

“The Significance of Religious Disagreement”
by John M. DePoe

If your experiences are similar to mine, you probably have many acquaintances and possibly even some close friends who hold beliefs that significantly differ from your own. In some cases these differences can be mundane, such as my belief that the San Antonio Spurs are the best NBA team whereas some of my friends believe that, say, the Dallas Mavericks or even that the LA Lakers are the best NBA team. Despite these differences, we still manage to get along (with a few rocky moments during the playoffs) and remain friends.

Of course, we all know that our differences in beliefs can be more severe and consequential than our beliefs about the NBA. One of the most deeply rooted and consequential set of beliefs where we find disagreement between our friends and ourselves concerns our religious beliefs. Even though one’s religion almost always consists in more than affirming the truth of a set of propositions, nonetheless affirming that certain claims are true is an essential aspect of adhering to a religion. Christians, for example, traditionally have affirmed the following beliefs: that God exists, that Jesus is the Son of God, that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, among many others. Those who adhere to another religion or to no religion at all will affirm a contrary set of religious claims. When we disagree with our friends over beliefs that play an important—perhaps even the most important—role in our day-to-day lives, the results are not always dispassionate to say the least.

While we may be all too aware of the practical consequences that occur when we disagree with others on momentous matters, I want to direct this essay to a different concern. Another aspect of the nature of disagreements concerns how they impact the rational status of our beliefs. In particular, when we are confronted with others who seem to have roughly the same intellectual abilities and evidence as ourselves for significant religious beliefs, initially it

seems that this should reduce the rational credibility that we possessed before being confronted with the disagreement of our peers. Disagreement in these circumstances acts like counterevidence with respect to the beliefs that are in dispute.¹ I intend to show how the problem of disagreement impacts the justification of religious beliefs. Specifically, I will present a defense of the rational credibility of Christianity in light of the epistemic consequences of disagreement.²

The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement

Before examining the impact that disagreement should have on the claims of Christianity, let’s first define some terminology and look at some clear-cut cases that motivate a problem for the justification of religious beliefs.³

Two Conditions

One condition for the sort of disagreement I’ll be discussing is that the person with whom you are disagreeing is an *epistemic peer*. An epistemic peer is a person who has approximately the same rational capacities and background beliefs as yourself. For most people reading this essay, neither Forrest Gump nor Isaac Newton will count as epistemic peers. The former has significantly lesser rational capacities as yourself, while the latter has remarkably greater rational capacities as yourself. Furthermore, despite these obvious differences in rational capacities, both

¹ In the terminology of contemporary epistemology, I mean to say that it is an *undercutting defeater*.

² The response I develop in this paper is intended to be optimally compatible with Christianity. However, much of what I say probably is compatible to some extent with other religious traditions.

³ The following terminology is more or less adapted from the standard literature on epistemic disagreement. For example, see Thomas Kelly, “The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement” in *Oxford Studies in Epistemology*, volume 1, eds. Tamar Szabo Gendler and John Hawthorne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.167-196; Richard Feldman, “Epistemological Puzzles About Disagreement” in *Epistemology Futures*, ed. Stephen Hetherington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 216-236; Richard Feldman, “Reasonable Religious Disagreements” in *Philosophers Without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*, ed. Louise Antony (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 194-214; and the essays in Richard Feldman and Ted Warfield, eds., *Disagreement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

Gump and Newton might be ruled out as epistemic peers for an independent reason—they both have a significantly different set of background beliefs from yourself (due to temporal, and possibly geographical, differences). So, the kind of disagreement that we’re studying involves an epistemic peer, a person who has roughly the same background information and rational capacities as oneself.⁴

Another necessary condition for disagreements (of the sort currently under discussion) to obtain is that all the relevant evidence that informs all parties involved in the disagreement must be roughly the same. It is important to understand that this condition does not stipulate that all of the parties involved in the disagreement must possess the *exact same* evidence. Consider the simple example of the sort of evidence you and an epistemic peer may have for the claim that “Experiences of pain feel bad.” If we required both you and your epistemic peer to have the *exact same evidence* in this case, we would be unable to satisfy this condition since the primary relevant evidence for this belief would be one’s own experiences of pain, which are essentially private. Given that experiences of pain are essentially private and cannot be shared, no two people would be able to have the exact same evidence for a fairly common belief such as that “Experiences of pain feel bad.” In the case of private experiences, however, most of us are willing to allow two people to satisfy the same evidence requirement when each person’s private experiences are of a similar kind. As we will see later, how one determines what counts as two people having the same evidence in the case of private experiences—or how to tell whether two private experiences are of the same kind—will play a crucial role in measuring the epistemic significance of religious disagreement.

⁴ There is an important issue about how disagreement with non-peers impacts one’s justification for a disputed belief. This is an issue I’ll have to lay aside in this essay. Although, I believe much of what I write in this essay could be applied to non-peer disagreement.

Cases & Consequences of Disagreement

So, we’ve sketched two conditions that are essential to constituting the sort of disagreements that impact the justification of beliefs: first, the disagreement must be between epistemic peers; and second, the relevant evidence must be roughly the same. Now we can look at a few cases to see how disagreements of this sort impact the justification of the belief that is in question.

Consider this first case, where you and an epistemic peer are asked to recall the name of a common childhood friend’s dog. After reflecting on the matter for a few minutes, you become fairly confident that the dog’s name was Sparky. However, after arriving at this conclusion you learn that your epistemic peer is equally confident that the dog’s name is Parker. Given that you are both equally capable in your ability to recall past memories accurately and that you both have the same evidence at your disposal and that you’ve drawn contrary conclusions, it seems that the most reasonable thing to do in the face of this disagreement is to suspend judgment. In light of the disagreement of your epistemic peer, you should no longer be confident that the dog’s name is Sparky. It is important to note that you also shouldn’t confidently believe that the dog’s name is Parker either. You must confess that you can’t be sure whether the dog’s name is Sparky or Parker or perhaps some other name.

Here’s a second case: you and an epistemic peer are both given an addition problem where you have to sum several eight-digit numbers in one column. You pay careful attention to each step in solving the problem and come to a conclusion that you are confident is correct. When you compare your answer with your peer, however, you discover that your peer has arrived at a different answer where he has worked just as carefully as you have at every step, and he is equally confident that he has arrived at the right answer. It seems that you are no longer

justified in believing that you have the right answer to the problem since your epistemic peer has reached a conclusion that you could have easily drawn. Since you cannot find any reason to prefer your answer to your peer’s, the rational thing to do is to suspend judgment on the matter.

