# REFORMED EPISTEMOLOGY AND DIVERSITY

## Andrew Koehl

Reformed epistemologists hold that belief in God can be rational and war-ranted apart from being based on any other propositions. The facts of reli-gious diversity, however, are seen by many to pose a challenge to this view. In the first part of this paper I suggest some developments of Plantinga's account of environment, proper function, and the kinds of faculties involved in the production of warranted belief. In the second part I develop a reformed response to "the Epistemological Challenge of Diversity," with a particular focus on the "best explanation" aspect of the pluralistic challenge and the role of environment and character in a non-pluralist explanation of the facts of diversity. In the final section I address some objections.

Reformed epistemologists such as William Alston and Alvin Plantinga hold that belief in God can be rational and warranted apart from being based on any other propositions. The facts of religious diversity, however, are seen by many to pose a challenge to this view.[1] The pluralist believes that the facts of diversity show that no one is warranted in holding one's own significant and exclusive religious beliefs to be true. In the first part of this paper I suggest some developments of Plantinga's account of environ-ment, proper function, and the kinds of faculties involved in the produc-tion of warranted belief. In the second part I develop a reformed response to what I call "the Epistemological Challenge of Diversity," with a particu-lar focus on factors that have been largely neglected by reformed episte-mologists - the "best explanation" aspect of the pluralistic challenge and the role of environment and character in a non-pluralist explanation of the facts of diversity. In the final section I address some objections and make some clarifications.

### I. A Reformed View on Character and Environment

According to Alvin Plantinga, knowledge is warranted true belief, and a belief is warranted *iff* it has been produced by cognitive faculties aimed at producing true beliefs, which are working properly (and in accordance with a *good* design plan) in a cognitive environment that is appropriate for those cognitive faculties.[2] Recently, Peter Klein has produced a counterexample to Plantinga's account.[3] Ms. Jones owns a Ford and drives it to work. While at work her Ford is hit and demolished, but not knowing this she continues

to believe that she owns a well-functioning Ford. Luckily for her, she happened to win a new Ford in a contest that very morning. Though her cognitive faculties are functioning properly in the cognitive environment for which they were designed, her belief that she owns a well-functioning Ford is not warranted. On the other hand, if her car had not been demolished, her belief would have been warranted. But in either case her cognitive faculties function in exactly the same way and the environment in which they operate (understood as the usual earthly environment) is exactly the same. Thus, so the argument goes, warrant cannot be merely the proper function of cognitive faculties in an appropriate environment.

In response to this example, Plantinga has clarified what it means for an environment to be appropriate for one's cognitive faculties:

> In WPF I spoke of our cognitive environment...For the most part I was thinking of our cognitive environment as the one we enjoy right here on earth, the one for which we were designed by God or evolution. This environment would include such features as the presence and properties of light and air, the presence of visible objects, of other objects detectable by our kind of cognitive system, of some objects not so detectable, of the regularities of nature, the existence of other people, and so on. Call this our "maxi-environment;" in stating the environmental condition what I (mostly) had in mind was a maxi-environment...But there is also a much less global cognitive environment...We can think of a cognitive mini-environment of a given exercise of cognitive powers $E$ as a *state of affairs* (or proposition) - one that includes all the relevant epistemic circumstances obtaining when that belief is formed...[It] includes the state of affairs specified by my cognitive maxi-environment, but also much more specific features of my epistemic situation. It will include, for example... my van's being destroyed in unforeseen ways (if it is)... and any other relevant epistemic circumstance.[4]

Though Plantinga doesn't mention it here, something like this interpretation of the environment clause is present at one place in *Warrant and Proper Function*, where Plantinga remarks that in Gettier examples "the faculties involved are functioning properly, but still there is no warrant; and the reason has to do with the local cognitive environment in which the belief is formed."[5] The belief-forming process of *credulity*, for instance, is not designed to work in an environment where people are deceptive, but only where people know the truth and are willing and able to share it.[6] The fulfillment of Plantinga's environment condition requires a proper mini- as well as maxi-environment, and if any situation we are in deviates enough from the specific types of situations for which we were designed, then even if our faculties function properly we will fail to have knowledge.

In order for my cognitive faculties to be working properly they must operate according to their design plan. The design plan is best thought of as "a set of triples: circumstance, response, and purpose or function."[7] In order for my belief to have warrant, the function of my faculties in the given instance must be to produce true belief, and given the circumstance,

my response needs to be the correct one. For instance, if I am appeared to redly (circumstance), the design plan dictates that I will be inclined to form the belief that what I see is red (response). Here we can see some connections among proper function, environment, and circumstance which Plantinga has not yet made. The first is that the circumstance element in the design plan is a part of the mini-environment in which cognitive faculties operate - namely the mini-environment internal to the subject. According to Plantinga, the epistemic mini-environment "includes all the relevant epistemic circumstances obtaining when that belief is formed," and this would include circumstances both internal and external to the subject's perspective. Those outside of her purview may include the fact that a person she trusts is really lying to her, or that her car has been unexpectedly demolished. The part of the epistemic mini-environment within her purview may include the experience she has of a trusted friend telling her something, or of parking her car and leaving it. The elements within her perspective also include those beliefs, impressions, and inclinations which provide the background against which she processes new information, including the sense of plausibility or implausibility various propositions have for her. The circumstance element of her design plan, then, is the part of the mini-environment which is internal to her perspective.

Previous cognitive malfunction or inadequate environments can pollute the current mini-environment, in particular by causing the circumstances to which one responds to be misleading. Suppose I come to believe that Dave is dishonest based on Abe's testimony. Later Dave asks me to lend him $20, saying that he will repay me that afternoon, and I form the belief $p$, that he will not do as he says. The circumstance (C) to which I respond includes both Dave's present claim and my background belief that he is dishonest. Given C, my response of believing $p$ would presumably be dictated by my design plan, and so would be warranted. But suppose Abe had lied about Dave, thus providing me with a misleading background belief, one which affected my adopting $p$. Or suppose that cognitive malfunction led to the faulty background belief in question - e.g. Abe had told me nothing, but I had jumped to a prejudice against Dave based on some scant evidence. In either case my present belief would lack warrant because a previous infelicity in environment or cognitive function caused present circumstances, in particular the part consisting of my background beliefs, to be misleading.

If our cognitive faculties are designed to operate in particular kinds of mini-environments, and these mini-environments include the "circumstances" to which our cognitive faculties respond (from here on the "cognitive circumstances"), then there is design at a higher level than the circumstance, response, function triple. This design indicates not only the kinds of response we should make given certain circumstances, but also the kinds of circumstances to which we should have opportunity to respond. In order for a belief to be warranted, the cognitive circumstances in which a person forms her belief must not be misleading, and they will be if there has been significant enough cognitive malfunction or environmental pollution at those moments when influential background beliefs were formed. Because of this, current beliefs which arise in part from a wealth of relative-

ly unevaluated background beliefs are susceptible to infelicities which defeat warrant. As will be addressed in the next section, ethical and religious beliefs are often of this sort, and this fact can figure into a non-pluralist explanation of religious and ethical diversity.

