

## On Believing that the Scriptures are Divinely Inspired

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This chapter will investigate the epistemology of belief that the Bible is divinely inspired. Christians believe that it is; many take it that, furthermore, their belief is justified—that it is appropriate or proper from the epistemic point of view. Suppose they're right on both counts. Then there's this question: what makes Christian belief in the divine inspiration of the Bible justified? What is the source of justification for this belief?

Does it come by way of historical argument? Call the proposition that the Bible is divinely inspired 'IB'. Is it, then, that there is some group of propositions such that (a) the probability of their conjunction C on our knowledge of history is high, and (b) the probability of IB on C is high? Or is it rather that the source of justification for belief that IB is testimony, testimony that traces back to some authoritative source—the Synods of Carthage or Athanasius perhaps? (Suppose the latter. Then what was the source of justification for *his* belief that IB?) Or is it rather that the Holy Spirit, perhaps by way of a process like Calvin's 'internal witness of the Holy Spirit', produces in each Christian belief that IB, thereby conferring justification on the belief? Or something else yet?

In what follows I look into these and connected questions.

### PRELIMINARIES

I begin with a few comments about (a) what I shall mean by talk of a belief's being 'justified', (b) what I shall mean by the claim that the Bible is 'divinely inspired', and (c) what I shall mean by talk of 'the Bible'.

First, justification. I'm thinking here clearly enough about *epistemic* justification—the sort that attaches to beliefs or believings when they are

epistemically proper, proper from the intellectual point of view. Given the history of recent epistemology, of course, this isn't to say anything very informative: disagreement runs riot in contemporary epistemology about what exactly epistemic justification is, whether one property deserves the label 'epistemic justification' or many, and much more besides. I have my own view about what deserves the label but won't be able to argue for it here. I shall simply presuppose that a belief B is epistemically justified for a human being S iff B is *properly basic* for S or *properly based* for S, where the key terms here are to be understood as follows:

B is properly basic for a human being S iff B is the output of a properly functioning, truth-aimed, belief-independent belief-forming process in S. B is properly based for a human being S iff B is the output of a properly functioning, truth-aimed, belief-dependent belief-forming process in S whose inputs are either properly basic for S or properly based for S.

So for those who follow these things, I'm plumping for a Plantinga-style 'proper functionalist' approach to justification.<sup>1</sup> A belief-forming process is any cognitive process whose output is belief. A belief-forming process functions *properly* iff it functions, well, the way it's *supposed* to, the way God designed it to function. A belief-dependent process is a belief-forming process whose inputs are *inter alia* other beliefs. A belief-independent process is a belief-forming process that isn't belief-dependent. Finally, a belief-forming process is *truth-aimed* iff its function is to produce true belief (as opposed to, say, belief that conduces to survival or emotional well-being).<sup>2</sup> *Much* more could said, of course, to fill this in, but we've enough on board, I think, to proceed.

Secondly, as to what I shall mean by the claim that the Bible is 'divinely inspired': I assume that to say of the Bible that it is divinely inspired is to say, among other things, that it has been *authored* by God and that, by way of its sentences, God asserts various propositions. (There's more to it, of course. He asserts propositions by way of its sentences, true enough, but he also heals our affections, warns us against sin, encourages us, directs us, comforts us, and more.<sup>3</sup> I assume though that inspiration of the scriptures is *at least* a matter of God's communicating various propositions by way of its sentences.) This raises many questions. In what *sense* was the Bible 'authored' by God? Can we really make sense of the idea that God asserts propositions by way of the

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Plantinga 1993a, 1993b, 2000. For a close cousin of the approach to justification I favor, see Bergmann 2006. My approach is also indebted to Goldman 1979.

<sup>2</sup> For more on what's involved in a belief-forming process's being truth-aimed, see Plantinga 1993b: ch. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Al Plantinga for helpful feedback here.

sentences of the Bible? Isn't that way of thinking passé, fundamentalist, or otherwise suspect? To *whom* does God assert these propositions? Who's the audience here?

I haven't much to say about these questions. I take it that God authored the Bible in the sense that he arranged for the inscription of its sentences and that he intends to assert various propositions to us by way of these sentences. As to *how* he arranged for their inscription, I've nothing to say here other than that he seems to have employed a multitude of methods. As to whether we can really make sense of the idea that God asserts propositions by way of the sentences of the Bible, it seems to me that we clearly *can* and that arguments to the contrary are underwhelming. And finally, his audience, I take it, is either the whole human family (or perhaps the larger family of rational creatures), or that part of the human family comprising the Church. I'm not sure which; I don't think it much matters for present purposes.

Thirdly, as to what I shall mean by talk of 'the Bible': as is well known, no single book uncontroversially answers to that title. There's the Catholic Bible, the Greek Orthodox Bible, the Ethiopian Orthodox Bible, the Protestant Bible, and so forth. Which do I propose to refer to when talking of 'the Bible'? For now, let me hold off on answering this question. It'll be clear by the end of the chapter that not much hangs on it.

Now to the main question of the chapter, which again is this: assuming that Christian belief that the Bible is divinely inspired is justified, how does it come by way of justification? Put differently, what is the *source* of justification for this belief? Call this the Main Question.

What I want to do next is sketch what I take to be the principal options for answering the Main Question and suggest along the way reasons for dissatisfaction with each. Then I'll propose an amendment to one of those options that avoids my objections to its unamended compeer and close by considering several questions about my proposal.

## THE PRINCIPAL OPTIONS

The principal options for answering the Main Question, I think, are these. First, there's the Lockean suggestion—developed in recent years with subtlety and sophistication by Richard Swinburne<sup>4</sup>—that belief that the scriptures are divinely inspired is justified on the basis of argument from 'natural theology',

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Swinburne 1992, 2003.

where the idea here is that one starts with an evidence base that intelligent, reasonably well-educated people would think of as epistemically above board—a set of propositions that intelligent, reasonably well-educated people would think of as *known*—and tries to show that the likelihood or probability that the scriptures are divinely inspired is high or reasonably high on the relevant evidence base.

Secondly, there's the suggestion that justification for belief that the scriptures are divinely inspired comes by way of testimony. Much that we justifiedly believe is believed on the basis of testimony—the say-so of others. So too with belief that the Bible is divinely inspired. The Church teaches that it is, and when we accept the Church's testimony, we get justified belief, just as I got justified belief when I accepted testimony, for example, that there is a place called 'China', that my name is 'Thomas Crisp', and that Caesar crossed the Rubicon.

Thirdly, there's the suggestion mooted by the Belgic Confession, one of the central confessions of the Reformed branch of Protestantism:

...we believe without a doubt all things contained in [the Bible]—not so much because the church receives them and approves them as such, but above all because the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that they are from God, and also because they prove themselves to be from God. (Belgic Confession, Article 5)

The idea here is that something like Plantinga's 'internal instigation of the Holy Spirit' (Plantinga 2000) operates in the minds and hearts of believers, producing in them either belief that the Bible is divinely inspired or something in the near neighborhood. Since, you might think, belief so produced is epistemically justified, we get an answer here to the Main Question.

There are problems with each of these suggestions, problems I now turn to.

## NATURAL THEOLOGY AND 'DWINDLING PROBABILITIES'

Plantinga has argued that attempts to argue for 'the great things of the gospel' (i.e. incarnation, atonement, Jesus's resurrection) on the basis of natural theology and historical argument suffer from a problem he dubs the 'Principle of Dwindling Probabilities'.<sup>5</sup>

The Principle of Dwindling Probabilities afflicts arguments with a certain structure. Suppose you want to show some proposition P probable on our

<sup>5</sup> See Plantinga 2000: 270–80. For response and counter-response, see Swinburne 2004; McGrew 2004; Plantinga 2006; McGrew 2006.

background knowledge  $K$ . You might do that by producing some other proposition  $A$ , showing that  $P(A/K)$  and  $P(P/A \& K)$  are high, and concluding that, by the probability calculus, it follows that  $P(P/K)$  is high.