From these cases it seems reasonable to conclude that when we find ourselves in disagreement between an epistemic peer with the same relevant evidence, we lose the rational credibility for the belief that is in dispute. Disagreement of this kind undermines the credibility that a belief would have otherwise possessed. When we realize that someone with the same rational abilities as oneself who is working with the same evidence arrives at a different conclusion, we see that we could have just as easily drawn that conclusion rather than the one we did. Faced with this realization, we should suspend judgment on the matter.

The Problem of Religious Disagreement

From the cases given above, we’ve drawn the general conclusion that when there is a disagreement among epistemic peers with equal evidence, then the parties in the disagreement no longer have good grounds to maintain the rational credibility of what they believe. In other words, the thing to do when faced with disagreement of this sort is to suspend judgment and claim ignorance. If this is right, then religious disagreement poses a serious problem to the rational credibility of religious beliefs. Below, I’ll sketch the basic argument that supports the thesis that religious disagreement leads to skepticism about religious beliefs. Once the argument for the problem of religious disagreement has been clearly stated, I’ll proceed by responding to the problem of religious disagreement.

The Argument

Here is one way to state the problem of religious disagreement:

- (1) For any significant religious belief, there will be an epistemic peer with the same relevant evidence who disagrees with that belief.
- (2) Whenever there is a disagreement over a belief with an epistemic peer who has the same relevant evidence as yourself, then the thing to do is to suspend judgment of the belief in question.

Therefore

- (3) For any significant religious belief, the thing to do is to suspend judgment of the belief in question.

In some form or another, the problem of religious disagreement has appeared compelling to many people. Indeed, this appears to be the reason Jean Bodin, a sixteenth century thinker, claimed, “each [religion] is refuted by all.”⁵ More recently, Richard Feldman has argued that disagreement over religious beliefs implies that the disagreeing parties are no longer rationally justified in believing that one’s own religious beliefs are true.⁶ In the form given above, the argument is *valid*, which means that the *structure* of the argument is such that if the premises are true, then the conclusion cannot be false. So, the crucial issue is whether the argument is *sound*, i.e., in addition to the argument being valid, is it also the case that the premises are true? The first premise seems correct given the diversity of beliefs I find among my friends.⁷ We’ve already examined a prima facie case for the second premise, which appears to be correct. Thus, unless we can find some way to resist the argument, the problem of religious disagreement will undermine the justification of all significant religious beliefs.

⁵ Jean Bodin, *Colloquium Heptaplomeres de rerum sublimium arcanis abditis*, trans. Marion Kuntz (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 256. [This work was written in 1593 but first published in 1857.]

⁶ Feldman, “Reasonable Religious Disagreements.”

⁷ Some have suggested to me that the argument could be made stronger by making the first premise a modal claim, such as “For any significant religious belief, possibly there is an epistemic peer with the same relevant evidence who disagrees with that belief.” This would seem to make the first premise stronger since its truth would only depend on the possibility of there being epistemic peers who disagree with one’s significant religious beliefs. I’ve decided not to put the argument this way because it isn’t clear whether *possible disagreement* constitutes rational grounds for *actual defeat*. Since there is no serious defect in the first premise stated indicatively, I will proceed without entering into the complications of *possible disagreement*.

Fortunately for the rational status of religious belief, the argument from religious disagreement is *unsound*. Below, I’ll argue that the concept of an *epistemic peer* and what counts as having *the same relevant evidence* are more complicated with religious beliefs than the simple cases we saw in the examples given above. In turn, establishing bona fide cases of religious disagreement will not be easily accomplished. My solution to the problem of religious disagreement, as stated above, is to show that there are good reasons for Christians to deny the truth of both premises of the argument. However, to strengthen the case for my solution to the problem of religious disagreement, I will first survey a number of popular answers to this problem that do not adequately answer the skeptical challenge of the argument. In what follows, I am not attempting to provide a decisive refutation of the following inadequate responses. Rather, my aim is to cast initial doubt on them, so that readers are motivated to accept my response.

Inadequate Response 1 — Relativism

One response to the problem of religious disagreement is to claim that in disagreements over religious beliefs, the participants do not actually hold beliefs that are inconsistent. Rather, the appearance of inconsistent religious beliefs is a result of taking the truth-values of religious propositions to be objective. If the truth-values of religious claims are actually relative to those who believe them, then the apparent inconsistency between the parties of an apparent disagreement turns out not to be in any real disagreement after all! This response is called *relativism*. With regard to the problem of religious disagreement, then, one could deny the first premise of the argument and avoid its skeptical consequences.

According to the relativist, when two people seem to disagree over an important religious claim, such as that “Jesus is the Son of God,” the appearance of disagreement is only superficial.

The person who affirms the proposition *really means* that “Jesus is the Son of God *is true for me.*” Similarly, the relativist maintains that the one who does not affirm the proposition *really means* that “Jesus is the Son of God *is not true for me.*” Since the truth-value of the proposition will depend on the *believer*, it follows that there is no real disagreement or inconsistency. Both are right! For the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God, it is true for that person.

Likewise, the one who denies that Jesus is the Son of God also believes a true proposition. So, by accepting that the truth-values of religious claims are relative, the argument from religious disagreement appears to be neutralized.

While it is difficult to find philosophers who endorse this sort of relativism today,⁸ there is no doubt that for many non-academics the relativist option is often endorsed when faced with the problem of religious disagreement. And let’s face it, relativism seems like an agreeable solution to the problem of religious disagreement because in the end everyone’s religious claims turn out to be true, and we don’t have to break the bad news to anyone that the religious claims he believes are false or held irrationally. If relativism were a viable option, it seems at least for the problem of religious disagreement, it would be the best way to have one’s cake and eat it too.

Despite the apparent benefits of embracing relativism, it is probably the most intellectually untenable solution to the problem of religious disagreement. The reason for this is that the majority of significant religious claims are objective propositions, whereas the relativist makes the truth of religious propositions to depend on the psychology of the believer. Consider, for example, the significant religious claim that “Jesus died on the cross for our sins.” The truth-

⁸ For a possible candidate of a scholar who endorses relativism for religious beliefs see the works of Joseph Runzo, such as *Reason, Relativism and God* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986) and Runzo, “God Commitment, and Other Faiths: Pluralism vs. Relativism,” *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988): 343-64. See, however, John Hick, “A Concluding Comment,” *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988): 449-455, and especially Phillip Quinn, “Religious Pluralism and Religious Relativism” in *Relativism and Religion*, ed. Charles M. Lewis (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), pp. 35-51, for an interpretation of Runzo’s work as a form of *pluralism*. For a recent refutation of relativist epistemologies see Paul Boghossion, *Fear of Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

value of this proposition cannot be determined entirely by the psychological states of the believer, if for no other reason than its truth depends on the actual actions of a man who lived in the first century. If Jesus didn't exist or if Jesus existed but didn't die on a cross, then the proposition that “Jesus died on the cross for our sins” is false no matter the psychological states of the one who believes it is true. All the fervor, passion, and good intentions of a believer today cannot provide sufficient grounding for the truth of a proposition that is about events that took place in history.