Just as previous environments and cognitive acts influence one's background beliefs, they would seem to contribute to one's emotions, desires, and inclinations. Let's call the faculties which produce these "faculties of character." Though for Plantinga proper function of *cognitive* faculties is the key to warrant, the proper function of faculties of character also seems necessary for warrant, especially in cases of religious and ethical belief. Plantinga has said that he intends to include what I am calling faculties of character under the rubric of cognitive faculties.[8] It is better, however, to think of our faculties of character as separate from our cognitive faculties, since one's cognitive faculties (those which produce propositional attitudes) could be functioning splendidly, given their input, while one's character contributes emotional or inclinational input to the cognitive faculties which has a non-truth-conducive influence on their output.

The meta-design for our cognitive faculties, then, should be thought to include not only the background beliefs one should have in given situations, but also the emotions, desires, and inclinations one should have in those situations. The higher level design will involve specifications of how the faculties of character should operate when their purpose is to aid the production of true belief. When operating well, their contribution to one's cognitive circumstances will encourage the formation of true beliefs, and when they are functioning poorly their input will encourage wrong results.[9]

Suppose I see a colleague stealing from the department's petty cash and have a negative emotional reaction, and among others form the belief $p$ that what is happening is wrong. The circumstances to which my cognitive faculties respond include not only seeing the money stolen but also my affective state while this is happening. So when I see thievery, my design plan dictates that I should have a negative emotional response. One function of this emotional response will be to influence the cognitive faculties towards producing the true belief $p$. But if seeing the theft creates in me a strong desire to have some of the money, my emotional response may encourage a wrong cognitive result - perhaps I will withhold my belief in $p$, or may conclude that stealing small amounts of money is acceptable. So my faculties of character contribute to the cognitive circumstances, and if they are not functioning properly the cognitive circumstances will be misleading.

The cognitive design plan will also specify that character faculties develop and operate in certain environments, perhaps those in which the people whom we respect express emotion, desire, and inclination in ways conducive to producing true belief. The environment for our character faculties, as with our cognitive faculties, will also include our background belief system. As emotions and desires influence belief, so beliefs influence emotions and desires. My background beliefs form part of the circumstance to which my character faculties respond, and can cause my emotional responses to encourage false belief if those background beliefs were formed in an inappropriate environment or as the result of cognitive malfunction. Because of this, current beliefs which are particularly susceptible

to being influenced by emotion, inclination, and desire will be susceptible to past and current infelicities in cognitive *and* character environment and in the functioning of cognitive *and* character faculties, infelicities which can undermine warrant. Ethical and religious beliefs are often of this sort, and this fact, like the fact that they tend to arise in part from a wealth of relatively unevaluated background beliefs, figures into the non-pluralist explanation of religious and ethical diversity discussed in the next section.

In *Warranted Christian Belief*[10] Plantinga discusses the "affections" in a way that is amenable to this understanding of the operation of the faculties of character. There he says that there is an analogue of warrant for affections. An affection can be produced by faculties functioning properly or not, and "the right kind of affective environment (for us) will be one where, given our design plan, we will form the right affective responses."[11] While Plantinga has not pursued the connection between faculties of character and affect and the cognitive faculties, the notion that character faculties produce emotions and desires in us which become part of our cognitive circumstances fits well with what he says of affections in *Warranted Christian Belief*. If Plantinga were to agree that this is how it should go, it would represent a change in his previous position that all such factors fall under the rubric of "cognitive faculties." Note, however, that on Plantinga's theory there is no need to incorporate a further condition for warrant - that one's *character* faculties be functioning properly - since this element can be included in the environment condition as now explicated and understood. If one's current cognitive mini-environment is appropriate, this will mean that the character faculties are and have been functioning well.

Before exploring the role of character and environment in explaining the facts of ethical and religious diversity, I turn briefly to a review of Plantinga's views on the properly basic. Among warranted beliefs, some are basic and foundational, and Plantinga holds that belief in God is one of these properly basic beliefs. The classical evidentialist claims that the only properly basic beliefs are those that are *self-evident* or *incorrigible*. Plantinga has plausibly argued, however, that this position itself is neither self-evident nor incorrigible, nor does it follow from propositions which are. The theist need not therefore concede that her basic belief in God is not properly basic.[12] But then can't anyone validly claim that her crazy belief, say in the Great Pumpkin, is properly basic? No. There *are* standards for proper basicality, though they are best brought to light through an inductive method.

> We must assemble examples of beliefs and conditions such that the former are obviously properly basic in the latter, and examples of beliefs and conditions such that the former are obviously *not* properly basic in the latter. We must then frame hypotheses as to the necessary and sufficient conditions of proper basicality and test these by reference to those examples.[13]

Plantinga's nominations for properly basic beliefs include clear perceptual and memory beliefs and beliefs in other persons. Drawing from Calvin's notion of a *sensus divinitatis*, Plantinga also suggests that we have a faculty which, given certain experiences, inclines us to believe in God in the basic

way. Given that there are no *universally acceptable* criteria for proper basicality, different groups may disagree about paradigm cases, but this does not mean that the Christian community, for instance, should feel compelled to give up theirs. Finally, Plantinga gives us, if not criteria, conditions[14] for proper basicality in *Warrant and Proper Function*. Our cognitive faculties are designed so that given certain circumstances we should form particular beliefs in the basic way. Those beliefs which are so formed (in an appropriate environment) are properly basic, and Plantinga holds that belief in God and indeed in Christ fulfills these conditions.

Note that "properly basic" has different senses depending on the kind of positive epistemic status being accorded to a belief. Ignoring these distinctions has sometimes resulted in confusion. I will distinguish between proper basicality with respect to warrant($PB_w$) and proper basicality with respect to justification($PB_j$) or internal rationality($PB_r$). I will treat justification and internal rationality in general terms, as being within one's epistemic rights or as doing well epistemically from the internal perspective of the believer. Note that one's belief in the Great Pumpkin might conceivably be $PB_j$ or $PB_r$ while still failing to be $PB_w$. One may do well from his perspective in believing in the Great Pumpkin, but that belief may still fail to have warrant, due to cognitive malfunction, character failure, and/or a misleading environment. Justification and internal rationality are each, given truth, insufficient for knowledge. I take the Gettier cases to show that justification, conceived of internalistically, does not fill the gap between true belief and knowledge. Most epistemologists agree that warrant involves elements both internal and external to the perspective of the believer. I use "warrant" in this sense, and regard it as that which fills the gap between true belief and knowledge.