You might, however, try to show that  $P(P/K)$  is high by iterating the above procedure, arguing that some proposition  $A$  is probable on  $K$ , that some other proposition  $B$  is probable on  $A \& K$ , and that  $P$  is probable on  $A \& B \& K$ , concluding that, therefore,  $P$  is probable on  $K$ . But such an argument is subject to Plantinga's Principle. If all you've said is that  $P(A/K)$ ,  $P(B/A \& K)$ , and  $P(P/A \& B \& K)$  are high, say around .8 each, then, so far, all that follows from the probability calculus is that  $P(P/K)$  is greater than or equal to  $.8 \times .8 \times .8$ , a tad higher than .5. Though the conditional probabilities  $P(A/K)$ ,  $P(B/A \& K)$ , and  $P(P/A \& B \& K)$  are each high, the probabilities 'dwindle' when you multiply them through.

This Principle of Dwindling Probabilities (PDP), then, makes trouble for arguments with the foregoing iterative structure, arguments that attempt to motivate the claim that  $P(P/K)$  is high for some  $P$  by arguing, for some  $Q_1 \dots Q_n$ , that  $P(Q_1/K)$ ,  $P(Q_2/Q_1 \& K)$ ,  $\dots$ ,  $P(Q_n/Q_1 \& \dots Q_{n-1} \& K)$ , and  $P(P/Q_1 \& \dots Q_n \& K)$  are high.

Plantinga's PDP, notice, will afflict just those arguments with the relevant iterative structure. There's a problem closely connected to PDP though that can arise for *any* historical or natural theological argument, whether it displays that structure or not. I shall now argue that this close cousin of PDP will afflict any attempt to argue for the divine inspiration of the Bible on historical or natural theological grounds and that, therefore, we need to look elsewhere for an answer to the Main Question.

The point of any historical or natural theological argument, I take it, is to show of some conclusion  $C$  that it is probable—or more exactly, that it is probable with respect to what we know or take for granted ( $K$ )—by putting forward certain premises  $P_1, \dots P_n$ , and urging, roughly, that (a)  $P_1, \dots P_n$  are probable given  $K$ , and (b)  $P_1, \dots P_n$  make it probable, given  $K$ , that  $C$ .

Let us look into this more carefully. Suppose you propose to argue from premises  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  that  $P(C/K)$  is high. What you'll need to do, then, roughly, is show that  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  are probable given  $K$  and that  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  make it probable (given  $K$ ) that  $C$ . Less roughly, what you'll need to do may be seen by reflecting on the 'lattice' diagram shown in Figure 9.1.<sup>6</sup>

The four pathways from  $K$  to  $C$  correspond to four jointly exhaustive and mutually exclusive ways for  $C$  to be true given  $K$ . The probability of  $C$  given  $K$  is equal to the sum of the probabilities (on  $K$ ) of the conjunctions of  $C$  and the propositions along each path, that is:

<sup>6</sup> I borrow this way of representing probabilistic arguments from McGrew 2004.

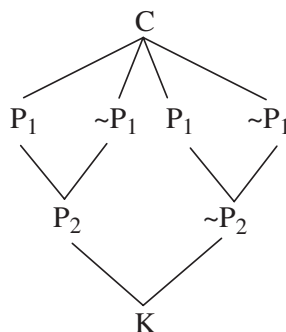


Figure 9.1

$$P(C/K) = P(C \& P_1 \& P_2/K) + P(C \& \sim P_1 \& P_2/K) + \\ P(C \& P_1 \& \sim P_2/K) + P(C \& \sim P_1 \& \sim P_2/K).$$

To each path, then, corresponds a probability (the probability (on K) of the conjunction of C and the propositions along that path);  $P(C/K)$  is equal to the sum of the probabilities corresponding to each path.

We can see, then, what you must do if you're to argue from  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  that  $P(C/K)$  is high: show that the sum of the probabilities corresponding to the leftmost three pathways of the above lattice is high. (What if you can't show that the sum of the probabilities corresponding to the leftmost three pathways is high, but *can* show that the probability corresponding to the rightmost pathway is high? Then you've got an argument to C alright, but not an argument from  $P_1$  and  $P_2$ : more an argument from their denials.)

So: you have a good argument to C from  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  only if you can show that the sum of the probabilities corresponding to the leftmost three pathways of the above lattice is high. Reflection on this point suggests some ways of objecting to your argument from  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  to C. First, I could show that the sum of the probabilities corresponding to the leftmost three pathways is low on account of the sort of 'dwindling' discussed by Plantinga. Since, by the probability calculus, the probability corresponding to each pathway (or more simply: the probability *along* each pathway) is equal to the product of various conditional probabilities, Plantinga-style dwindling can arise. So, for example, the probability calculus gives us that the probability along the leftmost pathway ( $P(C \& P_1 \& P_2/K)$ ) is equal to

$$P(C/P_1 \& P_2 \& K) \times P(P_1/P_2 \& K) \times P(P_2/K)$$

Even if the values of the three multiplicands are high, the product of the three might be low. If the probabilities along each of the three leftmost pathways is low enough, their sum might be low as well.

Secondly, I could show that the sum of the probabilities along the leftmost three pathways is, to borrow Plantinga's language, 'inscrutable'—such that one can't tell what it is.

And thirdly, I could show that the sum of the probabilities along the leftmost three pathways lies in an interval with a low lower bound and inscrutable upper bound. That'd be to show that the sum of the probabilities along the leftmost three pathways is greater than or equal to some smallish number but that we don't know how *much* greater (if it's greater).

There's trouble for your argument if I can show any of these. Each constitutes reason to either withhold or deny the proposition that the sum of the probabilities along the leftmost three pathways of the above lattice is high. And reason to withhold or deny that proposition is reason for thinking your argument from  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  to  $C$  no good. As we might put it, it undermines the evidential value of your premises *vis-à-vis* your conclusion. Let us say that objecting to your argument from  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  to  $C$  by giving one of the above reasons for withholding or denying the proposition that the sum of the probabilities along the leftmost three pathways of the above lattice is high is to put against your argument an *undermining* objection.<sup>7</sup>

Below I shall suggest that the strongest argument from history and natural theology to IB is compromised by an undermining objection. I shall there need a notion of undermining objection that is more general than the one described in the previous paragraph, which applies just to two-premise arguments. A few remarks, then, about how to make that notion more general: Note that the three leftmost pathways through the above lattice are pathways in which one or more of  $P_1$  and  $P_2$ , the premises of the argument, are true. We might say that those pathways are *favorable with respect to*  $P_1$  and  $P_2$ , where a pathway through the lattice is favorable with respect to  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  iff one or more of  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  are true in that pathway. Now, corresponding to any argument  $A$  from premises  $P_1, \dots, P_n$  for the claim that  $P(C/K)$  is high, for some proposition  $C$  and body of background belief  $K$ , will be various lattices like that considered above. You have an undermining objection to  $A$ , let us say, iff for at least one of these lattices  $L$ , you have reason to withhold or deny the proposition that the sum of the probabilities along the pathways through  $L$  favorable to  $P_1, \dots, P_n$  is high.

This generalized notion of an undermining objection in hand, let us return to natural theology and the Main Question. I suggested above that a close cousin of PDP will afflict any attempt to argue for the divine inspiration of the Bible on historical or natural theological grounds and that, therefore, we need

<sup>7</sup> Here I have in mind John Pollock's well-known distinction between rebutting and undermining defeaters (Pollock 1986).

to look elsewhere for an explanation how belief that IB (where 'IB', again, denotes the proposition that the Bible is divinely inspired) comes by way of justification. I can now spell that suggestion out in more detail.