For another example, consider the religious proposition that “God exists.” Typically those who believe this claim are asserting an alleged fact about the world. They are not making reports about their own psychology. In philosophical jargon we'd say that the truth-conditions for the proposition that “God exists” do not in any way depend on whether or how firmly that proposition is believed. “God exists,” if it is true, would be true even if no one believed that it were true. The relativist, however, must provide truth-conditions for claims like “God exists” that depend in some way on the person who believes it to be true. But this is absurd. Suppose only one person has ever existed and that one day he comes to believe that God exists. According to the relativist, this means that at this time the claims that “God exists” is true for him. Does this mean that God suddenly pops into existence because of this man's belief in God? Then, imagine what would happen if he changes his mind and now believes that God does not exist (he reasons that God would not create a man to live such a desolate life). If relativism is true, this implies that now the proposition that “God does not exist” is true for him. But does this change in belief cause God to cease to exist? The correct and obvious answer is *no*. The beliefs (or any other psychological states) about our lonely man do not cause God to exist or not to exist. Indeed, this shows that certain religious propositions like “God exists” purportedly make claims

about reality whose truth is independent of the thoughts of the believer.⁹

I would like to offer one final consideration to show that relativism is an unacceptable solution to the problem of religious disagreement. While we may recognize a certain set of religions that could plausibly be true (such as Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism), there are clearly some religious claims that we all would take to be untenable because they are plainly false. For example, if someone (let’s call him Ted) were to tell you that he believed that God was an invisible hedgehog who sent him on a mission to consume large amounts of licorice to save the planet from being destroyed by a comet made of rainbows, you would rightly think that Ted—no matter how sincerely he held to his belief—believed a false proposition. Of course, once you admit that Ted’s religious claim is false, you’ve given up relativism; you’ve conceded that the truth-value of one religious proposition is not relative to the believer. Since it would be ludicrous to accept that Ted’s claim is true *in any sense*, and relativism would imply that there is some sense in which Ted’s claim is true, we cannot endorse relativism as a way out of the problem of religious disagreement.

Inadequate Response 2 — Pluralism

Another inadequate response to the problem of religious disagreement is to take the position of *religious pluralism*. Put crudely, religious pluralism maintains that different religions are the result of different experiences or manifestations of the same divine reality. Many people have turned to religious pluralism as a response to the problem of disagreement. Robert J. Miller, for example, grew up believing in traditional Catholicism, but in graduate school he encountered epistemic peers who were not responsive to the same evidence that he thought was

⁹ For an instructive popular explanation of the objectivity of claims about God, see William Lane Craig, “Are there Objective Truths about God?” (2007), online at: <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=5342>.

convincing proof that Christianity is uniquely true. Notice how Miller describes the role of disagreement in his change of mind:

This mind-set [that Christianity is uniquely true] held together until I went to graduate school at secular universities and got to know people who had different religions. For the first time in my life, I got to know people who took other religions as seriously as I took mine. I knew these people were well educated and highly rational, and I could tell from our arguments that they were sincere.... It took several years, but gradually I accepted the fact that informed, intelligent, sincere, and spiritual people are almost never persuaded by apologetics to change their core beliefs.¹⁰

Today, Miller is a member of the Jesus Seminar, a group of about 150 New Testament revisionists who are best known for voting with colored beads to cast judgment on the historical accuracy of the words and actions of Jesus as reported in the Gospels. Like most of the members of the Jesus Seminar, Miller does not accept that the historical Jesus miraculously rose from the dead. He does not believe that Christianity provides the only means of God’s revelation or salvation. Due to the problem of religious disagreement, Miller has abandoned his traditional Catholic faith for a more pluralistic understanding of religion.

Let’s look more closely at what religious pluralism is. John Hick is one of the most formidable advocates for religious pluralism.¹¹ Hick models his account of religious pluralism roughly on Immanuel Kant’s epistemology. Kant believed that each person’s experience of the world is mediated and interpreted through innate categories of one’s mind. One’s subjective experience of the world is called *phenomena*. Kant referred to the world as it is in itself, or as it is independent of one’s mind, as the *noumena*. The *noumena* is unknowable to humans because the human experience of the *noumena* is inherently laden with the categories of one’s mind and perspective. As a result, there will be many differing *phenomenal* representations of the same *noumenal* reality.

¹⁰ Robert J. Miller, “What do the Stories About the Resurrection(s) Prove?” in *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?* ed. Paul Copan (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), p. 87.

¹¹ John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

Similarly, Hick holds that different religions are diverse expressions or responses to the same divine reality. Since God is infinitely transcendent and the real essence of the divine is unknowable, Hick claims that it is possible for many different religions to represent different perspectives of the same divine reality. For example, Hick claims that Yahweh, Vishnu, Sivu, the Holy Trinity, and Allah are “*personae* of the Real, each jointly formed by its universal presence to humanity and by the particular conceptualities and spiritual practices of the different religious traditions.”¹² If Hick is correct, then we can escape the problem of religious disagreement by denying the first premise. In other words, if religious pluralism is true, then the appearance of disagreement is the consequence of our inherently perspectival and limited experience of God or the divine reality. “The Kantian-type hypothesis addresses the problem of the conflicting truth-claims of different religions,” explains Hick, “by the proposal that they do not in fact conflict because they are claims about different manifestations of the Real to different faith communities.”¹³

Pluralism may appear to be a more sophisticated way for multiple sets of religious propositions to be true (in comparison to relativism). But on closer inspection, pluralism ultimately requires every religion to abandon its core beliefs. Consider the sense in which (a) the Christian’s claim that God is triune and (b) the Muslim’s claim that God is not triune are understood to be true by the pluralist. These claims are both true, on the pluralist model, insofar as they are both inadequate, non-literal expressions of the divine reality to which neither claim can be accurately applied. In other words, they are both taken to be true accounts of one’s experience of the divine, but neither statement is *really* a true description of the actual divine reality. Clark Pinnock criticizes pluralism because it “asks Muslims, in effect, to deny that the

¹² John Hick, “Religious Pluralism” in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, eds. Charles Taliaferro and Philip L. Quinn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 612.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Koran is central to God’s purposes. It asks Jews to deny that God spoke definitively through Moses. It asks Christians to deny that Jesus is the Incarnation of God in history.”¹⁴ In essence, pluralism can allow fundamentally different religious claims to be true (in the sense that they are true of each religion’s understanding of God) only if these claims are not taken to be actually true of the divine reality itself. By altering the nature in which all of the central propositions of all the major religions are understood to be true, we see that pluralism requires each religion to change so radically that we no longer recognize each religion once the pluralist is done with it. Ironically pluralism destroys each religion in an attempt to save them all.

