are not better alternatives, has received plenty of negative attention.[24] But these objections fail to strike at the real core of Alston's move. Sure, the practical rationality argument might be cut off at the knees if it can't get past the first step, but it's Alston's proposal to connect practical rationality with epistemic rationality that makes of r the really interesting discussion. If that gap could be closed, a religious believer could boast the epistemic, as well as practical, value of her religious beliefs. However, there is a host of opposition in Alston's way to crossing that gap.

First of all, let's look at this objection on a more shallow level. Can a person accept her beliefs as being rationally attained and still doubt the reliability of the practice producing those beliefs? Apparently, many think so. Here are some thoughts from Robert Pasnau, Richard Gale, Michael Wakoff, and Matthias Steup, respectively.

> But it seems to me that one can engage in a practice on a day-to-day basis without ever believing that most of the beliefs generated by the practice are true. It would in fact be quite normal for one to go along with a practice from moment to moment, accepting the beliefs generated by a practice without ever considering whether most of the beliefs generated over the past x hours/days/years have in fact been true…. Someone uncertain about t he reliability of a practice could engage in it on a day-to-day basis without being forced to believe that the practice *as a whole* is reliable.[25]

> …[I]t is possible for a person…not to realize that truth is agglomerative or collective with respect to a conjunction and thus to believe of every output proposition of a DP that it is true but not believe that all or even most of these propositions are true and that the practice thereby is reliable.[26]

> If my reliance on SP is rational only in this sense…, one t hat gives such weight to entrenchment and the difficulty of abandoning a practice, then it seems quite reasonable to be agnostic about its reliability. Once I discover that my only basis for trusting a habitual way of forming beliefs is that it would frustrate some of my nonepistemic ends if I were to try to disengage from it, then I can *lazily* stick with it and not be guilty of pragmatic contradiction if I express agnosticism about its reliability.[27]

> What is at issue here is the *practical* rationality of attributing reliability to SP. Now, it might very well be that even skeptics who deny the epistemic rationality of the reliability attribution are prepared to accept the practical rationality of that attribution. Nevertheless, (A2*) [that one is irrational in taking a practice to be practically rational to engage in while not taking it to be reliable] strikes me as dubious…. First, those who judge SP reliable have available to them two alternatives: to suspend judgment as to the reliability of SP, and to judge SP to be unreliable. Second, it is possible to give good reasons for at least one of these two positions: suspending judgment as to the reliability of SP.[28]

I find the first two of these citations to point out one alternative to Alston's claim an d the second set to suggest another.

Both Robert Pasnau and Richard Gale have in mind a believer of the highly non-reflective stripe. Pasnau speaks of a believer who doesn't stop to wonder whether the

beliefs she is operating with are from a reliable source or not. She is simply going about her business. Getting things done, he suggests, sometimes takes precedence over making sure that the principles guiding the action are what they ought to be. Sometimes this is a faulty oversight of the subject. Gale is also thinking this way. The quote above from him comes in the context of an example of students in his own experience who are often vocal about both their acceptance of each individual product of a mode of belief-formation and their unwillingness to recognize that mode, as a whole, as productive of true beliefs. In that instance, it might not be effective with Alston's claim because one might say it's surely possible for them to do so, but they aren't being rational. On that point, Pasnau's picture of the practitioner who doesn't have the time to reflect on the fact that she doesn't hold the source of her beliefs to be reliable presents the problem in a stronger light.[29] The question that Alston poses is whether that person can be said to be rational in holding herself as rationally participating in the DP while failing to reflect on the possible reliability of her DP. Pasnau believes she can.

The second pair of citations, from Michael Wakoff and Matthias Steup, respectively, focus on the possibility of the reflective believer to simply be agnostic toward the reliability of a practice while continuing to practice it and take herself to be rational in practicing it. They both aver that there is no transgression of practical rationality, so far as they can see, in taking on and putting to use certain beliefs from a DP that one rationally participates in while at the same time standing in doubt toward the practice's reliability. If our epistemic situation is as Alston has described it, with no way to non-circularly show a practice to be reliable, why can't we acknowledge the skepticism that stands in our path while also continuing along that path? The point is that simply because we see the rationality of staying with the practices we have, there is no rational *necessity* involved in taking those practices as reliable simply because we use them. Using them may be the only option we have, if Alston's first step is correct. That being so, it is the contention of Alston's challengers that practicing a DP, and even

understanding ourselves to be rational in doing so, doesn't require us to take the DP as reliable in order to rational.

Perhaps we ought to give Alston room to respond. In the first instance, where Pasnau cites the non-reflective use of beliefs that we do not hold to come from reliable sources, Alston gives a specific response. He agrees with Pasnau that there is certainly the possibility that one could do just as Pasnau describes. Alston never questions the ability of a person to consider their participation in an accepted DP to be rational, and yet not take the DP to be reliable. The question is whether the person is rational in doing so. Here Alston states that there seems to be a difference in their basic intuitive insights on the matter. All he can do is reaffirm his position that "if I confidently form beliefs in a certain way, and continue to do so over a long period of time,…I thereby evince my confidence that that way of forming beliefs can be relied on to yield mostly true beliefs."[30] What is interesting in this response that might not have been so evident in his earlier rehearsal of this point is the obvious connection Alston is making between a person's action and her attribution of reliability to the present practice. As we look closely at his replies to this charge, the connection of those two comes out in strong relief.[31] Eventually we shall have to ask how this connection affects his overall position with respect to his use of DPs.

Turning to the proposal that agnosticism should be open to a practitioner in regard to a practice's reliability, we can imagine that Alston might make the same point as before in shedding the objection. Were we to watch virtually any person's behavior as she went through her daily routine, there would be few surprises in how she handled things around her. She would measure her steps so as to avoid obstacles in her path. She would make sure there is enough light in a room to enable her to perform whatever task she might undertake. Her conversations and dealing s with other people would follow a normal pattern cone could expect between distinct rational individuals. Now imagine that we ask her about the activities of her day and she answers, "Oh, yes, I did all those

things, but I'm not sure if it's true that there are objects in the world, that vision gives me an accurate account of those objects, or that there are other minds." Would we be surprised? I suspect so. The reason for our surprise would be our observation of all the ways she handled objects and people. There appeared to be a tacit acceptance of the reliability of her senses, intuition, and whatever else it takes to get us through the day. That is, given her actions, she seemed to attribute reliability to all those DPs by accepting the output beliefs of those practices as rational enough for acting as a basis for her behavior. We might believe the person's actions to reveal what she thinks about the reliability of her DPs.

This rejoinder of Alston's tends to remind us of the suggestion of Hume when faced with a similar situation. Hume, on a similar scale as Alston, also detailed our epistemic setting as a good deal less than what we would like.[32] Our "knowledge" of the world turns out to be no more than a glorified expectation that things will remain as they have always seemed to be. If this is the best we can do, then the question comes: How do we continue living? Abject skepticism doesn't make for a very comfortable way of life. Hume realized that.

> Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hour's amusement, I wou'd return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain'd, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther.[33]

Hume's point is that our human nature commandeers us in skeptical situations. We are unable to retain distrust in our senses where our everyday lives are concerned. Our actions take on the revelations of our belief-forming practices and treat them as being from reputable sources.

Though this sounds similar to Alston, it cannot be equated to his position. Hume, as a matter of fact, would appear to side with Pasnau, Gale, Wakoff, and Steup. He speaks of two sides warring, as it were, for our attention. Our reason tells us that we don't know whether our senses are reliable or not. Our human nature compels us to accept the presentations of our perception as true. In the end, it seems that Hume allows for both to play their part. We can both 'yield to the current of nature, in submitting to [the] senses'[34] and 'preserve our skepticism.'[35] This makes for a good deal of ambivalence, but it is just the life Hume believes we are condemned to live. Alston might have no problem with Hume's point that such a double life is actually outside the realm of the deliverances of strict reason.[36] The difference is that Alston and Hume disagree on who it is that ends up outside the realm of strict reason. Hume calls the acceptance of our belief-forming practices like sense perception as reliable a deliverance of our human nature and not reason. Alston's charge of irrationality applies only to the person who takes her involvement in an accepted practice to be rational, but stops short of admitting the reliability of the given practice. This indicates a more fundamental point of difference between Alston and Hume on the matter of action in the world in the face of skepticism. Where Hume disallows the possibility that a person could be using strictly reasonable faculties in accepting the beliefs granted through the senses or any other dubitable means, Alston is arguing for, not only a use of rationality in possessing those beliefs, but also for a positive *epistemic* status for those beliefs. This is where we get into the deeper concern for Alston's claim of the irrationality in taking engagement in a DP to be rational but doubting the reliability of the DP.

Underlying all of the ostensive objections to his claim is the worry that Alston believes the simple practice of a person commits them to a certain propositional, epistemic stance. As noted above, Alston makes a tight connection between a person's actions and her attribution of reliability to a DP. Here Alston finds stiff opposition from his academic colleagues. The proposed bridge between a practically rational evaluation

of the situation and an epistemic evaluation leaves some wondering where the connection is. Gale sees Alston as attempting to claim some kind of epistemic justification for DPs in claiming them to be rationally taken as reliable. The problem is that he sees no argumentation by Alston in support of that attempt.[37] Steup's difficulty is even more challenging. Not only is there no clear argument for the connection between the practical and the epistemic side of this coin, he wonders whether the practical position Alston shows has any bearing at all on a person's epistemic situation.[38] We'll take these on one at a time.

I am making an effort here to point out what will turn out to be the fundamental problem facing Alston's work. It is important, then, to see exactly why it is a problem. The specific form of the charge against Alston that we are developing at the moment is that the results of a practical evaluation of one's DPs does not necessarily imply similar results for an epistemic evaluation. The practical rationality argument seems to turn on the recognition that I have no better practical alternative to the DPs already in use. I can either continue with the beliefs delivered by my current DPs or live as a wholesale skeptic. Since the life of a skeptic is not taken as a serious option, I am left with my current DPs. As that is my practical situation, Alston has further argued that by continuing to work with my DPs I am staking out a position on the reliability of those DPs. The question is this: How does the fact that I am stuck with my DPs because of practical circumstances have any influence on the epistemic status of those DPs? Why should we assume that because practicality necessitates that I take my DPs as reliable, that they can then be shown to have some greater degree of epistemic status? It's this connection that Alston has to come up with to shore up his practical rationality argument. And it is this connection that this next group of objectors accuses Alston of failing to produce.

Gale cites Alston's move from the practical to the epistemic and tries to flesh it out in order to clearly see how it is meant to work. He has in mind the argument from

practical rationality which we have already seen. This is coupled with three instances later in Alston's book, *Perceiving God*, where he appears to believe himself to have offered proof of the connection somewhere within that previous argument.

> It should be clear from the above that even though I hold that a Christian is epistemically justified (at least prima facie) on the basis of mystical perception in holding certain Christian beliefs about God,…[39]

> [N]one of these considerations [concerning inconsistencies in CMP, the Christian Mystical-perception Practice, etc.] are fatal to the epistemic claims we have made for CMP.[40]

> …I have hinted that this is not the whole story of the epistemic support of religious belief and that in a comprehensive treatment, mystical perception would be integrated into a larger picture.[41]

In each place, Alston seems to be making claims about the epistemic situation rather than the practical side of things. In the first, he speaks of epistemic justification. The second refers to epistemic claims that he has supposedly made for a person's participation in a DP, specifically CMP in that context. Lastly, Alston mentions that what he has done in *Perceiving God* is to give at least some portion of a possible total epistemic support, thus, implying that he has given some epistemic support already.

But from what we have seen already, there seems to be nothing in Alston's writing that makes anything even close to an explicit argument for the jump from the realm of the practical to the epistemic in the case of DPs. The closest we come is his insistence that a person is rationally committed to taking her DP to be reliable if she can take herself to be practically rational in continuing to participate in that DP. But this still leaves things on the practical side since, as we have shown, he understands the commitment more as a matter of practical activity than reflective cognitive deliberation that moves toward truth-conducivity on the part of the subject's practices.

> But we must remember that the practical rationality of taking SP to be reliable is taken in turn to be a reason for so taking it. (Not a reason – at least not a sufficient reason – for supposing SP to *be* reliable, but a reason for *taking* it to be reliable.) Thus the ultimate conclusion of the argument really is that SP is

reliable; and it is this that we are assuming, in practice, in using SP outputs as premises (or as support for premises).[42]

Notice in this passage that Alston says the assumption of the practice's reliability is something that happens "*in practice*," not necessarily consciously, when the beliefs from a practice are used in the conscious formation of other beliefs. For all its use of the epistemic qualifier "reliable," there just doesn't seem to be much epistemic work going on. The only exception is a practical assumption. We are assuming that the epistemic work assuring the reliability or truth-conducivity of one's DP is taken care of. We apparently do this when we participate in a practice with confidence. The lack of explicit argumentation from Alston on this point is one thing, but Steup states that even if there were argumentation,[43] it would basically show no relevance to a person's epistemic situation. Whatever a person's practical circumstances might be, the same is not thereby entailed for their epistemic circumstances.

Steup illustrates his point[44] with a classic desert island story which philosophers are so fond of resorting to. On Steup's island are several castaways from a shipwreck. On the ship were an evenly divided number of psychopathic murderers and normal people serving as personnel. Because of the confusion during the wreck, there is no external, physical evidence of the difference between the psychopaths and the normal passengers. Therefore, the chances of your dealing with a psychopath are just as good (or bad) as those of your dealing with a non-psychopath. But you have no alternative but to work with all of the castaways for the sake of survival. Without the cooperation of everyone, you will most likely die. The risk is that you will become involved with a psychopath and place yourself in mortal danger, but you have no other choice but to place yourself in the other's trust. That is, you are practically rational for placing trust in the person or people you cooperate with. However, Steup points out that this does not say anything about your take on the reliability of those people. You might resign yourself to there being no other rational position to take other than working with the others, but it

does not mean that you should take the individual you are working with at the moment to be reliable. And the same, Steup says, follows for our situation *vis a vis* DPs.

At first glance this appears to be a continuation of the shallower objection dealt with earlier. Steup seems to be merely pointing out that it may be rational to believe oneself to be rational in operating a certain way while not taking that operation to be a reliable one. Below this idea, however, is Steup's claim that it is not only rational to take this stance, but that the practical realm has no bearing on what goes on in the epistemic realm in this case. Even though we may be practically rational in participating in a DP, such as sense perception, that does not mean that we are automatically locked in to a particular position with respect to its reliability. One does not entail the other. This constitutes a question of whether there really can be a bridge spanning the gap between the practical and epistemic parts of our situation.

The onus now stands upon Alston to answer for what appears to be an oversight on his part. How can he believe himself to have offered some sort of means whereby epistemic claims can be made on the basis of practical considerations for operating within DPs? Exactly where is the epistemic relevance of having no practically rational alternative beyond what is already practiced? More specifically, what relation does the practical concern of *taking* a DP to be reliable have with the epistemic reality of its actually *being* reliable? Perhaps the best way to see Alston's attempt to answer these questions is to return to what we found in Gale and Steup above. Both may be seen to suffer from the same type of misunderstanding of Alston's position.

Gale charges Alston with assuming an epistemic validation of DPs – in particular, sense perception and the Christian mystical perception practice – by virtue of some of his later claims. However, if we look back at each one of those citations, we might see that Alston really doesn't have DPs in mind at all when speaking of their epistemic warrantedness. In the first and third examples Gale uses, we find that Alston is actually talking about a practitioner's beliefs, not her practice. That means that the epistemic

status in question is not that of the DP, but the beliefs which are a result of the DP. In other words, Alston is not assuming anything about the epistemic case for DPs in those passages. What he *is* doing, is pointing out that assuming the reliability of the DP makes a positive difference for the epistemic standing of the resultant *beliefs* of the DP. Just what kind of difference this is supposed to make will be taken up momentarily.

The second passage referred to by Gale does appear to be concerned with the epistemic status of the DP involved. There, Alston says explicitly that epistemic claims have been made for the sake of CMP, and that current considerations taken up have caused no permanent damage to them. If we take a look at the "considerations" under inspection, though, it may shed some light on what epistemic claims Alston is talking about. Let's pick up the preceding thought to the passage cited.

> …I considered some reasons for s upposing CMP to be insufficiently reliable to serve as a source of justification…. The main reasons discussed in Chapter 6 were (1) the claim that mystical experience can be explained in purely naturalistic terms, (2) inconsistencies in the output of CMP, and (3) contradictions between the output of CMP and that of various secular practices, particularly science, history, and metaphysics. Again it was concluded that none of these considerations are fatal to the epistemic claims we have made for CMP.[45]

With a better view of the context, it appears that the epistemic claims Alston is making reference to are the tacit approvals of the practice as reliable, the taking-to-be-reliable move made by practitioners when they continue practicing a DP they find no rational alternative for. More specifically, Alston has in mind here the epistemic claim that a DP, CMP in particular, has not been able to be shown as *un*reliable. And, although it would be a negative claim, it would be an epistemic one nonetheless. Moreover, it is an epistemic claim that doesn't arrive from any practical participation "bridge." There is no reliance on the practical acceptance of the DP in realizing that the DP cannot be shown to be unreliable for the reasons mentioned. It seems, then, that Gale has either misrepresented Alston, misunderstood him, or both.

But what of Steup's contention that we shouldn't think that there is the possibility of any merging between the practical and epistemic domains? Gale's point aside, Alston certainly makes explicit that he believes there is such a connection, and he gets significant mileage out of it. Just where is the epistemic value of the practical rationality argument? In particular, what is the epistemic force of the practical rationality of taking a DP to be reliable? Defending this becomes the biggest problem facing Alston's DP approach. In answer, we look to the same point of departure that was brought up in answer to Gale's criticism a moment ago.

Alston's practical rationality argument is not meant to grant any kind of epistemic seal of approval on DPs beyond their practically rational acceptance as reliable. He never claims anything else. What does this mean for DPs, then? It means that they are not the epistemically important part of the picture. They are the practically important part. The mistake Steup makes is to assume that the epistemic value Alston wishes to attribute through his practical rationality argument is primarily for DPs. But that is not the case. DPs are merely the vehicle by which we arrive at Alston's main epistemic concern. As noted above, that main concern seems to center around individual beliefs. Understanding this, perhaps we could put Alston's response this way: The reason there appears to be no bridge between the practical and the epistemic for DPs is because there is none. The bridge is not *for* DPs. The bridge *is* DPs.

Clearly there is a lot left to be said on the matter. *How* do DPs serve as a bridge? Why do we need a bridge? What would be wrong with simply leaving things in purely practical terms? The questions of Gale and Steup have led us to an even deeper question. For the presentation of that question and the ensuing discussions, we turn to a deeper conversation.

III

The question that faces Alston now is the most crucial for the success of his aims for the practical rationality argument. The reason for this is that it strikes at the very heart of some of the basic contentions we saw him make early in establishing the notion of DPs and their function in epistemology. His purpose for bringing DPs into play was to show the possibility of avoiding the problem of epistemic circularity. He gave us reasons to demonstrate that DPs are actually the way our beliefs are produced[46] and that all DPs suffer from epistemic circularity in the same way. Then the practical rationality argument comes on the scene. In the first step, it shows that our DPs are practically rationally engaged in because we have no other choice. The second step tries to show that rationally engaging in a practice makes it a rational requirement that one take the practice to be a reliable one. The claim is that there is epistemic significance in this entailment. Before we get to the central question of whether there really is any epistemic significance to this, we should preface that discussion by asking why there even *needs* to be any epistemic significance to it.

Suppose all Alston's argument did was to show the pragmatic availability and perhaps the greater pragmatic value of participating in one's DPs. [47] What would be the result? This question forms the major objection against Alston's argument from a variety of sources. Here are some examples from Gale, Kevin Meeker, and Wakoff, respectively. Each one focuses on the same idea.

> With a pragmatic argument we must distinguish between the person who gives the argument, the 'Justifier', and the person(s) whose action or belief is being justified, the Justifee(s). While a pragmatic argument is universalizable among justifiers,…(i.e., If my pragmatic argument for person X doing or accepting Y is sound, then anyone's presentation of this argument is sound), it is not among justifees (It is possible that X be pragmatically justified in doing or accepting Y but some other person not be).[48]

> …Alston could concede that only those *inside* CMP can conclude that it is practically rational to engage in this practice…. But this amounts to *employing*

mystical perception within CMP to defend it – what seems to be most assuredly an *internal* defense.[49]

> If p-rationality [practical rationality] requires participation, then each participant has p-reasons [practical reasons] to stick with his own practice, but these p-reasons are entirely internal to and relative to the practice. On this view, Aston's [sic] position is a version of communitarian relativism about p-rationality. Such relativism is not problematic for a wholly instrumental conception of p-rationality; it is just what one would expect. But if we take seriously the epistemic strand in p-rationality, then such relativism defeats one's aim in relying on a doxastic practice to form true beliefs about a mind-independent subject matter.[50]

In each one of these instances, a problem is pointed out that would result from sticking merely with the pragmatic implications of the practical rationality argument. It is the problem of internal subjectivism.

How does the problem arise? Let's take a look at what is being suggested. If we admit that there is no real epistemic value provided by DPs in avoiding epistemic circularity, then we are only left with the practical rationality of remaining with the practices we already have. But that tells us nothing about the practice's connection with truth or its probable truth-conduciveness. This leaves us in one of two possible positions. One is to take it that we are left in skepticism since sense perception is no better at proving its reliability than mystical perception.[51] That might be going too far. Remember that DPs are still available, and we *would* be practically rational in participating in them. It seems we would even have no choice but participate as the first step of the practical rationality argument states. But DPs have criteria for the evaluation of beliefs built in, as we noted earlier. Here the second possibility opens up to us. This would mean that we *could* display our "epistemically" justified beliefs of a certain kind, but they would not be of the kind that we have found Alston to argue for. The beliefs produced would be epistemically justified according to the particular criteria set up *within* that certain DP. That is, the chain of justifying reasons supporting a belief would end inside the active DP. Our reasons for taking a certain DP to be reliable would also be within that DP or some other circularly-supported DP, as we discovered with epistemic circularity.

The reason this would be such a problem for Alston harks back to what we saw him say in distinguishing his DP view from the language-game position. Alston has spent a fair amount of time trying to distance DPs from being cast in the same light as those Wittgensteinian language-games. His greatest concern is that DPs should have some connection to an external truth, where language-games seem to provide truth for themselves internally.[52] But this is just what those passages quoted above bring against Alston's position should it become too entangled with the pragmatic function of the practical rationality argument at the expense of accomplishing anything on the epistemic side. Gale's passage speaks to the problem of being unable to talk about epistemic criteria among practitioners of different DPs. That is, the solely pragmatic approach allows relativism to set in. Also, the quotations from Meeker and Wakoff explicitly mention the internal results of a practical rationality for DPs. If it is only about what practical alternatives are left open for a person, each practitioner is left stranded within her own DP with no outside source for guidance. Even though Alston talks of external criteria for DPs, the long and short of it is that they too fall to circularity.[53]

I mentioned in the last chapter that perhaps one of the main difficulties that Lammenranta has with Alston would have to wait.[54] Well, this is just where his beef with Alston rejoins the fray. Lammenranta wonders precisely the same thing as these others we have seen, but phrases it in a different way. He basically asks what the difference is between understanding oneself to be rational in participating in a DP and understanding oneself to be rational in taking the DP to be reliable.[55] If they are both a practical matter, he has no bones about allowing Alston the point that the former entails the latter. The real sticking point is that if neither of them get beyond the practical level, the level of pragmatic activity, then neither cuts any more epistemic wood than the other. Being able to count oneself as practically rational in taking a DP as reliable makes no more headway than Alston's first step in granting real progress in the face of epistemic circularity.

All of this, so far, takes for granted that Alston is arguing purely from the pragmatic side of the issue. What this all shows is that if Alston can only approach DPs with pragmatic reasoning, then the position he has sought so diligently to separate himself from seeps into the DP framework. If the practical rationality argument has only a pragmatic effect, then Alston is more Wittgensteinian than he believes himself to be. This leads us to the second, and more important question alluded to earlier: Is there any real epistemic significance to Alston's DP theory or is it merely pragmatic?