To argue for the divine inspiration of the Bible on historical or natural theological grounds, I take it, is to argue that it is probable that the Bible is divinely inspired given some body of background knowledge *K* comprising propositions from history and/or the data of natural theology, propositions that all or most of us would think of as known. I think any such argument will be subject to an undermining objection. This is because I suspect the strongest case from the deliverances of history and natural theology for the claim that  $P(\text{IB}/K)$  is high will rely, if not on these precise premises, then on premises in the near vicinity of these:<sup>8</sup>

T: God exists.

A: God intervenes in history to provide a propositional revelation about himself.

B: Jesus's teachings were such that they could be plausibly interpreted as implying that he intended to found a church that would function for a long period time as an authoritative source of information about him.

C: Jesus rose from the dead.

D: In raising Jesus from the dead, God declared his approval of Jesus's teachings.

E: The Church that, by the start of the fifth century, had pronounced on which books were divinely inspired, is a legitimate successor—the 'closest continuer'—of the church founded by Jesus.

If so, then the strongest case for IB will be compromised by an undermining objection. Let me try to indicate why. The probability lattices from these premises are intricate, but we get a feel for whether an argument of this sort is compromised by an undermining objection by considering a partial lattice for the argument, one that omits pathways running through  $\sim T$  and  $\sim A$  since, plausibly, the probabilities along those pathways will be 0: see Figure 9.2.

Other pathways through the lattice that 'zero out', arguably, are those running through  $\sim C$ . The resurrection is central to the message of the Christian scriptures; if it didn't occur, then, one thinks, the probability that those scriptures are divinely inspired is small indeed.

<sup>8</sup> This way of thinking about arguing to IB is inspired by Swinburne's (1992) argument for the central claims of Christianity. Plantinga (2000) argued that Swinburne's argument is compromised by PDP. Swinburne then denied this on grounds that his argument lacks the iterative structure relevant to PDP (2004). I am not attempting to adjudicate their dispute here. I am merely arguing that any attempt to argue for IB on the above Swinburne-inspired premises will be subject to what I am calling an undermining objection, an objection that is closely related to but not identical with Plantinga's PDP.



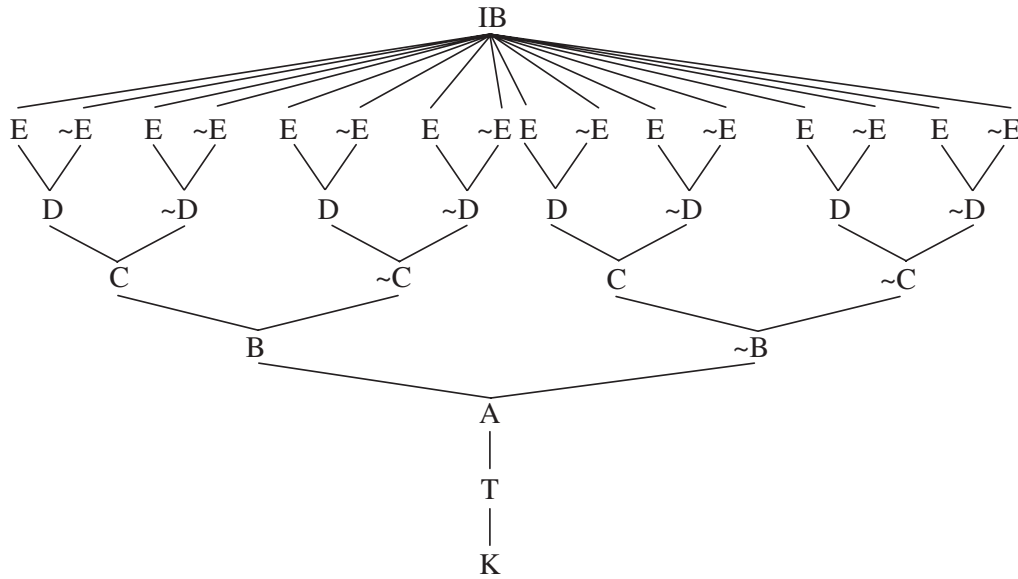


Figure 9.2

Other pathways, while not obviously such as to ‘zero out’, are such that, so it seems to me, we don’t know what their probabilities are.<sup>9</sup> The pathways running through  $\sim B$  are like this. So consider the  $K \& T \& A \& \sim B \& C \& D \& E \& IB$  pathway. The probability along it is equal to

$$P(IB/T \& A \& \sim B \& C \& D \& E \& K) \times P(T \& A \& \sim B \& C \& D \& E/K).$$

Consider the left multiplicand, the probability of IB given that God exists, he intervenes in history to provide us a propositional revelation about himself, Jesus’s message *couldn’t* be interpreted as implying that he intended to found a church that would be an authoritative source of information about him, he rose from the dead, and so forth. What is this probability? Hard to say. If God exists, provides a propositional revelation about himself, and raised Jesus from the dead thereby endorsing his teachings, then it seems likely he’d provide us with propositional revelation about Jesus and his teachings. But what’s the probability that revelation would be the one identified by the Church of the first few centuries, the one specified by IB, given that Jesus never claimed to be founding a group that would function as an authoritative source of information about him? Perhaps the Church got it wrong: perhaps God left us a propositional revelation about Jesus, alright, but it’s much smaller than we suppose, comprising for example, just the gospel of Luke, or just the book of Romans. What’s the probability (again, given  $\sim B$ ) that the Church got it right here? I think we’ve no way of saying; we can’t tell. The probability along this pathway, so it seems to me, is inscrutable.

<sup>9</sup> Here I am indebted to Plantinga 2006: 10–12.

Similar reasoning applies to the other  $\sim B$  pathways. And to the  $\sim D$  pathways. Think about the  $K \& T \& A \& B \& C \& \sim D \& E \& IB$  pathway. The probability along it is equal to

$$P(IB/T \& A \& B \& C \& \sim D \& E \& K) \times P(T \& A \& B \& C \& \sim D \& E/K)$$

What to say, then, about the probability of IB given that God exists, intervenes in history to make a propositional revelation of himself to us, Jesus's message could be sensibly extrapolated to the relevant claims, he rose from the dead, the church that was the closest continuer of the church founded by Jesus pronounced on the books of the Bible, *but* Jesus's resurrection did not constitute a divine declaration of approval of Jesus's teachings. I'm not sure. One possibility here is that God's raising Jesus from the dead wasn't a declaration of approval of his teachings because in fact he did not approve of them—or some of them at least. So perhaps he disapproved of teaching to the effect that Jesus was the Messiah, but approved teaching to the effect that Israel would soon be judged for its flirtation with armed resistance to the Romans. Perhaps then he raised Jesus from the dead as an endorsement of just that part of Jesus's message. What's the probability of IB on that scenario? About zero: if God disapproved of Jesus's claim to be the Messiah, then Jesus presumably wasn't the Messiah, and IB, one thinks, is false. Another possibility: in raising Jesus from the dead, God was not declaring his approval of Jesus's teachings, though in fact he did approve of them. What's the probability of IB on that scenario? High, I guess. We've two possibilities, then, each consistent with  $T \& A \& B \& C \& \sim D \& E \& K$ . IB is extremely *improbable* on the first, and fairly *probable* on the second. Which possibility is more likely on  $T \& A \& B \& C \& \sim D \& E \& K$ ? I have no idea: no answer seems more defensible than another here. As best I can tell, we've no way of answering this question. As best I can tell, then, we've no way of knowing the probability of IB on  $T \& A \& B \& C \& \sim D \& E \& K$ . Likewise with the other  $\sim D$  pathways.