Pluralism does not adequately respond to the problem of religious disagreement for another reason—it implies total skepticism for our beliefs about God or the divine reality.¹⁵ Recall that the problem posed by religious disagreement is that it entailed skepticism for all of our religious beliefs. The problem with pluralism is that even if it were true, then we would have no grounds for believing that any of our religious beliefs are true. Since any account of the divine reality cannot truly describe the divine reality as it is in itself, then, we should come to doubt that any claims about God or the divine reality are true. Like pulling a cork from one hole in a ship’s hull in order to plug another, religious pluralism avoids the skeptical consequences of the problem from religious disagreement, but at the expense of endorsing a view where the nature of God is ultimately unknowable. Consequently, religious pluralism loses its motivation as a solution to the problem of disagreement.

¹⁴ Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God’s Mercy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. 70.

¹⁵ Several colleagues have urged me to exercise caution in pressing this problem because Hick’s Kantian approach to religion is quite complicated and difficult to interpret. This is undoubtedly true. However, I would remind my readers that I am not trying to demonstrate that these alternative solutions to religious disagreement fail outright. Rather, I am trying to cast initial doubt on them in order to show that my solution is in some sense simpler or more plausible. My criticisms for Hick’s approach seems appropriate gauged for this more modest goal. To the extent that a fully developed account of Hick’s views might avoid this problem also shows how it is more complicated and less plausible to accept.

Inadequate Response 3 — Redefining Rationality

Another inadequate response to the problem of religious disagreement is to redefine the traditional standards of rationality such that reasonable religious belief does not require supporting evidence or reasons. Interestingly, this approach has recently attracted a number of traditional Christians, such as conservative Catholics and evangelical Christians (among others). The basic strategy behind this approach is to provide a different understanding of reasonable belief, specifically one that permits one to have a rational belief even when one does not necessarily possess any reasons or evidence to think one’s belief is true. The second premise of the argument from disagreement is motivated by the assumption that a belief is held reasonably by being correctly proportioned to one’s evidence for that belief. If the traditional standard for reasonable belief were incorrect, this would provide a way out of the argument from disagreement.

In the case of reasonable religious belief, the most prominent statement for this sort of change is the position that has become known as Reformed epistemology. Kelly Clark describes Reformed epistemology as a position that denies “constantly proportioning belief to the evidence” and one that involves a “complete rethinking of the very concept of rationality.”¹⁶ Elsewhere, he explains, “It is the position of Reformed epistemology ... that belief in God ... does not require the support of evidence or argument in order for it to be rational.”¹⁷ Alvin Plantinga, one of the most significant proponents of Reformed epistemology, states unequivocally that one can rationally accept the core beliefs of Christianity such that God exists, that Jesus is the Son of God who died on the cross for our sins, that the Bible is God’s revelation, and so on without having any good evidence or reasons that make these beliefs likely to be

¹⁶ Kelly James Clark, *Return to Reason* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 8.

¹⁷ Kelly James Clark, “Reformed Epistemology Apologetics” in *Five Views on Apologetics*, eds. Steven B. Cowan and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), p. 267.

true.¹⁸ Clearly part of the project of Reformed epistemology is not merely to propose a modified account of rationality; it is a radical departure from the traditional understanding of rational belief.

So, it is clear that Reformed epistemologists reject the traditional notion of rational belief. In fact, some Reformed epistemologists have dropped the word “justification” from their work altogether since it signifies the traditional concept of rationality, and prefer to use words like “warrant” or “positive epistemic status” to denote the new kind of rationality they have in mind.¹⁹ In place of the traditional understanding of rationality, Reformed epistemologists maintain that beliefs are considered warranted in virtue of the kind of way they are produced. In particular, warranted beliefs are those that are produced in a way that accords with *proper function*. Crudely stated, a belief is produced in a properly functioning way when the belief is produced by a cognitive faculty successfully aimed at producing true beliefs, operating in the environment for which it was designed. Thus, when a belief satisfies the conditions of being produced in a properly functioning way, it is warranted.²⁰

According to Reformed epistemologists, warranted religious beliefs are those that are produced by a properly functioning process. On this account, arriving at religious beliefs by making appropriate inferences from one’s evidence *could* provide a warranted way to form those beliefs. However, Reformed epistemologists believe that most ordinary people’s religious beliefs are produced immediately without any evidential basis, and that when these immediately formed beliefs are produced in a way that accords with proper function, their religious beliefs are

¹⁸ Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁹ See Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 3-5. A notable exception is Michael Bergmann, *Justification without Awareness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), who aims to provide an analysis of justification in terms of proper function.

²⁰ This is a very rough sketch of the necessary conditions for a belief to be warranted. In addition to some refinements on the conditions for proper function, there is also typically a “no defeaters” clause. I have spared these details for the sake of brevity. For those interested in the details, see Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) and Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*.

warranted.²¹ Beliefs produced by a properly functioning process are warranted unless one encounters an argument that undermines the legitimacy of the belief. In cases of religious disagreement, claim Reformed epistemologists, a warranted belief maintains its positive epistemic status because disagreement with one’s peers does not indicate that one has not formed the belief in a properly functioning way; it may only indicate that one’s peers haven’t been in a position to produce the belief in a properly functioning way. Kelly Clark suggests this sort of strategy for handling the problem of religious disagreement:

[O]n a starry night Theodore is overcome with the conviction that God created all this and that when he descends to the flatland he is met by disagreement from his intellectual peers. It seems that initially Theodore is justified in his belief in God. The question is, Why would the fact of disagreement contradict that justification? Why would other people’s not being inclined to accept belief in God undermine Theodore’s right to believe without a good argument? ... Surely the existence of disagreement by his intellectual peers does not discredit his belief. Theodore will probably believe that his intellectual peers disagree because they were not in the same situation; they did not have the same experience.²²

It is crucial to keep in mind that in Clark’s example, Theodore is not inferring the existence of a divine creator by an argument from design, beauty, or religious experience. Rather, his belief is spontaneously produced by his cognitive faculties working in the right way and the environment being just right to cause those faculties to produce that belief. If asked what evidence or reasons he has for his belief, Theodore would say that he has none; from Theodore’s perspective it is merely a firm conviction of his. Of course, given that his friends have no arguments against his belief (they disagree with equally firm convictions, but they have no evidence or reasons either), he has no reason to doubt his belief is true.