This question has generally been approached by asking what Alston means by "practical ration ality." Does he mean by this a pragmatic, instrumental rationality considering only what it is reasonable to do or perform? Or does he mean something more epistemically evaluative? In the cases where this has been asked, something along the order of a dilemma has been set up to confront Alston.[56] If his practical rationality is only pragmatic, he runs the risk of turning toward the Wittgenteinianism of language-games and anti-realist truth. In that case, an attempt to point out any semblance of epistemic justification would become internal to only the practice itself, and there would be the loss of a connection with truth-conduciveness, as we noticed a moment ago. However, if through practical rationality he intends to grant epistemic blessings on the practitioners of DPs, then his epistemology becomes too permissive by allowing any DP that passes the argument to be considered as reliable. We might spend some time setting this last issue aside due to Alston's case for external criteria that face any pri ma facie rational DP, but that would take us too far afield from the matter at hand. Instead, let's focus on this unfortunate either/or which has been left at Alston's doorstep.

In attempting to defend Alston, I think we should remember what we discovered at the end of the last section. It must be kept in mind that Alston is working on more than one level through all of this. Our initial concern, brought on by epistemic circularity, was on the level of individual belief. This is where we should keep a mental bookmark, a reference point to which our thoughts must return. In order to deal with the first concern,

Alston finds that we must step back out on the meta-level and investigate how things proceed at the level of belief-formation. We have to ask whether those DPs from whence our beliefs arise are the kinds of sources they need to be in order to produce justified beliefs. Because of this multi-level approach, Alston may have access to a response which allows him to use the practical rationality argument in a way that provides epistemic efficacy. If so, the disassociation of DPs and language-games may be vindicated.

In the first place, Alston does not take himself to be offering any kind of positive epistemic assurance of DPs with the practical rationality argument. Keeping the initial concern in mind, the inability to demonstrate a DP's reliability does not immediately cut the epistemic project off at the knees. The criticism of Alston's practical rationality argument that it fails to give us any epistemic grounding for DPs misses Alston's point entirely. He makes that claim himself.[57] Rather than trying to show the reliability of DPs, Alston recognizes that he must retreat to what he terms a 'negative coherentism' in order to determine which ones can to be participated in and which ones would be rejected.[58] This coherentism revolves around those external criteria noticed earlier whereby a DP may be judged as inconsistent or lacking in self-support. The point at issue, however, is that this is not the case for beliefs. Whereas DPs are left with no alternative beyond the practical rationality argument which can only produce a pragmatic commitment to a practice as reliable, this says nothing about the means by which a belief may be found to be justified.

There are two things that might strike us at this point having seen the progress of Alston's work through the course of our study. The first takes us back to the debate between internalism and externalism. This 'negative coherentism' looks suspiciously like an internalist account for DPs. Our continuance with DPs in regard to taking them as reliable depends, not on our ability to show by non-circular external means that DPs are just as we take them to be, but on their interaction with other DPs and their internal workings. The negative aspect comes in with the acceptance of a DP on prima facie terms

until it is shown to be unacceptable. The suspicion of internalism here is well founded,

but Alston's use of it is intentional.

> …[T]he difficulti es in establishing justification (rationality) for beliefs in an objectivist sense drives us…to appeal to an internalist rationality for practices…. By focusing on this general *way* of forming beliefs, we may have a hope of finding some basis for an internalist judgment of (*prima facie*) reasonableness for all beliefs so formed.[59]

The internalism involved in the pragmatic practical rationality argument for DPs via

negative coherence is the means by which we may discover the justification of particular

beliefs! This means that Alston's externalism is being defended through an internalistic

DP theory. The important thing for us to recognize from Alston here is that the

internalism is not what allows a belief to be justified; it only presents the opportunity for

being able to demonstrate a belief's justification. In other words, it is on the level of a

determination of the rationality of taking a DP to be reliable that internalism comes into

play. On the level of belief, the same externalism that Alston has been concerned to front

is still at work. The epistemic evaluation of *beliefs* remains an externalist one.

The second thing that strikes us about the negative coherentism for DPs is one of

the themes that we have been training our eyes on in this chapter. Alston is giving only a

pragmatic defense of the participation in DPs. The only epistemic value is attained

through the present lack of any proof that a practice is unreliable or incoherent. Alston

makes no bones about this. He talks of our tacit acceptance of the reliability of a DP

through our practice.[60] This tacit acceptance comes in the form of active commitment to

the practice.[61] The practical rationality argument is put in terms of what it is rational to

do.[62] This leads us to ask whether there is anything positive that can be said about DPs on

the epistemic front at all. The distinction Alston wants to make with the epistemic import

lying with beliefs will be investigated momentarily. But if we assume that we can use the

practical rationality of *participating* in a DP to lead to a demonstration of the epistemic

worth of our *beliefs*, does this leave the actual DPs themselves completely out in the cold

with respect to our insight into their epistemic status? What can be said about them? Are we left with only a pragmatic account of a DP's reliability? Can a mere pragmatic account be sufficient to provide an epistemic account of the beliefs produced?

Even though we cannot non-circularly show DPs to be in fact reliable, Alston is not ready to throw over the idea that we can see them to have a positive epistemic status all the same. Recall that the crucial aim that Alston recognizes for all believers is to produce beliefs that are more likely to be true than false, i.e. truth-conducivity. And this, of course, is an epistemic aim. The better our chances of coming to true belief, the better our epistemic standing. That being our goal, Alston says there is clearly something to be said for DPs since they "constitute the most reasonable procedures to use, so far as we can judge, when trying to realize that aim."[63] Although we can't non-circularly show DPs to have reliability, we do have access to means by which certain ones of them can be recognized as the most rational course toward achieving true rather than false beliefs. These include the external means Alston has described for adjudicating between competing DPs. Certainly that is a far cry from being epistemically irrelevant.

All the same, this doesn't really get us very far toward our epistemic aims. We have no non-circular way of showing whether our DPs really do present the truth. On top of that, there is much discussion over whether continuing to practice our DPs in light of this ignorance is actually the only rational option left open for us.[64] There are still the possibilities of agnosticism or revision left on the table. But this need not detain us from the more central question at issue here. Whether we can establish that there is anything of epistemic worth for DPs as a result of the practical rationality argument does not get to the real epistemic work which Alston seems to believe he has accomplished. The question that must be satisfied is whether DPs can allow particular beliefs a greater epistemic status thanks to the practical rationality argument.

What is it about the argument as we have seen it explained that somehow gives us a viable account of the justification for the products of DPs? Epistemic circularity

pervades our lives. We take it that DPs are the only course available to handle things, and so are taken as reliable sources of belief. And the result of this is a demonstration of justified beliefs? How did that happen? We could easily imagine Alston's objectors to quickly reply with these difficult queries. Regardless of Alston's distinction between epistemic evaluations for DPs and beliefs, if a belief's ground has only a pragmatically rational connection to reliability, how is it that we can then show that epistemic justification is conferred on that belief? In short, the objection remains. It makes no difference if you place the practical rationality argument in direct contact with DPs only. If the epistemic value we can assign to our beliefs has to do with the reliability of a belief's ground, then we have gained no ground in displaying any epistemic status on any level. The threat of dogmatism still haunts us.

It wouldn't hurt to remind ourselves here of just how a belief's justification is understood to be connected to its ground for Alston. In the first place, he identifies grounds for beliefs as "psychological states." [65] This is an inclusive term which takes in things like beliefs, perceptions, intuitions, other experiences, etc. The inclusiveness of this definition for grounds was intended to allow room for a limited internalism in Alston's externalism.[66] Notice how DPs fit into that description. Part of their purpose is to act as modes of belief production. Part of what the sense perceptual practice does is to use its particular psychological states of sensual perceiving to deliver beliefs. The memory practice involves psychological states in storage to form beliefs. What Alston calls the Christian mystical-perception practice fashions beliefs from the psychological state of experiences of God. When we ask about the source or ground of our beliefs, Alston is pointing us back to the function of our DPs in forming beliefs. In each instance, the particular DP is supplying its process of formation for the output beliefs, and a belief, according to Alston, can only be justified if its belief-forming process is reliable. Since we are unable to non-circularly show that DPs are reliable, it doesn't seem that we should be able to show that the beliefs they produce have any positive epistemic value, either.

There are features of Alston's view of epistemic justification that we ought not forget, however. When we first discussed Alston's reliabilist RI-AI position, we distinguished process reliabilism from a reliable indication view.[67] The characteristics of Alston's reliable indication RI-AI view bring up a possible means of avoiding this jam.[68] The distinct feature of that position that set it apart was that truth-conducivity is the important aspect for a belief-forming process, a DP, to have. That is, it must be conducive to the production of true beliefs. It should be able to connect the believer to a reliable indicator of true beliefs over false beliefs. What might count against such a process or practice would be any over-riders or defeaters that might cause one to doubt the truth of the beliefs produced. These internalist tools are used to assess the epistemic status of a belief. At the same time, we should remember the 'reasonably immediate access of support" feature of Alston's RI-AI position when wondering about the justification of a belief. This means that the subject should have the support for her beliefs, i.e. the reliable source, reasonably within reflective reach although she need not have it ready at hand.

What we discovered with Alston's RI-AI theory is that a belief may be justified if its producing DP connects it to a ground that is a reliable indicator of true beliefs and there are no over-riders or defeaters of the belief and the justifying support for the belief is reasonably immediately accessible to the subject's awareness. Our current problem asks about the chances of showing our beliefs to have real epistemic support if we can only show our DPs to be reliable through circular means. If we take what we find at the end of the practical rationality argument, would our conclusion there be able somehow to fit into the workings of Alston's version of justification? Depending on how well it is able to fit, that may offer a possible means for Alston to claim a positive epistemic contribution for belief through the practical rationality argument.

The conclusion of the practical rationality argument states that it is practically rational to take one's accepted DPs to be reliable. That is, we are practically rational in *believing* our accepted DPs to be reliable. Suppose we have a belief and are concerned not

to be guilty of being dogmatic in holding it. If we check into the support for that belief, would the conclusion of the practical rationality argument give that belief any positive epistemic support toward escaping the charge of dogmatism? Here we shall need the working of Alston's justification theory to build that possible escape.

Suppose I have a mystical experience of some sort, which leads me to the belief that there is a loving God watching out for his children. When questioning the justification of that belief in an attempt to avoid dogmatism, I ask whether this mystical experience is a reliable source for my belief. At this point the practical rationality argument provides the practical rationality of believing that DP to be reliable. Putting Alston's RI_AI formulation into the mix, if there are no perceivable over-riders or defeaters for my belief about God and the practice forming the belief is reliable and I have reasonably within my reach support for the belief, I may be prima facie justified in believing that there is a loving God watching out for his children. Having support for the belief reasonably within reach is a very sketchy part of this. The support is the reliability of the DP, and my awareness of that fact would have to be accessible to that degree of "reasonably within reach." That might be a high expectation, but let us assume that is achievable for the moment. The result is this:

(I): If the DP acting as a source for my belief is reliable and there are no over-riders or defeaters for the product-belief, then that belief is prima facie justified.

This formulation only describes the actual reliability and justification in our epistemic situation. Our concern is to demonstrate these factors in some way so as to avoid dogmatism.

To do so, we must return to the practical rationality argument. Since the practical rationality argument states that we can be rational in taking or believing our DPs to be reliable, Alston understands his argument to allow the possibility that it is practically rational for us to believe our belief-forming processes to be reliable producers of true

beliefs. We are introducing the qualifier of rationality into the course of the above proceedings. Our claim (I) now has the element of rationality injected into it.

> (II): If I am practically rational in taking the DP acting as a source for my belief to be reliable and there are no over-riders or defeaters for the product-belief, then I am practically rational in taking that belief to be prima facie justified.

Surely there is *some* positive epistemic value involved here. It would seem that Alston may be able to provide some vestige of epistemic support for the possible justification of one's beliefs arising from accepted DPs. The upshot of this is that Alston appears to have provided a way for *showing* DPs to make a positive epistemic contribution for their products. And we discover that way via his earlier work on epistemic theory, specifically the RI-AI understanding of justification.

Perhaps, though, we have overstepped our bounds in suggesting such an out for Alston. Perhaps, as well, we haven't made it clear whether this out has the potency we have presented it as enjoying. Looking to Alston's own response to the specific charge of an inadequate connection between practical rationality and epistemic justification might give us insight on both of these fronts. That seems to be the fair approach.

We should take careful notice of Alston's words when defending his position against Pasnau's charge that a DP's epistemic failing reflects on its resultant beliefs. There he states that while external disparities for a DP such as a conflict with another DP may be damaging, "it doesn't have the same negative consequences as an incompatibility between different beliefs within the same practice."[69] The reason for this is a reappearance of the level confusion. The belief that my DP is a reliable one might surely be shown to be unjustified by demonstrating that my reasons for that belief fail in some respect or another. This belief, however, is a belief *about* the practice in question. It is not a belief *from* the practice in question. As Alston points out,

> Let's agree that if one picks CMP by an unreliable meta-practice, one is not justified in believing that CMP is reliable. (That, of course, does not prevent CMP from *being* reliable.) But to suppose that that implies that the beliefs that

stem from CMP are not justified is to fail to distinguish between the epistemic statuses of beliefs on different levels.[70]

The reason one can't infer that the lower-level beliefs stemming from the practice are unjustified is precisely because the practice might still *be* a reliable one regardless of whether it is *shown* to be reliable or not. Here again, though, we don't have a proof that the beliefs produced can be shown to be justified. In this case, Alston only gives us a negative claim that beliefs can't be shown as *un*justified simply because one isn't justified in believing her DP to be reliable.

The connection to our previous discussion comes out at this point. We were wondering there whether Alston might successfully demonstrate a positive epistemic move being made through the work of the practical rationality argument. If one is to be practically rational in seeing herself as justified in believing that *p*, it's still necessary that it be practically rational for her to believe that the DP producing *p* is reliable. This is another step in the right direction for Alston, but it still doesn't deal entirely with the main question. It might seem that some epistemic foothold is gained here, but we have to remind ourselves that the real work is only happening for the sake of the subject's practical rationality. We might end up with a comforting negative epistemic observation that our belief can't be shown to be unjustified, but the positive epistemic value of the move appears to remain beyond our grasp.

In another response to the criticism of bringing no positive epistemic import through the pragmatic means of practical rationality, Alston defends his idea of practical rationality against the charge that it leads to abject relativism.[71] The charge is the same as the one we have been dealing with. If practical rationality only provides pragmatic support for a DP's belief products, then any DP will do and each supplies its own version of the truth of things. It's a descent into language-games. But Alston says that his version of rationality doesn't include such subjectivism.

> …[T]he central weight of emphasis in assessments of rational action is on how well the agent reasons in determining what to do…. The action is rational or not

> depending on the soundness of the reasoning that issued in it. We suppose ourselves to be using objective standards of soundness here…. Sometimes our assessment takes place relative to a set of background beliefs and values we are assuming the agent to have. Sometimes there is a less specific presupposition that the beliefs and goals of the agent are fairly normal, not too idiosyncratic or outré…. But on none of these approaches is it the case that anything goes with respect to what the agent reasons from. There are principles by which we distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable premises for practical reasoning. The conception I was employing fits somewhere in this thicket.[72]

This claim for an objective type of rationality within his argument points to a means whereby a person's rationality in taking her DP to be reliable is not purely pragmatic or instrumental to some personal, practical aim.

Returning to the question at hand, the important question is whether this explanation offers a way of showing practical rationality to provide any positive epistemic steps. It may well be that Alston's comments here show that one's rationality in taking a DP to be reliable is not based on personal whim or desire, but neither is it epistemic in the sense we are interested in. There is no reference to truth-conducivity. Having objective standards of rationality here might still only involve simple rules of default behavior: I stand by my current DP because there's no good reason why I shouldn't. While this does tend to suggest something more than simple practicality in operating within a DP, it comes up short of being anything we might confuse with epistemic rationality. The gap between practical rationality and epistemic value remains.

It is at this point that Alston does something which is both very surprising and revealing at the same time. Instead of accepting his own defense of the practical rationality in use in his argument, he admits that even though the practical rationality argument is supposed to side-step the difficulties brought on by epistemic circularity, there are still possible problems with circularity and the apparent impossibility of getting around the use of DPs in order to defend DPs. The result is that we still haven't achieved "some neutral, 'God's eye' point of view from whi ch we can critically examine the pretensions of all doxastic practices without any prior commitment to any of them."[73] Epistemic

circularity denies our ability to climb out of our practices and make non-circular epistemic evaluations of those practices and their products. Any attempt to do so, it would seem, would have to be something besides a totally epistemic evaluation if it is to avoid circularity. In other words, it seems as though Alston is admitting that his practical rationality argument might not have the ability to connect pragmatic, practically rational considerations with epistemic ones, after all. The practical rationality means of providing that connection has apparently fallen through, and Alston is left with that realization.

But this is only how it seems, and not how Alston believes things to be in actuality. He still wants to hold on to the possibility that the level of belief would be undisturbed by the lack of an adequately positive epistemic status on the DP level. To do so, he must acknowledge that the practical rationality approach doesn't give him what he needs.

> Hence at the moment I am disposed to ditch the practical rationality approach and replace it with something much simpler. To wit, considerations of epistemic circularity show that there is no appeal beyond the doxastic practices to which we find ourselves firmly committed. We can make modifications within that sphere. We can tidy up some of them so as to minimize internal and external contradictions. And in extreme cases, we may have to abandon some in order to maintain the most coherent total position. But our starting place for any cognitive enterprise is the belief forming dispositions with which we find ourselves at the moment. This is a kind of negative coherentism with respect to doxastic practices, *not* with respect to beliefs. Needless to say, this shift of strategy does not involve abandoning the emphasis on doxastic *practices* in epistemic evaluation. It only involves dethroning practical rationality from the position given it in the book [*Perceiving God*]. (That is not to say that the practical rationality of doxastic practices is an incoherent notion, or that there is never any point in making it the focus of discussion.)[74]

Note that he appeals here, once again, to the external criteria involved in showing one DP to be superior to another that were displayed near the beginning of this chapter. He retains those, and seems here to shift them into the more prominent position when it comes to determining how one stands epistemically. As he says, practical rationality is "dethroned" as his featured vehicle for facing epistemic circularity, and that places the burden on these external criteria. But he again, as seen before, makes it clear that this

"negative coherentism" does not trickle into the level of the product –beliefs. If it did, his commitment to externalism might suffer. On the level of belief, the proper connection to a reliable belief-forming process is still the appropriate designator for epistemic success.

Now the question that must be asked is whether this move puts Alston in any better position than the practical rationality argument in accomplishing what he wants. Does this shift allow him to bridge the gap between and adherence to our firmly established DPs and the positive epistemic status of the beliefs produced by them? The practical side of thing s continues to be represented by our being "firmly committed" to the practices we find ourselves in. This recalls the definitive aspects of DPs, i.e. we are initiated pre-reflectively and our social surroundings determine the DP in which we shall discover ourselves participating. These are the reasons we operate within the DPs that we do, but these are certainly not epistemic concerns. How can the fact that my DP is firmly established by my social situation have any bearing on whether the belief produced from that DP may be justified or not? Wouldn't this be just like defending one's belief in Santa Claus by retorting "My mother told me so?" It seems unacceptable to depend on one's well-historied background to stand as the epistemic grounding for one's beliefs. Wouldn't this open things too far? Couldn't *any* belief from a firmly established practice be shown as justified on this understanding?

The quick answer, I believe, is "no." The reason is that Alston hasn't said that the practical matter of social establishment is the epistemically important part when it comes to proving the status of our beliefs in respect to their ground. As we noted just above, the shift was made from practical rationality, not to firm establishment of the DP, but to the external considerations of negative coherence. Can this provide a way of showing the reliability of a DP thereby allowing us the opportunity to avoid dogmatism by displaying a positive epistemic grounding of a DP's product –beliefs? Yes! Coherence is a very historic and widely-accepted aspect of epistemic theorizing. Although he doesn't espouse coherentism with respect to the justification of lower-level belief, even Alston

recognizes that it certainly doesn't hurt things on the epistemic front if a subject's beliefs are fully coherent with one another.[75] Of course, this wouldn't fully solve the epistemic circularity problem. Under the negative coherentism approach, we would be accepting a DP as reliable until it is shown not to appropriately cohere according to those external criteria already mentioned. This means we could not show the DP to *be* reliable, but since it is firmly established, and since it is the practice we actually have, we can *take it to be* reliable at least prima facie as long as it can stand against the external criteria. Here, then, is what Alston finally takes as a solution whereby we have epistemic means at the fore of taking a DP to be reliable which may go on to allow a demonstration of prima facie justification for the beliefs produced.[76] Whether it truly succeeds is a matter we shall be sure to illuminate in the following chapters.

IV

There are a couple of questions that remain for us here. Although Alston only dedicates two paragraphs to this switch in the focus of evaluating DPs, we should wonder how deeply the effects of that shift actually run. Something that seems to have been standing just below the surface of this entire discussion is the matter of exactly how epistemic justification is taken through all of this. I am reserving this issue as the subject of our final chapters, but I believe what we have found here to serve as a strong impetus in dealing with it. Putting off the more theoretical subject for the moment, I turn back to slightly more practical matters inclosing this chapter. As has been the habit throughout, this brings us to the more specific area of religious epistemology.

In the book wherein his most detailed work on the DP approach to epistemology is done, Alston's main concern is to offer a way of validating religious belief based on an experience of the divine.[77] He follows the pattern we have seen pieces of in the course of our discussion. At the end of the last chapter, it was argued that all DPs stand on equal footing with regard to epistemic circularity. The practice of sense perception (SP) is no

better off than that of the Christian mystical-perception practice (CMP). The use of the practical rationality argument is just as available to CMP as to SP. Making the shift to the external criteria, although SP might have a bit of an advantage over CMP in this respect, CMP is not disqualified from being taken prima facie as reliable. For this reason, it seems that beliefs produced by CMP may be understood as prima facie justified beliefs. It appears to be a victory for religious epistemology.

However, there is still a problem hanging overhead. The problem is that CMP is not the only firmly-established mystical-perception practice (MP) on the market.[78] There are a plethora of religions which bring with them their own practices of forming and evaluating beliefs based on religious experience. It would seem that each one stands in the same relation to reliability that CMP does, based on the practical rationality argument. This is the case even though each one of those MPs would include among its many beliefs, the belief that their MP is actually reliable and the belief that the other MPs *cannot* be reliable. What this boils down to is that only one of the MPs can be right, at most. If every one of them includes the belief that their particular religious practice is right and the belief that all the others are wrong, at best only one MP can be said to be adhering to true beliefs.[79] How do we escape this difficulty? How can we be sure that the MP we are a part of is the one that is right?

The answer he gives is the practical rationality argument. Alston uses the argument to show that a CMP practitioner can be rational in taking her practice to be reliable and thereby continue in her practice with assurance. The reason he believes this to follow makes a crucial difference in light of what we discovered at the end of the last section. Alston takes it for granted that *all MPs stand on the same ground when assessed by the external criteria available*.[80] He calls this his "worst case scenario" approach precisely because it is so difficult to show one MP to be superior to the others with respect to the external criteria. Such cases are often made, but Alston takes them to be largely unfruitful and continues on in the full assurance that he can show the practitioner

of CMP to be rational in taking her practice as reliable despite the presence of the other MPs. As Alston concludes, since there are no external means of adjudicating between one MP and another, "the rational thing for a practitioner of C[M]P to do is to continue to form Christian M-beliefs [manifestations-of-God-beliefs], and, more generally, to continue to accept, and operate in accordance with, the system of Christian belief."[81] Why? Because there is no good reason to adopt any other system. The external reasons available to show that any one MP ought to be practiced rather than another are taken to be equally distributed. Dropping my own practice for the sake of another couldn't be done on the basis of any rational method.[82] The practical rationality argument, then, continues to work for my MP, and I am still rational in taking that practice to be reliable. As a matter of fact, it turns out that I am rational in taking that practice to be *the* reliable practice. But that also goes for the practitioners of all the other MPs, as well.