Next the  $\sim E$  pathways. So consider the  $K \& T \& A \& B \& C \& D \& \sim E \& IB$  pathway. Its probability:

$$P(IB/T \& A \& B \& C \& D \& \sim E \& K) \times P(T \& A \& B \& C \& D \& \sim E/K).$$

What then of the probability of IB given that God exists, he intervenes in history to make a propositional revelation of himself, Jesus rose from the dead, etc., but the church that pronounced on IB wasn't the legitimate successor—the 'closest continuer'—of the church founded by Jesus? Same point here: hard to tell.

This leaves the leftmost pathway. The probability along it:

$$P(IB/T \& A \& B \& C \& D \& E \& K) \times P(T \& A \& B \& C \& D \& E/K),$$

which is equal to

$$\begin{aligned} &P(\text{IB}/\text{T}\&\text{A}\&\text{B}\&\text{C}\&\text{D}\&\text{E}\&\text{K}) \times P(\text{T}/\text{K}) \times P(\text{A}/\text{T}\&\text{K}) \\ &\times P(\text{B}/\text{T}\&\text{A}\&\text{K}) \times P(\text{C}/\text{T}\&\text{A}\&\text{B}\&\text{K}) \times P(\text{D}/\text{T}\&\text{A}\&\text{B}\&\text{C}\&\text{K}) \\ &\times P(\text{E}/\text{T}\&\text{A}\&\text{B}\&\text{C}\&\text{D}\&\text{K}). \end{aligned}$$

What to say about it? Well, consider  $P(\text{T}/\text{K})$ , the probability of theism on K. How high is it? Much depends, clearly, on how we construe K. McGrew (2004) suggests that  $P(\text{T}/\text{K})$  will be high indeed if we think of K as including historical evidence for the resurrection. If I'm understanding him aright, the thought is that  $P(\text{C}/\text{K})$ —where C, again, is the proposition that Jesus rose from the dead and K is thought of as including the historical evidence for the resurrection—is *extremely* high, that  $P(\text{T}/\text{C}\&\text{K})$  is also extremely high, and that, therefore,  $P(\text{T}/\text{K})$  is extremely high as well (since, by the probability calculus,  $P(\text{T}/\text{K}) \geq P(\text{T}/\text{C}\&\text{K}) \times P(\text{C}/\text{K})$ ).

I am not so sure. I grant there are powerful historical arguments for the resurrection. Arguments by *inter alia* N.T. Wright, William Lane Craig, Stephen T. Davis, and Gary Habermas are quite strong.<sup>10</sup> But they don't, I think, show  $P(\text{C}/\text{K})$  (or  $P(\text{T}/\text{K})$ ) anywhere near 1. Here's why. Let K— be the evidence relevant to natural theological arguments for the existence of God, evidence regarding the big bang, fine tuning of the fundamental constants of physics, and so forth. And let R be the detailed historical evidence we possess for the resurrection: the evidence for the empty tomb, the disciple's post-crucifixion experiences of what seemed to be the risen Jesus, their subsequent martyrdoms, and so forth. K, we can suppose, is the conjunction of K— and R.

The question, then: how to think about  $P(\text{C}/\text{R}\&\text{K}—)$ ? It's a theorem of the probability calculus that

$$\begin{aligned} P(\text{C}/\text{R}\&\text{K}—) &= P(\text{C}/\text{T}—\&\text{R}\&\text{K}—) \times P(\text{T}—/\text{R}\&\text{K}—) + \\ &P(\text{C}/\sim\text{T}—\&\text{R}\&\text{K}—) \times P(\sim\text{T}—/\text{R}\&\text{K}—), \end{aligned}$$

where T—, let us say, is the doctrine of minimal theism, the doctrine that there exists some god or other: some powerful, non-physical person capable of interacting causally with the physical world. Start with the rightmost addend ( $P(\text{C}/\sim\text{T}\&\text{R}\&\text{K}—) \times P(\sim\text{T}/\text{R}\&\text{K}—)$ ). What sort of value can we sensibly assign it? Not a very high one, I should think, for as Wright and others have pointed out, the early Christian claim that Jesus had been resurrected was not a claim to the effect that he had been somehow resuscitated, but something much more dramatic: that his body had been transformed into something utterly new, something incorruptible, something not bound by the ordinary

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. Wright 2003; Craig 1989; Davis 1993; Habermas 1987.

operation of the laws of physics and chemistry. The probability that that's what happened, given the denial of minimal theism, is not far from zero, I should think. Therefore:

$$P(C/R\&K-) \approx P(C/T- \& R\&K-) \times P(T-/R\&K-).$$

What to say then about  $P(C/T- \& R\&K-)$  and  $P(T-/R\&K-)$ ? Treat them in order. First, how probable is the resurrection given the evidence of natural theology, minimal theism, and the historical evidence for the empty tomb, the post-mortem appearances, and so forth? Here there'll be disagreement, but it's not unreasonable to think it high. Given that we're conditionalizing on an evidence base that includes minimal theism, I think Wright *et al.* make a strong case that C is highly likely. Suppose so and see what happens.

Next,  $P(T-/R\&K-)$ . Bayes' Theorem gives us that

$$P(T-/R\&K-) = \frac{P(R/T- \& K-) \times P(T-/K-)}{P(R/K-)}$$

Start with  $P(R/K-)$ : the probability, given the evidence of natural theology, that there'd be evidence of the sort we have for the empty tomb, the post-mortem appearances, and so forth. How high is that? Low, I should think. Given merely the evidence of natural theology (the cosmos came about by way of the big bang, its fundamental constants are fine tuned, etc.), it isn't particularly probable that there'd be evidence for the empty tomb, the post-mortem appearances, and so forth. Now enrich our evidence base by T-. Does the probability of R go up? Is it more probable that there'd be evidence of the sort we have for the empty tomb, etc., on T-&K- than on just K-? That depends on the likelihood ratio

$$\frac{P(R/T- \& K-)}{P(R/\sim T- \& K-)}.$$

If it's 'top heavy', the probability of R (on K-) goes up when we add T-; if it's not, it doesn't. (Well, this iff  $P(T-/K-)$  isn't 1. And surely it isn't.) So is it top heavy? Hard to say. Minimal theism says there is some god or other, some powerful non-physical person, but tells us almost nothing about this being. Hard to see then why minimal theism should generate any *expectation* that we'd see something like R, something we'd expect not to see given the denial of minimal theism. I'd think the above ratio either inscrutable (who knows *what*  $P(R/T- \& K-)$  is) or not too far above 1. If it's inscrutable, then McGrew's suggestion that  $P(C/R\&K-)$  is extremely high is in trouble: If the

above ratio is inscrutable, then, I should think, so is  $P(T-/R\&K-)$ . But if so, then since

$$P(C/R\&K-) \approx P(C/T- \& R\&K-) \times P(T-/R\&K-),$$

$P(C/R\&K-)$  looks to be inscrutable as well. If the above ratio is near 1, then

$$P(R/T- \& K-) \approx P(R/K-).$$

But if so, then

$$P(T-/R\&K-) \approx P(T-/K-).$$

And since, as we've seen,

$$P(C/R\&K-) \approx P(C/T- \& R\&K-) \times P(T-/R\&K-).$$

we get that the probability of minimal theism on  $K-$  puts an upper bound on the probability of  $C$  on  $R\&K-$ . Here again, there's trouble for the suggestion that  $P(C/R\&K-)$  is extremely high. The evidence for theism—minimal or otherwise—from natural theology is strong but not knockdown.