I would like to propose two reasons to avoid Reformed epistemology as an answer to the

²¹ For details see Clark, “Reformed Epistemology in Apologetics,” pp. 271-73, Plantinga *Warranted Christian Belief*, pp. 175-77, and W. Jay Wood, *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), pp. 162-65.

²² Clark, *Return to Reason*, p. 152.

problem of religious disagreement. The first reason is that the traditional account of reasonable belief carries very strong intuitive plausibility. We do not have the space to evaluate the various reasons Reformed epistemologists offer for abandoning the traditional view of rationality. Nonetheless, it should seem odd to allow contentious claims (some that involve historical events) to be held rationally even when the believer has no reason or evidence whatsoever to think that these beliefs are true. The notion that reasonable belief should be understood in terms of proportioning the belief to one’s evidence is exceptionally compelling—some might even think it is true by definition. Unless we have exceptionally strong misgivings about the traditional account of rationality, we shouldn’t give it up so easily.

The second reason Reformed epistemology isn’t an adequate response to the problem of religious disagreement is that it offers no resolution to the apparent disagreement from the subject’s perspective, the perspective of the person holding the belief. When you and an epistemic peer hold contrary religious beliefs, it might be the case that one of you has produced the belief in a properly functioning way and the other hasn’t, but how do you know that your belief is produced in a properly functioning way? If your religion is true, then you might think that it is highly likely that God would have provided a properly functioning way for you to form that belief. Of course, your peer could say something similar—if he is right, then it is highly likely that his belief has been formed by a warranted process. The result is that Reformed epistemology only provides a conditional answer to the problem of disagreement: my belief is produced by a properly functioning way *only if* my belief is true.²³ When faced with an

²³ For confirmation of this point, see Plantinga “Reformed Epistemology” in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Charles Taliaferro and Philip L. Quinn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 388-89, and Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 285. Nate King reminds me, however, that Plantinga has defended the rationality of accepting the exclusivity of the Christian faith in some of his writings that do not rely on redefining rationality, which works with the traditional concept of rationality. For example, see Alvin Plantinga, “Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism,” in *The Rationality of Belief and the Plurality of Faith* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 191-215.

epistemic peer who disagrees with our central religious beliefs, we want some assurance from our perspective that our belief is true or reasonable to hold. Reformed epistemology does not offer any such assurance.

Inadequate Response 4 — Skepticism

The final inadequate response to the problem of religious disagreement that I will consider is the one endorsed by Feldman, which is to accept the argument and admit that religious disagreement from one’s peers implies that all of our significant religious beliefs are not held rationally. To accept the soundness of the argument from religious disagreement is to concede that one must suspend judgment and be agnostic about all of one’s significant religious beliefs, but accepting the argument from religious disagreement may have other unwanted implications as well.

Since I will offer more direct reasons not to accept the argument from religious disagreement in the next section, my discussion here will be short. Before one is willing to accept the argument, I think it is important to realize that the argument from disagreement could be used to imply skepticism for a large set of important beliefs. Consider, for example, all the sorts of beliefs where it appears as if we have epistemic peers with the same relevant evidence who disagree with us. This sort of disagreement exists not only for our religious beliefs, but also for many of our significant moral beliefs, political beliefs, and scientific beliefs. Almost all of our philosophical beliefs (such as whether we have free will, whether the mind is reducible to the body, what conditions must be met for a person to have knowledge) seem to meet the same kind of disagreement that exists with religious beliefs. Given the similarity of the sort of disagreement we find with our religious beliefs to these other kinds of beliefs, it seems that if there is no way out of the problem for our religious beliefs, then all of these other beliefs are

likely doomed to meet a similar fate. This consideration does not show that the skeptical conclusion of the argument from religious disagreement is incorrect, but it does provide a motive for searching fervently for a way out before acquiescing to widespread agnosticism.

There is a similar problem that you must deal with if you give in to the argument from religious disagreement. What are you going to do if you have an epistemic peer with the same relevant evidence who disagrees about the soundness of the argument from disagreement? At this point do you continue to accept the argument from disagreement or not? If in the light of this disagreement you no longer find the argument from religious disagreement compelling, then you no longer have a reason to be agnostic about your religious beliefs (at least you have no reason to do so on the basis of disagreement). If, however, you continue to suspend judgment on your religious beliefs and you do not suspend judgment on the soundness of the argument from disagreement, then you are being inconsistent in your application of the second premise of the argument. This reveals that consistently accepting the argument from disagreement may be very difficult. In the above case, one can have consistent beliefs either by not suspending judgment in both cases because of the disagreement of peers or by suspending judgment in all relevant cases where there is disagreement with one’s peers. In fact, it is well-known among philosophers that some ancient philosophers employed arguments based on disagreement to try to show that all of our beliefs lack justification.²⁴ Once again, I want to stress that this consideration doesn’t show that the argument from disagreement is unsound. Rather, given the widespread skeptical consequences that seem to follow from it, we should not glibly endorse the argument from religious disagreement.

An Answer to the Problem of Religious Disagreement

²⁴ For details see Markus Lamménranta, “The Pyrrhonian Problematic,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Skepticism*, ed. Paul K. Moser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 9-37.

As we’ve already seen, when evaluating the argument from disagreement, the stakes are high. The justification for our most significant religious beliefs is on the line. Perhaps one might take comfort in supposing that even if one’s religious beliefs are not rationally justified, it would still be pragmatically useful or reasonable on a cost-benefit analysis to bet on one’s religious beliefs being true. These practical rejoinders are, perhaps, preferable to complete agnosticism, but it would be better to answer the problem of religious disagreement in a way that allows for the possibility of having rationally justified religious beliefs. In this sense I mean to say that we do not merely want to claim that it is more useful to accept a certain set of religious beliefs rather than not to do so. Instead, we seek an answer to the problem of religious disagreement such that we are justified in believing that our religious beliefs are true in virtue of the evidence or reasons available to us.