### II. A New Reformed Response to the Epistemological Challenge of Diversity

William Alston has argued that since members of different religious communities have different doxastic practices, and "the competitors lack the kind of common procedure for settling disputes that is available to the participants in a shared [doxastic practice]," the fact of religious disagreement does not impugn the reliability of Christian doxastic practice.[15] In a recent paper, Plantinga argues that the facts of diversity need not defeat one's basic, and exclusive, religious belief if after considering everything carefully, including the facts of diversity, one still finds it most compelling. For what else can one do but side with those beliefs which after careful consideration one finds most convincing?[16] While the pluralist might accept that one should for the most part side with carefully considered and deeply felt convictions, she may yet wonder what kind of evidence from diversity *would* be sufficient to defeat a firmly held, exclusive, basic religious conviction. At what point would evidence from the facts of diversity against such a conviction be so strong that one *shouldn't* find her exclusive belief compelling anymore — that she would be epistemically in the wrong for her incalcitrance? Alternatively, how could the facts of diversity undermine one's faith in the output of her consistent religious doxastic practice? I will explore what I take to be central to the Epistemological Challenge of

Diversity – that given not only the facts of diversity, but also the over-
whelming plausibility of certain *explanations* of those facts, there is some-
thing wrong epistemically with one who still finds basic exclusive religious
beliefs compelling. The claim is that the facts of diversity *and their most
plausible explanation* comprise the right sort of evidence for defeating firmly
held, basic, exclusive ethical and religious beliefs (from here on, "E-
beliefs," "E-propositions," "E-knowledge,", etc.).[17] It is this claim that I
intend to refute. In doing so, I will explicate a new reformed explanation
of the facts of diversity. Note that while the examples I give will be from
the perspective of the Christian theist, my response to the challenge of
diversity will be in principle available to all theists. I will discuss ramifica-
tions of this availability in the third section.

One who holds an E-belief is what we might call a *doctrinal exclusivist*
with respect to that belief. She maintains that her belief is true and that
others incompatible with it are false. In arguing that E-beliefs can be justi-
fied, rational, and/or warranted, I will be endorsing the claim that doctri-
nal exclusivism is epistemically acceptable. However, in doing so I remain
neutral between what might be termed *soteriological exclusivism* and *soterio-
logical inclusivism* with respect to religious belief.[18] The soteriological exclu-
sivist believes that only those who hold particular key doctrines associated
with her religion can receive salvation from God. The soteriological inclu-
sivist may be a doctrinal exclusivist but still maintain that at least some of
those who do not hold the correct doctrinal beliefs nonetheless have access
to the saving grace of God. The thesis of this paper supports doctrinal
exclusivism but does not directly concern either soteriological exclusivism
or soteriological inclusivism.

The facts that give rise to the Epistemological Challenge of Diversity are
that equally upright and thoughtful people, with apparently the same sorts
of grounds for their beliefs and coherent systems of belief,[19] come up with
contradictory and often seemingly irreconcilable positions on religious and
ethical matters. The particular E-beliefs one holds also seem largely depen-
dent upon one's culture and environment. Two versions of the
Epistemological Challenge of Diversity might be drawn from these facts.
According to the *No Truth Challenge*, the facts of religious and ethical diver-
sity show that there is no truth about these matters, and so claims to E-
knowledge are mistaken.

According to the No Truth Challenge, where there is truth to be found
honest people will come to agreement. If I randomly pick twenty people
and take them to the same outdoor spot, they will agree on whether it is
night or day, and this is because there is a truth of the matter. But if I ran-
domly select twenty people from across the world and ask them whether
God exists, or what God is like, or whether sex outside of marriage is
wrong, or whether bribery is wrong, no amount of discussion and reason-
ing is likely to bring them into agreement. If there were truth on these mat-
ters it would anchor opinions in such a way that there would be agree-
ment, but since there is no agreement, there is no truth.

But the No Truth Challenge is a weak argument. That it takes time for
people to come into agreement on some matters can be seen from the history
of science and other realms of human knowing. And why shouldn't ethical

and religious matters be of this sort? Indeed, it is possible that something should be true without humans *ever* agreeing on it. The No Truth Challenge also ignores the possibility suggested by Plantinga's theory, that the reason for disagreement is that some have faculties functioning properly with respect to forming a given ethical or religious belief and others don't. Finally, the No Truth Challenge ignores the possibility that disagreement arises because some of us have formed E-beliefs in environments not truth-conducive with respect to those beliefs. Given that we often arrive at ethical and religious beliefs over time, through experiences, impressions, dialogue, and responding to the environment around us, there are many points at which inadequate environments or malfunctioning cognitive or affective faculties could promote false E-beliefs, thereby bringing about disagreement.

But since the long history of ethical and religious discussion has not produced agreement, doesn't this show that there is no truth about such matters? The length of the disagreement is not conclusive here, since the reason for disagreement may be differences in cognitive or affective functioning of our faculties, or in the influence of environment. Such differences would explain not only a long period of disagreement but an interminable period of disagreement. It's important to note that the No Truth Challenge is a strong claim; it alleges that the facts of diversity *show* that there is no truth to be found about religious matters. To undermine this claim, all that is required is to show, as I have done here, that there are a number of alternative explanations of the facts of diversity that do not entail that there is no truth about ethical and religious matters. The weaker form of the No Truth Challenge, that the facts of diversity *strongly suggest* that there is no truth about such matters, is really one form of the second variant of the Epistemological Challenge of Diversity, the *No Warrant Challenge*, which I will address shortly.[20] A more direct argument against the No Truth Challenge is that it is self-refuting. There is no agreement concerning the claims of the No Truth Challenge itself. But then, if we are to believe the thesis of the No Truth Challenge, it follows that the claims of the No Truth Challenge are neither true nor false, and so they are not in a position to serve as a challenge to the truth of E-beliefs.

While the No Truth Challenge attacks claims to E-knowledge by challenging the truth of E-beliefs, the second variety of the Epistemological Challenge of Diversity, the *No Warrant Challenge*, attacks their warrant (or justification or rationality),[21] arguing that when one becomes aware of the facts of diversity and the best explanations of those facts (1) one can't be warranted (or justified or rational) in holding one's E-beliefs and/or (2) the believer should notably alter her epistemic attitude towards E-propositions. ("Notably altering" her attitude might mean that she should hold the belief less firmly or that she should withhold her belief. Proponents of the No Warrant Challenge might take different positions on exactly what effect the facts of diversity have or should have on the believer and the epistemic status of her beliefs.) For brevity's sake I will use the term 'defeat' to encompass (1) and (2), and will argue that the No Warrant Challenge fails to defeat[22] many E-beliefs.[23]

If the reformed epistemologist is right about proper basicality, then the facts of diversity need not defeat an E-belief. For if the design plan dictates

that a certain belief should be held firmly in the basic way, then that belief is $PB_W$ (all other conditions being fulfilled) unless the right sort of very strong evidence defeats it. And because (as common, and not just reformed, epistemic practice confirms) the design plan gives prominence to properly basic beliefs, it dictates that in general one should rely on one's deeply held basic convictions unless confronted with a particular kind of strong contrary evidence. Any epistemic duties will accord with this preference, so even if a basic belief is false and not the precise one dictated by the design plan, one may still be justified and internally rational in maintaining that basically held belief.