One possibility here is that I've mischaracterized the above likelihood ratio. I said I thought it was either inscrutable or somewhere near 1. Perhaps it's higher than 1. Suppose it's as high as two: that it's twice as likely that  $R$  given  $T- \& K-$  than given  $\sim T- \& K-$ . Then assuming that  $P(T-/K-)$  isn't much higher than .5 and plugging in the numbers, we get that

$$P(T-/R\&K-) \approx .67,$$

and that

$$P(C/R\&K-) \approx P(C/T- \& R\&K-) \times .67.$$

Assuming that  $P(C/T- \& R\&K-)$  is extremely high, .99 say, it turns out that  $P(C/R\&K-)$  isn't much higher than around .66. Therefore, even if it's twice as likely that  $R$  given  $T- \& K-$  than given  $\sim T- \& K-$ , the probability of  $C$  on  $R\&K-$  isn't much higher than the probability of  $T-$  on  $K-$ .

Perhaps you'll reply that our above ratio is considerably higher than 2, and that  $P(C/R\&K-)$  is, accordingly, considerably greater than .66. I'd wonder, though, what grounds you could have for thinking the ratio that high. I can't see what they'd be.

(A likelihood ratio closely connected to the one presently under discussion plays a key role in Swinburne's recent argument for the resurrection (Swinburne 2003; see especially pp. 212–15). His argument turns on the ratio of (*a*) the probability we'd find historical evidence of the sort and strength we have

for Jesus's life and resurrection given the evidence of natural theology and the proposition that God incarnates himself at some time to (b) the probability we'd find historical evidence of that sort and strength given the evidence of natural theology and the proposition that it is not the case that God incarnates himself at some time. Swinburne thinks that ratio quite high: about 100:1. If he's right, then, given plausible assumptions, the ratio I discuss above is much higher than 2:1. But is he right? Hard to say. It's not implausible to think his ratio greater than 1:1, but why think it 100:1? Why not think it more like, say, 5:1 or 2:1? I don't know, and Swinburne doesn't say much that would help us decide. He proposes that it is somewhat unlikely, though not very unlikely, we'd have the sort and strength of evidence we do for Jesus's life and resurrection if God had incarnated himself, suggesting that the relevant probability is something in the neighborhood of .1 (2003: 212). He then proposes that it is 'very unlikely indeed' we'd have that sort and strength of evidence if God hadn't incarnated himself, suggesting a probability here of .001 (2003: 213). Take the first probability. Swinburne has argued in various places (e.g. 2003: 173–4), plausibly to my mind, that we should expect a certain amount of divine hiddenness, a certain amount of 'epistemic distance' between us and God, so as to leave us free to choose for and against him. How much distance should we expect? Should we expect the distance on display in the sort and strength of evidence we have for Jesus's life and resurrection? Should we expect more distance than that? Less? I have no idea. I think we have no principled way of answering such questions. Consequently, I think we have no principled way of assigning a number like .1 to the above probability, and thus no principled reason for thinking Swinburne's ratio nearer 100:1 than, say, 2:1 or 5:1. But if his ratio is nearer the latter numbers than the former, it'll follow given plausible assumptions that our focal ratio, the one under discussion in the last several paragraphs, is low. I tentatively conclude that Swinburne's arguments shed little light on the question how to think about that ratio.)

*Pace* McGrew, then, I think we have no good reason for thinking  $P(C/R\&K-)$  extremely high. Arguments for the resurrection by Wright *et al.* are powerful, but they don't show  $P(C/R\&K-)$  near 1.

To recapitulate: we are presently considering the probability along the leftmost pathway of our above lattice

$$\begin{aligned} &P(IB/T\&A\&B\&C\&D\&E\&K) \times P(T/K) \times P(A/T\&K) \\ &\quad \times P(B/T\&A\&K) \times P(C/T\&A\&B\&K) \times P(D/T\&A\&B\&C\&K) \\ &\quad \times P(E/T\&A\&B\&C\&D\&K) \end{aligned}$$

and wondering about  $P(T/K)$ . McGrew suggests it's extremely high if K includes historical evidence for the resurrection. I think he's wrong. I can't

see any reason for thinking it much higher than the probability of T on K—, the evidence of natural theology. And as I read that evidence, it's good but not knockdown: it shows theism more probable than not, but not that it's certain. The most we can say about  $P(T/K)$ , I think, is that falls somewhere in an interval like  $[.7 - .9]$ . Likewise with  $P(A/T\&K)$ . That God would intervene in history to provide us with propositional revelation about himself seems likely but not certain. The most we can say about  $P(A/T\&K)$ , I should think, is that it too is somewhere in an interval like  $[.7 - .9]$ . But if so, then even if the other of the above multiplicands are extremely high, each .99 say, the most we can say for the probability along the leftmost pathway is that it's greater than .47 or so.

As I read the evidence, then, there's reason to withhold the proposition that the sum of the probabilities along the pathways of the above lattice favorable to T and A–E is high. If I'm right to think the strongest case for IB from history and natural theology will rely on premises in the near vicinity of T and A–E, we get that the strongest case for IB from history and natural theology is vitiated by an undermining objection.

I conclude we have good reason to look elsewhere for an answer to the Main Question.

## THE MAIN QUESTION AND TESTIMONY

The second principal option for answering the Main Question—the question whence comes justification for belief that IB—is that justification for such belief comes by way of testimony. Perception, memory, and rational intuition are sources of justified belief; so too is testimony. Much, perhaps most, of what we justifiedly believe we believe on the basis of testimony. Likewise, you might think, with belief that IB. The Church teaches that IB; when I accepted its testimony, I *eo ipso* got justified belief, just as I got justified belief when I accepted my parents' testimony that my name is 'Crisp', my teachers' testimony that Caesar crossed the Rubicon, and so forth. Ultimately, I think something like this is right, but it needs some fleshing out before it can be sensibly accepted.

True enough, testimony is a source of justification for many of our beliefs. In the ordinary case, though, if one's *only* evidence for belief that P is testimony that P, then, one thinks, one's evidence for belief that P is *defeated* if one comes across testimony that  $\sim P$  and has no reason for thinking the one bit of testimony more trustworthy than the other. So suppose you form a belief that it's half-past-four on the basis of testimony from me. (Say too my testimony is your only evidence that it's half-past-four.) You thereupon

overhear testimony to the effect that it's half-past-*five* and have no reason for trusting my testimony over this latest bit of testimony. Then, one thinks, your original testimonial evidence has been defeated and you've reason to be agnostic about the time.

If belief that IB is justified by way of ordinary testimony, therefore, and your only justification for belief that IB is testimonial, then you'll get a defeater for your belief that IB if you run across testimony that  $\sim$ IB and have no good reason for trusting one bit of testimony over the other. Most of us, clearly enough, *have* run across testimony that  $\sim$ IB. There's testimony from various other religions that *their* holy books are inspired and that the Bible isn't, testimony from skeptical practitioners of historical biblical criticism that the Bible is a mishmash of error, and more besides. So most of us have plenty of testimonial evidence that  $\sim$ IB, suggesting that absent good reason for preferring the Church's testimony to these other sources—absent good reason for crediting the Church's authority on these matters over its competitors'—testimonial evidence from the Church that IB isn't good reason for belief that IB.

All this, of course, *absent good reason to prefer the Church's testimony to its competitors'*. If we'd good reason to trust the Church over alternative sources of testimony on IB, then testimonial evidence provided by the Church's teaching that IB might well justify our belief that IB.

The crucial question, then: *is* there good reason for trusting the Church over alternative sources of testimony on IB? Well, if there *were*, it'd presumably comprise some combination of the following. First, it might comprise an argument from history and natural theology that the Church is a divinely backed source of information about matters of faith. Secondly, it could consist of arguments from history and natural theology impugning the credibility of competitors to the Church—arguments impugning the credibility of historical biblical criticism, other religious traditions, and so forth. And thirdly, it could consist of argument from propositions known not by way of history and natural theology, but in some other way, for example, Plantinga's 'internal instigation of the Holy Spirit' (IIHS).