Following Richard Fumerton,²⁵ I think we can recognize three cases where one can encounter disagreement without losing justification, which include when (1) we have good reason to believe that we have a different and better evidence base than the person with whom we disagree; (2) we have good reason to believe that we have engaged a common evidence base more successfully than the person with whom we disagree; or (3) we have good reason to believe that the person with whom we disagree is cognitively defective. The first way stops the argument from religious disagreement by showing that premise one can be false in some instances—thereby showing that the parties in the disagreement have different evidence. Both the second and third ways of responding to the argument from disagreement allow one to deny the second premise in certain circumstances, which shows that sometimes we are justified in holding our beliefs when confronted with epistemic peers with the same evidence. Below, I will

²⁵ Richard Fumerton, “You Can’t Trust a Philosopher” in *Disagreement*, eds. Richard Feldman and Ted Warfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

look at the prospects of maintaining justified religious beliefs in the face of disagreement using these criteria.

Different and Better Evidence

The first way to remain justified in the face of disagreement is when one has different and better evidence than the person who is voicing the disagreement. One reason to think that someone might have different and better evidence in the case of religious beliefs is that one source of evidence for some significant religious beliefs are private religious experiences. Even though people with different purported religious experiences can disagree on the basis of their respective experiences, it isn't clear that we should consider both parties to have the *same* relevant evidence. Consider, for example, a man and a woman arguing about which experience is more painful: a woman's childbirth or a man's passing a kidney stone. While each person has access to his or her own pain experiences, neither person has access to the other person's experience of pain. Furthermore, it is clear that each person's experience is of a different *kind* of pain. In this case, then, we should say that each person's disagreement fails to fit the relevant pattern for the sort of situation where disagreement undermines one's justification because both people have good reasons to think that they have significantly different evidence from the other. This illustrates how one's justification for a belief in cases where one's evidence is some sort of unique personal experience is untouched by disagreement because there is good reason to believe that the evidence is not the same for both parties in the disagreement.

Similar considerations apply to the case of religious experiences. For example, suppose that Jane is a Christian who in a time of devout prayer experiences the presence of God in vivid and powerful way. Compare that to a Rastafarian, Bob, who claims to have a religious experience after smoking a lot of marijuana, but Bob's experience is much weaker than Jane's; it

is not a veridical experience at all. Although Bob may think that his alleged religious experience is evidentially equal to Jane’s, I would contend that it is not. The character of Jane’s experience is better evidence for her religious belief than Bob’s experience is for his belief. From Jane’s perspective, however, she does not know that Bob has had a significantly impoverished religious experience. Suppose Jane and Bob were to discuss the differences in their religious beliefs and that they cited their religious experiences as their primary evidence, what should Jane do?

I think the reasonable thing for Jane to do at this point is to recognize that she has no access at all to the character of Bob’s religious experiences. She has no good reason to think that Bob’s religious experience equals the evidential potency of her experience. Yet, she does know the vivid and powerful character of her religious experience. When her experience has a compelling veridical character and she has no access to the evidential character of Bob’s, she is justified in holding her religious belief in the face of Bob’s disagreement. Therefore, Bob’s disagreement does not undermine the evidential support that she possesses in virtue of her religious experience. Due to the private nature of religious experiences (and their counterfeits), we are not able to compare the evidential quality of different supposed religious experiences. In this way, Jane can reasonably maintain her belief on the grounds that the kind of evidence she possesses for her religious belief is different from Bob’s.

There is another reason to think that having the same evidence may not be the case when there is religious disagreement. Acquiring certain kinds of evidence for significant religious beliefs might necessarily involve having a certain character or volition. More specifically, one’s character and volition are important features for possessing the same epistemic vantage point with regard to many Christian beliefs because beliefs about God are beliefs about a person. When acquiring information about a person, the extent of your evidence about the person is up to

him to disclose it to you. If God were merely some artifact or impersonal force, then one would correctly assume that all the relevant evidence for God would be equally available to any seekers with the same intellectual capacities. In that case, the acquisition of evidence would rest entirely on the agency of the seeker. However, when the object of inquiry is another person, then, the amount of information one will have depends significantly on the person’s willingness to divulge it.

In the case of Christianity, there is good reason to suppose that God would not reveal the same information to all people regardless of their character and will. Paul Moser has recently championed this approach to knowing God in his book, *The Elusive God*.²⁶ Moser emphasizes that we should not expect God to provide “spectator evidence,” which is evidence that shows something to be true without requiring believers to align their wills to the source of the evidence. Rather, God would provide “authoritative evidence,” which is evidence that requires believers to align their wills to the source of the evidence.²⁷ Thus, the manner and amount of evidence that God discloses to any person will depend on the extent that the person is willing to submit to God as Lord. Although one might think that God is obligated to provide compelling evidence to everyone in order to make everyone believe in him, this does not follow. Since God desires people to recognize Him as Lord and follow Him willingly, it would defeat God’s intention for Him to cause someone to believe in Him and submit to His will coercively.²⁸

So, there are at least two sorts of cases of religious disagreement where Christians can deflect the force of the disagreement by appealing to having different and better evidence. First is when a veridical religious experience is the primary source of evidence. And second occurs

²⁶ Paul K. Moser, *The Elusive God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2008).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

²⁸ For more on the problem of divine hiddenness, see Moser, *The Elusive God*, pp. 105-113, and the essays in Daniel Howard-Snyder and Moser and Paul Moser, eds., *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

when one’s access to the relevant evidence depends on the character and volition of the believer.

Reason to Think We’ve Better Engaged the Same Evidence

A second way to remain justified in one’s belief when faced with disagreement is to have some reasons for thinking that one has better engaged the same evidence that is being commonly used by the person with whom one is disagreeing. Consider, for example, that you and a friend are considering a logic puzzle that has one determinate solution. Even though you and your friend may have been introduced to the puzzle at the same time, and although you may also have the same relevant background knowledge to respond to it, nonetheless once you see the solution to the puzzle, your friend’s disagreement will do nothing to move you from doubting the conclusion you’ve reached. Since you see the solution and understand how your solution works, you are in a position to dismiss your friend’s disagreement because you can see that you have done a better job at engaging the same evidence. The fact that your friend disagrees only shows you that he has not engaged the same evidence as well as you have.

Something analogous to the disagreement described above can occur in almost any situation where there are beliefs that involve long and complex chains of reasoning. Even though the relevant evidence is available to both parties in a disagreement, sometimes one person is in a position to see that he has engaged the evidence in a better way. Usually when this occurs the person who has engaged the evidence in a better way sees how the evidence could mislead the other to accept the wrong conclusion.