When we return to the revelations of the last section, the problem for this felicitous pluralism becomes clear. The practical rationality argument has been "dethroned" from its position as the chief means of showing DPs to have an epistemic connection, namely the ability to be taken as reliable. Instead, the external criteria are called upon. If a DP stands in a negatively coherent posture with respect to these criteria, then its ability to be taken prima facie as reliable remains. For each one of the MPs, that might not pose any difficulties when investigated individually. But, as noted before, CMP contains the belief that every other MP cannot be reliable. That certainly isn't consistent with the beliefs of the other MPs, which is one of the external criteria. Although this seems to be a strike against CMP, the blow is softened by the realization that every MP has the same problem. They all deny the reliability of the other MPs in comparison to their own reliability. They all are equally inconsistent on that point. As a matter of fact, as indicated just above, Alston's "worst case scenario" has taken it for granted that all MPs have *total parity* when it comes to the external criteria. External criteria can't show any of them to be more reliable, and without practical rationality on

board, that leaves the practitioners to conclude, not that they should stick with taking their own MP to be the reliable one, but that they should understand *every MP to likely be as reliable as their own*.

While this clearly opens up the floor for pluralism, it is a far different pluralism than Alston was touting. The pluralism that resulted from the practical rationality argument was one wherein each practitioner could continue to exercise a full and sincere commitment to her particular MP.[83] This would include continuing to believe that no other MPs can be as reliable as one's own. Without the practical rationality argument, though, sincere commitment vanishes. The only response we could expect from practitioners who realize that all the other MPs are just as likely to be the accurate depiction of the truth is confusion, doubt, and ultimately skepticism. This is all because the practical considerations Alston has thrown over do not give us the kind of epistemic evidence or assurance needed to show that our MP might be best able to grant us reliably produced beliefs. Without that bridge from the practical realm to the epistemic, the problem of religious diversity turns out to be more of a challenge than Alston might be prepared for.

As we end this chapter, the epistemological landscape seems to have been cast into disorder. The simplicity which we had begun to associate with Alston's position has taken a sudden turn. That turn, however, seems to be directed back toward perhaps a simpler understanding. Alston himself says that the dismissal of the practical rationality argument is a move toward a simpler standard. While it may have thrown his stance with regard to religious pluralism into disarray, what might it have done to the more important matter of his understanding of epistemology as a whole, especially justification? This, as I stated before, forms the central question of our final chapters.

CHAPTER FIVE

The question making its way over from the last chapter sets us up for a conclusion, of sorts, to the whole matter. If we were somewhat less that satisfied with the results in the last chapter, that sentiment should only increase when the difficulties are discovered within the theoretical framework of Alston's own position. While it is somewhat of a relief to find Alston backing away from the practical rationality argument for the purpose of establishing some kind of epistemic superiority for religious practices, the alternative will have to face the same kinds of questions its predecessor did. The question immediate to the end of the last chapter was whether one could continue to work within one's DP and hold it to be reliable. By moving to the external criteria of a negative coherentism, we found that Alston may have left a much more disconcerting pluralism in his wake than he had intended. It's a troubling situation considering the purpose of Alston's book was to show that the practice of forming (Christian) religious belief may be rationally understood as reliable, but that is just the surface of the matter.

The deeper question that remains for us is what the shift from practical rationality to negative coherence means for Alston's epistemology as a whole. Is this only an isolated issue that can be left within the confines of his work in *Perceiving God*, or does it indicate the seed of a more extensive move for him? To answer these questions, we shall have to look backward at some hints within Alston's writings. Once that is done, however, we shall also be required to look ahead to the possible means for Alston to avoid the pitfalls that he himself has revealed and the larger more daunting one that we had begun to notice in the last chapter. In the end, I believe we find Alston being more friendly to a position that he had been careful to distinguish himself from.

As on might guess, this will lead us into a more speculative realm than what we have perhaps encountered hitherto on our journey. I shall be, in effect, pushing Alston's

work toward its ultimate destination, as I find the textual evidence to suggest. Whether this will indeed be Alston's course, I do not pretend to know. Such prognostications should be left to other disciplines. What I *do* intend to show, is that given what Alston has shown us so far, the traditional ways of thinking about and doing epistemology are headed for quite a shift, and even greater one than ever he might have forecasted.

I shall begin by re-establishing the problem discovered in the last chapter in its more theoretical context. I believe this takes Alston into a dilemma, much like the one suggested by Wakoff and Pasnau in the last chapter, which forces him to take drastic measures for the sake of avoiding it. The questions remaining will concern the repercussions of Alston's move to avoid the dilemma.

<div align="center">I</div>

We had been noticing a tension between the practical and epistemic realms as the last chapter came to a close. One of the more crippling problems of the practical rationality argument was that it did not seem to be able to provide a bridge between the two realms. One could be practically rational in assuming her practice to be reliable, but when it comes to the actual justification of the beliefs involved, that doesn't seem to cut much wood. Practical value does not entail epistemic value. At the root of this is the matter of truth. Not matter how well the beliefs produced by a practice may fit with one's way of life, an adherent to realist truth–a position which Alston has averred[1]–would not recognize that this fit would have any bearing on the truth of those beliefs. And while justification is not equal to truth, Alston has certainly been clear to point out that justification must involve a reliable indication toward a belief's being true.[2] Hence, practical matters don't offer much help when it comes to determining the epistemic status of our beliefs or their sources.

Since epistemic justification has been more or less the central topic under scrutiny throughout, it should be made clear just how little a practical approach to belief

evaluation has to do with the notion of justification that Alston has had in mind so far. Recall that what counts as a justified belief (at least prima facie) for Alston is one that comes from a ground that is a reliable indicator of truth and the recognition of that ground as such is reasonably within the subject's reflective grasp should she be so motivated to discover it.[3] We should also keep in mind that what makes a belief-forming process reliable, among other things, is that it tends to produce true rather than false beliefs. Its success in this regard would apparently be a result of its use of a ground that is a reliable indicator. This is the RI-AI view we were introduced to back in chapter two. If we adopted the claim of the practical rationality argument, we would find it to fall short of what is expected on this understanding of justification. Again, as stated before, the stumbling block centers on truth. Even though I take my DP to be reliable because I am practically rational in doing so, I have in no way gained access to any guarantees that my DP or its outputs will have the kind of relation to truth that I would want them to have. That is, being practically rational in taking a DP to be reliable does not mean that it is in fact reliable.

With the switch to the negative coherentism criteria located outside of the particular practice, however, we find an evaluative measure more in line with Alston's ideas on justification. Among those criteria for DPs were: internal consistency, consistency among other practices and significant self-support.[4] These being criteria that are external to a DP's own in-house evaluative standards, they would easily have a closer relation to a realist notion of truth than simple practicality. We expect the beliefs produced by a practice to be in harmony with one another. If a belief-forming process results in two contradictory beliefs, the law of non-contradiction tells us that one of them must be false. Hence, we have a practice that is producing false beliefs. That would reduce its claim on reliability. If two of our DPs produce beliefs or sets of beliefs which contradict one another, we know, once again thanks to the law of non-contradiction, that one or the other must be false. Again, this means one of them can't be as reliable as the

other when it comes to those opposing beliefs. The connection to truth is clear in both cases.

Although the use of significant self-support which Alston deals with does not lead conclusively to the truth of a practice's resultant beliefs, he does take it to give evidence for a practice's reliability. The point here is that the results experienced through the use of a practice either show an extent of its reliability or they don't. When they don't, it may be a reason to take that practice to be less than adequately reliable. While this doesn't lead to the assurance of the truth of a DP's beliefs, it may at least provide an indirect hint to the probable truth of those beliefs since they are the kinds of positive results we would expect from a reliable practice.

It should be noted that the one external criterion of Alston's negative coherentism not mentioned above is one that does not bear such a strong relationship to truth. Alston says that when the beliefs of two rival DPs come into conflict, where no other external means of adjudication is available, one should opt for the more firmly established practice.[5] That means nothing more than going with the DP that has the stronger social standing or most entrenched position in the subject's life. Clearly there is not much of a connection to truth here. Even though a fairly new and obscure practice arrives at beliefs that run counter to those of a more core practice to a person's life, it certainly does not mean that the former of those practices is forming false beliefs. That does not mean that the goal of true belief is being thrown over, though. It is just that when all else fails, this may be the only way left to resolve the matter. If that situation should arise, Alston suggests that we reason that a practice that has such a history in comparison to its opponent should surely give us a hint to its being more reliable than the other. Longevity is a virtue. Mass approval is a virtue. Neither ensure truth, but where there are no other means at hand, weak as it is, it might be the only indication of truth so far as we can tell.

What we find, then, is that Alston's negative coherentism stands a much better chance at compatibility with his theory of justification than did the practical rationality

argument. The issue of reliability for his RI-AI justification fits well with the criteria involved for DPs. But is the fit good enough? Practical rationality failed to give a bridge between pragmatic and epistemic considerations. Is the negative coherentism offered here able to do it? Before dealing with this question, we back up a little farther to check the credentials of Alston's newer suggestion.

There is still the matter of epistemic circularity threatening to taint the whole enterprise. It was the practical rationality argument's job to deliver reasons for accepting our DPs as reliable even in the face of epistemic circularity. With the practical rationality argument out of the picture, one question is whether a negative coherentism can accomplish this goal. The problem we saw in chapter three was that there seems to be no non-circular way to show that any given DP is reliable.[6] The proposed solution to the problem was that we may be practically rational in taking our product-beliefs to be justified even in an epistemically circular situation where the reliability of the DP acting as a source is assumed "in practice."[7] To accomplish this solution, the practical rationality argument was put into effect. Where we have no non-circular way of showing our practices to be reliable and we have no choice but to continue in those practices, it is only practically rational to assume that they are reliable.

When the shift is made away from practical rationality to negative coherentism, we simply continue to hold to the practices we have so long as they are not found to violate the four criteria mentioned above. The problem of epistemic circularity may still be avoided when it comes to the actual justification of our beliefs. The distinction between being justified and showing justification still works in that regard. The difference is that we no longer have an argument telling us that we are practically rational in remaining with our old DPs. What we have instead, though, is perhaps just as good or maybe better. By staying fair of the external criteria, we still have some positive reasons for understanding our beliefs to be from reliable DPs. We seem to have lost nothing in the move to negative coherentism when it comes to the question of epistemic circularity.

Returning to our question about the gap between the practical and the epistemic, however, negative coherentism may not deliver any improvements in the position left us by the practical rationality argument. When the question of reliability arises, the practical rationality argument could do not better than show us that our practical situation allows us to be rational in taking our DPs to be reliable. Can negative coherentism provide anything better? It may offer some more or less concrete standards like consistency and firm establishment to hold on to. But these were available to Alston's position even *with* the practical rationality argument.[8] They are not new replacement measures for the practical rationality argument, but measures taking on a more important role that before. An accurate description of Alston's move toward negative coherentism would be that he has thrown over the practical rationality *part* of his position in *Perceiving God.* His negative coherence criteria were also a part of that view to begin with, and that was a view that we found to be motivated by practical concerns. What Alston has really done is cull out what he believes to be the more troublesome part of that view. However, with respect to bridging the gap between practical and epistemic concerns, this exercise may not get us far enough.

For the two criteria of having significant self-support and being firmly established we found that the strong relation to truth needed is not available. Neither of them shows that the source of a belief is clearly truth-conducive. At best, an instance that passes both those tests would show that a DP has been generally accepted for a long time and that the kinds of results it claims to be important are fulfilled according to its own standards. Both could easily be accomplished without much of a guarantee for the truth of the product beliefs. We shall be taking a closer look at the other two criteria in the next chapter with an eye toward their connection to truth being somewhat less than the stringent one that is advertised. What we shall find is that even this new focus on negative coherentism doesn't provide the shift away from the practical that we might have thought. For the moment that discussion will have to wait.

At the end of the day, it turns out that even though a DP in good standing with the criteria could be shown to have some advantage over one that does not, the fact is that this is merely a negative support of the DP's reliability. It only shows a DP's superiority over certain alternatives, not its acumen at successfully displaying the justification of one's beliefs. This follows from what Alston observed about our epistemic situation that "our starting place for any cognitive enterprise is the belief forming dispositions with which we find ourselves at the moment."[9] He means that we may only take the criteria of negative coherentism to apply to DPs that we are forced to accept already by our practical situation. "[T]here is no appeal beyond the doxastic practices to which we find ourselves firmly committed."[10] To suggest that the negative coherentism put to use in this situation moves us into an epistemic evaluation of our beliefs and their processes of formation would be to miss the true gravity of epistemic circularity. Our practical circumstances with respect to epistemic circularity have put us in this position: We may only work with the DPs we have. The criteria allow us to change and alter them, but this is only after the fact of our practical realization of epistemic circularity. Since epistemic circularity blocks our path toward establishing the reliability of a DP, all we have left is to use the negative coherentism criteria as a means of arriving at the best option available. This leaves the criteria of negative coherentism driven by practical concerns without the prospect of connecting us with any objective, definitive description of our justificatory status. The victory we had granted Alston toward the end of the last chapter is fading. The gap remains intact, and the charge of dogmatism still holds sway.

What does all this mean for Alston? I believe this controversy over epistemic circularity's challenge to find a connection from the practical realm to the epistemic realm leads him to a dilemma.[11] On the one hand, we have the choice to stick to a hard-line epistemic approach. This would entail adopting a certain take on such epistemic considerations as justification and defending that position against those forces that would try to point out its weaknesses. If Alston took this course, he would simply

stick by his RI-AI version of justification theory and defend it against opposing views on justification. He could continue to talk about what is required for a belief to be justified and what it means for the source of a belief to be reliable. The problem with this for Alston is that this completely ignores the trap lying immediately before our feet in the guise of epistemic circularity. The charge of dogmatism from chapter one forces us to look for a means of showing our beliefs to be arrived upon in a manner that renders them justified. When questioning the justification of some particular belief, we turn to look at the reliability of its source. But checking the source will in turn produce a belief that is dependent on the same source or some other source with circular support for its reliability. Hence, we depend on a circular demonstration to prove that it is a reliable source. I think we have sufficiently pounded this point into the ground without having to go over it in detail once again. The idea is that standing solely on the epistemic evaluation of our beliefs would take Alston straight into the Scylla of epistemic circularity. From a purely epistemic standpoint, this would be fatal to any attempt to demonstrate that one's beliefs are justified.

On the other hand, Alston could give epistemic circularity a wide berth by focusing on the practicality of certain beliefs and their belief-forming practices or DPs. This was one of the strengths of the practical rationality argument. There we saw that since we have no other choice but what we've got, we ought to stay with the DPs already in use. Certainly there is something to be said for this, but previous discussion has shown why this leaves us with some concern. When practical matters are the only things important to the evaluation of our beliefs, we leave behind those core evaluative measures that are epistemically important. For instance, one of Alston's major interests when it comes to evaluating beliefs is that they stand in an appropriate relation to truth in order to be justified. Without a connection to truth, understood by Alston in the realist sense, Alston has said that a DP and its belief-products cannot be justified. This is because he has staked himself to an understanding of justification which includes the idea

of truth-conducivity where for a belief to be justified, it must arise from a process that is reliable in its conduciveness to the production of beliefs that line up with the facts of the world. If the only means of evaluating our beliefs leads to a pragmatic acceptance of the reliability (in a truth-conducive sense) of the sources of those beliefs, then it its left open as to whether a realist conception of truth is the right way to think about how a belief may be evaluated. If practical means of evaluating our practices are the best we can do, this leaves room for it being the case that truth is a pragmatic concept that may only be discovered within a particular DP.[12] Voila, the Charybdis.

Now we can clearly understand why it would be so important for Alston to show that he can operate on the practical level that epistemic circularity has reduced us to and still satisfy his epistemic criteria for justification and its demonstration. The problem is that we have not seen him successfully channel that middle course so far. He wants to use pragmatic concerns to quiet the monster of epistemic circularity, but he doesn't want to loosen his grip on realist truth to accomplish this.[13] His first attempt did not seem to go very well. In the following section, we move on to what I believe to be a second possible attempt of his to run between the horns of the above dilemma. Alston has not indicated that any of the work we shall be addressing is intended for that purpose, but as we flesh out the details of what he is saying, I think it will become more and more apparent that his ideas are clearly applicable to the situation we have described. In other words, I am taking it upon myself to use Alston's own words and work to address a difficulty that he has himself raised. I ask, then, that you judge whether I am accurate in my representation of Alston.

II

Before getting into the meat of our proposal for Alston's middle course, I should first give some means of supporting my audacity for charting Alston's course for him.

To do so, let us start by looking at several hints within the literature that we have already encountered to demonstrate that Alston indeed has had the notion to start this course himself for some time. Although this will involve picking up comments here and there, a similar message comes through in each case. Then we may continue on to observe his more specific treatment on the matter.

a

We find an introduction to Alston's possible maneuvering in some of his earlier forays into his DP approach. He begins there to indicate that our understanding of justification may be due for a change.

> On this approach, by contrast, pluralism reigns; there is no common measure for all beliefs. The epistemic status of a particular belief depends on the doxastic practice(s) from which it sprang; it depends on whether the belief conforms to the requirement of that practice, and, of course, on whether that practice itself is acceptable. There is no single, all-inclusive system by reference to which the credentials of any belief is to be assessed.[14]

We have been operating under the assumption that Alston takes reliability to be the only standard for determining the justification of beliefs. Here, however, he indicates that the pluralistic diversity of DPs will have an effect on the ways we evaluate beliefs. Among those ways of evaluation is, of course, justification. The DP approach seems to lead to a different understanding of justification. With that in mind, the last line should be given serious attention. The reference to a "system" of credential assessment for belief points in the direction of a theory of justification rather than some loose criterion for epistemic evaluation like over-riders and defeaters. Also, Alston specifically states his concern to be belief assessment, not prima facie justified belief assessment. This would again indicate evaluative measures other than over-riders and defeaters. Something very different seems to be stirring below the surface. This idea reappears as we continue.

Before moving on, however, a quick side-note is in order. I have made mention in the notes from our third chapter about the relation of DPs to grounds. Alston's RI-AI

position phrases reliable indication in terms of a belief's grounds. Moving into the DP approach, we have seen DPs spoken of as reliably truth-conducive. I have taken it that Alston understands DPs to have that kind of reliability because of their use of grounds that are reliable indicators of true belief in the DPs' formation of beliefs. What this means is that the ground somehow becomes a part of the process of a DP's belief formation. A ground acts as the basis for there even being the formation of belief. But at the same time, the ground can only *be* a ground if it is connected to a resultant belief through some process, a DP. Because of this very tight – and sometimes confusing – relationship, questions about the evaluative status of a belief might arise. Is Alston saying in the above citation that justification may no longer be the result of a belief's coming from an adequate, reliably indicating ground? It is certainly clear that Alston is placing more weight on DPs than any ground for providing justification. When he speaks of there being no transcending system of belief evaluation, he is alluding to our situation with epistemic circularity whereby our variously structured DPs are our only means of demonstrating our beliefs' justification. This appears to signal a substantial move in Alston's epistemic position. Reliability as a connection of a belief to an adequate ground seems to be fading in its epistemic importance for Alston. As we continue on, we shall find this notion becoming more pronounced to the extent that it begins to take Alston away from any one strict position on epistemic justification, including reliabilism.

In the middle of his work in *Perceiving God,* Alston begins to flavor some of his passages with what might be taken as precursors to his middle path. The focus of his remarks focuses again on our evaluation of beliefs. During his explication of the doxastic practice method in chapter four of his book, he states that using his notion of DPs will result in a diverse understanding of justification much different than the one currently in practice in most epistemological circles.

> Thus the contemporary view just alluded to is that whether the basis of the belief is sense experience, introspection, memory, or inference, that basis is justifying only because the truth of the belief is the best explanation for its ground.
>
> Following Reid and Wittgenstein, I mean the thesis of the irreducible plurality of doxastic practices to run counter to this claim of an underlying unity. I do not deny that the aim at unification and systematization is a laudable one. The only question concerns when or to what extent it is possible…. Ultimate diversity is a fact of our epistemic life, however humbling this may be for our pride as theoreticians.[15]

By introducing the idea of DPs, Alston has also allowed that the means by which a belief is justified may be altered from one DP to another. A "mode of justification that is common to most or all other practices" is not to be expected among variegated sources of belief.[16]

Thus, even at this stage, Alston takes a step farther than his peers might wish to travel when speaking of justification. He seems to be hinting at a fragmented understanding of justification that might follow the lines of particular DPs or groups of DPs. To suggest that the concept of justification could be something less than unified may immediately set off alarms for the traditional epistemologist. Historically it had been taken for granted that all our justified beliefs enjoy that status because of a similar standing of some form or another among those beliefs. This assumes justification to mean the same thing for all our justified beliefs. But now Alston is claiming that this may not be the case, at all.

In perhaps his plainest language on the matter that can be found in these early examples, Alston clears away all doubt about what direction he might be going.

> Each practice, as we have seen, carries its own distinctive modes of justification, its own distinctive principles that lay down sufficient conditions for justification, not only prima facie justification but also, through its overrider system, unqualified justification as well. These conditions differ markedly from one practice to another. A belief's being based on a sensory appearance is quite different from its being based on a set of premises.[17]

This reduces the vagueness of his suggestions significantly. What is being set before us is a pluralized justification in high contrast to the single version of justification that he has himself been pushing all along.

Alston returns to this idea again and again as he lays out his picture of our epistemic situation. Having different sources of belief-formation, DPs, allows for the evaluative side of epistemology to open up a bit when it comes to the question of justified belief. His message is that there is no unique or universal standard of justification that can be placed on all of our beliefs.[18] Before we move deeper into the matter by asking how a pluralistic understanding of justification could possibly help him steer through the aforementioned dilemma, we shall allow Alston to defend his stance that there is no one right way to think about justification. For this we turn to his more focused work on the subject.

<div style="text-align:center">b</div>

It is clear that a doxastic practice approach to epistemology will result in a fragmentation of the concept of justification. Is that possible in reality, though? If there really is only one concept of justification that can be applied to all our beliefs no matter what the source, this would tend to disrupt Alston's entire scheme. To lay the issue to rest once and for all, Alston offers a means of proof whereby he hopes to show that there is no chance of discovering a universally-applicable concept of justification. After delineating several of the major theories concerning justification he begins to map out the disagreements that lie among them all. These recurring endless oppositions lead Alston to the conclusion we have already seen him begin to form.

> The persistence of the disputes leads to the suspicion that there is no unique common item concerning the nature of which people are disagreeing…It is not just that the disputes are long lasting. In addition there are features of the disputes that are best explained by supposing that there is no unique item called 'epistemic justification' concerning which the parties are disagreeing.[19]

This suspicion is heightened more and more as we discover the different features or "roots," as Alston calls them, of the term "justified" and how differing theories seem to have picked out different foci based on those various features.[20] This points to a case where theory may have tainted our understanding.

> If we take the full range of parties to the disputes we have been considering, some of whom have had their thinking about "epistemic justification" nourished primarily by some of the roots just mentioned and others by others, there does not seem to be enough commonality in their pre-theoretical understanding of the nature of epistemic justification to warrant us in supposing that there is some uniquely identifiable item about which they hold different views. It seems, rather, that they are highlighting, emphasizing, "pushing" different concepts, all called 'justification'.[21]

In other words, the differences among theories of justification seem to lie, not in the normal content of the argumentation back and forth, but in the fact that there is not one concept to be agreed upon, at all. That the disagreement goes all the way back to the pre-theoretical level only further demonstrates that there is something to the notion that justification may be multi-faceted.

Raising a suspicion does not warrant satisfactory proof, however, no matter how compelling. Alston is aware of this and continues to build a case against the prospect of a unique concept of justification. He imagines a situation where several different theorists come to agreement on some formula for identifying how true belief may arrive at the status of knowledge, e.g. true belief + X + whatever would satisfy Gettier considerations = knowledge. Where that formula disagrees with their various views on justification, each theorist would deny that the proposed addition X to the formula is justification rather than recognize the possibility that their idea of justification might have been wrong.[22] The reason for this is that each theorist is picking out a different concept. Instead of accusing them all of simply being stubborn in holding on to their particular positions, a better explanation would be that they are indicating a diversity in how justification can work.[23]

In addition, when we see disputes among theorists, the strong tie to common sense considerations on either side seems to direct us to something less than unified when it comes to justification.