By their very nature properly basic beliefs (e.g. clear memory, introspective, or perceptual beliefs) are not such that I can necessarily persuade others to believe them, nor will they necessarily be defeated by the fact that others disagree with me or by other strong evidence to the contrary. For example, there may be substantial evidence that I stole money from a store - there may be witnesses saying I did, a motive for me to do it, and threats to do it made by me in front of witnesses. But if I clearly remember going hiking all day, I am still warranted, justified, and rational in believing, based on memory, that I was hiking, even though evidence is arrayed against me and other sincere and thoughtful people believe that I stole the money. This is so even if I can give no argument that convinces them otherwise. The contrary evidence does not defeat my belief that I was hiking largely because of my clear memory of hiking. But then it seems that if my cognitive faculties are so designed that based on certain experiences I should come to believe a particular E-proposition, that belief could be $PB_W$ even in the face of the facts of diversity. And given the foundational importance of basic beliefs in the epistemic life, I may still be justified and rational in holding an E-belief, even though the particular belief I espouse is *not* dictated by the design plan, if after careful consideration of the facts of diversity and all other relevant evidence I still find it convincing, and have made no epistemic mistakes of which I am culpable.

But basic beliefs *can* be defeated, so what kind of evidence can do the job? Suppose that in the theft scenario there is also evidence that I went through an operation that reconstructed my memories - there are pictures of me going through this operation, a detailed explanation of how it works, testimony from those who performed the procedure, a plausible explanation of why it was performed, etc. This would lessen the warrant, justification, and rationality of my basic memory belief, perhaps to the degree that I would cease to know it and/or should alter my epistemic attitude towards it.

I take it that what makes the undisputed facts[24] of a case "evidence" against a proposition is that they make the proposition less epistemically probable; they make it seem less evident to a person. Let's say that you know me only casually, and that before you heard of the theft (as described in the first scenario) I tell you I had been hiking all that day. Naturally enough, you form the belief that I was hiking that day. But when you hear that witnesses claim to have seen me stealing money from the store, that I had a motive to steal it, and that I had threatened to steal it, these undisputed facts, all things being equal, make the proposition that I was away hiking that day seem less probable to you than it seemed before. You will

naturally see these facts as evidence against my alibi, and your belief that I was hiking that day will probably be defeated. But these undisputed facts will have a different effect on me. These facts either will not make my hiking belief any less epistemically probable for me, or if they do lessen its probability for me slightly, they will not do so enough to significantly alter my epistemic attitude towards that hiking belief, and so defeat it.

Why do the undisputed facts have a different effect on me than on you? Because the *cumulative* evidence you have for my belief that I was hiking is different from the cumulative evidence I have. Your cumulative evidence is the undisputed facts, any relevant experiences you have had, plus what seems to you the most likely explanation of the undisputed facts and your experiences. That I did indeed steal money from the store that day seems to you the best explanation of the encounters you've had with witnesses (who appeared sincere and competent) and of the undisputed facts. That explanation entails that I was not hiking as I claim to have been. I also accept the undisputed facts, but in addition to the undisputed facts and what seems to me the best explanation of those facts, I have my clear memory belief of hiking that day. Earlier I argued that in the first theft scenario the undisputed facts do not defeat my hiking belief and that this is largely due to the strong and clear memory I have of hiking. Let's now clarify things by saying that the cumulative evidence against my hiking belief does not seem nearly as strong to me as the cumulative evidence for my hiking belief, and moreover that it *should not* seem nearly as strong.

I therefore suggest that a basic belief is defeated in the following way.

> **Defeat Test** - A basic belief is defeated if, in addition to the undisputed facts and personal experiences relevant to the basic belief, the believer is aware of an explanation for those facts and experiences (i) that entails that the basic belief is false, extremely unlikely, or has a non-truth conducive source and (ii) that is (or should be), together with the undisputed facts and relevant experiences, more plausible to the believer than any explanation (of which she is aware) that provides for the truth or likelihood, or the reliability of the source of, the basic belief.

This test accords with reformed assumptions that basic beliefs are defeasible, and that it is part of our cognitive design plan to consider and respond to evidence against our basically held beliefs.[25] A less transparent but simpler way of putting the Defeat Test would be to say that a basic belief is defeated if the cumulative evidence against it is greater than the cumulative evidence for it.

Note that given my memory of hiking, the facts and available explanation in the first description of the theft scenario do not pass the Defeat Test, while those in the second description do. Under the first description, though the undisputed facts fit well with the explanation that I stole money from the store, since my conviction that I was hiking is so strong (i.e., it is grounded in such a powerful doxastic experience[26]), and since the public facts are not so unexplainable, it still makes more sense for me to believe that I was hiking and that those facts have some other explanation. The alternative explanation might be that I had indeed intended to take the

money, and had proclaimed that I would.  Perhaps people also "saw" what they expected to see, or perhaps some opportunist dressing like me stole the money.  From a third-person perspective, parts of this explanation may be far-fetched, but combined with my clear memory of hiking, my belief that I was hiking is (and should be) more convincing than the undisputed facts in conjunction with the explanation that I stole the money.  But in the second scenario the cumulative evidence against my basically held belief is considerably stronger.  There is overwhelming evidence that my basically held belief has a source that is other than truth-conducive[27] - in this case that my memory was erased and re-programmed.  Note that in the first theft scenario, an outsider might well think that the explanation that I stole the money is far more plausible than any explanation that preserves my innocence. Of course, it will not seem so to me.  It is not until the evidence and explanation arrayed against my hiking belief is as overwhelming as that cited in the second scenario that we have something that defeats it.

An important factor here is that a clear memory belief is the sort of belief which is designed to be held very strongly and it takes a powerful sort of counter-evidence to supplant it.  In order to defeat a basic belief *like a clear memory belief* it is not enough for a contrary explanation of undisputed facts and relevant experiences *merely* to be more plausible from a third-person perspective than any that preserve the truth of the memory belief.  The explanation must be such that it *should* be more plausible *to the believer*, given the believer's powerful experiences and everything else that the believer knows.  Let's define an "outsider's perspective" or a "third-person perspective" on someone's firmly held basic belief as the perspective that would be generally accepted by reasonable people who have not had the relevant experiences (in this case the memory) that led the believer to embrace that proposition.  The believer will naturally not be inclined to believe an explanation that entails that his memory belief is false, and so an explanation of the undisputed facts that entails that the memory belief is false will have to be one which from an outsider's perspective is *vastly* more plausible than any that preserves the warrant of the memory belief. If the explanation seems only mildly more plausible to the outsider, how can it be expected to convince the believer to reject what rightly seems to him clearly to be the case?  That is why it is not enough in the first theft scenario that there are witnesses who claim to have seen me steal the money, etc.  While the explanation that I stole the money will seem more plausible to the outside observer it will not seem so to me, and it *shouldn't* seem so to me.  At least not until the contrary evidence and explanation are as overwhelming as that cited in the second scenario.