In cases of reasonable religious beliefs, there are often a series of complex chains of reasoning that may require paying careful attention to one’s evidence and how to reason from that evidence to the conclusion. For example, in Richard Swinburne’s cumulative case for the

existence of the Christian God,²⁹ one must carefully assess the mounting justification that jointly supports his conclusion. For those who see the strength of the cumulative case, they can often see how others might be misled to think the argument does not succeed. Perhaps they can see how an epistemic peer might incorrectly assess the argument due to basic, yet alluring, mistakes in figuring the weight of various probabilistic pieces of evidences. In this situation, if an epistemic peer rejects the argument by falling into one of these sorts of mistakes, then those who understand the argument and have engaged the same evidence in a better way are in no position to lose their justification for the significant religious belief they have reached from that evidence. I believe this sort of misunderstanding is often at the root of religious disagreement, for it comes into play not only in assessing one’s reasons for the claim that God exists, but it would equally apply to claims such as that God is a Trinity or that Jesus is the Son of God or that Jesus bodily rose from the dead, as well as many others.³⁰ So, the rationality of significant religious beliefs can be maintained in cases where one person has a reason to believe that he has reasoned better from the same evidence as the person with whom he disagrees.

Cognitive Defects

The final way that one can reasonably maintain one’s significant religious belief in the face of disagreement is by having good reasons for thinking that persons with whom one disagrees have a cognitive defect. In line with Fumerton’s description,³¹ I will understand a cognitive defect as a sort of defect that can affect one’s ability to assess properly one’s evidence

²⁹ Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2d. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

³⁰ Of course, the success of this response relies on the rational credibility of arguments that support Christianity, which I think suits this response. It is beyond the purview of this essay to argue for this point, but for those who are interested in sophisticated arguments for the rationality of Christianity, I would recommend the following sources as a place to begin: Swinburne, *Existence of God*; Douglas Groothuis and James Sennett, eds., *In Defense of Natural Theology: A Post-Humean Assessment* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005); William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

³¹ Fumerton, “You Can’t Trust a Philosopher.”

such as bias, wishful thinking, stubbornness, and intellectual competitiveness. When one has good reason to believe that the disagreement of one’s peer is the result of a cognitive defect, then the disagreement does not significantly impact one’s justification for holding the belief in question.

I’d like to present one case where a cognitive defect occurs that plausibly is not too infrequent among those who reject Christianity. The cognitive defect I have in mind is the fear of accepting God’s moral authority on one’s life. Since the truth of Christianity implies that an individual is not the ultimate authority for his own life, many non-Christians have rejected Christianity on the grounds that they want to believe that they are the ultimate authority of their lives.³² While I want to be clear that I don’t think that this sort of cognitive defect plagues everyone who rejects Christianity, it would be far-fetched to suppose that it never affects those who disbelieve it. One reason for thinking that this cognitive defect has impacted non-Christians is that many of them have confessed to it themselves! For example, in chapter fourteen of *Surprised by Joy*, C. S. Lewis described his pre-Christian state of mind this way, “I had always wanted, above all things, not to be ‘interfered with.’ I had wanted (mad wish) ‘to call my soul my own.’”³³ In a revealing and honest passage of *The Last Word*, Thomas Nagel (a prominent contemporary philosopher) explains that he fears the possibility that God exists:

In speaking of the fear of religion, . . . I am talking about something much deeper—namely, the fear of religion itself. I speak from experience, being strongly subject to this fear myself: I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn’t just that I don’t believe in God and, naturally, hope that I’m right in my belief. It’s that I hope that there is no God! I don’t want there to be a God; I don’t want the universe to be like that.³⁴

³² For more on the “cosmic authority problem” and how it has impacted beliefs in a cognitively defective way, see J. P. Moreland, *Consciousness and the Existence of God* (New York: Routledge, 2008), ch. 9.

³³ C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955), p. 228.

³⁴ Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 130.

In this passage, Nagel is clearly expressing his fear that God exists, and how this truth would go against the way he would like the world to be. Nagel is not alone. Some of my friends who are atheists have confessed similar fears to me in moments of honest reflection and candor. Responding to the aforementioned passage, Moser explains how the fear of God typified in Nagel’s words reflects a cognitive defect: “Nagel’s position illustrates, if unintentionally, that some human attitudes towards God’s existence aren’t purely cognitive in their origin and sustenance, even if we pretend otherwise in some philosophical discussion. A human quest for moral independence sometimes looms large behind such important attitudes, and obstructs purposely available authoritative evidence of divine reality.”³⁵

Of course, it is often difficult to surmise whether another person is in the grips of a cognitive defect of this sort, and I don’t recommend presuming that one’s interlocutor has this sort of cognitive defect without adequate evidence. How would one acquire such evidence? If you are close friends with the person with whom you are disagreeing, one way is to ask your friend respectfully and trust that you will get an honest answer. There may be other ways to determine whether a cognitive defect is to blame for the disagreement. For instance, one time after extensively debating the Cosmological Argument for God’s existence with a friend who was an atheist, he confessed that he saw no flaw in the argument and admitted that it established the existence of God. Yet, he still refused to believe that there is a God. In this sort of case, I think one is justified in concluding that a cognitive defect is to blame for the unbeliever’s stubbornness. And when you really think about it, given what is at stake in disagreements over significant religious beliefs, it shouldn’t surprise us that cognitive defects of this sort are often at

³⁵ Moser, *Elusive God*, p. 257.

work.³⁶

There is a final concern that naturally arises when considering cognitive defects that are at play in religious disagreements—namely, how am I to know that I am not in the grips of a cognitive defect? Perhaps the best advice is to probe one’s own reasons for holding one’s religious beliefs candidly. This, of course, is not a foolproof test, but it may be the best we can do. Epistemology is an enterprise that is undertaken from the first-person perspective. While our own desires are not always transparent to us, it is still true that the best we can do is work from the information that is available to us from our perspective. I think this is the moral that Fumerton draws in the following passage:

I do know how I reason better than I know how others reason. It is important to keep firmly in mind that in the final analysis there really is no alternative to the egocentric perspective. Even when my discoveries about what others believe defeat the justification I had prior to those discoveries, it is *my* discoveries that are doing the defeating. I can only use the discovery of disagreement to weaken my justification insofar as I trust *my* reasoning. Without such trust, there is no access even to what others believe. That is not to deny that trust in my reasoning ability can turn on itself—can lead me to doubt the very faculties that I trust. But when that hasn’t happened, and when I can’t understand exactly what is going on in the minds of others, I’ll always turn back to the reasoning I understand best—my own.³⁷

While we may not be able to know beyond a doubt whether we are afflicted with a cognitive defect, we can search our hearts and souls for the motivations and reasons we have for holding our significant religious beliefs. Once we have honestly examined ourselves and see no reason to think we have a cognitive defect and we do find reasons to justify our significant religious beliefs, I think we have no other choice but to proceed using the reasons that are most

³⁶ Once again, I don’t want to give the impression that all Christians are immune to similar cognitive defects all the time. It seems very plausible to me that some theists when faced with the problem of evil have demonstrated that they have a cognitive defect that is similar to the atheist I described in this paragraph. This observation, however, does not weaken my general point that when one recognizes that one’s religious disagreement is with someone with a cognitive defect, it does not diminish one’s justification for the religious belief in question.