> Consider the demon worlds case. Given a possible world in which the inhabitants have all the same bases for common sense beliefs about the physical and social environment that we have, but where those beliefs are mostly false, should we say that those people are justified in their beliefs or not? On the one hand, it is very plausible to say that they are. After all, they have just the same grounds for their beliefs that we have for ours, which are, by hypothesis, justified. So far as they can tell, they are believing what is true. On the other hand, I find it plausible to say that they are not justified. Truth is the goal of the believing game, and if they are failing miserably to attain that goal, how can their beliefs be justified? This is an indication to me that there are *at least two epistemic desiderata* that are being conflated here under the term 'justification'. Depending on which one is in the front of our minds at a given moment our intuitions will go in one way rather than the other.[24]

Here Alston is referring to what has become a standard conundrum in the epistemologist's toolkit. If a manipulative demon is placing false beliefs in our heads without our being aware of it, can we be said to have justified beliefs as long as, for all that we can tell, all our beliefs come from adequate grounds? This has ever been a point of division among justification theorists, and Alston is using it here to drive home his point. Both answers to the question can appear correct to our intuitions depending on the direction from which we approach things. Rather than throwing up our hands and bemoaning our formerly solid common sense means of recognizing paradigm cases of knowledge, perhaps we should open our eyes to the possibility that justification is not as limited as we at first thought. If we can swallow the idea that our discussions of justification come heavily laden with theory[25] and can see how our common sense sometimes leads us to a positive stance in regard to more than one theory of justification, then we should be ready to agree that understanding justification as a unique concept applying to all our justified beliefs does not fit so well as it ought.

Alston moves on at this point to present his alternative to the traditional unified version of justification theory. It involves what he calls epistemic desiderata which may

be at work in different epistemic situations. Each of these desiderata can be taken to arise

from the several heated and unresolved disputes among theorists of justification.[26] The

list that Alston provides is not exhaustive and is not intended to be, but it does serve to

offer a substitute for the older idea that only one way of thinking about what makes a

belief justified can be considered. For each particular desideratum, it is interesting to

note that no epistemologist would deny the positive influence that it would bring to one's

epistemic situation. For example, any externalist would quickly grant that having the

evidence of one's belief ready for anyone that asks is an epistemically desirable, even

enviable, position to be in. Turning that point about, even though an internalist might

demand that the subject have her evidence consciously before her mind in order for a

belief to be justified, at the same time, the internalist would have to respect the epistemic

worthiness of a belief being based on an adequate ground regardless of the subject's

awareness of it. Otherwise her claim that the evidence for a justified belief must be

concurrent with the subject's belief wouldn't have anything on which to stand. Further, if

that upon which a belief is based is not adequate, then it doesn't matter whether the

believer consciously holds it as evidence for her belief or not. A belief must have an

adequate ground before it can be justified belief, even for an internalist.

When all is said and done, however, what we have here is a brand new approach

to epistemic justification.[27] This goes hand in hand with the doxastic practice structure in

regard to its multiplicity. Alston has shown us that our beliefs have different sources.

Those sources constitute different practices of belief formation (DPs). The justificatory

status of the resultant beliefs of those practices is in a large way determined by the

practice itself. As every DP has its own means of evaluating a belief that may not be the

same for some other DP, we can see how the DP approach and Alston's new

understanding of pluralistic justification might work together. Justification may be

broken up among the DPs. This doesn't necessarily mean that there would be a specific

desideratum for each DP. A DP might use more than one, and several DPs could make

use of the same desiderata. The point is, of course, that making a case for pluralizing the concept of justification just opens things up that much more for the doxastic approach and its inherent multiplicity.

I should point out, before going on, that nowhere does Alston make such connections between his doxastic practice approach and the desiderata-based epistemology. There can be no doubt, however, that the ideas at work in one are being influenced by those at work in the other. The fragmentation of the concept of justification is a theme that is of central importance in both instances. As such, what is indicated about that fragmentation in "Epistemic Desiderata" is bound to have some bearing on how it appears among and with DPs. To that end, we return to the more pressing question left from our earlier discussion. How might this new approach to epistemic justification theory help Alston avoid the dilemma we have described?

III

Here is where we make our bold attempt to put the pieces together that Alston has gathered around himself. On the one had, Alston has clearly rejected the hard-line epistemic approach of traditional theorists. Epistemic circularity bars the way. Moreover, the fragmentation of the concept of justification commits him to a new course.[28] The admission of different viable means of turning out justified beliefs opens the possibility that the defense of a belief's justification might be available solely within the scope of a particular practice. If justification is entirely dependent on a particular practice, our concern to avoid dogmatic beliefs without falling prey to epistemic circularity could be handled by presenting the evaluative means present within the DP. We shall return to this possibility momentarily. As we continue, keep in mind Alston's continuation in holding on to the epistemic lodestone of realist truth. None of what we have seen from Alston would signify a reversal of his position concerning the necessity of realist truth to the mix. A clear indication of this can be seen by his criticism of certain

possible epistemic desiderata that would weaken the need for a connection to truth in the evaluative status of a belief.[29]

We take it, then, that Alston would not attempt to prove one side or the other of the dilemma to be unproblematic or decide to accept his fate on one horn or the other. Instead, it seems that Alston is prepared to charge between the horns with his "revolutionary" appr oach to epistemic evaluation. This would involve proving that the dilemma is a false one that ignores the possibility of a third course. To accomplish this, Alston must be able to establish a viable position between the two unfavorable ones and ensure us that this third possibility is not subject to any of the difficulties raised by the other two. But how does unmasking the disunity of justification allow for such a move on his part?

To begin, let us be certain that this new course does not in any way weaken Alston's former position on realist truth. I have mentioned an example of his continued dedication in this regard, but let's look deeper than just an indirect gesture toward that end. An initial negative reaction to Alston's alternative to unique j ustification in epistemic desiderata is that he is touting a kind of contextualism that will fragment the concept of truth at the same time that it does the concept of justification. By taking a given epistemic situation to instantiate a different evaluative perspective than another, it might seem that truth becomes a situational matter rather than an over-arching standard. We have already made note how certain desiderata will be at work depending on the DP producing the belief at the time. This simply means that depending on one's current epistemic situation, different desiderata may be called upon. One of Alston's concerns when investigating this is that we notice which desideratum is the important one in that particular circumstance. When questioning the justification of some belief, his advice is to pick out the "relative importance or centrality of one or another desideratum" without giving in to our traditional urges to make that desideratum out to be "*the* central, basic, or key epistemic desideratum for belief."[30] This might sound at first blush as if there is no

standard controlling which desideratum will be in command so long as none is absolute. However, Alston is quick to show that external standards check the possibility of rampant relativism.

Alston recognizes that in certain situations, a particular epistemic point of view might not be the kind of thing that would be of greatest weight at that moment. When we are looking to avoid dogmatism by asking what makes a belief justified, there are certain questions that we should ask of the situation. First of all there is the question of *viability*.[31] This asks whether the desideratum assumed to be the means of a belief's justification would be adequate in that respect. In some cases, the proposed desideratum might be too demanding or too lax in what passes as justified. For instance, we have seen Aston's disapproval of those views which would make belief a matter of voluntary control. Such desiderata would then not be "viable" for turning out justified beliefs. In addition to this, in a given epistemic situation, Alston says that some desiderata just speak more to the concern at hand.[32] This is the question of the *importance* of the proposed desideratum. These checks on the importance and viability of a desideratum seem to imply the presence of something other than merely pragmatic standards.[33] Whatever desideratum is found important to the situation would appear to be objectively so, for example. It may be that Alston has here a means whereby the justification of a belief may be shown to be the result of something other than practical concerns. We shall follow this possibility further momentarily.

One telling aspect of the desiderata picture of epistemic justification in regard to this issue of relative standards is that Alston is careful to show that the pluralization of contextualist element to the whole scheme. We are talking about one desideratum being the means of justification in one situation while a different desideratum is at work in another. How Alston displays an objectivity to remain is found in these same two areas of the importance and viability of desiderata. The point to his warning of avoiding the

opposite extremes of (a) searching for the one true concept of justification or (b) allowing that any concept at all may be at work at any time[34] was that for any given context, there is only one right desideratum or combination of desiderata governing the epistemic evaluative status of a belief. This means we have a fragmented notion of epistemic evaluation or justification, but there are certain standards by which those fragments are to be identified. In other words, the pluralization only goes so far. In the same way, DPs are left on their own when it comes to questions of the justification of their resultant beliefs. Justification is pluralized, but the DP that stands as the ground allowing for that justification may be called into question itself by examination under the external criteria involved in negative coherentism. Once again, the question of justification may be contextually relative, but the rules governing the source of that justification are clearly understood as objective and fixed.

This observation should help us to understand how Alston might enable himself to avoid the second horn of the dilemma. The considerations of importance and viability assist in tying the epistemic desiderata approach to an objective reality about epistemic evaluation. With that in place, when the issue of dogmatism arises for a belief, there is now no longer any reason to assume that Alston's reliable indication view is the important epistemic desiderata at work in justifying the belief. When establishing that a belief is justified, one need only work with the desiderata that are a part of the structure of the DP in practice. Alston seems to suggest his reliable indication position would be a viable desideratum in all cases,[35] but that doesn't mean it would be the most important desideratum in all cases. Imagine a case where we show the justification of a belief through the working of another desideratum like the reliable process view that Alston distinguishes his position from.[36] This means we don't have to worry about being rational in taking the DP to be a reliable indication of the truth of our belief to take that belief as justified. All that matters is that we have found the belief to be justified by the actual means accounting for that justification, and it does not involve showing a reliable

indicator. This could be the case with any other desideratum that would be recognized as more important in a given situation.[37] Whether this would completely solve Alston's problem is a question we shall take up presently. For the moment, however, we see that Alston has at least given himself another possible option.

One might ask how we know we have come upon the right desideratum. Wouldn't we have to know *something* about the DP that has this desideratum as its epistemic evaluative machinery? This would tend to take us back to the question of DP's reliability, understood in either the process or indication form. This would not appear to move us outside the scope of the problem of epistemic circularity. We have already mentioned some of the pragmatic baggage brought along with the negative coherence criteria. Those criteria were questions dealing with the DP's status as a reliable source of belief. The questions of viability and importance, however, can also be applied to DPs in an indirect fashion. It appears that the criteria of viability and importance are considerations in addition to the negative coherence criteria. If viability and importance allow us to identify the desideratum at work and desiderata are a part of the DO that makes use of them, then viability and importance will allow us to also pick out which DO may be at work. These additional external criteria will allow us to by-pass the negative coherence criteria and continue on in showing a belief's justification. Hence, the defense of a belief's justification could be completely internal to the DP with out ever getting to the question of reliability, which introduces the problem of epistemic circularity.[38]

One problem lurking ahead is a slip into pure pragmatism where any talk about epistemic concerns would be nothing more than a specialized way of describing pragmatic circumstance. That is, our understanding of justification might be nothing more than going with what allows the process of belief to continue. In the present case, we have to be sure that the recognition of different epistemic desiderata through viability and importance is not just making some practical response to a believer's situation as

has seemed to be the case for the negative coherence criteria. (More on this later.) If we admit that different desiderata may be in place at different times and in different situations, we might have opened the possibility that those desiderata are in place for simple practical reasons rather than objective, epistemic ones. If this is the case, Alston's desiderata approach may still be subject to the criticism of contextualism and he will not have made a successful bid to avoid the dilemma raised against him.

By way of reminder, when the question of loose or pragmatically-based criteria was raised against DPs earlier, the introduction of objective standards beyond the DP in operation came into play. The claim was that pragmatic concerns alone are not able to designate whether a DP stands the test of the negative coherence criteria. Not every DP could be retained as one rationally taken to be a reliable source of beliefs. For example, among the criteria to be maintained by a DP was internal consistency. If a DP had a recurring problem of turning out beliefs that contradict one another, our rationality in taking it as a reliable DP suffered to the point of probable rejection of that DP. This was framed as an epistemic concern because taking the DP to be reliable would commit a subject to believing both p and not p. Certainly that is not the kind of epistemic situation one would want for oneself, and the external, objective criteria involved helped us to weed it out. The bottom line was that there is an epistemic evaluative structure motivating and monitoring the DPs that are in use. The problem was that we found those criteria to be motivated by practical considerations. This meant that the only way we had of showing our beliefs to have a positive evaluative status was the result of pragmatic concerns rather than purely objective ones.

The same move with respect to objective criteria is open to the desiderata approach, as well. There are criteria that determine which desideratum will be at work just as there were criteria for DPs. In fact, it seems that the criteria of viability and importance might even allow us to recognize which DP our beliefs would be coming from. On the desiderata level, when testing an extreme internalist desideratum in regard

to the criterion of viability, Alston finds that there would be epistemic deficiencies involved in many circumstances.[39] He cites the higher-level requirement that we examined in chapter one as being too restrictive a condition in most cases for the desideratum to be viable. The epistemic deficiency is that it limits the availability of justified true belief to a highly exclusive group of believers. The pool of potential knowers is reduced to a handful of people, and even they could not fulfill the requirement very frequently. Notice that this example is not intended to hold true in all situations. Alston is only concerned to show that in *most* cases such internalistic desiderata would not be viable. Of course, that would also mean that any DP that holds an internalistic desideratum as the most important would not be the source of the belief in question, provided it is in fact justified.

It is left, then, for us to see whether any vestiges of the presence or necessity of practical matters in his new description of our epistemic situation turns out to be as problematic for the desiderata approach as it was for DPs and negative coherence. While the actual justification of belief may be as fragmented as Alston says, our more pressing concern has been whether we can *show* those beliefs to be justified in order to avoid dogmatism. Under Alston's first approach, to show justification we had to be able to say something about the reliability of our DPs and their position in respect to the negative coherence criteria. In that situation the only reason we had to take recourse to the kinds of criteria like negative coherentism in order to establish some evidence of reliability is that practical matters, in the shape of epistemic circularity, forced us to do so. Demonstrating justification and, hence, knowledge had become an 'inside job" by practical necessity for each DP.[40] Our practical situation required that we take each DP to be reliable if we were to understand our beliefs to have any positive epistemic status. But this, of course, was subject to our dilemma of epistemic circularity on the one hand and the loss of objectivity on the other. Proving a DP's reliability requires the less than objective negative coherentism criteria. Without those criteria, a practice would have to

prove its own reliability, which would involve circularity. In the present case, we are suggesting that Alston might have another way of avoiding the dilemma. The criteria of viability and importance could indicate which DP and desiderata are at work in producing a justified belief. Because the criteria considered are understood to be objective, there appears to be the possibility of showing the means of justifying a belief.[41]

However, the desiderata version is not without its use of practical concerns. Discovering the appropriate desideratum via the tests of viability and importance can easily be interpreted in a pragmatic sense. For instance, how do we know which desideratum is the most important one in a given situation? The solution may be to look at the one that allows us to continue to function in the most efficient manner, without snubbing truth in the process, of course. It may also involve recognizing that some desiderata allow us to proceed as we always have when it comes to the language of knowledge, while some do not. Here again, practical concerns rise to dominance though without tainting the hold on realist truth.

While this second attempt that we have fashioned from Alston's work does appear to offer perhaps a less naïve move toward dealing with the dilemma, Alston's constant returns to the pragmatic considerations involved should have us wondering whether he is indeed successful. For all his concern to retain objectivity, it seems that the original epistemic question might have been lost for the moment. If epistemic circularity has moved us to a DP approach that ultimately takes justification as pluralistic instead of unified, mightn't it also reduce the possibility of demonstrating justification to a demonstration of pragmatic necessity? Sure, our commitment to objective truth and reality might restrict us from assuming that certain kinds of epistemic desiderata or DPs could come into play, but at the end of the day, whatever desideratum or practice is at work, won't it only be useful as a proof of a belief's justification because our practical situation doesn't allow any other epistemic means for concluding otherwise? Isn't this

just the kind of epistemic position that Wittgenstein understood humanity to be in? How is Alston any different, after all?

<div align="center">IV</div>

In laying out his position, Alston has been very careful not to be identified with a Wittgensteinian position. His reasoning has been that such views tend to pluralize not only justification, but also truth and reality, an idea he rejects.[42] To bring our journey to a head, what I want to suggest is that Alston does not escape the dilemma we have discovered and that he actually moves closer to the position he has tried to avoid all along. To begin, however, it's important that we see how Alston might have lost sight of his course and shifted toward one of the dilemma's horns. This will be the goal of the present section before showing Alston's growing affinity to the Wittgensteinian position in our final chapter.

We have seen how the importance of desiderata in particular circumstances is taken to be a new way of fixing on epistemic evaluation.[43] To demonstrate how importance can be adjudicated, Alston takes the two opposing desiderata of externalism and extreme internalism and shows how contrasts between them should present one to be more important in most situations. The externalist desideratum imagined takes it that justification entails the likelihood of truth for a belief and denies that what brings that justification must be knowable by the subject simply on reflection in order for the belief to be justified.[44] As we have seen, this desideratum eventually leads to epistemic circularity when we continue on to attempt to demonstrate the justification of a belief. The internalist desideratum, by contrast, denies that the truth-conducivity part of justification is all that is necessary. It adds that justification for a belief also requires that a subject have reflective possession of the right kind of support for that belief.[45] The problem with this is that in addition to the support being reflectively available to the subject, the ability to identify its "right-kindness" must also be in her reflective

possession. We have already seen Alston's reasons for not believing there to be a need

for the support to be in the subject's possession, but this requirement pushes things even

farther. When Alston considers a possible internalist solution to this problem, he finds

that it only leads to a second difficulty.

One could say that we have reflective access to the "right-kindness" of a belief's

support in the sense that: 'S has evidence e such that on adequate reflection S would

believe that e sufficiently objectively probabilifies p.'[46] But why must we be so

restrictive in doing epistemology? Alston asks what good reasons we have for limiting

ourselves in this way to reflection and not allowing external means of evidence to play a

part. The immediate answer is that externalism leads to epistemic circularity. The

trouble here is that the reflection involved is just as subject to epistemic circularity as

externalism.

> But what happens when we come to the epistemology of reflection? Doesn't
> reliance on reflection to do the job land us in the same kind of circularity? A
> similar point can be made about the "answer to scepticism" argument. When we
> get our epistemological conclusions from reflection and avoid any reliance on
> perception or induction, we avoid begging the question against the sceptic about
> perception and induction. But what about a more thoroughgoing sceptic who
> includes reflection in the scope of his scepticism? Won't the reflective approach
> to epistemology involve begging the question against him? Thus the internalist
> orientation escapes these difficulties locally, so to say, but not globally.[47]

Internalism has the same problem as externalism only with the added restriction to a

subject's reflection. Even if the internalist were to argue that externalists' theories of

justification often conflict with one another, Alston would remind her that what has been

taken as reflectively available to subjects has also been in conflict through history.[48]

Both externalism and internalism have their troubles when it comes to defending

the justification of belief. But where we are considering the importance of the two

desiderata, Alston sums up the situation.

> If we are free to use whatever it is we know (are justified in believing) in tackling
> epistemological problems, then internalist restrictions to reflection are
> unwarranted, unless it can be shown (persuasively argued) that we know nothing

relevant to epistemic assessment except what we know by reflection, a highly unlikely outcome…. If and onl y if the internalist can provide sufficient grounds for those assumptions will distinctively internalist desiderata like B.2. [the internalist desideratum under discussion] rightfully occupy a central place in epistemological inquiry…. But once the inte rnalist is forced out into open country, in which there is a variety of epistemic desiderata, each of which presents strong claims to attention, he is forced to look for more substantial reasons for ruling out of bounds any of those contenders that do not disclose themselves to reflective scrutiny…. And we have already seen that when he tries to do so, he will run into formidable difficulties.[49]

Internalist desiderata are found to be left on the sidelines because they cannot offer any compelling reasons for their importance above the others. In other words, Alston has just delivered another knockout blow to internalism in addition to those seen earlier.

Notice, however, how this rejection of internalism is played out. It is not the epistemic prowess of the externalist desideratum that allows it to win the day over internalism. Rather, externalism wins out because internalism fails to show any good reasons for its superiority. This doesn't mean that an epistemic evaluation has shown externalist desiderata to be connected with justification. As a matter of fact, as Alston points out, an epistemic evaluation has shown them to be lacking in that area because they ultimately lead to epistemic circularity. We are being shown that internalist desiderata are simply not necessary given the pluralistic, competitive landscape in which we now find ourselves. Externalist desiderata are more important to our epistemic needs because they don't have the problems and restrictions that internalist desiderata do. It has nothing to do with their own abilities as the justifiers of belief. This revelation raises serious doubts as to whether Alston could escape the dilemma in the manner we have been developing.[50]

Alston has internalism on the ropes again. He has developed another way of persuading us that traditional internalist views should be ignored. In his zeal for showing off internalism's weaknesses, though, it seems that he has exposed himself as delivering a position which is somewhat more pragmatic in scope than its author would want to admit. Recognizing the correct desiderata that come into play in assessing the epistemic worth

of our beliefs turns out to be an issue of simple practicality rather than an objective

epistemic evaluation . Alston proclaims externalism as the champion over internalism for

no other reason than that it is the best we have, not necessarily because it does the job we

are looking to it to perform. For that reason, it appears that the method of demonstrating

one desideratum to be more vital to a situation than another does not involve objective

criteria. We are being led to acknowledge a more important desideratum on a practical

basis by the fact that although externalism has its problems, at least it doesn't have

internalism's problems.[51] The criteria of viability and importance turn out to be motivated

as much or more by practical concerns than negative coherence. The present case shows

that in order to deal internalism one more damaging blow, a blow he believes will run

pure internalism out of the epistemology business, Alston must do so by appealing to the

pragmatic superiority of externalism. Alston is effectively turning epistemology over

into something that begins to look more and more like a Wittgensteinian position.

I want to make this point in as strong a fashion as I am able. I do *not* think that

Alston has as his intention to overly-pragmatize epistemology. He has stated again and

again his disapproval of the Witgensteinian approach. We shall attend to that subject in a

moment. But his efforts to get rid of what he deems as extreme internalism, a view he has

been as vocal in rejecting if not more so, seem to push him closer and closer to the

pragmatist's side. Here is another example of the same tactic with the same result in his

conclusion form another important article. He begins with an attack on internalism that

leads him to a pragmatic concession in retaining and externalist position.

> To sum up the basic message of this paper in a slightly different way, it is a
> mistake to suppose that we can first determine whether we have knowledge before
> getting any. Not only is the determination that we have a certain piece of
> knowledge itself a piece of knowledge, but to carry out that determination we
> have to rely on other knowledge we suppose ourselves to have already.
> Knowledge that we know cannot be the first bit of knowledge we attain, or
> anywhere near the first. And, I have been arguing, this is not only true in general,
> but also within each large department of knowledge. We can't get knowledge

about our knowledge of the natural world without relying on a lot of what we take ourselves to know about the natural world.[52]

It may sound uncontroversial at first, but when we pay attention to details, the middle course between the horns of the dilemma begins to disappear.

Notice that the beginning of this passage is a denial of internalism. It comes at internalism for its insistence on the reflective possession of a justified belief that one's belief is justified. This mirrors the problems with internalism we have laid out above. Next comes a general statement of the problem of epistemic circularity where Alston recognizes that you can't assess whether you indeed have knowledge without *assuming* that you already had some to begin with. This recognition ends with a kind of shrugging of the shoulders over the whole matter. The internalistic requirement of having to know that you know *p* before you can know *p* is rejected and a tacit acceptance of prior knowledge is believed to exist instead. We simply accept that this is the way things are. As Alston puts it, "such is the human condition." [53] Again Alston has spent his time showing the faults of internalism. But while this results in the seemingly unproblematic acceptance of externalism, a resignation to the presence of epistemic circularity pushes him toward accepting more than he may be prepared for.