I doubt it would consist of the first; I doubt, that is, it would consist of argument from history and natural theology that the Church is a divinely backed source of information about IB. Note here that there is non-trivial dispute among the various branches of Christendom about what the Bible *is*—that is, about *which* books comprise the Bible. There's the Catholic view, on which the list of the divinely inspired books comprises the standard twenty-seven New Testament books and the Alexandrian canon of the Greek Septuagint, including the so-called deuterocanonical books; there's the Greek Orthodox canon comprising the foregoing books plus five books



of the Septuagint not found in the Catholic canon; there's the Slavonic Orthodox canon comprising all of the foregoing less three; there's the Protestant canon which comprises only the standard twenty-seven New Testament books and the standard Hebrew canon; there are the Ethiopian and Armenian Orthodox canons, which differ in further ways yet on the limits of both the Old and New Testament canons; and there are more canons besides.

So there's disagreement between the major branches of Christendom about what the Bible comprises. All this suggests that talk thus far about the proposition I've been calling 'IB', the proposition that the Bible is divinely inspired, has been a tad imprecise. It looks as if no one proposition uncontroversially answers to the definite description 'the proposition that the Bible is divinely inspired' on account of the fact that no one book uncontroversially answers to the name 'the Bible'. There isn't one Bible; there are many. For each, then, there is the proposition that it is inspired:  $IB_i$ ,  $IB_j$ , . . .

Well, suppose so, and suppose you accept some one of the IBs,  $IB_x$ , on the basis of testimony from the teachers of your branch of Christendom. If your reason for trusting your branch of Christendom over alternative sources of testimony on  $IB_x$  is some argument from history and natural theology, then, I suggest, you'll have undermining troubles like those explored above. For any argument you give from history and natural theology to the effect that your branch of Christendom is to be trusted on  $IB_x$  over other branches of Christendom and other non-Christian religious traditions will, I suspect, invoke at least these premises (or premises in the near neighborhood):

T: God exists.

A: God intervenes in history to provide a propositional revelation about himself.

B: Jesus's teachings were such that they could be plausibly interpreted as implying that he intended to found a church that would function for a long period of time as an authoritative source of information about him.

C: Jesus rose from the dead.

D: In raising Jesus from the dead, God declared his approval of Jesus's teachings.

E': The Church that pronounced on  $IB_x$  is a legitimate successor—the 'closest continuer'—of the church founded by Jesus.

And for reasons given above, any such argument will be subject to an undermining objection.

Perhaps, then, your reason for trusting your branch of the Church over alternative sources of testimony on  $IB_x$  is that you have arguments that undermine the credibility of those sources, reasons for thinking that other branches of the Church, non-Christian religions, semi-Christian religions,

and skeptical practitioners of historical biblical criticism aren't to be trusted on IB<sub>x</sub>. Perhaps, but you'd be unusual. Most of us don't have much at all by way of decent argument against the credibility of other branches of the Church, non-Christian religions, and so forth. Most of us, then, lack this sort of reason for trusting the testimony of our branch of Christendom on its version of IB over competitors. Of course, it could be that only those who have this sort of reason are justified in accepting their church's teaching on IB,<sup>11</sup> and that, consequently, relatively few Christians are justified in believing the Bible to be divinely inspired. It could be, but I'm assuming it's not. It's a working assumption of this chapter that most Christians justifiedly believe that the scriptures are divinely inspired. The question is, how does this belief (or these beliefs) come by way of justification? I'll assume, then, that for most, it's not because they have serious objections to the credibility of traditions other than their own.

Finally, there's the possibility that your reason for trusting the testimony of your branch of Christendom on IB<sub>x</sub> over the testimony of competitors comprises argument from propositions known not by way of history and natural theology, but in some other way, perhaps via something like Plantinga's IIHS. This suggestion connects up neatly with our third principal option for answering the Main Question, on which belief that IB or something in the near neighborhood arises via IIHS. Let us look into this option then.

## THE MAIN QUESTION AND IIHS

The central suggestion here is that the Holy Spirit directly produces in us certain beliefs. On Plantinga's view, the Holy Spirit directly produces in us belief in the 'great things of the gospel': sin, incarnation, atonement, resurrection, and so forth (Plantinga 2000). The process works something like this: one hears the gospel preached, evinces an openness to the leading of the Holy Spirit and thereupon has belief in the great things of the gospel produced in one by the Holy Spirit. Belief thus arrived at is, says Plantinga, perfectly reasonable, perfectly respectable from the epistemic point of view. In our terms, such belief is justified.

Suppose all this is right: various of our Christian beliefs arise via IIHS and belief so produced is justified. The idea we're exploring, then, is that your reason for trusting the testimony of your community on IB<sub>x</sub> over the testi-

<sup>11</sup> Here and below, I use an unmarked 'IB' when precision about which version of IB is at issue is unnecessary.

mony of competitors comprises argument from premises that are deliverances of this process—deliverances of IIHS. This could happen in various ways.

So, for example, perhaps it's a deliverance of IIHS for you that your specific branch of the Church has been guided by the Spirit and preserved from error on important matters of faith, including matters pertaining to the extent of the scriptures. So suppose you're an Ethiopian Orthodox Christian. The idea, then, is that the Holy Spirit is directly producing and sustaining belief in you to the effect that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has been protected from error on important matters of faith, including matters pertaining to the extent of the scriptures. Clearly enough, if the Holy Spirit is producing this belief in you, then you have the makings of an excellent argument for trusting the testimony of your community on its version of IB ('IB<sub>x</sub>' as we're calling it) over that of competitors.

Two worries though. First, once again, it's a working assumption of the chapter that most Christians justifiably believe that the scriptures are divinely inspired. Hard to see, though, how to turn the above suggestion into an account of how most Christians get justified belief that the scriptures are inspired.

And secondly, the suggestion carries a theoretical cost. The idea is that the Holy Spirit directly produces belief in some to the effect that their branch of the Church has been preserved from error on the question what the extent of the scriptures is. Since, one thinks, the Holy Spirit *isn't* producing the analogous belief in members of other Christian communities (lest the Holy Spirit be in the business of producing false belief in many of us), we get the following explanatory asymmetry. Though *your* belief that the teachings of your branch of the Church on IB<sub>x</sub> are true is to be explained by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, *my* belief that the teachings of my branch of the Church on IB<sub>y</sub> (for some distinct IB<sub>y</sub> among the IBs) are true is to be explained in some other way (the instigation of unholy spirits, 'group think', perhaps some other psychological mechanism). Now, though it's hard to be sure, I would suspect that our beliefs are quite similar in terms of phenomenology, that 'downstream of experience', to borrow Plantinga's phrase, they're pretty similar. But then the present suggestion displays this inelegance: it postulates diverse explanations of what would seem to be very similar phenomena. This costs. Better to give a unified explanation of similar phenomena; theories that don't pay a theoretical price. It could be, of course, that the cost here is small and that it's worth paying when all is said and done. It could be. That'll depend on what other theories are on offer. Let us look further into that, then.

The basic idea we're exploring is that your reason for trusting the testimony of your community on IB<sub>x</sub> over the testimony of competitors comprises argument from premises some of which are deliverances of IIHS. Maybe it

works like this. Maybe Christians of all stripes get belief in the great things of the gospel (incarnation, atonement, resurrection) via IIHS. These beliefs, combined with premises like

B: Jesus's teachings were such that they could be plausibly interpreted as implying that he intended to found a church that would function for a long period of time as an authoritative source of information about him, and

E': The Church that pronounced on IB<sub>x</sub> is a legitimate successor—the 'closest continuer'—of the church founded by Jesus,

might, then, provide the makings of a good argument for trusting your community on IB<sub>x</sub> over the testimony of competitors.

They might. But it'd be a small minority of Christians that come to justified belief that IB by this sort of argument. Clearly most of us aren't in possession of historical argument robust enough to underwrite such reasoning. But, again, I am assuming that most Christians have justified belief that IB. If so, then for most of us anyway, it's not by way of the above sort of argument.