³⁷ Fumerton, “You Can’t Trust a Philosopher.”

evident from one’s own perspective.³⁸

Concluding Thoughts

In wrapping up this essay, perhaps it is a good idea for me to be clear about what I have *not* tried to show in this essay. I am not trying to argue that all disagreements over significant religious beliefs are unaffected by disagreement. There is little doubt in my mind that there are many instances where disagreement does undermine one’s justification for holding a significant religious belief. My goal has been much more modest and realistic. I’ve tried to show that the argument from religious disagreement does not undermine all significant religious beliefs. While there may be many religious beliefs that will lose justification when confronted with disagreement, the important point I’ve labored to establish is that there are some cases where Christians have the resources to prevent disagreement from undermining their justification.

Secondly, I have not intended to argue that all disagreements that take place between Christians and non-Christians are necessarily resolved by vindicating the Christian’s belief. Christians are vulnerable to epistemic flaws too, and nothing I have written should suggest otherwise. What I have argued is that in certain circumstances it is possible for Christians to maintain their justified religious beliefs when faced with disagreement. In short, nothing in this essay implies that there are general considerations that show Christians are always justified in holding their religious beliefs in the face of disagreement. To the contrary, I have argued how to use principles to assess on a case by case basis whether or not a Christian can remain justified in holding a significant religious belief when confronted with disagreement. Whether the Christian

³⁸ If this line of inquiry is pressed to its furthest extent, we will be forced to confront the problem of skepticism (how can I be sure any of my beliefs are really justified?). Obviously, answering such a momentous question is beyond the scope of this essay. Assuming that there is an answer to the problem of skepticism, I am confident that given enough time and reflection we can have justified beliefs about one’s own motivations and reasons for holding significant religious beliefs.

is justified in such instances will depend on the details of the given case.

Nonetheless this essay has embarked to establish some important truths. In a time when our awareness of other religious beliefs is more apparent and unavoidable than ever, the lure of the argument from religious disagreement can be exceptionally tempting. The point of this essay has been to show that the argument from religious disagreement does not succeed as a general refutation for all justified religious beliefs. Furthermore, I’ve supplied a number of reasons that are available for Christians to consider as a response to religious disagreements. In light of these important truths, I hope everyone will have more confidence to engage others in serious conversation without fear of facing disagreement and live in accordance of Ephesians 4:14-15 (NASB), “we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into ... Christ.”³⁹

³⁹ I would like to thank Brett Coppenger, Nate King, and Jonah Schupbach for the critical comments they gave me on earlier drafts of this paper, which helped improve the paper significantly.

Works Cited

- Bergmann, Michael. *Justification without Awareness: A Defense of Epistemic Externalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Bodin, Jean. *Colloquium Heptaplomeres de rerum sublimium arcanis abditis*. Translated by Marion Kuntz. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975. [This work was written in 1593 but first published in 1857.]
- Boghossian, Paul. *Fear of Knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Clark, Kelly James. *Return to Reason*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.
- Clark, Kelly James. “Reformed Epistemology Apologetics.” In *Five Views on Apologetics*. Edited by Steven B. Cowan and Stanley N. Gundry. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000. Pp. 266-284.
- Craig, William Lane. “Are there Objective Truths about God?” 2007. Online at: <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=5342>
- Craig, William Lane and J. P. Moreland, eds. *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- Feldman, Richard. “Epistemological Puzzles About Disagreement.” In *Epistemology Futures*. Edited by Stephen Hetherington. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. Pp. 216-236.
- Feldman, Richard. “Reasonable Religious Disagreements.” In *Philosophers Without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*. Edited by Louise Antony. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Pp. 194-214.
- Feldman, Richard and Ted Warfield, eds. *Disagreement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming.
- Fumerton, Richard. “You Can’t Trust a Philosopher.” In *Disagreement*. Edited by Richard Feldman and Ted Warfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming.
- Groothuis, Douglas and James F. Sennett, eds. *In Defense of Natural Theology: A Post-Humean Assessment*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005.
- Hick, John. “A Concluding Comment.” *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988): 449-455.
- Hick, John. *An Interpretation of Religion*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989.
- Hick, John. “Religious Pluralism.” In *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*. Edited by Charles Taliaferro and Philip L. Quinn. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999. Pp. 607-14.

Howard-Snyder, Daniel and Paul K. Moser, eds. *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Kelly, Thomas. “The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement.” In *Oxford Studies in Epistemology*. Volume 1, edited Tamar Szabo Gendler and John Hawthorne. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Pp.167-196.

Lammenranta, Markus. “The Pyrrhonian Problematic.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Skepticism*. Edited by Paul K. Moser. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. 9-37.

Lewis, C. S. *Surprised by Joy*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955.

Moreland, J. P. *Consciousness and the Existence of God*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Miller, Robert J. “What do the Stories About the Resurrection(s) Prove?” In *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?* Edited by Paul Copan. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998. Pp. 77-98.

Moser, Paul K. *The Elusive God*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Nagel, Thomas. *The Last Word*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Pinnock, Clark H. *A Wideness in God’s Mercy*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.

Plantinga, Alvin. *Warrant: The Current Debate*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Plantinga, Alvin. *Warrant and Proper Function*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Plantinga, Alvin. “Reformed Epistemology.” In *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*. Edited by Charles Taliaferro and Philip L. Quinn. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999. Pp. 383-89.

Plantinga, Alvin. *Warranted Christian Belief*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Quinn, Phillip L. “Religious Pluralism and Religious Relativism.” In *Relativism and Religion*. Edited by Charles M. Lewis. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995. Pp. 35-51.

Runzo, Joseph. *Reason, Relativism and God*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986.

Runzo, Joseph. “God Commitment, and Other Faiths: Pluralism vs. Relativism.” *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988): 343-64.

Swinburne, Richard. *The Existence of God*. Second edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Wood, W Jay. *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998.