The rejection of internalism has led Alston here. As we think back on the earlier chapters, some of his reasons for advocating externalism over internalism should help us to see how the seeds of this trouble were planted. The denial we saw in chapter one of higher-level constraints for justified belief as unnecessary follows the exact reasoning we have just witnessed in adjudicating the importance of epistemic desiderata. Voluntarism in belief, raised in chapter two, was rejected because of its impossibility rather than any purely epistemic fault. If that course is simply not open to us, it is just as much a practical consideration as anything else. The regress problem for internalism from chapter two seems to be more promising as a truly epistemic weakness. If we require that a subject have justification for believing that she is justified in a belief, there seems to be

no end to the need for justification on level after level. However, we must recall that if we turn up the heat on epistemic evaluation by asking how a belief is justified, externalism doesn't fair any better. It may not be a regress problem that is encountered by externalism, but rather the problem of epistemic circularity, which is certainly an analogous difficulty. These are the very epistemic messes which cause us to look to the other problems of internalism shown by Alston by way of comparison. Although these are meant to eliminate internalism as a pure theory and elevate externalism, what we find is that the reasons we are given for seeing externalism as the victor have more to do with internalism's failings in practical matters than externalism's ability to fit the epistemic bill entirely. Even from our earlier discussions, this move toward a pragmatic turn in epistemology has been developing underneath Alston's work. Though he does not acknowledge it, Alston's break with traditional forms of epistemolo gy seems to be drawing him too close to the Charybdis to avoid its pull.

What we have found here is that Alston's own words seem to have laid out a pattern for him. If we make use of those words in an attempt to preserve what he apparently wishes to preserve, the course tends to curve away from its intended goal. Alston bills himself as an epistemologist who understands rational evaluation of beliefs and belief-forming practices to be important from an epistemic perspective. As we continue further, his position seems less likely to be able to hold that line quite so firmly.

CHAPTER SIX

Having just looked into Alston's work to imagine what course might be possible for him, we have found indications that the middle road might be unavailable to him as his thought now stands. In our final discussion, we allow a kind of protest from Alston to our hints of his possible turn toward the side of the practical against the purely epistemic in the assessment of our beliefs. If that view he refers to as Wittgensteinian is in such opposition to his own, we should examine with some diligence just how that opposition is thought to exist. Can he successfully prove his own epistemic theorizing to be free of the kinds of thinking associated with the pragmatic, practical opposition?

Our efforts to clear this up will focus on the specific points of differentiation mentioned by Alston. These points are Alston's insistence on external criteria for evaluation of practices and a realist understanding of truth and ontology. For both, we shall find the main target of his words to be Wittgenstein, whom he understands as holding the counter position on these issues. Using Wittgenstein as a foil for his own position will provide us with a chance to see whether their perspectives are as diverse as Alston would have us believe. As Alston's later theorizing progresses, I maintain that he moves closer and closer to Wittgenstein than these points of differentiation would suggest.

As in the last chapter we found Alston's early commitments to propel him toward some of his later moves, so in this case the direction to which we find Alston drifting is a result of earlier claims. In the end, I believe we find those pragmatic components so heavily guarded against by Alston to be an undeniable part of his thought. That being the case, Alston stands once again on the verge of introducing us to a new frontier of epistemic endeavors, even though it doesn't seem to have been his intention to do so.

I

What is it, then, that Alston believes to separate his view from the Wittgensteinian positions he so wants to avoid? Here we must return to the descriptions of DPs and how they are intended to be similar to but distinct from the Wittgensteinian concept of language-games. Recall from chapter four that DPs are taken to be the product of influences from Thomas Reid and Ludwig Wittgenstein.[1] Where Wittgenstein supplies the structure via language-games, though limited by Alston to the realm of belief and belief-formation, Reid provides an "innocent until proven guilty" approach to the reliability of belief-forming practices. In the many places Alston lays out this scheme, he points out the core of divergence between language-games and DPs. Aside from DPs being only concerned with practices of belief-formation rather than the broader scope found in Wittgenstein's "forms of life," the matter of realist truth seems to be the primary stumbling block.

> Now I do not accept for a moment Wittgenstein's verificationist restrictions on what assertions, questions, and doubts are intelligible…. I can perfectly well understand the propositions that sense perception is (is not) reliable, that physical objects do (do not) exist, and that the earth has (has not) been in existence for more than a year, whether or not I or anyone else has any idea of how to go about determining whether one of these propositions is true. This confidence reflects a realist concept of truth, on which a proposition's being true is *not* a matter of anyone's actual or possible epistemic position vis-à-vis the proposition.[2]

> …I dissent from Wittgenstein in fundamental respects. I have inveighed against the idea that each language-game (doxastic practice) determines a separate, distinctive conception of truth and reality. And I have dissented from the associated view that 'true' (and presumably 'real' as well) is to be construed in epistemic terms, plumping instead for a realist conception of truth. With that slant on truth, there can be no reason for denying that the same concept of truth (reality) is employed in all language-games.[3]

Both of these passages are explicit in their disagreement with Wittgenstein. Alston holds to a realist concept of independent truth which he believes to be clearly counter to Wittgenstein's language-games that subject truth and reality to a dependence on the game being played.

Other passages seem to be dealing with a different point of disagreement between the two, but they actually result from the very same rift. The specific issue concerns the availability of external criteria that would evaluate a DP or language-game.[4] Behind the scenes, though, the clash is being motivated by differing takes on the nature of truth and reality.

> Reid, much more than Wittgenstein, goes into the way in which belief forming dispositions, once established, can be modified by experience.… [O]ne reason my account is closer to Reid's is that Reid had the advantage of philosophizing before the advent of verificationist and other antirealist philosophies. Reid never suggests that there is anything unintelligible about the idea that, for example, sense perception is or is not reliable, or that we cannot meaningfully raise the question of whether this is so, however difficult it may be to find a way to answer the question. This leaves Reid and me free to look for ways of evaluating basic doxastic practices.[5]

Of course Alston is including Wittgenstein's among the 'verificationist and other antirealist philosophies." His concern here is to make it plain that Wittgenstein only recognizes criteria for evaluation from within a language-game or DP. Alston believes there to be external criteria that are subject to objective, realist truth.

Here is another example of Alston making the same kind of point. In this case the topic is the use of Wittgenstein's Private Language Argument to show that a DP like the sense-perception practice is a reliable one.

> Note that this argument exhibits more clearly a feature of all the arguments we have called 'Wittgensteinian'. They all contend that the hypothesis that sense perception is not reliable is self-defeating. If we try to maintain it, it crumbles beneath our fingers. Either it is meaningless because not empirically confirmable, or it takes away criterial features of the terms we use to formulate particular perceptual judgments, or it would render impossible our learning the meaning of such terms to mean what they do, or, as in the present argument, it denies a necessary condition of any term's having meaning.[6]

Alston goes on to show how this kind of approach runs into trouble, but it is this common feature that he keys on.[7] This self-defeating nature of suggesting that sense perception might not be reliable arises from Wittgenstein's assumption that the criteria for truth and

meaning are internal to the game or practice at issue. Any move contrary to that recognition will automatically be called out of bounds and result in meaninglessness.

In both these instances, we find a fundamental schism on the question of the nature of truth and reality. What we find coming out loud and clear is Alston differing with a Wittgensteinian kind of position over the availability of realist truth which would be external to the DP or language game, and hence, able to act as a standard outside of the practice. Alston is claiming that truth is something real that stands outside of a practice and acts as a standard for any evaluation of the practice or its resultant beliefs. This realism of truth would then have an effect on the meaning of terms as mentioned in the second passage. Under Alston's way of thinking, meaning wouldn't fluctuate as much as Wittgenstein seems to suggest. Alston believes that what a statement means has some relation to truth in the sense that the statement is true when its meaning is properly connected to the external conditions that make it true. Where truth is understood in a realist purview, meaning is more stolid and rigid than flexible to the variances of different DPs or language-games.

The bottom line is that Alston sees the need for a real, rational standard standing outside the realm of practices in order to judge which ones are appropriate. When speaking of the Wittgensteinian approach he says:

> …[H]e might hold that the reliability of our f amiliar basic doxastic practices is just a rock-bottom commitment from which there is no appeal. It is impossible to find anything more basic on the basis of which this commitment could be evaluated. I find this claim quite appealing…. But a totally uncritical acceptance of our customary practices, without any provision for rational rejection or modification, I find quite indefensible, provided, as I shall be arguing shortly, there is a possibility of rational criticism.[8]

The specific kind of rational criticism Alston has in mind here is the practical rationality argument. We have seen him discard that, but regardless, he is pointing to outside, realist criteria for evaluating a practice. And he believes the criteria he has in place to be of the sort that establish a means of real epistemic evaluation on the level of belief. This is

something he does not see to be available to those like Wittgenstein who leave the evaluation in more pragmatic terms.

How deep does this distinction between an Alstonian position and Wittgenstein really run, though? Granted there are some obvious differences between the two. Alston is clearly more concerned to provide some kind of objective evaluative standard to bolster an epistemic structure. Meanwhile, the Wittgensteinian approach only allows for evaluation that is relative to the language-game or practice at hand. The question facing Alston is whether this is a difference that makes a difference, given the commitments we have seen him make. Does the commitment to realist truth give him the tie to epistemic evaluation he needs, or is he still languishing on the pragmatic side of things? Even if he can hold on to realist truth, we must continue to ask whether that stance can be counted on to quiet the skeptic's challenge of dogmatism from the earlier chapters on epistemic terms or from a practical basis.

For all his care to distinguish himself from a Wittgensteinian position, much of what he says sounds almost too similar to be very convincing when it comes to epistemic over pragmatic concerns in showing a belief to be justified. Here is an example wherein Alston is drawing some conclusions about religious knowledge.

> The most basic point is this: The question of the conditions under which we can reliably form beliefs about God is a theological question, just as the question of the conditions under which we can reliably form beliefs about the physical world is a scientific question.[9]

> We have to rely on our knowledge of God to determine what sources of belief about God are reliable ones. This involves epistemic circularity, but, as I have been pointing out, this doesn't distinguish religious knowledge from other areas of human knowledge, including the most prestigious ones.[10]

These two complimentary passages place the display of the epistemic status of belief squarely within the realm of a DP. The first talks of theological and scientific practices, of which there are many different DPs. The second speaks of remaining within the religious framework, or practice, in showing a religious belief to be justified. This is

certainly no different from the kind of evaluation found in Wittgenstein's language-games. The way a belief will be shown as evaluated is determined by the practice at work at that time. Assuming the involvement of criteria from some other game or practice is not appropriate if the right assessment is to be made. In terms of justification, some forms of desideratum are simply not important in some circumstances. When we are showing that justification, we shouldn't look to desiderata that aren't important or to the DPs that don't take those desiderata to be important.

But isn't this just what Alston has said, that this is the very part of Wittgenstein that most appeals to him? Couldn't he point out that while he has made room for this kind of pluralistic take on the level of DPs, it leaves epistemic matters on the level of belief firmly intact? He would want to say that even though DPs are subject to situational considerations, what makes the belief justified is still a matter of objective epistemic actuality. This is what he made clear for us at the end of the third section of our chapter four. In chapter five we saw him continue with that refrain. There we found him to recognize different domains of epistemic discourse, but within each one a specific means of epistemic evaluation is in order depending on which desiderata are deemed important, and each one is subject externally to their relationship with realist truth. We have a pluralized means of turning out justified belief, but it is still governed by objective standards. The understanding is that this move allows us to appreciate the practical situation we find ourselves in while continuing to give respect to epistemic concerns. There are two points I want to make that would suggest that success in this area is not so clear as Alston might wish. We begin with the one that is carried over from the last chapter.

Does the retention of realist truth ensure that our epistemic concerns are not a mere façade for our practical concerns? This is a restatement of the question asked earlier about whether the differences between Alston and Wittgenstein make a difference. I suggest that, for the most part, they do not. Alston would have us believe that since

there is an external, realist standard of truth for the criteria that monitor what practices may be legitimately participated in and which ones may not, this assures us that any irrational practices that might be in question will be excluded. When we find that stargazing yields continually conflicting claims, our commitment to objective, realist truth requires us to either overhaul that method of belief-formation or set it aside completely. This keeps a practice like stargazing from being considered a DP worthy of maintaining its own internal system of epistemic evaluation. Only those practices that are able to stay clean in regard to the prescribed negative coherence should be seen as viable and rational DPs. In addition, such a practice might put emphasis on certain desiderata that are not viable or important enough for the given situation. But how is this different from Wittgenstein? Aren't they actually suggesting similar ideas? When Wittgenstein speaks of following rules, he recognizes that penalties are incurred when we adopt practices that do not match up with the set rules.[11] He would agree with Alston that stargazing has no place among our other DPs because it stands contrary to the criteria of negative coherentism which we all recognize as important. Acknowledging a practice that results in habitually contradicting beliefs disrupts how things are accomplished.

A possible initial response could be that Wittgenstein's rejection of stargazing is ultimately only because of practical considerations while Alston pushes those aside for more objective reasons, i.e. its shaky connection with realist truth. This may be the case for Wittgenstein. He takes great pains to show that such rules that we have are there only by our application or use.[12] As such, when we make the move to expel a mode of belief-formation for not following the rules, we are doing so to enhance our practical situation. In Alston's case, we must be careful about assuming too much about his reliance on objective external standards. At first blush, it seems that Alston is doing something much different from Wittgenstein because where Wittgenstein only recognizes rules and standards as a means of allowing us to do what we do, Alston is giving those standards a special realist designation. For Alston, the standards of truth and consistency governing

practices are hard and fast and exist independently of the practice. But notice that even with that special designation, an element of practicality still holds sway over the criteria of importance and viability and the proceedings of a negative coherentism. We have already made some headway in showing importance and viability to be subject to practical motivations as well as two of the criteria of negative coherence. Here is where we make good on the promise in the last chapter to pick out the practical concerns behind the first two criteria of Alston's negative coherentism.

The reason negative coherentism can act as an external measure for a practice's acceptability is because it assumes a realist truth. In the actual functioning of the criteria, however, the connection to such an objective standard begins to loosen. As we explored the basic criteria of negative coherentism above,[13] we saw that internal consistency is important because we can't have one of our core DPs delivering a bunch of beliefs that contradict one another. Looking closer at Alston's refinements on this point shows us something interesting. It is not enough to disqualify a DP if it produces a few out of the way contradictory beliefs. Only when that occurrence is "sufficiently extensive and persistent" would we cast the DP aside.[14] But how are we to know when it is extensive and persistent enough to warrant knocking out the questionable DP? If some number or some concentration of contradicting beliefs is allowable in a practice or certain areas of a practice but another number or concentration is not, what determines that call? It seems that we are asking about the degree to which a DP should be expected to be reliable in this regard. That kind of question would appear to call for a very loose measure. Surely this isn't a matter for objective, realist truth to solve.

Could it be that we might turn to Wittgenstein to answer this question? He allows for a distinction between problematic and unproblematic contradiction, as well.

> Let us suppose, however, that the game is such that whoever begins can always win by a particular simple trick. But this has not been realized; – so it is a game. Now someone draws our attention to it; – and it stops being a game.[15]

> Can we say: 'Contradiction is harmless if it can be sealed off'? But what prevents us from sealing it off? That we do not know our way about in the calculus. Then *that* is the harm. And this is what one means when one says: the contradiction indicates that there is something wrong about our calculus. It is merely the (local) *symptom* of a sickness of the whole body. But the body is only sick if we do not know our way about.[16]

> Let us suppose that I prove the unprovability (in Russell's system) of *P*; then by this proof I have proved *P*. Now if this proof were one in Russell's system – I should in that case have proved at once that it belonged and did not belong to Russell's system. –That is what comes of making up such sentences. – But there is a contradiction here! – Well, then there is a contradiction here. *Does it do any harm here?*[17]

What these passages are meant to show is that there are times when contradictions don't have to be taken so seriously. If we can continue to perform in the way we have in the past, there is no reason for an internal conflict like those we have in mind to result in the overthrow of our practice or game. As long as we 'know our way about,' we can continue on. Only when the contradiction keeps the practice from being what it was originally understood to be, as the first passage describes, does it necessitate any changes in the practice. Wittgenstein's advice here is clearly practical in nature. It doesn't refer to some high epistemic principle to explain why we should allow some contradictions to pass by without a great amount of worry. If Alston is willing to do the same, there doesn't seem to be any alternative for allowing some limited amount of internal conflict *except* for practical reasons. We might grant that at least Alston seems to imply *some* kind of non-pragmatic standard in suggesting that contradiction disallows a connection to truth. However, by allowing that some level of contradiction might not disconnect us from truth, the standard becomes somewhat less than purely objective.

One caveat of this negative coherentism criterion is that the contradictions must be of a persisting and extensive nature before they become worrisome.[18] I take by Alston's use of 'persistence' that a specific contradiction may reappear time and time again. His "extensive" criterion seems to be focused on that contradiction that would cause significant damage to the practice at hand. By putting the criteria in conjunction,

Alston appears to be saying that only when both are "sufficiently" breeched would we consider the contradiction worrisome enough to warrant change in the DP involved. But this doesn't say anything more than Wittgenstein has said. The criterion of extensiveness is especially reminiscent of the Wittgensteinian observation that we let the contradiction pass if it doesn't disrupt the ability of the game to be played. That being the case, the criterion of internal consistency takes on a much more pragmatic shade than it seemed.

Turning to the criterion of external consistency, the use of practical concerns becomes even more apparent. The idea was that if two DPs produce conflicting beliefs, only one of the beliefs is true. Thus, one of the DPs is more reliable. We can see the obvious commitment to realist truth behind this. An external objective truth allows us to apply the law of non-contradiction rather than taking them both to be true. So far there is nothing condemning about which we should be concerned. When we return to the question of whether this difference makes a difference, though, things get muddier. Once we find two DPs that cannot both be participated in and that present conflicting beliefs we are left with the matter of deciding which is the one that prevails. Again, those conflicts must be of the sort that are "sufficiently extensive and persistent." How do we decide between them? Here is Alston's admonition.

> What can we do to choose between the disputants in such a case? The only principle that suggests itself to me as both non-question-begging and eminently plausible is the conservative principle that one should give preference to the more firmly established practice. What does being more firmly established amount to? I don't have a precise definition, but it involves such components as (a) being more widely accepted, (b) having more definite structure, (c) being more important in our lives, (d) having more of an innate basis, (e) being more difficult to abstain from, and (f) its principles seeming more obviously true.[19]

Alston is telling us that there is no other way of adjudicating except by looking at the way things are, the way things would be.

Is this not a pragmatic criterion for our epistemic practices? Granted, some of his components, specifically (d) and (f), sound more strictly epistemic to the ear. There are

two things to keep in mind, however. First, we look to (d) and (f) not as criteria unto themselves, but as aspects of the larger notion of "firm establishment." This seems to assume that without the other aspects, there is not enough evidence in (d) or (f) to take them as independently showing which of a set of competitors is the more reliable practice. Beside that, the element of competition brings with it the over-arching aspect of pragmatic concern regardless of the rules of engagement between the DPs. This point is established all the more firmly by Alston's own admission:

> But might it not be the case in a particular conflict that the less firmly established practice is the more reliable? Of course that is conceivable. Nevertheless, in the absence of anything else to go on, it seems the part of wisdom to go with the more firmly established.[20]

If going with the 'more firmly established" DP allows that we may t ake on the one that is in fact less reliable, the clear epistemic goal for Alston, how else can we interpret the criterion than as a practical one? It certainly does not carry the objectivity expected.

Isn't this also reminiscent of Wittgenstein? We are casting aside the questions about actual epistemic status and dealing instead with what we have before us. If someone tried to convince us that the less firmly established practice is the one that wins out because, even though we cannot show it, it is in fact more reliable, Alston would likely take that person to be some kind of irrational deviant. We don't have access to that approach; firm establishment is all we have to go on. This sounds hauntingly familiar.

> If you demand a rule from which it follows that there can't have been a miscalculation here, the answer is that we did not learn this through a rule, but by learning to calculate.

> We got to know the *nature* of calculating by learning to calculate.

> But then can't it be described how we satisf y ourselves of the reliability of a calculation? Oh yes! Yet no rule emerges when we do so. – But the most important thing is: The rule is not needed. Nothing is lacking. We do calculate according to a rule, and that is enough.

But remember: even when the calculation is something fixed for me, this is only a decision for a practical purpose.

So is the *hypothesis* possible, that all the things around us don't exist? Would that not be like the hypothesis of our having miscalculated in all our calculations?[21]

Anyone who would suggest that the established way of doing things is somehow less epistemically sure than it needs to be misunderstands our epistemic position. This idea finds its place as a part of Alston's system, as well. While he would not suggest that a DP could not be overthrown or found to be unreliable, Alston has said that rationality demands that we stay with our established practices regardless of the shaky position left for them thanks to epistemic circularity. Knowing our position, we have to recognize that our epistemology is built upon less than epistemic certainty. Even so, for both Alston and Wittgenstein, our epistemological lives continue on.

The final criterion that Alston calls upon as a possible defense for a DP's reliability is its significant self-support. Recalling our brief examination of this last external check on DPs[22], it was found there that self-support bolsters a DP's claim on reliability by producing the right kinds of results, or the results that would be expected if the principles behind that DP were true. However, once again, this kind of success tends to only satisfy our pragmatic needs by accepting the support in spite of epistemic circularity. Alston recognizes that even to allow significant self-support as evidence, one would have to assume the reliability of the DP in question.[23] That assumption will undercut any evidence that follows as springing from a practical base. There can be no doubt that the evidence of changed lives should not be ignored when considering, for example, CMP and its possible reliability. Significant self-support is a kind of evidence of the success of the DP in this respect. However, that evidence *is* evidence only if we take CMP to be what it says it is.

Once again, Wittgenstein's words find application. His understanding was that any evidence for the truth of any claim or belief, or the reliability of any DP or language-

game, is ultimately based on an underlying assumption. That assumption, in turn, finds

its origin in our natural, practical goals.

> Would it be correct to say that it is a matter of induction, and that I am as certain
> that I shall be able to continue the series, as I am that this book will drop on the
> ground when I let it go; and that I should be no less astonished if I suddenly and
> for no obvious reason got stuck in working out the series, than I should be if the
> book remained hanging in the air instead of falling? – To that I will reply that we
> don't need any grounds for *this* certainty either. What could justify the certainty
> *better* than success?
>
> "The certainty that I shall be able to go on after I have had this experience –
> seen the formula, for instance,– is simply based on induction." What does this
> mean? –"The certainty that the fire will burn me is based on induction." Does
> that mean that I argue to myself: "Fire has always burned me, so it will happen
> now too?" Or is the previous experience the *cause* of my certainty, not its
> ground? Whether the earlier experience is the cause of the certainty depends on
> the system of hypotheses, of natural laws, in which we are considering the
> phenomenon of certainty.
>
> Is our confidence justified? – What people accept as a justification – is
> shown by how they think and live.

We expect *this*, and are surprised at *that*. But the chain of reasons has an end.[24]

Wittgenstein's point is, of course, that for all our reasoning in support of some belief or

idea, our certainty is actually based on our assumption of how the world is and how we

live in it. As he says, "Then what we do in our language -game always rests on a tacit

presupposition."[25] Reasons and evidence reach a point beyond which they can no longer

pursue. Alston has seen this in the guise of epistemic circularity, and his advice reflects

that of Wittgenstein: Use our working assumptions and move on. In doing so, however,

we are basing all of our epistemic endeavors upon a foundation of practicality.

What we have found is that Alston's designations of contrast between himself and

Wittgenstein appear to be less than solid. We have asked the question whether the

differences he points out really do make a difference. When applied to Alston's negative

coherentism criteria for DPs or the criteria of importance and viability, those differences

tend to vanish where the rubber meets the road. Rather than making a way around a

pragmatic Wittgensteinian position, Alston may be steering for a course more closely in

line with that way of thinking. But we are not ready just yet to condemn him to this fate.

In this section we have seen how Alston's position on realistic epistemic principles may

be sliding more and more deeply into a pragmatic mindset. In the next, we shall focus on

his commitment to objective truth.