The strength of the contrary evidence and accompanying explanation needed to defeat a basic belief depends in each case on the kind of basic belief it is, the strength with which it is held, and the strength with which it is *designed* to be held in those circumstances.  For instance, it takes more to defeat a belief like the hiking belief that is grounded in a clear memory of a recent event than it does to defeat a hazy memory belief concerning the distant past, and it takes more to defeat a moderately clear memory belief than a basic conviction that the next roll of the dice will be a "12." So what about E-beliefs?  Some are less important and less firmly held

than others, such that the evidence required to supplant them would be less than that required to overcome a clear memory belief. But if God has designed us to form a basic belief in his existence, *that* belief (and others like it) would presumably, like the clear memory belief, be the sort of properly basic belief that is designed to be convincing and held strongly when believed under the right circumstances. (Let's define a "significant basic belief" as one that it is reasonable to suppose our cognitive design plan would have us find convincing and hold to firmly under the right circumstances.) If beliefs concerning God's existence, who he is, his relationship to us, etc., are *significant* basic beliefs, then in order to defeat such beliefs the quality of the contrary cumulative evidence would have to be similar to that of the evidence required to defeat a clear memory belief. But then the question is whether the facts of diversity adduced against E-beliefs such as "Jesus is God" have a force similar to the evidence arrayed against the memory belief in the second theft example.

As the Defeat Test states, the cumulative evidence against a basic belief must be such that the believer should find it more compelling than she does the cumulative evidence she has for it. But for a *significant, firmly held E-belief* this evidence will have to go beyond simply being more plausible to the outside observer. It has to be strong enough to overcome all that the belief has in its favor (and should have in its favor) from the believer's perspective. In order for an E-belief to be defeated, the undisputed facts of diversity must be coupled with an explanation that entails that the E-belief is false or wrongly formed *and* is *vastly* superior (from a third-person perspective) to any competitor explanation that the believer has that supports the E-belief. In order for the No Warrant Challenge to succeed in *defeating* E-beliefs, the best explanation of the facts of diversity that accompanies the No Warrant Challenge will need to be at least as superior to any alternative explanation that preserves E-beliefs as the thieving explanation is to any non-thieving explanation in the second theft scenario.

Those who think E-beliefs are defeated by the facts of diversity seem to have something like the Defeat Test in mind, though they might not realize how stringent it has to be. In a slightly different context, John Hick challenges those who would undermine his pluralist theory to come up with a religious explanation of diversity that is *better* than his. In a future paper, I hope to argue that (what below I call) the Reformed/Aristotelian view meets this challenge. But in this context, if the No Warrant Challenge against E-beliefs is to succeed, so that E-beliefs are *defeated* by the facts of diversity, the burden of proof will have to shift in the way I have described. The claim of the No Warrant Challenge will have to be not just that the facts of diversity defeat E-beliefs, but that those facts in conjunction with a certain explanation defeat E-beliefs. In order to do so the facts of diversity and the No Warrant Challenge explanation must fulfill the Defeat Test, and to fulfill the Defeat Test for a *firmly held, significant E-belief*, the No Warrant Challenge must offer an explanation of the facts of diversity and of the personal believer's experience which is vastly more plausible from an outsider's perspective than any that provides for the truth or likelihood, or the reliability of the source of, the basic belief. But can the No Warrant Challenge offer such an overwhelmingly powerful explanation? I am convinced the answer is no.

The No Warrant Challenge might include either of two explanations of the facts of diversity. The first is the agnostic or atheistic explanation, that E-beliefs arise from random, non-truth-conducive origins - namely from the vagaries of cultural and environmental influence. This is why they are diverse and irreconcilable. The other explanation, the pluralist one, also cites a non-truth-conducive source for E-beliefs - that there is one Ultimate Reality which manifests itself to people in different cultures in different ways, so that none of the E-beliefs held by members of those cultures are literally true (though they may be "authentic" approaches to the Real).[28] I will not challenge the plausibility of these explanations. Plantinga has argued that such explanations, when used to defeat E-beliefs, suffer from self-referential difficulties and fail to show that E-beliefs are not warranted.[29] My position is that even if both are plausible, what I will call the Reformed/Aristotelian view explains the facts of diversity at least as well while allowing that E-beliefs can be warranted. All that is required to turn back the No Warrant Challenge, however, is that the Reformed/Aristotelian view not be significantly less plausible from an objective perspective than either No Warrant Challenge explanation.

According to Aristotle, the armchair ethical opiner cannot attain ethical knowledge, because her cognitive faculties and her faculties of character have not undergone the right process of transformation in a proper ethical environment. Without a virtue-conducive community, an adequate *endoxa*,[30] proper habituation, and virtuous mentors who have ethical knowledge, one will not form the right perspectives, virtues of thought, intuitions and impressions, and so will be precluded from gaining significant ethical knowledge. Plantinga has also alluded to the importance of one's community, especially in determining what will be one's paradigm cases of properly basic beliefs. But he has not given the role of environment and community enough emphasis. The result of a fuller development of this role is what one might call a Reformed/Aristotelian view (the R/A view) on religious and ethical knowledge, one that provides a plausible explanation of the facts of diversity while still allowing for warranted E-beliefs. According to both Plantinga and the R/A view the human design plan dictates a *primary way* of attaining ethical and religious knowledge. Not that such knowledge is only attained in this way, but it is the primary and preferred mode. Plantinga describes the following varieties of this mode: With respect to generic belief in God, he follows Calvin in suggesting that we are designed in such a way that upon beholding the glories of the night sky, we form a belief about God, perhaps the belief that God must be great to have created all this, and thus come to believe that God exists. In *Warranted Christian Belief* Plantinga explicates a view according to which one is designed to form a belief in Christ upon hearing the gospel. I assume that Plantinga would also hold that given certain experiences we are designed to form basic moral beliefs.

Plantinga's descriptions of the primary way have the disadvantage of being monochronic, thereby neglecting the larger environmental factor that seems crucial to how we are designed to arrive at E-beliefs. As a result, this monochronic view has a limited ability to explain the facts of diversity. On such a view, the explanation of diversity is that the Fall has caused our

cognitive faculties to malfunction and so to create in many of us wrong beliefs. The Reformed/Aristotelian View which I'm proposing addresses the crucial impact of culture and environment, as well as the impact of character, and so offers a more complete explanation of the facts of diversity, one that is better able to withstand the No Warrant Challenge. According to the R/A view, the primary way in which one is designed to come to E-beliefs is for the moment(s) of basic insight that Plantinga describes to happen in the context of a community and culture that are conducive to ethical and religious knowledge. The environment in which the person lives should be filled with people who know the truth and are willing and able to share it, and whose affective responses are conducive towards the embracing of that truth. In this environment the belief-forming mechanism of credulity works well, so that one gains a wealth of background beliefs and impressions, and of moral and affective inclinations, which support, affirm, incline her towards, and corroborate those E-beliefs that she will develop through her ethical sense or the *sensus divinitatis* or (as the specifically Christian version of the R/A view[31] envisions the case of Christian belief) the Testimony of the Holy Spirit.