The foregoing ways of deploying the IIHS model leave it a mystery how it could be that most Christians get justified belief that IB. There are ways of deploying the model that avoid this. So recall the *Belgic Confession*: 'we believe without a doubt all things contained in [the Bible]—not so much because the church receives them and approves them as such, but above all because the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that they are from God, and also because they prove themselves to be from God'. The basic idea: we believe what the Bible teaches because the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that its books are from God—that is, that they're divinely inspired. Maybe it works like this. There is some core list of biblical books endorsed by all or most major branches of Christendom such that belief in their inspiration is a deliverance of IIHS. Belief in the inspiration of these books is nearly universal across Christianity and is justified by dint of being a deliverance of IIHS. Such is the sense in which most Christians get justified belief that IB.

What to say, though, about belief in the inspiration of those books that aren't endorsed across Christendom, for example, Catholic and Orthodox belief in the inspiration of the deuterocanonical books? Whence come those beliefs? Looks like we'll need some story other than IIHS to account for them, at the above-discussed cost in unity of theory. (Though it's hard to be sure, one suspects that, 'downstream of experience', belief in the inspiration of the deuterocanonical books is quite similar to belief in the inspiration of, say, the Gospel of Matthew. So we've dissimilar explanations of what would seem to be very similar phenomena and consequent theoretical cost.)

The obvious ways of deploying the IIHS model face this difficulty: either it's not clear on them how it could be that most Christians are justified in belief that IB or we get diverse explanations of similar phenomena and consequent theoretical cost. In the next section, I'll sketch a model for thinking about the epistemology of belief that IB not subject to this difficulty, a model that, so I'll claim, is more satisfying than the options so far considered.

### MORE ON AUTHORITY

I argued above that if justification for belief that IB comes by way of ordinary testimony, we get a defeater for belief that IB when we run across testimony that  $\sim$ IB and lack good reason for preferring one source of testimony to the other. I said this makes trouble for the idea that justification for belief that IB arises by way of ordinary testimony since most of us have run across plenty of testimony that  $\sim$ IB. I want to propose now a model that gets round this worry, a model on which justification for belief that IB *does* come by way of testimony, but not by way of ordinary testimony.

Peter Van Inwagen's point here is surely correct:

Each of us accepts certain authorities and certain traditions. You may think that you are an epistemic engine that takes sensory input (that 'fancifully fanciless medium of unvarnished news') and generates assignments of probabilities to propositions by means of a set of rules that yields the most useful (useful for dealing with the future stream of sensory input) probability assignments in most possible worlds. In fact, however, you trust a lot of people and groups of people and—within very broad limits—believe what they tell you. And this is not because the epistemic engine that is yourself has processed a lot of sensory data and, in consequence, assigned high probabilities to propositions like 'Dixy Lee Ray is a reliable source of information on ecological matters' or 'Most things that the *Boston Globe* says about the homeless are true.' You may have done some of that, but you haven't had time to do very much of it. (1994: 48)

The central suggestion: we accept the testimony of certain authorities, often-times without much by way of argument that we should. Typically this is a matter of accepting the testimony of those deemed authoritative or expert by our social group. When I was young, my social group was my family and the experts were my parents. I accepted much that they told me, usually in the basic way (where to accept a belief in the 'basic way' here, is to accept it without having *inferred* it from argument or evidence—it's to hold the belief *non-inferentially*). Nowadays, my social group is much wider and its experts more diverse. I accept quite a bit of testimony from, for example, physics,

often in the basic way: it's not as if I've much by way of decent, non-circular argument that the methods of physics are truth-conducive.

Note that we'll often accept the testimony of those deemed expert by our social group in the face of conflicting testimony. So when I was young, I'd occasionally run across testimony that conflicted with that of my parents but would go on believing my parents nonetheless. (I remember hearing much testimony on the playground to the effect that there was no Santa Claus; I didn't believe it for a minute.) Not that I had much by way of argument for thinking my parents should be trusted over these other sources. I didn't. But confronted with conflicting testimony, without much by way of argument that my parents should be trusted over conflicting sources of information, I'd go on believing my parents.

I still do this sort of thing. So, for example, science assures us there is overwhelming evidence for the claim that the cosmos is considerably older than 10,000 years. I believe there is. I know of people, though, who claim there isn't. They think the idea that there is powerful evidence for this claim is based on enormous confusion in the scientific community. I think they're mistaken, but pressed for argument why we should trust the deliverances of mainstream science here and not these people, I'm not sure what to say. I've only a halting grip on the relevant science.

Of course I'm not alone here. We all do this sort of thing. We trust those deemed expert by our social groups, often in the face of conflicting testimony, often without much by way of argument for preferring the experts to the non-experts. As I'll put it, we *defer* to those deemed expert by our social group, where, let us say, you defer to an expert in your social group iff (a) you accept her testimony in the basic way, and (b) you'd continue to do so if apprised of conflicting testimony by those your community deems non-expert, whether or not you had good argument for preferring the expert's testimony to the non-expert's.

We do this sort of thing, but why? Why do we engage in this doxastic practice?<sup>12</sup> I conjecture that it's hard-wired into us. Deferring to experts is, I conjecture, a matter of proper cognitive function. More, I conjecture that God's intention in hard-wiring the practice into us had to do with his desire

<sup>12</sup> Where a *doxastic practice*, for present purposes, is a way of forming belief, a mode of belief formation; e.g., forming belief on the basis of testimony, forming belief on the basis of perceptual experience, forming belief on the basis of deductive reasoning—all are ways of forming belief and doxastic practices in my sense. I borrow the expression 'doxastic practice' from Alston (see e.g. Alston 1989). He develops a sophisticated epistemology around the notion of a doxastic practice—his so-called doxastic practice approach to epistemology (see e.g. Alston 1989). I am borrowing his expression, but not his epistemology, which differs in important ways from the proper-functionalist approach to epistemology I assume at the chapter's outset.

that we have true belief about the world. He designed us to come to know much about the world, but his intention was that we do it cooperatively. We're built for cooperative knowledge acquisition and the hard-wired tendency to defer to those deemed expert by our social group is plausibly thought of as conducive to that.

Suppose all this right. Then the practice of deferring to those deemed expert by one's social group evinces proper cognitive function. Plausibly, many of the deliverances of this practice are outputs of a properly functioning, truth-aimed, belief-producing process. Therefore, given the view of justification presupposed at the outset of the chapter, many of the deliverances of the practice are justified. (I don't say all deliverances of the practice are justified. No doubt there are situations in which deference to your community's experts would be unreasonable. I'll say a bit about this below.)

Call this practice of deferring to those your social group deems expert the *authoritative testimonial* doxastic practice: 'AT' for short. Interesting questions about AT clamor for attention. What is it, exactly, to be an 'expert'? What counts as one's 'social group'? What if one is a member of several social groups with conflicting experts? What if you yourself are an expert and disagree with other experts? And more besides. I propose to set these aside and turn instead to a sketch of the bearing of our discussion of AT on the Main Question, the question, again, how it is that Christian belief that the Bible is divinely inspired comes by way of epistemic justification.

## AT AND THE MAIN QUESTION

So: Suppose you are a serious Roman Catholic Christian and consider the Roman Catholic Church your primary social group. That Church deems certain of its teachers authoritative on matters of faith and practice—it deems certain of them *experts* on these matters. These teachers claim that certain books are divinely inspired. Suppose, aware of all of this, you accept their testimony in the basic way; you defer, in the above sense, to those deemed expert by your social group. Then, so I say, your belief is a deliverance of AT and *ipso facto* justified.