II

Even with the similarities we have observed between Alston and Wittgenstein,

there remains a very strict line of demarcation. Both tend to agree that our evaluation of

DPs or language-games comes up short of what we might want in terms of a sure

demonstration of their connection to truth. Alston finds us to be bound by epistemic

circularity to the point that we must lean on some external criteria like negative

coherentism to demonstrate how one DP might have an edge over another. This means of

evaluation we have found to be heavily flavored by practical concerns. For Wittgenstein,

the skeptic's question loses its bite. This also is a matter of practical concern. For our

immediate epistemic situation, we have used this to indicate that nay difference between

the two thinkers doesn't really seem to make any difference. However, what they take

our epistemic situation to show takes them on widely diverging paths.

Wittgenstein understands our inability to find an epistemic foundation for our

language-games to be a proof that there are not real, objective standard beyond the

language-game. It's foolish to be frustrated with aberrant behavior as though it were the

transgression of some universal code of existence.

> The steps which are not brought in question are logical inferences. But the reason
> why they are not brought in question is not that they 'certainly correspond to the
> truth' –or something of the sort, -no, it is just this that is called 'thinking',
> 'speaking', 'inferring', 'arguing'. There is not any question at all here of some
> correspondence between what is said and reality; rather is logic *antecedent* to any
> such correspondence; in the same sense, that is, as that in which the establishment

of a method of measurement is *antecedent* to the correctness or incorrectness of a statement of length.[26]

Wittgenstein is saying here that there is no outside justification for things like rules of inference. This is because practice makes such things justified. The justification comes from within the practice or game, not from without. There is no outside truth to which our language-games or DPs are subject. This what he means when he says that the question of some correspondence with an outside reality is out of place. When we act as if there is some outside standard, we are guilty of reifying our rules of logic or standard by which our criteria of epistemic evaluation are measured.[27] Any concept of truth must be internal to the practice, and hence, just as fragmented as our concept of epistemic evaluation.

Alston holds the line on this front. Even though we cannot non-circularly show a DP to be in the right relationship with realist truth, he does not assume this to mean that there is not any realist truth to which it might be related. Of course, this harks back to his distinction between having justification and being justified. Not being able to prove that a DP is reliable doesn't mean that it is not in fact reliable; further, it doesn't me an that there isn't an objective reality upon which that reliability can be based. In short, this is still the same point of difference that Alston has been declaring all along. Although it might not make any difference to our ability to answer skeptical challenges of dogmatism in defense of our epistemic situation, realist truth allows us to assume that there is something making our epistemic situation more solid than we can demonstrate it to be.

Let us assume, for the moment, that Alston has satisfied us on this point. Let's put off for now the challenge of dogmatism from the skeptic to pursue a line of thinking more dear to Alston. The real question, he might want to say, is whether our DPs do *in fact* act as reliable sources of belief. Asking for proof of their reliability is to push us, necessarily, into practical territory. There is no way to give a non-circular, purely epistemic answer to those kinds of questions. Here is our epistemic situation, and this is

the best we can do. If we were to stay simply on epistemic ground, we would devote our attention only to the issue of how our beliefs might *be* produced by reliable DPs, not how we can show them to be so. And to do that, the concept of realist truth is of utmost importance. If there weren't an external, objective truth upon which the reliability of a DP could be founded, then our epistemic situation would surely turn to the kind of picture Wittgenstein has displayed. Here, Alston has been clear in demanding something much more than just pragmatic satisfaction. If a DP *is* reliable, it is because of realist epistemic standards rather than practical needs, or so Alston claims.

But does Alston's concept of realist truth make such a clean break from a pragmatic influence and/or interpretation? Just what does Alston mean when he speaks of his own stance on truth as being "realist?" Is it the same as we would expect from most any other realism toward truth? It would be impossible here to give a fair representation of Alston's full position on realist truth. For our purposes, however, it will be enough to show certain of Alston's descriptions of his own position and garner what conclusions we may.

For starters, it's of some significance that Alston calls his position on truth an "alethic" realism.[28] This moniker is intended to act as a special designation for a somewhat distinct theory. In chapter two of *A Realist Conception of Truth*, Alston spends some time marking out the differences between his own realism concerning truth and the traditional "metaphysical" realisms. In doing so he makes it clear that alethic realism does not make any specific claims about the metaphysical furniture of the universe. Whether objects exist in one way or another – or not at all – is not something that his theory of truth is meant to decide. A theory of truth can only have something to say about what it is for a proposition about those objects to be true or not. Alston believes his position to be obvious to our commonsensical use of "truth." As such, it doesn't matter what kind of ontology one is working from, the theory still works.

To illustrate this point, Alston considers several different positions on reality all with the same result: whichever position is right, there will still be a truth in talking about objects. Here is an example where he takes up Berkeleyan idealism.

> If everything other than minds are, as Berkeley supposed, congeries of ideas, then the proposition that a spruce tree is in front of my house, understood in a Berkeleyan way, will be true if and only if there [sic] certain ideas related in certain ways (i.e., if and only if *there is a spruce tree in front of my house*, where that is construed in the Berkeleyan fashion). Whereas on the realist position, the corresponding proposition will be true if and only if there is a spruce tree in front of my house, where that is understood in a more familiar realist way.[29]

His point here is that whether the correct metaphysical position is traditional realism, an idealism of the sort spoken of above or even an antirealism for that matter, a proposition in every case will only be true if the content of that proposition fits with that correct metaphysical view. This is working off his simplistic version of truth represented most simply by the T-schema: *p* is true iff it is the case that *p*.

Later in the book, Alston is busy showing how one of the archrivals of traditional realism, Hilary Putnam, could actually be seen as forwarding a view that is compatible with his own alethic realism. Putnam's irrealism (or internal realism), Alston finds, can be understood in one of two ways. As he narrows down the two possibilities to one, Alston believes that the kind of alethic realism he is concerned to defend stands easily within the scope of Putnam's irrealism. The main reason for this is that Putnam is chiefly trying to dismantle the traditional metaphysical realism which Alston has himself set as distinct from alethic realism.

> We are always dealing with the world as structured in some conceptual scheme to which there are acceptable alternatives. But within any such scheme, Putnam argues, things are one way rather than another independently of our choices or beliefs…. On this construal internal realism has the familiar features of realism, with the important qualification that we have realism in each of many different ways of conceptualizing the world, instead of having realism "all at once" for a unique reality. *Within* a given scheme, and as long [sic] we don't remind ourselves of the possibility of alternative schemes, it is just as if we were "metaphysical realists". Hence, on this construal, it is clear that we can use a

realist conception of truth inside each scheme, though we can't raise the question as to which scheme is the true one, in the realist sense of 'true' or in any other.[30]

He continues on to say that he is not willing to go along unhesitatingly with Putnam's conceptual scheme understanding of reality, but regardless, since alethic realism doesn't make any claims on metaphysics, it is perfectly able to stand within Putnam's system.[31] The simplicity of alethic realism is such that it avoids those kinds of controversies.

But this sounds as if Alston is allowing that truth is subject to the internal workings of conceptual schemes.[32] A closer inspection reveals that this may misrepresent Alston's position. He is saying that Putnam's view is in agreement with realism, not that he is in agreement with Putnam's irrealism. Alston is allowing the possibility that ontological relativity may be the correct metaphysical view, but he believes that truth remains realist through all schemes or games. How is this possible? First of all, his simplistic understanding of truth via the T-schema is taken to hold true in every way of conceptualizing as we saw him demonstrate above in the Berkeleyan idealism case. Secondly, he holds that a proposition's truth value will remain constant within any conceptual scheme or language-game. This is accomplished by assuming every proposition to implicitly include a qualifier such as "in this particular conceptual scheme" or "understood from within conceptual scheme X."[33]

Again, however, we might ask: What is realist about this? It might sound to some as if Alston is agreeing with Putnam[34] and others by placing what is actually true at the mercy of conceptual schemes. What is *in fact* true is allowed to be different depending on how one approaches reality. However, this would be a mistaken interpretation of Alston's work, as well. It *is* the case that he doesn't believe it important to argue against conceptual schemes in order to establish his version of truth. He doesn't see there to be a conflict between them. Alston believes he can present a realist theory of truth without having to first confirm a realism about anything else. Alethic realism is taken to hold even among some of the most extreme ontological alternatives. If there are

no external objects as Berkeley suggests, then the proposition that the universe is made up of external objects is *false*. And this fits perfectly well with the version of truth that Alston is touting as a *realist* conception of truth. How can a realist position on truth accept the possible truth of a proposition denying that there are external objects? Again, Alston reminds us that it is not the metaphysical structure of the world that alethic realism is concerned with. It is merely that whatever the correct metaphysical view is, there is a simple, consistent understanding of truth that is correct: For *p* to be true, it must be the case that *p*. Metaphysical realism is not defended in this theory. Instead, the only 'realism' here concerns the claim that truth remains the same, no matter what metaphysical view may actually be the correct one.

How does this idea of truth translate into our discussion, now? We said that there needs to be an external, objective truth to be the basis for the epistemic work done by the criteria acting as evaluative standards for DPs. We may grant that Alston has provided a theory of truth that is both external and objective in the ways just described. Perhaps, though, we should ask whether such a simplistic, all-encompassing version of truth gives away too much to ontological relativism. In other words, could this be such a weak portrayal of truth that it gives deference to more pragmatic ways of dealing with reality? We have seen Alston move away from the traditional realist position on the unified concept of justification. On that matter, he rejected the idea that there is some single, unique concept out in logical space called 'justification' to which all justified beliefs stand in relation. While he advertises himself here as a realist when it comes to truth, isn't this the kind of realism that pragmatist's can easily sign o n for without losing any of their commitments?

To make this clear, let's return to Wittgenstein since it was his position that was set at variance from Alston's in the first place. The chief thing to recognize is that Wittgenstein's language -games easily match up with Alston's alethic realism. If we understand reality to be that which is described from within any given language-game,

then certainly we have something other than a metaphysical realism at work. But since alethic realism makes no comments about the metaphysical commitments of a proposition, there can be no disputation over how things exist when all we want to know is whether the proposition is true or false. If alethic realism can accommodate such a view as Putnamian irrealism, it can certainly do the same for a Wittgensteinian version of reality.

Secondly, there is nothing that Alston claims to be doing with a realist understanding of truth in his negative coherentism or criteria of importance and viability that Wittgenstein does not himself advocate and demonstrate the ability to perform. For example, the purpose of criteria like those found in Alston's negative coherentism was to eliminate the possibility of unreliable practices being taken as reliable. Those criteria have the efficacy they do because they assume a realist picture of truth wherein practices producing consistently plaguing contradictions cannot remain among our alternatives for belief-formation. We have just seen some similarities between Alston and Wittgenstein on the subject of contradiction, but our focus here is the notion of truth. If Alston's epistemic concern is truth-conduciveness when speaking of a practice's reliability and truth is understood in terms of alethic realism, then so long as this realism about truth is preserved in a metaphysical system, so is his epistemic concern. As mentioned, since there are no metaphysical assumptions within Alston's realism toward truth, there seems to be no reason why his version of truth wouldn't be preserved in a Wittgensteinian language-game system. Any language-game would require that truth be upheld, as it is understood within the structure of that game.

Beside this, when Alston puts this to work in delineating acceptable from unacceptable practices, he doesn't leave Wittgenstein behind. Not only are there internal problems with truth, but also conflicts over truth between DPs or language-games. Can Wittgenstein offer an external set of criteria to handle such situations like Alston seems to have presented?

Supposing we met people who did not regard that as a telling reason. Now, how do we imagine this? Instead of the physicist, they consult an oracle. (And for that we consider them primitive.) Is it wrong for them to consult an oracle and be guided by it? – If we call this "wrong" aren't we using our language-game as a base from which to *combat* theirs?

And are we right or wrong to combat it? Of course there are all sorts of slogans which will be used to support our proceedings.

Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and heretic.

I said I wouldn't 'combat' the other man, – but wouldn't I give him *reasons*? Certainly; but how far do they go? At the end of reasons comes *persuasion*. (Think what happens when missionaries convert natives.)[35]

There seems to be suggested here an appeal to some kind of external source by the authority of which a language-game might be discontinued. That external source might be nothing more than "persuasion" in this case. The implication is that the external influence or "persuasion" would have nothing to do with rational means of adopting one way of thinking over another, but Wittgenstein has at least raised the possibility of something besides a solely internal evaluative basis for language-game participation. This, of course, is not nearly strong enough evidence to connect Wittgenstein to something like Alston's notion of negative coherentism. Although we have here a clear example where Wittgenstein points to some kind of external means of examining language-games,[36] it doesn't even remotely appear to be for the same sort of thing that Alston has in mind. Alston is concerned to have DPs that can be taken to be reliable. To cull the chaff from this category, he fosters an alethic realism toward truth which motivates his negative coherentism. While an appeal to that negative coherentism might be a *form* of persuasion, it is easily understood as more of a rational criterion than what Wittgenstein has in mind between missionaries and natives. But this is not Wittgenstein's strongest language when it comes to evaluating language-games.

Continuing the thoughts quoted from him above, Wittgenstein proceeds with the theme of what it would be like to cease participation in a language-game.

> Certain events would put me into a position in which I could not go on with the old language-game any further. In which I was torn away from the *sureness* of the game.
>   Indeed, doesn't it seem obvious that the possibili ty of a language-game is conditioned by certain facts?

> In that case it would seem as if the language-game must '*show*' the facts that make it possible. (But that's not how it is.)
>   Then can one say that only a certain regularity in occurrences makes induction possible? The 'possible' would of course have to be '*logically possible*'.

> Am I to say: even if an irregularity in natural events did suddenly occur, that wouldn't *have* to throw me out of the saddle. I might make inferences then just as before, but whether one would call that "induction" is another question. [37]

Here Wittgenstein speaks of "facts" that might have something to do with a continued participation in a language-game. It might appear as though he is suggesting that one can stay within a language-game no matter how it conflicts with one's experience. He imagines a case where houses disappear and asks whether we can still think of Truth and Falsity in the same way since certain claims like, "I know there is a house here" are no longer true.[38] In such a situation, Wittgenstein would remain a practitioner of that game so long as it still allows for continuance, i.e. inferences are still possible.

However, this somewhat striking tenacity is not unshakable. In the first part of the set of passages above, Wittgenstein considers what might tear him away from his language-game. Where a game is so rife with conflict that my assurance in it won't allow me to continue to play it as I used to, the game has changed. I am no longer participating in the same game as before.[39] Part of our discovery in Wittgenstein earlier was that conflict within a game can be of the sort that "harms" the game to the point of abandonment.[40] When Wittgenstein says that checking the facts before continuing with a game is not really how it goes, he means to make it clear that we don't operate within a

game by constantly looking to some external rulebook to make sure our next move can be done. There *are* certain facts that the continuance of the game depends on. But the facts involved are observed *inside* the game through our activity, our practice. This means that there *are* facts involved in a language-game. These facts *do* have something to do with whether a game can continue to be played or not. It's just that thos e facts are not the kinds of independent things we have always believed them to be.

Could this stand as a parallel stopgap to Alston's negative coherentism? Again, the major difference that stands out between the two of them is that Alston's criteria come from outside the scope of a DP while Wittgenstein's point of abandonment is 'discovered' by participation within the game itself. [41] And this is just the factor that Alston has pointed out as one of the marks distinguishing his view from the pragmatic or Wittgensteinian approach.[42] Wittgenstein takes the criteria at work to be a matter for each practice to determine through the course of its activity, and this Alston takes to go against his understanding of realist truth. As we noted some time back, Alston believes that the same concept of truth should be at work in all language-games or DPs; something he takes Wittgenstein to be unable to support.[43] At that time, Alston was dissociating himself from Wittgenstein because his realist concept of truth was incompatible with the language-game approach. After looking into Alston's theory on truth, however, one might wonder, again, whether this difference between them makes any difference.

Since Alston's alethic realism makes no attempt to say which ontology is correct, there doesn't seem to be any reason for him to count a Wittgensteinian language -game approach as unable to support that concept of truth. If all that matters is whether the T-schema can be applied, it seems that this concept of truth *can* be at work in a language-game system. It doesn't matter if the particular game at hand gives higher preference to long-term memory than computers or calculators in calculating large figures as long as we find the proposition 'Long -term memory is more accurate than a computer in calculating long, difficult figures' to be true. In this case, the proposition is to be

understood in a Wittgensteinian way in the sense that one's long-term memory *is* more accurate than a computer because it may be better within that language-game at accomplishing what it is needed to accomplish.[44] This may be the case, under the language-game view, even if long-term memory presents different results than a computer. To apply the T-schema, then, the proposition "Long-term memory is more accurate than a computer in calculating long, difficult figures" is true if and only if *long-term memory is more accurate than a computer in calculating long, difficult figures*, where this is understood in a Wittgensteinian fashion.

What we have done here is to merely substitute Wittgenstein's position for that of Berkeley's as per the example quoted from Alston on p. 200. And what has been lost? I find no reason why the concept of alethic realism that Alston argues for cannot be maintained within Wittgenstein's language-games. He mentions in the Berkeleyan case that the traditional realist would certainly not agree with the truth of the proposition that objects are congeries of ideas. In like manner, the traditional realist would name as false the proposition that reality is dependent on one's current language-game or conceptual scheme. But Alston's theory of truth is not limited to the traditional realist position, metaphysical realism. Instead, alethic realism is compatible with whatever metaphysical position is the actual one. As long as the simple T-schema works within that position, it is compatible with alethic realism.

We have been pointing out that one of the distinguishing features that Alston sets up between his own position and a Wittgensteinian one is the subject of realist truth.[45] However, it seems here that Wittgenstein's language-games are able to support the T-schema. In other words, that fundamental mark of distinction that Alston had been so careful to hold between himself and Wittgenstein all along is not nearly the clear line that Alston describes. His alethic realism has opened up the possibility that a language-game or conceptual scheme metaphysics could continue with such an idea of truth. When a theory of truth is expressed in as loose terms of application as Alston expresses his, there

is room for many positions on ontology to fit under the umbrella. Alston's alethic realism has taken away his recourse to casting Wittgenstein's language-games aside for their misuse of realist truth. Realist truth, as Alston describes it, appears to feel right at home with Wittgenstein.

That being said, there is still a pretty strong divide between Alston and Wittgenstein. Although Alston's concept of realist truth might not pose such a clear line of distinction, there is still the matter of what metaphysical position actually is the correct one. We substituted a Wittgensteinian position for the Berkeleyan one that Alston uses in showing the flexibility of his theory. Of course, Alston would certainly reject Berkeley's contention that there are no externally existing objects. In that passage his concern was to show that his concept of truth stands even in all sorts of possible metaphysical positions, not that all of those positions are equally viable or acceptable. Even though his idea of truth is compatible with those versions of reality, there is still the question of what the actual ontology of the world really is. Just as he would reject Berkeley's position, Alston also rejects Wittgenstein's. This constitutes the second mark of distinction between them indicated by Alston.[46]

Though Alston distinguishes his position from traditional metaphysical realisms, he still counts himself among the metaphysical realists. In his most recent work to date on the subject, he characterizes his view as a "sensible metaphysical realism."[47] One of the reasons his position is "sensible" rather than the regular brand of metaphysical realism is that he recognizes the possibility of some things being dependent on conceptual-theoretical positions and choices. Standard metaphysical positions would claim that all things exist independently of any conceptualizing or theorization. In his "sensible" approach, Alston comes up with a list of things that appear to exist as dependent of the conceptual framework from which they arise: mereological sums, homogenous stuffs, temporal parts of enduring objects, and process metaphysics as opposed to a common substance metaphysics.[48] I shall not take it as necessary for us to

delve into the reasons why Alston believes such things to have a conceptual-scheme dependent existence or how his view on reality has evolved through the years.[49] I direct our attention to this as a means of showing that Alston's own version of metaphysical realism actually leaves room for conceptual schemes or language-games to have a place when it comes to the existence of some things.

> To sum up, I take it that I have given reason to hold both that there are indefinitely many objects that exist and facts that obtain absolutely, not relative to some conceptual-theoretical scheme to which there are equally viable alternatives, and that there are also indefinitely many objects that exist and facts that obtain relative to a conceptual-theoretical scheme to which there are equally viable alternatives.[50]

Alston continues on to say that those objects and facts that exist absolutely are likely to be more numerous and surely more important than those that are relative.[51] Regardless, we can see that this is a step away from the strict traditional forms of metaphysical realism, and a step closer to the kind of pluralistic metaphysics fostered by Wittgenstein.

All of this brings out a closer similarity between Alston and Wittgenstein that is much stronger than was advertised. The question of contradiction or conflict within a practice and between practices displayed more of a connection than perhaps would have been guessed. Our deeper look into Alston's idea of realist truth reveals that one major line of demarcation believed to hold between the two is weaker than was thought. The second major dividing wall between Alston and Wittgenstein has been their opposing position on ontology. On that point, Alston is willing to allow at least a little room for plurality. But what does this show? Is Wittgenstein more of an Alstonian than we thought, or is Alston more of a Wittgensteinian than believed?

We have found Alston making reference again and again to Wittgenstein's work as an influence for his own, and that is telling. Beyond that, keeping in mind the larger context of our discussion, we have been trying to discover whether Alston might be heading in a more pragmatic direction than he tends to let on. Through that process, in every instance wherein Alston attempts to set himself apart from a more practical

understanding of our epistemic situation we have found him to end up closer to the practical side of things rather than the strictly epistemic. In projecting a possible path left for us in his literature whereby the problem of epistemic circularity might be avoided on one side and a pragmatic epistemology avoided on the other, Alston's gravitation toward the pragmatic side is clear. The early Alston of foundationalist justification has taken quite a turn. And yet, as I maintain, it was there in the cards all along.

III

We have traveled through about twenty years of literature over the course of these pages. We have started with what may be effectively taken as Alston's beginning in the field of epistemology to his most recent work. If we look at his position in the beginning and compare it to his view at the end, there are some marked differences. His classical foundationalist stance has turned into a reliabilist foundationalism. His reliance on a practical rationality argument to support a prima facie case for justification of religious beliefs has been dropped for negative coherentist criteria. Even the very concept of justification itself has been shed for a pluralistic version of epistemic evaluation subject to different epistemic situations or doxastic practices. At face value, one might conclude that Alston has repudiated his former position for the sake of a completely different one. However, there *is* one position that is retained throughout the entire episode. In fact, it could be speculated that all of the changes in Alston's epistemology are the result of an effort to hold on to that position. As a result of a continual adherence to that stance at the sacrifice of his other former sympathies, I believe he is led to this last, most remarkable change in his position. This change from defending an epistemic pursuit to embracing a practical view is something even Alston himself does not appear to be aware of.

The surviving position is Alston's abiding externalism against the epistemic internalists.[52] From the time we find Alston giving a clear definition to his version of externalism to his very latest writings, he never sways in defending the value and

correctness of an externalist understanding of epistemology. As was noted, it is this concern for demonstrating the advantages of externalism over internalism that drives Alston's case for a plurality of epistemic desiderata rather than a unique concept of justification.[53] And this fragmenting of epistemic evaluation, along with his DP approach to epistemology, leads us into the questions surrounding Alston's ties to a practical rather than a purely epistemic posture on our epistemic situation.

In the beginning was an affirmation of his externalist tenets. These tenets, in an interest to answer the charge of dogmatism, led Alston directly to epistemic circularity. Epistemic circularity and the dilemma produced by it led him to his first real connection to a Wittgensteinian way of thinking with his DP approach. This was his attempt to avoid epistemic circularity and an overly-pragmatic stance at the same time. The DP approach expanded into the pluralistic notion of epistemic desiderata. Finally, the pluralism of epistemic desiderata, in conjunction with the DP approach, takes Alston into a deeper relation to Wittgenstein than anticipated. When we also factor into this scenario what Alston has to say about realist truth and metaphysical realism, the dividing walls of separation suddenly lose their former distinctness. Alston ends up among those who emphasize the practical concerns in our lives as believers rather than the merely epistemic concerns he thought he had been defending. And this emphasis may be traced back to his early commitment to the protection of externalism against a pure internalism.