One's ethical sense and religious sense are often formed through long periods of experience, absorption, decision, contemplation, struggle, disillusionment, encouragement, thought, prayer, conversation, and so on. During this process what seems plausible, what one considers seriously, what has the ring of truth, what one is drawn towards and repelled by, becomes ingrained in one's thinking. This, according to the R/A view, is by design. Because of his concern for goodness God has created us so that character and intellect influence one another, and because of the importance of love and God's desire to transform all of human life and culture, he has created us with an emphasis on relationship and community, making our knowledge, especially in those crucial areas of how we should treat one another and how we should interact with him, to a large degree dependent on our relationships and our environment. The sociologists are right that many E-beliefs are imbibed from our larger culture as well as our closer knit communities and families, but according to the R/A view this is by design. We were *designed* so that much of our knowledge has a communal nature and source, so that we will naturally imbibe truths through the testimony of those around us and the circumstances in which we live. But we were also designed *with particular environments in mind*. We were designed to live in a trusting community in which those around us know the truth about God and ethics and are willing and able to share it, and in which life in that environment is conducive to that end. But for some reason (the Christian version of the R/A view makes reference to the Fall), the environments we actually live in deviate from this to one degree or another.

The primary way in which we are designed to come to E-beliefs makes their genesis vulnerable not only to cognitive dysfunction and to failures of character through time, but to the influence of environments which deviate too far from those for which we were designed. But *if* one's environment allows one to form an E-belief in accordance with one's design plan, then one's E-belief will be warranted. The R/A view gives a plausible explanation of the facts of diversity while (unlike the No Warrant Challenge) still provid-

ing for warranted E-beliefs. I find the R/A view more plausible than the explanations accompanying the No Warrant Challenge, but far less is required in order to reject the claim that the facts of religious diversity together with the explanations offered by the No Warrant Challenge defeat E-beliefs. It is enough that the explanations accompanying the No Warrant Challenge are not vastly more plausible than the best explanation (of which the believer is aware) that provides for warranted E-beliefs. It seems clear that the No Warrant Challenge lacks that kind of advantage over the R/A view.

Note that the R/A view accounts for the intuition that many of those whose E-beliefs are unwarranted (because they do not in fact correspond to those specified in our cognitive design plan) are nonetheless justified and rational in holding them. While Plantinga has not directly addressed this, we can see from our previous discussion of environment that *justification* and *internal rationality* have the same conditions as warrant with one exception - they do not require a proper environment. If one's cognitive and character faculties are functioning as they should in forming a particular belief, but one's cognitive and/or character environment deviates too much from that for which one is designed, one will still be justified and internally rational in holding one's belief, even though one lacks warrant. If because of what one has nonculpably absorbed from her external environment, her internal environment is misleading with respect to a particular belief, she may still be justified and internally rational in holding that belief, even if she lacks warrant for it. Thus, to hold that Jesus is God does not require believing that one who holds that Allah is God is irrational or unjustified (in the sense of not doing well from her perspective) in so believing. Of course she *may* be irrational or unjustified in holding that belief, but even if in fact Jesus is God and the design plan specifies that upon hearing the gospel one should believe in Christ, it may still be $PB_j$ and $PB_r$ for a Pakistani to believe in Allah, if she does her best in an environment that is not truth-conducive with respect to the belief in question.

Reformed epistemology, then, is the source of a good response to the Epistemological Challenge of Diversity. The facts of diversity together with the explanations accompanying the No Warrant Challenge are not by themselves strong enough to defeat strong significant E-beliefs, given the plausibility of the R/A view. If my design plan dictates that in response to a given experience I should believe a certain E-proposition, then my belief is $PB_w$ and recognition of diversity and the explanations accompanying the No Warrant Challenge need not defeat it. And given the importance of allegiance to foundational basic beliefs, if my particular E-belief has been formed in a misleading environment, and consequently is not the one endorsed by the design plan, it may still be $PB_j$ and $PB_r$ for me even in the face of the facts of diversity. The form of reformed epistemology captured in the R/A view is a useful and necessary development that captures and acknowledges the way in which people are influenced by environment and character in their believings.

### III. Objections and Replies

In this final section I address some objections to the foregoing which will serve to clarify my position.

### 3.1  The Argument Begs the Question.

One might wonder whether I have begged the question, whether I have assumed the truth of Christianity in order to argue that Christian E-beliefs are warranted and that therefore the facts of diversity do not pose a difficulty. To see that I have not begged the question it will be helpful to re-capitulate the argument. First, it is important to emphasize that the view operative in rejecting the No Warrant Challenge is the R/A view (not the Christian version of the R/A view), and the R/A view does not assume a Christian perspective, only a theistic one. Second, I have not argued that Christian or any other E-beliefs *are* warranted. The argument instead is a defensive one. The Epistemological Challenge of Diversity asserts that the facts of diversity and their most plausible explanation comprise the right sort of evidence for defeating significant and firmly held, basic, exclusive ethical and religious beliefs (E-beliefs). I have argued that this is not the case.

   The argument has two stages. First, I argue that the No Truth Challenge variant of the Epistemological Challenge of Diversity makes too strong of a claim. Second, the more modest approach, the No Warrant Challenge, also fails. I argue that if we take seriously the role of significant basic beliefs in one's cognitive life, then the evidence required to defeat many basic beliefs will have to be of a very strong sort. In particular, in order to defeat a significant, firmly held E-belief, the facts of diversity and at least one explanation that the No Warrant Challenge offers must be strong enough to fulfill the Defeat Test. But because such E-beliefs are significant, and because they arise from a powerful doxastic experience on the part of the believer, the explanation that accompanies the No Warrant Challenge must be at least as strong when combined with the facts of diversity as the cumulative evidence in the second theft scenario mentioned above. This means the No Warrant Challenge explanation will have to be vastly more plausible from an outsider's perspective than any explanation available that provides for the truth or likelihood, or the reliability of the source of, the basically held E-belief. But the explanations brought forward by the No Warrant Challenge are not vastly more plausible than the explanation offered by the R/A view. Therefore the cumulative evidence does not fulfill the Defeat Test and does not defeat significant, firmly held E-beliefs. The R/A view, then, provides resources for responding to the Epistemological Challenge of Diversity, and any theist who believes that our cognitive faculties have been designed by God can in principle make use of this response.

### 3.2  The Argument Entails that Conflicting Beliefs are Warranted.

A second objection might be that if this type of response is available to those from a number of different religious traditions, and if the R/A view is correct, won't we have to say that people holding conflicting beliefs are each warranted in their beliefs? First, it is an open question just how well adherents to a given religion can make use of the R/A view, in a way that accords with the religion's other teachings. This question needs to be answered on a case by case basis. For instance, does the particular religious perspective countenance in a natural way that humans have been

designed by God as epistemic agents, in accordance with values like those
alluded to by the R/A view? Assuming that people from a number of con-
flicting religious viewpoints *can* equally well make use of the R/A view,
what this would establish would be that where adherents hold their reli-
gious beliefs very strongly in the basic way, and where they are not break-
ing any intellectual obligations in doing so, those beliefs may be $PB_j$ or $PB_r$.
This means that in such cases those holding these beliefs have done their
best given their epistemic perspective. Then the question of which of those
conflicting beliefs that are $PB_j$ and $PB_r$ are also $PB_w$ will depend on what
the human design plan in fact is like. There would not, then, be conflicting
beliefs which are each *warranted*.