Suppose you then come across testimony that conflicts with the Church's teaching about the inspiration of the Bible and have no powerful argument for preferring the Church's testimony. Still, you reflect on it and find yourself firmly convinced that the Church's teaching is true. I said above that if justification for belief that the Bible is divinely inspired comes by way of ordinary testimony, then you get a defeater for that belief if you run across

conflicting testimony and have no good argument for preferring one source of testimony to the other. That's as may be given what we might call our *ordinary testimonial* doxastic practice (OT): the kind that's operative when you accept testimony on some matter from someone your social group deems non-expert on the matter. (The kind that's operative in the usual case of accepting someone's testimony about what time it is, say.) But if you're a serious Catholic, then your belief that the books of the Catholic Bible are inspired isn't a deliverance of OT but of AT, and conflicting testimony from those deemed non-expert by the Church makes no epistemic trouble for your belief. (What if you got conflicting testimony from those deemed expert by the Church? Then you'd have trouble, but I'm assuming that's not what's going on here.)

I conjecture that for many Christians, perhaps most, something in the near vicinity of the above story characterizes their belief that the Bible is divinely inspired. For many Christians, perhaps most, belief that IB is a deliverance of AT. If so, then we have an answer to the Main Question: Christian belief that IB is justified by dint of being a deliverance of AT.

I take this to be a more satisfying answer to the Main Question than the options explored above. The natural theological option is vitiated, I think, by undermining worries. The testimonial option considered above is basically right, but needs nuancing in the direction of our recent discussion of AT. The IHS options either leave it unclear how it could be that most Christians are justified in belief that IB or postulate diverse explanations of similar phenomena at the above-discussed theoretical cost. The AT model explains how it is that most Christians are justified in belief that IB but doesn't incur this cost, since, for the ATer, belief in the various versions of IB arises via the same cognitive process. Wherefore, I take it, the AT model has a slight edge over the IHS option.

I close by considering a few questions about the model.

#### A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT THE AT MODEL

First. What if you come across extremely powerful evidence that the experts in your tradition are wrong about IB. So suppose you learn of extremely powerful evidence that claims by Jesus's early followers that he'd risen from the dead were part of an elaborate hoax. Then, one thinks, you should give up your belief that IB: if Jesus didn't rise from the dead and the disciples deceived the world into thinking he did, it is implausible in the extreme that the Christian scriptures are inspired. But doesn't the AT model imply otherwise?



Doesn't it imply, that is, that one could go on blithely accepting IB despite such evidence to the contrary (cf. Plantinga 2000: 420–1)?

No, it doesn't. The model suggests you can reasonably believe the deliverances of your community's experts in the face of conflicting testimony, but it doesn't imply that testimony from your community's experts is indefeasible. It's consistent with the model that one could acquire sufficiently strong evidence against the claims of your community's experts to warrant your rejecting their testimony.

Second. It's a consequence of the AT model that Christians of a variety of stripes can be justified in accepting the version of IB indexed to their tradition. So it looks to follow from the model that Protestants are justified in accepting IB<sub>P</sub>, Catholics are justified in accepting IB<sub>C</sub>, Greek Orthodox are justified in accepting IB<sub>G</sub>, and so forth. More, it looks to be a consequence of the model that many Muslims are justified in thinking the Quran divinely inspired, that many Jews are justified in thinking the Talmud and Mishnah divinely inspired, that many Latter Day Saints are justified in thinking the Book of Mormon divinely inspired, and so forth. But isn't there something untoward about this? Isn't there something infelicitous about the suggestion that such conflicting beliefs could all be justified?

No, I don't see that there is. It's no part of my claim that all these beliefs are *true*. *That* would be infelicitous. I say only that adherents to these various traditions can be justified in accepting the teachings of those deemed authoritative by their traditions. This doesn't strike me as objectionable at all; quite the reverse: it strikes me as obviously right.

Third, suppose you're a Greek Orthodox Christian and accept the deliverances of certain authorities in your tradition on IB<sub>G</sub>—the version of IB indexed to your tradition. There's this question about those authorities though: whence comes *their* justification for belief that IB<sub>G</sub>? Perhaps some accept their belief on the basis of further authorities yet, but this can't go back indefinitely. Eventually, we reach authorities whose beliefs that IB<sub>G</sub> aren't based on expert testimony. So where does their justification for belief that IB<sub>G</sub> come from? If the above arguments are on target, not by the arguments of history and natural theology and not by IIHS. If not by those, though, and not by expert testimony, it's hard to see how their beliefs could be justified. But if their beliefs that IB<sub>G</sub> aren't justified, how could *your* belief that IB<sub>G</sub>, based as it is on their testimony, be justified? Similar problems arise, of course, for those of us accepting other versions of IB.

Two points in reply. First, the objection suggests that, given my arguments, we should doubt the Church fathers' beliefs on IB were deliverances of IIHS. I deny that. Nothing I've said suggests the fathers' beliefs weren't products of IIHS. I said: better to postulate similar explanations of similar phenomena,

and, so I suspect, belief in the inspiration of the scriptures across the major branches of Christendom is, by and large, pretty similar. Who's to say, though, whether the fathers' beliefs on IB were relevantly similar to ours? Perhaps they weren't; perhaps they were accompanied by powerful religious experiences, signs and wonders, or some such thing. I don't know. Nothing I say above suggests one way or another about it. So nothing I say above casts doubt on the suggestion that some of the fathers' beliefs that IB were products of IIHS.

Secondly, the objection assumes that belief that P held on the basis of a chain of testimony tracing back to someone your social group deems expert is justified only if the expert in question was justified in believing that P.<sup>13</sup> I deny that. Suppose an unscrupulous high school physics teacher knowingly foists various subtly false claims about physics on his students. Provided his sophistry is sufficiently subtle and that his students had no reason for suspicion, wouldn't they be justified in accepting his testimony? I think so.<sup>14</sup>

To be sure, there's epistemic trouble for my testimonial belief B if I come to think that the initial link in the testimonial chain subtending B isn't likely to be true. But in the case of belief that IB, few Christians would think that. Most of us, I suspect, think that God providently guided the development of the Church fathers' beliefs on IB in such a way as to protect them from error.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps their beliefs were also justified, maybe via IIHS. Not much hangs on it. If like most Christians, you think the beliefs of the fathers on IB a product of provident guidance and protection from error, the justificatory status of those beliefs isn't very relevant to the justificatory status of your belief that IB.<sup>16,17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Plantinga 1993b: 82–8.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Lackey 1999: 480–1. For a recent, full-length treatment of related issues, see Lackey 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Where 'provident guidance', as I'm thinking of it here, may or may not involve the sort of direct production of belief by the Holy Spirit postulated by the IIHS model. God could providently arrange for someone to hold a certain belief by directly causing it in her, but I assume he could do it in less direct ways too.

<sup>16</sup> Objection: 'Surely the justificatory status of the fathers' beliefs on IB *is* relevant to the justificatory status of present-day belief that IB. For if the Fathers weren't justified in belief that IB, we shouldn't deem them experts on IB. And if we shouldn't deem them experts on IB, we shouldn't think present-day belief that IB a deliverance of expert testimony. And if we shouldn't think belief that IB a deliverance of expert testimony, then given your earlier arguments, it seems we shouldn't think present-day belief that IB justified at all.' By way of reply, why think the fathers' status as experts on IB thus dependent on whether they were epistemically justified in belief that IB? So long as their beliefs regarding IB resulted from divine guidance and protection from error, I should think them experts in the relevant sense, even if they lacked what we would think of as justified belief that IB (and as I say above, I don't see any reason for thinking they did). Thanks to Mike Rea for helpful feedback here.

<sup>17</sup> Thanks to Nathan Ballantyne, Daniel Howard-Snyder, Alvin Plantinga, Ted Poston, Michael Rea, Donald Smith, and Gregg Ten Elshof for helpful comments and conversation.

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