Our means of supporting the DPs of which we are practitioners turn out to be more practical than epistemic. In the end, though epistemic circularity does not swallow him up, it does push him toward the most obvious means of escape. This means is not the one that Alston would appear to have chosen for himself, but it does open up new ground for the externalist to tread.

> …[C]onsiderations of epistemic circularity show that there is no appea l beyond the doxastic practices to which we find ourselves firmly committed. We can make modifications within that sphere. We can tidy up some of them so as to minimize internal and external contradictions. And in extreme cases, we may

have to abandon some in order to maintain the most coherent total position. But our starting place for any cognitive enterprise is the belief forming dispositions with which we find ourselves at the moment.[54]

It appears that the epistemic task that lies before us is to be accomplished from within our DPs, rather than from without. As Wittgensteinian as this sounds, it is not so pragmatic that it disallows the view most dear to Alston. Externalism may continue. Alston's core position still has its priority despite the shifts on every side.

We closed the last chapter with some insights as to where Alston's defense of externalism might lead him. The end of his work in "Epistemic Desiderata" concentrated on showing how his new take on understanding the evaluative side of epistemology would exclude those purely internalistic desiderata from having a central role to play in our theory of justification. What we discovered was that the championing of a more externalist brand of desiderata required an appeal to concerns of a practical nature instead of epistemic ones. In this chapter we have pushed that discovery by trying to show how Alston's own later work, rather than solidifying his position against the pragmatic approach to epistemology as represented by Wittgenstein, actually shows itself to be moving more and more in the direction of Wittgenstein. Our brief outline above of the course by which Alston has gone from a recognition of epistemic circularity and the ensuing dilemma to a dependence on pragmatic criteria indicates how Alston's early commitment to the importance of externalism to epistemology has brought him to this. Epistemic circularity is a result of the prominence of externalism in his RI-AI view. Without that adherence to externalism, epistemic circularity would not be a problem. Since epistemic circularity *is* a problem, however, the result is a turn toward the pragmatic in order to address it. My point here, then, is simple. The early commitment and defense of externalism that we have seen from start to finish has led Alston to the practical tendencies he does not appear to be able to escape.

IV

The persisting value of Alston's work has been that he has ever pushed the field of epistemology forward beyond its former prejudices. That continues to be the case even in what we are observing here. One significant way of appraising a person's work in academia is to notice the different avenues of thought that have been spawned from the original source. The greatest thinkers throughout the history of philosophy have been so designated largely for the fecundity of their work. Our measure of Alston's work in that respect is incomplete at this point. He has years left wherein he may alter and expand his former thought as we have seen him do already. Beyond his own work, however, Alston has opened the field of epistemology to burgeoning areas of thought and practice for others to take on. In our case, it appears he may have accomplished this for the externalist position without having that as his particular goal. It has been my task to illuminate the direction in which I believe Alston's work really does lead us. While it may not be the direction initially subscribed to by Alston himself, our debt to him in pushing us to its recognition cannot be diminished all the same.

The recent resurgence of externalism in epistemology has allowed the timely work of Alston to be given greater attention and interest. It is not our purpose here to resolve the old dispute between internalism and externalism, nor has it been our aim to advocate the reality of the problem of epistemic circularity resulting from externalism. All the same, it may certainly be instructive to ask, as we conclude our thoughts, whether there might be some means of avoiding the problem of epistemic circularity that would allow us to hold on to the importance of purely epistemic concerns. Are we really in the bind in which Alston appears to have led us? Is the appeal to non-epistemic, practical means the only way around the problem? I think there are two alternatives open to us beside the one offered by Alston. I begin with the one already mentioned.

We spent some time in chapter three talking about the disappearance of the problem of epistemic circularity under an internalistic understanding of epistemology.

We used Lammeranta's position as representative of the attempt to throw off epistemic circularity by rejecting externalism. As a solution to the epistemic circularity problem, as well as the dependence on pragmatic considerations, opting for internalism gets the job done. As was mentioned in that discussion, circularity of the right sort may be a benefit rather than a liability in an internalistic position. For all the objections raised by Alston against internalism back in chapter two, we might wonder whether biting the bullet on those issues would be worth it if we can escape the clutches of epistemic circularity. In other words, perhaps we should ask which is more damaging to our actual epistemic situation: the dilemma presented to externalism or the problems associated with internalism?

We have already seen Alston's take on this question in his argument for the importance of externalist desiderata above internalist ones at the end of chapter five. This rejection of internalism centered around the failure of internalistic desiderata to match up with what we need from a desideratum in our everyday life of belief. These problems were found to be latent in the attempts at a combination of internalism and externalism that we observed in earlier discussions, as well. They tended to lean too heavily on internalistic features. To restrict justification of belief to those justified beliefs that we believe ourselves to be justified in asks too much of us, he thinks. At the same time, internalism often assumes that we have some voluntary control over our beliefs. Those points aside, perhaps the most damaging problem facing internalism is its lack of truth-conducivity. As we saw with Lammenranta's position, the truth of the belief might in no way be assured even though the belief fully satisfies the internalist criterion. In the epistemic pursuit of true over false beliefs, this raises a significant bar to the victory of internalism. For this reason, even without the others, I find internalism's supposed dispersal of the epistemic circularity problem to be a bad trade-off: the disappearance of the epistemic circularity problem for the loss of truth-conducivity.

Do externalism's problems offer any brighter hope for us? The dilemma presented through epistemic circularity brings with it a fairly good reason for us to be discouraged. Alston doesn't appear to have been able to avoid it. In defending externalism against internalism the only effective route is to show externalism's standards of justification to have more practical value than internalism's since neither seem to fair well in epistemic terms. But this leads us to the second alternative to Alston's position. The reason Alston was unable to run between the horns of the dilemma was his failure to come up with any purely epistemic feature outside of a DP whereby it could be shown to be reliable. The negative coherence criteria each had their own links to practical concerns. The criteria of importance and viability for epistemic desiderata also had practical elements. Another telling observation was that Alston's theory of truth, which was so crucial to the criteria involving conflicts between beliefs and among DPs, was discovered as unable to draw a clear line between Alston and a Wittgensteinian position. Though Alston's metaphysical realism still sets a definable distinction between the two, even in that case we find Alston giving some ground to a conceptual scheme ontology similar to Wittgenstein's. If we were to try avoiding the turn toward the practical, it seems we would have to come up with some epistemic criterion of evaluation for DPs.

The natural place to look, since internalism has fallen into disfavor for its lack of truth-conducivity, is to some connection to truth that would preclude any possible compatibility with a pragmatic position. This would mean, of course, that a theory somewhat more robust than Alston's minimalist alethic realism would be in order. If we could show a DP to be in an appropriate relation to truth in an objective and robust sense, it might bring us a good distance toward delivering strong epistemic support for the DP. This directs us toward a realist version of truth that includes the more traditional metaphysical realism.[55] Could room be made for some form of metaphysical realism that would provide support for an epistemic evaluation? With something firm in hand, we

might have a more epistemically stable criterion for our belief-producing DPs. This is something that Alston was concerned to stay away from in both *A Realist Conception of Truth* and *A Sensible Metaphysical Realism* in order to show his theory to be more flexible than some. A more rigid understanding of ontology, however, would allow Alston to avoid some of those pragmatic aspects in his epistemology. Might we be able to defend a traditional metaphysical realism against its difficulties and thereby hold to a more solid evaluative criterion within our epistemology?

Unfortunately, this is where the waters that spread before us grow even deeper and more treacherous than before. Alston decides not to make the attempt of connecting a metaphysical realism to his alethic realism for precisely these kinds of reasons. The brands of metaphysical realism are numerous and the lines between them are highly controversial. To produce such a theory burdens one with the responsibility of explaining and answering many difficult questions. What are facts? How are facts related to truth? How can we be sure that a belief is properly connected to fact? What are propositions? Can they be truth-bearers? Are all facts independent of our theoretical, conceptual schemes? If not, which ones are dependent and why? Does recognizing the relativity of even a few facts to conceptual schemes or language-games mean the rejection of metaphysical realism altogether?

Clearly, this takes us beyond the pale of our current concerns. However, it does indicate a direction available for future work on an Alstonian version of epistemology. The questions are no less troublesome. The course is no less precarious. The possibilities are left wide open, though. As I said, one of the marks of an enduring contribution to the world of academia is its ability to create more and greater exploration in the future. We have tracked the course provided for us by Alston and then some. Though the answers remain clouded, a passage has been granted enabling us to push ahead in pursuit of an ever higher understanding of our own epistemic situation and how we might improve both our epistemic situation and our understanding of it.

NOTES:

Introduction:

[1] I shall not be using "pragmatic" in the philosophical sense but in the vulgar, to refer to a kind of practical standard as opposed to a more objectively epistemic standard.

Chapter one:

[1] I am ignoring Gettier requirements as unnecessary to the current project.

[2] William Alston, *Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989) (hereafter Alston89a) 26-7. Although there is some controversy over the conclusions drawn, I ignore this as being peripheral to this work.

[3] This is adapted from Alston89a pp. 26-7.

[4] Ibid. p. 20.

[5] Alston says similar things about over-determination of justification. Ibid. p. 45.

[6] Ralph Baergen, *Contemporary Epistemology* (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace, 1995) 51.

[7] Alston89a pp. 153-171.

[8] Ibid. pp. 162-3. More on this point later.

[9] New York: Random House, 1967.

[10] Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974.

[11] Aune p. 41.

[12] Alston89a pp. 20-1.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Cf. "Varieties of Privileged Access," Alston89a pp. 254-63.

[15] Aune p. 42

[16] Alston 89a p. 23.

[17] Ibid. p. 45.

[18] Ibid. p. 43.

[19] Aune p. 43.

[20] Cf. Frederick F. Schmitt, *Socializing Epistemology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1994) for some excellent essays on this problem.

[21] Alston89a pp. 24&63.

[22] Ibid. pp. 25&154.

[23] Aune does not seem to be explicitly suggesting this point though others like Will and Sellars appear to make use of it.

[24] Alston89a p. 25.

[25] Will p. 197.

[26] Ibid. p. 203.

[27] adapted from Will p. 200-1.

[28] Ibid. p. 190.

[29] Alston89a p. 45. his italics.

[30] Ibid. his italics.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Will p. 190.

[33] Alston89a p. 46.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid. p. 36.

[36] Ibid. p. 45.

[37] Ibid. p. 37. his italics.

[38] *Synthese* 55 (1983) 97-118.

[39] Alston89a p. 37.

[40] Shatz pp. 105-6.

[41] Alston89a p. 37.

[42] Shatz p. 108.

[43] For more on the coherence theory of justification and its relation to foundationalism and other theories cf. Laurence Bonjour "Can Empirical Knowledge have a Foundation?" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (1978) 1-13, "The Coherence Theory of Empirical Knowledge," *Philosophical Studies* 30 (1976) 281-312, Ernest Sosa "The Raft and the Pyramid," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy,* vol. 5 (University of Minnesota Press, 1980) 3-25, and Susan Haack *Evidence and Inquiry* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1993).

[44] Alston89a p. 37.

[45] Shatz p. 109.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Alston89a pp. 50&71.

[48] Ibid. pp. 209-10.

[49] Ibid. p. 70.

[50] There may be better examples of this, e.g. perceptual beliefs that would be less controversial and hence, more immediate, but this example serves the purpose sufficiently.

[51] Alston89a p. 37

[52] Ibid. p. 71. my italics.

[53] Ibid. p. 38. his italics.

[54] Alston, Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Walterstorff, Richard Swinburne, and George Mavrodes - among others - have all held, or do hold, such a position or variations on the theme. It should certainly not be implied from this that foundationalism is the best or only view to stand in good relation with the justification of religious belief. This will become clearer as we continue.

[55] E.g., Plantinga and Wolterstorff.

[56] Traditional a posteriori arguments for God's existence would be included in this, as well as most arguments from religious experience.

[57] This is, of course, ignoring any Gettier-type considerations.

[58] Alston89a p. 70

[59] While this might sound irresponsibly fideistic, I believe it gibes fairly well with the work of Plantinga and Wolterstorff in *Faith and Rationality* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

[60] Alston89a p. 36.

[61] Ibid.

Chapter two:

[1] I use "stands" here as a catch-all term including such ideas as "being based on," "direct/indirect causal connectedness," "adequacy of the grounds in respect to," and so on.

[2] Notice that I only claim that it "can" be so justified. As we saw in the preceding chapter, internalist constraints may also be allowed as a part of justification; they are just not deemed as necessary.

[3] I would not presume to exclude other thinkers from their due in this regard, chiefly David Armstrong and Alvin I. Goldman along with contributions from Fred Dretske and others. But Alston has been at the fore of this discussion and offers his own unique approach to the issue quite in contrast to those who welcome his defense of externalism.

[4] Alston89a.

[5] Ibid. p. 188.

[6] Ibid. p. 214.

[7] I shall continue from here to refer to cognitive states only as beliefs for the sake of simplicity though I fully understand other kinds of cognition are available for internal support.

[8] Ibid. pp. 199-200.

[9] Cf. chapters 3 and 4 of Alston89a.

[10] from "The Ethics of Belief," *Lectures and Essays*. (London: Macmillan, 1879).

[11] Alston89a p. 122.

[12] Ibid. p. 92.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Alston goes through several enumerations of varying degrees and types of voluntary control in "The Deontological Conception," Alston89a. Also cf. Louis Pojman *Belief and the Will* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986) for a helpful and lengthy discussion of historical views placing belief under some kind of voluntary control.

[15] Alston89a p. 208.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid. p. 96. Cf. also "The Deontological Conception," Alston89a pp.146 -7.

[19] Ibid. pp.149-50.

[20] p. 39 of the present work

[21] Ibid. p. 209. Also cf. "Level Confusions in Epistemology," and "An Internalist Externalism," Alston89a for restatements of this argument.

[22] Ibid. pp. 210-11.

[23] Ibid. p. 211.

[24] In demonstrating these, Alston points out that he is only using versions of AI that are evident in the literature. At the end of "Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology," Alston89a, he suggests that there might be a viable AI position whic h has yet to be forwarded.

[25] Alston89a p. 220.

[26] Ibid. p. 224.

[27] Ibid. p. 225. Cf. "Concepts of Epistemic Justification," Alston89a for a fuller treatment of this move.

[28] Ibid. p. 236.

[29] Ibid. p. 244.

[30] An "over-rider" would include any new evidence later discovered which might alter one's belief or introduce a substitute belief. "Defeaters" are pieces of evidence that demonstrate the falsehood of a previously held belief. Alston calls them "rebutters" and "neutralizers" respectively, Ibid. p. 238. Both of these would clearly eliminate the prima facie justified status of the belief under scrutiny.

[31] Ibid. p. 238.

[32] Ibid. pp. 237-8.

[33] Ibid. pp. 96ff .

[34] Ibid. pp. 233-4. It may appear to the reader that these comments tend to take Lammenranta toward a coherentist position. I agree that this seems to be apparent, but, following the example of Alston in *Perceiving God* p. 73, I refrain from pursuing an examination of that turn.

[35] Ibid. p. 232.

[36] Ibid. p. 234.

[37] in Peter French, Theodore Uehling, Jr., and Howard Wettstein, eds., *Midwest Studies in Philosophy V* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980) 53-73.

[38] Cf. especially "What is Justified Belief?" *Justification and Knowledge*, ed. George Pappas (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1979) 1-23, "Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge," *Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1976) 771-91, and *Epistemology and Cognition* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986).

[39] He actually delivers several versions of this example in response to possible maneuvers open to the reliabilist. Bonjour pp. 59-65.

[40] Ibid. p. 65.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Bonjour seems to be subject to the criticisms of voluntarism we have already discussed.

[43] E.g., Ibid. p. 62.

[44] Again, this ignores the controversy over voluntarism in respect to belief.

[45] Ibid. pp. 60-1.

[46] Ibid. p. 63.

[47] Bonjour uses the terms 'unreasonably' and 'irrationally'.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Alston89a pp. 233-4.

[50] *Synthese* 74 (1988) 285-296.

[51] Ibid. p. 286.

[52] Ibid. pp. 287-90. I should add that while he examines two kinds of externalist views, a reliabilist and a causal view, I am dealing only with the former as it offers a ready connection to Alston's RI-AI.

[53] Ibid. p. 288.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Cf. Goldman 'What is Justified Belief?' pp. 6-7. Although this is a criticism often raised against reliabilism, i.e. that the notion of "reliability" in leading to truth is too vague, no right-thinking reliabilist would consider a process reliable based on one attempt.

[56] A point that might seem to be more in line with Chishom's intentions in the passages quoted is that reliabilism fails to give a clear understanding of what kind of process we are to be mindful of in attributing reliability. That is, how does one define 'process'? I have ignored that for two reasons. The first is that it must be remembered that Alston's view is an 'indication' reliabilism, not a 'process' reliabilism. As such, Alston's concern is with the indicative capacity of the particular ground, not the process. Secondly, our focus has been the debate between internalism and externalism. That is the feature of these two passages that I chose to illuminate.

[57] Chisholm goes on to examine a formulation of reliabilism that takes into account the probability of the process being a truth-belief-producer on p. 290 of his article. Once again, though, he assumes that a process will be reliable when it has produced only one true belief.

[58] Chisholm p. 290.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

[61] E.g., Laurence Bonjour "The Coherence Theory of Empirical Knowledge," *Philosophical Studies* 30 (1976) 281-312 is an early move in this direction; also, Noah Lemos "High Accessibility and Justification," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 49 (3) (1989) 461-77; John Greco "Internalism and Epistemically Responsible Belief," *Sythese* 85 (1990) 245-77; Robert Audi "Structural Justification," *Journal of Philosophical Research* vol. xvi (1990-91) 473-92; James A. Moore "Knowledge, Society, Power, and the Promise of Epistemological Externalism," *Synthese* 88 (1991) 379-98; Susan Haack makes somewhat of a veiled attempt in *Evidence and Inquiry*.

[62] *Journal of Philosophical Research* vol. xvi (1990-91) 107-23.

[63] Ibid. p. 109.

[64] summarized from Ibid. pp. 109-12.

[65] Ibid. p. 112.

[66] pp. 45-46 of the present work

[67] Ibid. p. 113.

[68] Notice that this seems to revive the old Platonic problem found in the *Meno* and other dialogues where the doctrine of recollection arises. There, we must be able to know in order to be able to know. Without knowledge, you will not be able to know. But how do we get knowledge in the first place? In regard to Crawford's suggestion, if justified belief comes only after one knows how to find the justification, then how could we attain the knowledge of finding justification if we don't have justified belief? This problem is especially troubling for Crawford (and therefore, Sellars) because of the higher-level requirement involved which states that one must believe that she is justified in order to be so justified.

[69] Crawford p. 113.

[70] I hasten to add "in all cases" because there are many times when belief and reflection appear simultaneous or practically simultaneous with one another, e.g. my attention being called to the loudness of an ambulance siren. Even here knowledge is actually a step behind the belief formed according to Crawford.

[71] Crawford p. 117.

[72] It is important to note that Crawford (and Sellars) is speaking of justification as an act rather than an epistemic way of being. Justification comes through the subject's presentation of it. It is a performance of the believing subject. Alston opts for justification as a description that can be applied to a belief whether someone has gone through the cognitive process or not.

[73] "Toward a Compatibility Theory for Internalist and Externalist Epistemologies," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (51) 3 (1992) 641-46.

[74] Ibid. p. 647.

[75] Ibid. p. 648.

[76] Ibid. p. 649.

[77] from *The Theory of Epistemic Rationality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

[78] Sennett p. 651.

[79] Sennett does cite both Audi and Foley as giving possible examples of knowledge that do not meet the requirements of an internalist criterion of justification. However, they would not include beliefs like the simple one just mentioned about the presence of a keyboard before me. In fact, Sennett's introduction of the notion of "vacuous rationality", from p. 653 of his article, for perceptual beliefs makes the internalist criteria a necessity for any knowledge claim. "Vacuous rationality" is the low -level, sub-reflective acceptance of a belief, e.g. perception. Although vacuous, it must involve some internal awareness though Sennett doesn't really give an adequate description of what all it might entail.

[80] Alston89a p. 244 n. 18.

[81] Sennett pp. 652-3 & Alston89a p. 244.

[82] One of the motivating factors for Sennett is the possibility of his externalist requirement being the missing ingredient to solve the Gettier problem (Sennett pp. 653-5). The potential for that is damaged if internalism can't deliver justification as suggested by Alston.

[83] I am taking this from "Can Belief in God be Rational?" (hereafter Walterstorff83) in *Faith and Rationality* although more of this line of thinking can be found in his *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984) 135-86.

[84] Walterstorff83 pp. 159-61.

[85] Ibid. pp. 162-3.

[86] Ibid. p. 171.

[87] Ibid. p. 166.

[88] Ibid. p. 168. his italics.

[89] Ibid. p. 162.

[90] Ibid. pp. 176-7. my italics.

[91] Ibid. p. 155.

[92] Ibid. p. 156. his italics.

[93] Ibid. p. 177. Wolterstorff identifies this situation with the biblical situation of a 'trial" for believers.

[94] This is a point against Wolterstorff's idea of such beliefs being "eluctable".

[95] There are many other things to be said in objection to Wolterstorff's move. For example, how could we ever know what source of obligation associated with the different dispositions is the more authoritative one? Wolterstorff seems to think there is a hierarchy among dispositions. To support the idea that the disposition for establishing religious belief is the pre-eminent, he calls on his Calvinist tradition. The Christian will choose the correct disposition because she "believes that we have been made thus by a good Creator" (Ibid. p. 174). There is an obvious circularity here. How could she believe that she was thusly made, the belief that is supposed to support her choice of dispositions, unless *that* belief were not also the result of some belief-forming disposition? But what disposition should she choose for that task? The one that is supported by the belief she is trying to examine?

[96] Alston89a p. 244.

[97] Roderick Chisholm can be understood as the clear example of that tradition.

[98] There is also the related issue of just what our perceptual experiences represent. If they are considered truth-conducive, what truth is it of which they are conducive? How closely are those experiences related to the kinds of things we believe them to truthfully represent? This introduces the question of just what perception is of. Alston's position on this front can be most clearly found in "Externalist Theories of Perception," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 50, Supplement (1990) 73-97 and "Perception and Conception," in *Pragmatism, Reason, and Norms*, Kenneth Westphal, ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998) 59-87 and "Back to the Theory of Appearing," in *Philosophical Perspectives*, vol. 13, James Tomberlin, ed. (Astascadero, CA: Ridgeview Publishing Co., 1999) 181-203.

Chapter three:

[1] Alston89a.

[2] Ibid. pp. 243-4.

[3] From this point, I shall refer to the process of belief-formation as being the reliable indicator for reasons of space and aesthetics unless otherwise indicated. This should not be taken to come from a confusion about the relation of processes to grounds. Alston speaks of the ground of belief as the potentially reliable indicator of truth. A belief-forming process is reliable when its production of beliefs makes use of a ground that is a reliable indicator of true belief. However, when one casually speaks about one's vision, the reference may either be to the belief-forming process of vision or the visual experience. When one says her vision is reliable, it could be taken in either sense. Though they are different, I shall be following this colloquial equivalence for its ease of expression.

[4] Alston89a pp. 321-2.

[5] Ibid. p. 323.

[6] Many have suggested that introspection might not be subject to the problems of perception. Indeed, this was supposedly Descartes' saving grace for knowledge in general. Although introspection may be a more fundamental belief-forming process than perception in many or most cases, even introspection will not escape the difficulty Alston finds present for sense perception and all other processes.

[7] Ibid. p. 324.

[8] Ibid. p. 328.

[9] In *The Reliability of Sense Perception* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993) (hereafter Alston93a) as well as *Perceiving God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991) (hereafter Alston91) he considers even more than these basic three, but the idea at work can be easily grasped by the examples tackled in "Epistemic Circularity."

[10] Alston89a p. 325.

[11] Ibid. pp. 325-6.

[13] This designation of non-reflective belief includes the vast majority of all our daily beliefs formed through a simple trust in sense perception.

[14] Ibid. p. 327.

[15] Cf. n. 97 from chapter two.

[16] Ibid. p. 335.

[17] Ibid. pp. 336-7.