### 3.3  E-beliefs are Unlikely To Be True.

If a number of conflicting hypotheses account equally for the same evi-
dence without independent reasons to prefer one over the other, isn't the
probability of any one being true low? I think this objection misses the
point. The assessment of (epistemic) probability takes place against a back-
ground of other beliefs. And while it may seem to someone who has no
firm basic belief about a matter that there is no reason to prefer one expla-
nation over another, to the one who non-culpably has such basic beliefs,
her explanation may well seem superior to the others, and rationally and
even warrantedly so. It is regrettable that in some instances we do not
have universally accepted independent reasons to adjudicate competing
claims. This keeps us from having consensus, but it need not keep some of
us from knowing what we E-believe if the design plan dictates that we
should arrive at our belief in this basic way. It may keep one who holds
such a basic belief from being able to demonstrate that a person who holds
a conflicting belief is irrational or unjustified in so believing, but being able
to do this is not required for warrant. An interesting further question is
whether the lack of independent adjudicating reasons keeps us from
knowing that we know. But at any rate it need not keep our first-level
belief from having justification or warrant.
    Consider again the proposed principle - "If a number of conflicting
hypotheses all equally account for the same evidence without independent
reasons to prefer one over the other, the probability of any one being true is
low." If this principle were to be endorsed, it would apply to the pluralist
as well. The pluralist hypothesis conflicts with the various religious
hypotheses, and there is no independent reason, to which all parties can
agree, to prefer one to the other. The pluralist might respond that the rea-
son that there is disagreement is that none of the religious positions are lit-
erally true. But there are other explanations, such as the R/A view. The
pluralist finds her explanation most compelling, but many others do not.
This reply just takes us back to where we started. The pluralist challenge,
as captured in the No Warrant Challenge, does not fulfill the Defeat Test -
it is not strong enough to necessarily defeat a significant, firmly held E-
belief, just as a corresponding inclusivist or exclusivist challenge, put in
terms of the R/A view, might not be able to defeat a firmly held pluralist
conviction. This is just to say something that we already know — people

can rationally disagree on a matter and yet it can be the case that one party and not the other has knowledge. And even the one who doesn't know may nonetheless be rational or justified in believing as she does.

### 3.4  Very Few People Have Significant, Firmly Held E-beliefs.

One might object that very few people, if any, form significant, firmly held religious or ethical beliefs in the basic way. Instead, they form them on the basis of arguments of one sort or another. The question of what kind of beliefs people have and how they form them is an empirical one. I'm inclined to think that most people's firm beliefs about these matters are formed in the basic way, and I'm not aware of any good reasons for thinking otherwise. Nevertheless, there certainly are many whose beliefs about significant ethical and religious matters are not the sort of strong basic belief that I discuss in this paper. Many do not hold their significant religious or ethical beliefs in a basic way, or the beliefs that they hold in a basic way are rather weak. These believers' responses to the facts of diversity may have to be different from those who have significant, firmly held E-beliefs.

### 3.5  Christianity is Not Free From Evidential Challenges.

Another objection is that I have assumed that there are no serious problems with Christian belief, or with whatever theistic viewpoint underlies one's use of the R/A view. For example, if a Christian wants to use the R/A view in this way must he not assume that the Resurrection is not made improbable by historical evidence, and that the Trinity is not inconsistent? To the contrary, he need not assume that the religious view involved is free from evidential challenges. For instance, in the first theft scenario described above there is much evidence against the memory belief, but the memory belief is still warranted. It is possible (and this is the point of introducing the Defeat Test) that evidence may be of such a sort and of such force against a significant basic belief that it defeats it despite the firm inclination one has to accept it. But while apparent problems like those mentioned above may exist for a given religious view, in many instances they will not constitute strong enough evidence to defeat the basic belief in question, at least not if that basic belief is properly held. So while one need not make the assumption that there are no problems with the religious view of the person employing the R/A view, one does have to assume that there is not cumulative evidence against that religious view that is strong enough to fulfill the Defeat Test.

### 3.6  God Would Be Unloving If He Acted as the R/A View Suggests.

One might think that the method attributed to God by the R/A view is a poor one, and in fact terribly unloving. For ease of exposition, let us assume the Christian version of the R/A view. Given that non-Christian communities and environments are not as conducive to believing in Christ as Christian ones, and given that salvation is at least in part determined by what one comes to believe in such environments, isn't it the case that a great

proportion of human beings have been purposely put in a less than proper epistemic position and have thereby had their eternal salvation put in danger? One would suppose that, given God's desire that people achieve salvation, and his desire that salvation come through belief in Jesus, he would have designed things differently. But it's important to note that though the described method is God's primary way of bringing people to believe in him, he has other ways as well. So despite the influences of one's environment, and despite the influences of one's affective or cognitive faculties, God may still break through to a person, enabling her to see and feel the truth of the gospel. Why doesn't God *always* do this? Apparently, God has chosen for the most part not to negate the influences of community and culture - perhaps he desires the *transformation* of culture, environment, and relationships, a holistic way of bringing people to himself. Because he values the integrity of this primary way he does not circumvent it on a wholesale basis. To use another method of belief-formation as primary in this most important of areas might be to undermine the various goals God has for community life, relationships, the family, and so on.

It is helpful to bring to mind the above-mentioned distinction between *doctrinal* exclusivism and *soteriological* exclusivism. The reformed epistemologist need not be a soteriological exclusivist. He might be a soteriological *inclusivist*, holding that while the creeds of his faith alone are wholly correct, God still allows those who do not embrace the doctrines of the true faith access to his saving grace. Reformed epistemologists will tend to be doctrinal exclusivists, since their position is that certain E-beliefs are rational and warranted. But no specific position on soteriological exclusivism is suggested by reformed epistemology. Indeed, even doxastic exclusivists differ on how many of the "central truths of the faith" are properly basic, and on the extent to which the creeds of other faiths reveal religious truth and complement the teachings of the true faith. The present objection assumes soteriological exclusivism, but that position is not entailed by the R/A view.

### 3.7  The R/A View is Ethnocentric.

This objection is that the R/A view is morally objectionable because it entails that some cultures are superior to others. While strictly speaking this is not an epistemological objection, it is important to stress that the R/A view does *not* entail that one culture is superior to another, both because it is a thesis concerning cognitive *environments*, not cultures or ethnic groups, and because it does not even endorse cognitive environments in a wholesale manner, but only with respect to the formation of certain beliefs. Different cultural and ethnic groups can provide equally effective cognitive environments for the formation of E-beliefs. For instance, Christianity is a religion practiced by people from hundreds of different cultural and ethnic groups throughout the world. Each one of these different groups may enjoy a cognitive environment which is conducive to the formation of warranted Christian E-beliefs, if in fact particularly Christian beliefs are those specified by our cognitive design plan.