[18] Ibid. p. 343. This would of course translate into any other belief-forming mechanism besides perception that may have a relatively similar level of actual reliability.

[19] Ibid. p. 327.

[20] For a similar response to the problem of epistemic circularity which makes copious use of Alston's earlier work, see Leopold Stubenberg "Justifying Basic Belief Forming Processes," *Knowledge, Teaching and Wisdom* Keith Lehrer, B. Jeannie Lum, Beverly Slichta, and Nicholas Smith, eds. (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996) 155-60.

[21] Bonjour pp. 49-50.

[22] That circle might come in this form: Horoscope prediction is a reliable belief-forming mechanism because it says it is, and a reliable mechanism wouldn't claim anything unreliable. Or it could depend on some other mechanism for a defense of its reliability, e.g. perceptual experience where that experience shows the success of the predictions. In the latter case, the reliability of horoscope predictions would be dependent on the reliability of perceptual experience which we have already seen has a circularity problem in showing its reliability. Hence, horoscope predictions would only inherit the circularity of the supporting mechanism.

[23] While such a ready and unreflective assent to the reliability of horoscopes might seem far-fetched, there are many ways this mode of belief-formation might have arrived at such a fundamental place in a person's life. Susan might have been raised to take the horoscope page as some sort of divine revelation, or maybe Susan has noticed for some time that her horoscope prediction seems to come true much more often than it does not.

[24] I don't doubt that many believe in such a connection. I only wish to show that such predictions do not match up with our common understanding of justified belief. Perhaps this is because we recognize horoscopes to be unreliable mechanisms, but we have already stipulated in our example that this instance of horoscope prediction is to be understood as reliable.

[25] Alston91 pp. 148ff.

[26] *Proceedings of the 20th World Congress of Philosophy* (Boston University, 1998) 1-8.

[27] Alston93a pp. 20-1 and Alston91 pp. 73-6, 149.

[28] Alston91 p. 149.

[29] Lammenranta p. 2.

[30] Ibid. pp. 4-6.

[31] "Philosophical Scepticism and Epistemic Circularity," *The Aristotelian Society*, suppl. vol. 68 (1994) 261-90

[32] Lammenranta p. 6. We saw this to be Alston's assessment as well in Alston93a and Alston91.

[33] Alston91 p. 149 and Alston93a pp. 122-4.

[34] Lammenranta pp. 6-7.

[35] Lammenranta p. 6.

[36] Ibid. p. 7.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] This also has the classically internalistic feature of ignoring Alston's distinction between levels of belief. Our aim seems to be accomplished here if we make sure our beliefs fit with what we believe is the right standard of justification (or in 'reflective equilibrium'). This would require believing we are justified in a belief, a higher-level belief.

[40] Alston89a pp. 144-7, 242-4.

[41] Lammenranta pp. 6-7.

[42] Alston91 p. 182.

[43] Lammenranta p. 6.

[44] Alston89a p. 244.

[45] Much of this discussion is found in ch. 3 of Alston91.

[46] Alston91 p.144.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid. p. 143.

[49] Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre, eds. (London: SCM Press, 1955) 96-105.

[50] Flew p. 98.

[51] Ibid. p. 99.

[52] While there may be some differences between the two concepts, I won't explore those here. I shall take it that they are similar enough for one concept to be interchangeable with the other. Any differences that may exist would not do any damage to what I am trying to show here, anyway.

[53] Ibid. pp. 100-1.

[54] Ibid. p. 101.

[55] Ibid. p. 99. my emphasis

[56] Ibid.

Chapter four:

[1] Cf. for example, "Religious Experience and Religious Belief," *Nous*, vol. 16 (1982) 3-12 and "Christian Experience and Christian Belief," in *Faith and Rationality* Alvin Plantinga and Nicolas Wolterstorff, eds. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983) (hereafter Alston83).

[2] For the sake of our purposes, I shall use "doxastic practices" and "belief-forming processes" interchangeably unless otherwise indicated even though it should become clear that there is more to a doxastic practice than a belief-forming process. The differences between them are fully recognized, but no lasting damage will be done here in using one for the other.

[3] Alston83 pp. 110-5.

[4] Alston deals with the various ways these two have influenced his idea in "A 'Doxastic Practice' Approach to Epistemology," *Knowledge and Skepticism* Marjorie Clay and Keith Lehrer, eds. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989) (hereafter Alston89b).

[5] Ibid. pp. 5-8.

[6] Ibid. pp. 8-9.

[7] Alston recognizes that DPs seem more closely tied to our psychological make-up, but spends some time showing that the psychology of a DP cannot be extricated from one's epistemic situation. Ibid. pp. 10-14.

[8] Ibid. pp. 11-12.

[9] Before moving into this argument, he considers at least two other alternatives for which one could opt (Alston91 pp. 148-9 and Alston93a pp. 122-4). The coherentist could live happily ever after with epistemic circularity since that's just the way she describes justification anyway. There is also the way of naturalizing epistemology where practices are accepted as the final jury on what counts as meaningful and true. All justification would be internal, and where reasons are sought which would seek to stretch beyond the bounds of a practice, "all justification must come to an end." Alston rejects both of these paths though his reasons are different in each case.

[10] Alston93a p. 125 and Alston91 p. 168.

[11] Alston91 pp. 150-3 and Alston93a pp. 126-9.

[12] There are obviously some implications here concerning truth, meaning, and other concerns. Each of them will only be worrisome if one takes some version of a realist position with respect to them. Since Alston is a staunch realist in regard to all of them, this becomes the main bone of contention between his own theory and Wittgenstein's. Cf. especially Alston "Taking the Curse off Language-Games: A Realist Account of Doxastic Practices," *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief* Timothy Tessin and Mario von der Ruhr, eds. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995) pp. 36-40 (hereafter Alston95a) as well as Alston89b pp.8-9, Alston91 p. 154, and Alston93a p. 130. More on this as we continue.

[13] These are discussed in ch. 4 secs. vi & vii of Alston91, Alston "The Autonomy of Religious Experience," *Philosophy of Religion* 31 (1992) 67-87 (hereafter Alston92a), sc. 5 sec. iv of Alston93a, Alston 89b pp. 17-8, and Alston 95a pp. 40-2.

[14] Alston89b p. 17.

[15] Cf. Alston "Belief-forming Practices and the Social," in *Socializing Epistemology* Frederick F. Schmitt, ed. (Lanham, MD: Roman and Littlefield, 1994) (hereafter Aslton94a) sec. viii for a more detailed description of significant self-support and its relation to social influences and embeddedness.

[16] In Alston89b pp. 13-6, Alston spends some time defending the idea of rational philosophy as the bedrock of this outside standard.

[17] This is taken from Alston91 pp. 178-83 and Alston 93a pp. 130-3.

[18] The qualifier 'practically" is entered here, as before, because we are really talking about a person's activity in the realm of the everyday. It is not so much a reflective cognizance on the part of the practitioner, as it is a "commitment" on her part made through her daily unreflective behavior in practical living. Alston makes this same point in Alston91 p. 179 and Alston 93a p. 131.

[19] Alston "Religious Diversity and Perceptual Knowledge of God," *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity* Philip Quinn and Kevin Meeker, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) (hereafter Meeker00) p. 197. Alston means by 'basic" here a socially established practice which is subject to epistemic circularity. The "demonstration of unreliability" would, of course, refer to the external criteria of DP evaluation we have already discussed.

[20] Alston91 p. 179 and Alston93a p. 131.

[21] Notice that this is a circularity on the level of belief of which we are speaking. The three external evaluative criteria we mentioned earlier are reserved for assessing DPs, not beliefs. This is not to suggest that circularity might not invade even those criteria, and thus DPs (cf. for example the circularity of significant self-support in Alston95a p. 42), but it is the level of particular beliefs that our discussion has been concerned with from the outset.

[22] Alston91 p. 180.

[23] Alston repudiates, in Alston91 pp. 75-6, the internalist criteria we had seen him adopt for the sake of bringing a stronger case against externalist epistemology through epistemic circularity. More concerning this later.

[24] Cf., for example, Alvin Plantinga "What's the question?" *Journal of Philosophical Research*, vol. xx (1995) (hereafter Plantinga95) 30-36, Phillip Quinn "Towards thinner theologies: Hick and Alston on religious diversity," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 38 (1995) (hereafter Quinn95) 145-164, and Kevin Meeker "William Alston's epistemology of religious experience," *Philosophy of Religion* 35 (1994) (hereafter Meeker94) 89-110.

[25] Robert Pasnau "Justified Until Proven Guilty: Alston's New Epistemology," *Philosophical Studies* 72 (1993) 1-33, p. 11. his italics.

[26] Richard Gale "The Overall Argument of Alston's *Perceiving God*," *Religious Studies* 30 (1994) 135-149, p.142.

[27] Michael Wakoff "Alston's Practical Rationality Argument," *Journal of Philosophical Research*, vol. xxiv (1999) 247-284, p. 259. his italics.

[28] Matthias Steup, rev. of *Perceiving God*, by William Alston, *Nous*, vol. 31 (1997) 408-420, p. 416. his italics.

[29] Gale, in fact, goes on to consider (p. 142) those who might question the reliability of a DP in terms of its future ability to provide true beliefs, and so, would take the DP to be ultimately unreliable.

[30] Alston "Reply to Pasnau," *Philosophical Studies* 72 (1993) 35-45(hereafter Alston93b) p. 38.

[31] Alston's reply in Alston "Response to Critics," *Religious Studies* 30 (1994) 171-180 (hereafter Alston94b) centers on this idea.

[32] It should be noted that Alston believes Hume's skepticism to be misapplied. Hume doesn't take into account, for example, what Alston takes as the different origins of our belief which should be subject to different criteria of epistemic evaluation, i.e. DPs. Cf. Alston91 pp. 150-2 and Alston93a pp. 126-8.

[33] *A Treatise of Human Nature*. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) p. 269.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid. p. 270.

[36] This would, however, constitute a separation from Hume and the challengers of Alston mentioned above.

[37] Gale pp. 144-5.

[38] Steup pp. 417-8.

[39] Alston91 p. 278.

[40] Ibid. p. 279.

[41] Ibid. p. 286.

[42] Alston94a p. 43. his italics.

[43] We could imagine that the argument might run like the supplement Gale provides (p. 145) where epistemic justification for believing a practice to be reliable arises from the practical justification for participating in it.

[44] Steup p. 417.

[45] Alston91 p. 279.

[46] as in Alston89b.

[47] This would be opposed to not participating in your own DPs or not participating in any at all.

[48] Gale p. 148.

[49] Meeker94 p. 102.

[50] Wakoff p. 274.

[51] This seems to be the suggestion of Pasnau p. 28:

> His [Alston's] strategy of showing that mystical perception is epistemically no worse off than sense perception succeeds, but the result is not to improve the standing of mystical perception, but rather to weaken the status of sense perception. Once we distinguish between the practical rationality of engaging in a practice and the rationality of taking the practice to be reliable and hence to produce justified beliefs, we can see that Alston has shown only that we are entitled to the former.

Since the practical rationality of engaging in any practice is all that Pasnau believes to be shown, this means that we have no epistemic assurance that our DPs deliver justified beliefs. Hence, our *real* practical situation is epistemic skepticism.

[52] Alston95a p. 36.

[53] Cf. for example, Wakoff pp. 262-3 and Meeker94 p. 103.

[54] pp. 95 & 101 of the present work

[55] Lammenranta p. 4.

[56] In Wakoff, Pasnau, Plantinga95, and Meeker94 there appear somewhat variant, but similar versions of this dilemma. In addition, others, such as J. L. Schellenberg in his "Religious Experience and Religious Diversity: A Reply to Alston" and William Wainwright in his "Religious Experience and Religious Pluralism" (both in Meeker00), have also picked out the question of what we should take practical rationality to mean as the major obstacle facing Alston's position.

[57] Cf. for example Alston93b p. 37 and Alston94b pp. 171-2.

[58] Alston "Reply to Critics," *Journal of Philosophical Research* vol. xx (1995) 67-81 (hereafter Alston95b) 72 and Alston91 p. 153n.

[59] Alston89b p. 23. his italics.

[60] Aslton94a p. 43.

[61] Alston89b p. 22.

[62] Cf. Alston91 p. 180n. There he speaks of the second step of the practical rationality argument as exercising a "pragmatic implication" whereby insisting the first step of the argument pragmatically implies a commitment to the second.

[63] Ibid. p. 180.

[64] Cf. for example, Quinn95 pp. 160-1 and Gale p. 139.

[65] Alston89a p. 233.

[66] Ibid. p. 234.

[67] pp. 49ff of the present work

[68] Cf. Ibid. p. 244.

[69] Alston93b p. 36.

[70] Ibid. p. 43. Picking a practice by the use of a meta-practice is something which Pasnau invents for Alston's view, but which Alston denies as a veridical part of his position. He merely takes it up here for the sake of making a point.

[71] Alston95b pp. 69-70.

[72] Ibid. p. 70.

[73] Ibid. p. 71.

[74] Ibid. p. 72. his italics.

[75] Cf. for example, Alston93a p. 122.

[76] And prima facie justification is all that Alston ever claimed, anyway. Cf. Alston91 p. 262.

[77] Alston91.

[78] This constitutes Alston's own particular "plurality of religions" problem. He dedicates an entire chapter, Ibid. ch. 7, to dealing with it.

[79] This point is a result of Alston's staunch position in regard to realist truth of which we have already made mention. For an example of a position that would accept all MPs as true even though their beliefs about the reliability of the others appear incompatible, see John Hick, "Religious Pluralism and Salvation," *Faith and Philosophy* (October 1988) 365-377.

[80] Alston91 p. 270.

[81] Ibid. p. 274.

[82] This ignores the possibility of agnosticism, of course. This has been a constant objection to Alston's argument of which we have already seen evidence. I pass over that criticism here for the sake of what I take to be the more relevant concern for us at the moment.

[83] Ibid. pp. 278-9.

Chapter five:

[1] Cf. Alston, *A Realist Conception of Truth* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996) (hereafter Alston96).

[2] E.g., Alston89a p. 233.

[3] Recall note 3, ch. 3.

[4] Alston91 pp. 170-4.

[5] Ibid. p. 171.

[6] Cf. e.g., Alston89a pp. 325-6.

[7] Alston91 p. 148 and Alston89a p. 327.

[8] Cf. Alston91 p. 153 n. 10.

[9] Alston95b p. 72.

[10] Ibid.

[11] This, as stated earlier, is reminiscent of the dilemma presented by those like Wakoff and Pasnau in chapter four. The difference in the present case is twofold. First, the former dilemma was concerned with the practical rationality argument which we have

now dispensed with. Secondly, this latter dilemma's second horn is somewhat different than that from the former dilemma. The earlier version spoke of the danger of an epistemic evaluation that is too permissive. The present case deals with the potential problem of allowing epistemic circularity to swallow up any epistemic situation.

[12] This might not be *the* understanding of truth that would have to be adopted, but some version of pragmatic truth does appear to be imminent in the exercise of evaluating belief.

[13] For a clear statement by Alston on this front cf. Alston91 p. 148.

[14] Alston89b pp. 24-5.

[15] Alston91 pp.162-3.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid. p. 162

[18] In addition to the passages we have already mentioned, Alston also makes this point in Alston95a p. 35 as well as hinting toward it in Alston94a p. 33, n 6 and Alston93a p. 41 where he allows for the possibility of more than one concept of justification in the course of his discussion.

[19] Alston, "Epistemic Desiderata," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* vol. liii, no. 3 (1993) 527-551 (hereafter Alston93c) p. 532.

[20] Ibid. pp. 532-4.

[21] Ibid. p. 534.

[22] Ibid. p. 536. Situations like this are certainly not unheard-of. When Gettier came on the epistemological scene many theorists were forced to rethink the traditional standard formula for knowledge. This led some to postulate, not that we needed to rethink justification, but that there might be an additional means to gain knowledge without dealing directly with justification. For a helpful discussion of this, cf. Baergen ch. 5.

[23] Another consequence of this point is that justification might not be required for knowledge, at all. This is something Alston is fully willing to acknowledge; cf. for example Alston91 p. 285.

[24] Alston93c pp. 537-8. my italics.

[25] Kevin Meeker comes down hard on this part of Alston's case for plural concepts of justification in "Should We Abandon Epistemic Justification?" *Southwest Philosophy Review* 13 (1) (1997) 129-136. There he claims that if a concept of justification cannot be theory-neutral and thereby unique, then neither can knowledge, itself. The result, he

believes, would be the ridiculous conclusion that "epistemology is not properly concerned with knowledge" (p. 135). I take exception, however, in that identifying justification concepts as plural rather than unified does not automatically entail the disassembly of knowledge. It is not necessarily the case that having different desiderata in use in different situations would lead to a plurality of results for identifiable knowledge. This is exactly what the above demon world case was intended to show. If an epistemologist with a specific theory of justification can grasp even the possibility of both the case for the justification and the non-justification of the demon-worlders' beliefs, then she is beginning to recognize diversity within justification, not resulting in fractured knowledge concepts, but *because the concept of knowledge is unified*. If she hadn't been operating under a unified concept of knowledge, she wouldn't have been able to recognize the two possibilities of justification in the first place.

[26] Alston93c pp. 538-41.

[27] Alston goes so far as to call it "revolutionary" and "iconoclastic." Ibid. p. 541.

[28] I continue to use the term "justification" simply because it is the term that is traditionally used. Alston seems to prefer not to use it any longer because of the connotation of absolute unity it tends to bring with it. Ibid. p. 549. Hereafter, if I speak of "justification" I shall mean the new pluralized concept brought out in "Epistemic Desiderata" unless otherwise indicated. I shall also substitute the phrase "epistemic evaluator/evaluation" to cover the same idea from time to time.

[29] For instance, Alston considers a desideratum that would not involve truth-conducivity, but he stops short of allowing for any subjective or deflationary aspects within the desideratum. Ibid. p. 539.

[30] Ibid. p. 543.

[31] Ibid. p. 542.

[32] Alston uses the dispute between internalism and externalism to convey this point. Ibid. pp. 544-8.

[33] Alston includes two other issues which are left for the epistemologist to deal with after the fragmentation of justification: elucidation of desiderata and detailing how the desiderata might interrelate with one another to bring about justification. Ibid. p. 542.

[34] Ibid. p. 543.

[35] Ibid. pp. 544-8. I am taking his dismissal of internalistic desiderata here to imply that external desiderata like reliability are more viable in most situations.

[36] Recall that a reliable indication view is more concerned with whether the source of one's belief is likely to indicate truth rather than falsity. A reliable process view takes it

as more important that a certain mechanism is reliable in turning out true beliefs instead of false ones.

[37] Alston lists at least four other desiderata along with his RI-AI position that he considers as important desiderata. Ibid. pp. 538-41.

[38] It could be pointed out here that the criteria of importance and viability do not escape epistemic circularity themselves. In order to be able to attribute viability to a desideratum, for instance, one must assume that beliefs coming from that same source are generally justified. I leave this problem aside in order to stay with the theme of Alston's dependence on practical considerations.

[39] Ibid. pp. 542-3.

[40] Alston "On Knowing That We Know: The Application to Religious Knowledge," *Christian Perspectives on Religious Knowledge*. C. Stephen Evans and Merold Westphal, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993) (hereafter Alston93d) p. 34.

[41] Cf. note 38.

[42] Alston95a p. 36.

[43] Alston93c p. 543.

[44] Ibid. p. 544.

[45] Ibid. p. 546.

[46] Ibid. p. 547.

[47] Ibid. p. 548.

[48] Alston uses the example of reflective self-evidence as an example. Ibid. pp. 548-9.

[49] Ibid. pp. 549-50.

[50] I should point out that though this does reduce the amount of pluralism available in the epistemic desiderata approach, it does not eliminate it entirely. First of all, there are different desideratum that fall under the heading of externalist desiderata. There are different types of reliabilism, for instance. There are also other externalist versions of foundationalism. These options would allow for some pluralism. Secondly, the internalistic desiderata are not being dismissed from the epistemic ballgame altogether. Alston has simply shown them to be less viable and important than externalist desiderata. This doesn't mean that they might not play some sort of background role. As we have found Alston to say, internalistic requirements don't hurt justification, they just aren't necessary.

[51] This appears to actually be the result of epistemic circularity. Since there is no non-circular means of showing that externalist desiderata are better than internalist ones (e.g. to do so would involve assuming the justification of certain beliefs, where *their* justification presupposes certain desiderata), we are forced to resort to practical means.

[52] Alston93d pp. 38-9.

[53] Ibid. p. 39.

Chapter six:

[1] Alston89b pp. 3ff.

[2] Ibid. p. 5. This passage is repeated in Alston91 p. 155.

[3] Alston95a p. 36.

[4] I have been speaking as if these two ideas are interchangeable. Although the differences between them are not crucial to our discussion, Alston does find it important to distinguish the two concepts for understandable reasons in Alston95a p. 35.

[5] Alston91 p. 165.

[6] Alston93a p. 56.

[7] Ibid. p. 57.

[8] Alston93a pp.123&4.

[9] Alston93d p. 35.

[10] Ibid. p. 38.

[11] Cf. for example Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* G. H. von Wright, Rush Rhees and G. E. M. Anscombe, eds. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996) (hereafter *RFM*) sec. I.

[12] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1958) (hereafter *PI*) §218.

[13] pp. 159-60 of the present work

[14] After all, as Alston claims, almost all – if not all – DPs produce a few mutually contradicting beliefs. Cf. Alston91 pp. 170-1.

[15] *RFM* III-§77.

[16] Ibid. III-§80.

[17] Ibid. I (Appendix III)-§11. my italics.

[18] Alston91 pp. 170-1.

[19] Ibid. p. 171.

[20] Ibid. pp. 171-2.

[21] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, ids. (New York: Harper and Row Publisher, 1969) (hereafter *OC*) §§44-6, 49, 55.

[22] pp. 159-60 of the present work

[23] Alston91 p. 174.

[24] *PI* §§324-6.

[25] Alston91 p. 179.

[26] *RFM* I-§156.

[27] Ibid. §128. This is the very thing that Alston was guarding against when it comes to a unique concept of justification.

[28] Alston96.

[29] Ibid. p. 79.

[30] Ibid. pp. 184-5. his italics.

[31] Ibid. p. 187.

[32] Here we might substitute "language-games" in the place of "conceptual schemes" to make it more pertinent for us. I shall be using the two descriptions interchangeably.

[33] Ibid. p. 180.

[34] This is, of course, understood to be the Putnam of *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge University Press, 1980).

[35] *OC* §§607-12.

[36] For a more extended treatment of this point cf. Hilary Putnam, *Pragmatism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995) pp. 32-38.

[37] *OC* §§617-19.

[38] Ibid. §§513-14.

[39] Recall what we found Wittgenstein to say in *RFM*-III §77 where a game stops being a game when we realize that it cannot be played as the rules stand.

[40] p. 192 of the present work

[41] I set "discovery" within quotation marks because it seems that one might abandon a language-game, in Wittgenstein's description, and start a new one without necessarily realizing that one has done so.

[42] E.g., pp. 187-88 of the present work

[43] Alston95a p. 36.

[44] Wittgenstein uses this example in *RFM* III-§81.

[45] Alston95a p. 36.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Alston, *A Sensible Metaphysical Realism* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001) (hereafter Alston01).

[48] Alston01 pp. 41-54.

[49] E.g., Alston, "Ontological Commitments," *Philosophical Studies* 9 (1958) 8-17 and Alston, "Yes, Virginia, There Is A Real World," *Proceedings of the Western Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association* (1979) 770-807.

[50] Alston01 p. 57.

[51] Ibid. p. 58.

[52] This is, of course, tempered with a touch of internalism in the RI-AI approach.

[53] pp. 178-83 of the present work

[54] Alston95b p. 72.

[55] It might also direct us toward some position on truth like the classic correspondence theory. Alston tries not to have his position labeled as one – cf. Alston96 pp. 85ff – to avoid what he deems as unnecessary metaphysical problems and commitments. This avoidance may well be the reason his version of truth falls short of fully distinguishing itself from positions like that of Wittgenstein.