"Cognitive environments" include large environments such as states, nations, and continents, as well as mini-environments such as faith com-

munities, neighborhoods, and families.[32]  In the actual world, all cognitive environments are subject to weaknesses.  To say that one cognitive environment or group of environments is more conducive than others to a particular kind of religious and/or ethical knowledge is not to say that these environments do not themselves stand in need of transformation and correction.  It also seems that some environments are conducive for coming to know some ethical or religious truths, while others are better for coming to know others.  So even if Christianity is true, cultures whose cognitive environments are not very conducive to basic knowledge of the central creeds of the Christian faith may well provide a good environment for much E-knowledge, and may indeed be superior in many respects to many or all environments which are conducive to E-knowledge of the central truths of the Christian faith.  Indeed, another reason for God's ordaining that people come to E-beliefs in this way may be that they are encouraged to learn from one another in a way that requires love, openness, and humility.

*3.8 The R/A Explanation Does No Special Explanatory Work.*

The atheistic/agnostic explanation of the facts of diversity asserts that those facts are due to "the vagaries of cultural and environmental influence."  But the R/A view's explanation is basically the same.  All it adds to this explanation is that God *intended* E-beliefs to be formed in this way.  But isn't the part of the R/A view concerning God's intentions therefore superfluous, and shouldn't we go with the explanation that postulates the least entities?  To the contrary, God does play an explanatory role in the R/A explanation.  According to the R/A view, God is influencing culture in such a way as to produce a number of environments that *are* truth-conducive with respect to central E-beliefs.  God influences people and people influence culture, cultures influence cognitive and affective environments, and these influence the formation of E-beliefs.  Even those environments that are not conducive to the formation of central doctrines concerning the true God are conducive to the formation of other important E-beliefs.  The idea that God is actively influencing people and their cultures is not an *ad hoc* addendum to the R/A view.  On the contrary it is a central component of the Christian gospel and of many other theistic perspectives as well.  It also arguably explains the facts of diversity better than the agnostic/atheistic version, because it helps to explain the fact that E-beliefs across the globe share many common themes.  Furthermore, even if the atheistic/agnostic explanation were to seem simpler and for that reason more attractive than that accompanying the R/A view, that alone would not make it strong enough to defeat E-beliefs.  The atheistic or agnostic explanation must be strong enough, given the facts of diversity, to fulfill the Defeat Test, and to do this for a significant, firmly held E-belief it would have to be overwhelmingly more plausible from an outsider's perspective than the explanation that accompanies the R/A view.

   It is also important to note that the same objection could be brought against the pluralist explanation.  The pluralist adds the Divine Reality to the vagaries of cultural and environmental influence to explain the diversity of E-beliefs.  As with the R/A view's explanation, this divine Reality is

designed to play an explanatory role with respect to E-beliefs. I hope to compare the plausibility of each of these explanations of the facts of diversity in another paper, but for our present purposes it is clear that neither the agnostic/atheistic explanation nor the pluralist explanation is strong enough, given the facts of diversity, to *defeat* significant, firmly held E-beliefs, given the plausibility of the R/A view.

### 3.9  E-beliefs are not Universally Accepted.

A final objection might come from the fact that I claim that belief in God, like memory belief, can be properly basic. Yet the legitimacy of memory belief enjoys near universal assent, whereas this is not true of religious belief. There is no compelling reason, however, to think that near-universal assent to a kind of basic belief is a necessary condition for proper basicality. It is certainly possible that there be forms of basic knowing which some but not others possess. There is no *a priori* reason to exclude such a possibility, and a number of entrenched religious views suggest that this possibility is realized. Indeed, it is not only religious views that suggest this. Many people have cognitive abilities that others lack, and many people have been prepared through previous experience to arrive at beliefs in a way in which others do not. If a cognitive agent is well-situated because of her mode of cognitive functioning and previous experience to form $p$ in response to experience $h$, then $p$ may well be $PB_w$ for her, even though many other people would not form that belief given that experience.

In summary, a Reformed/Aristotelian view on warrant that addresses character and cognitive environments provides a good response to the Epistemological Challenge of Diversity, one that accords with the way people actually come to form religious and ethical views. In light of the R/A view, we should conclude that merely having an awareness of the facts of diversity and the explanations offered by the Epistemological Challenge of Diversity is not enough to defeat a basic, exclusive ethical and/or religious belief that is significant and firmly held.[33]

*Roberts Wesleyan College*

### NOTES

1.    A number of philosophers have suggested that diversity poses a difficulty for reformed views on proper basicality, but only a few have explored this difficulty in much depth. For works on this subject see William Alston, "Religious Diversity and Perceptual Knowledge of God," *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988), pp. 433-448, William Alston, "Response to Hick," *Faith and Philosophy* 14 (1997), pp. 287-288, Peter Appleby, "Reformed Epistemology, Rationality, and Belief in God," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 24 (1988), pp. 129-141, David Basinger, "Hick's Religious Pluralism and 'Reformed Epistemology': A Middle Ground," *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988), pp. 421-432, Rose Ann Christian, "Plantinga, Epistemic Permissiveness, and Metaphysical Pluralism," *Religious Studies* 28 (1992), pp. 553-573, Richard Grigg, "The Crucial Disanalogies Between Properly Basic Belief and Belief in God," *Religious Studies*

26 (1990), pp. 389-401, John Hick, "The Epistemological Challenge of Religious Pluralism," *Faith and Philosophy* 14 (1997), pp. 277-286, John Hick, "Religious Pluralism and Salvation" and "A Concluding Comment," *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988), pp. 365-377 and pp. 449-455, Alvin Plantinga, "Pluralism: a Defense of Religious Exclusivism," *The Rationality of Belief and the Plurality of Faith* , eds. T. Senor and A. Plantinga (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp.191-215, "Ad Hick," *Faith and Philosophy* 14 (1997), pp. 295-298, Philip Quinn, "Towards Thinner Theologies: Hick and Alston on Religious Diversity," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 38 (1995), pp. 145-64, Joseph Runzo, "God, Commitment, and Other Faiths: Pluralism vs. Relativism," *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988), pp. 343-364, J. L. Schellenberg, "Religious Experience and Religious Diversity: A Reply to Alston," *Religious Studies* 30 (1994), pp. 151-159.

    2.    This formulation of Plantinga's account is from his *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 46-7.

    3.    Peter Klein, "Warrant, Proper Function, Reliabilism, and Defeasability," *Warrant in Contemporary Epistemology: Essays in Honor of Plantinga's Theory of Knowledge* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), pp. 97-130; the example is from p. 105.

    4.    Plantinga, "Respondeo," *Warrant in Contemporary Epistemology*, pp. 307-378; the quotation is from pp. 313-314.

    5.    *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 33.

    6.    *Warrant and Proper Function*, pp. 34-5.

    7.    *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 22.

    8.    See Plantinga's "Reliabilism, Analyses and Defeaters," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 55 (1995), pp. 427-464.

    9.    We need not decide here whether all emotions have a cognitive basis. Cognitive psychologists have cast serious doubt on the hypothesis that *all* emotions have a cognitive basis. Most likely some emotions do arise from propositional attitudes of the subject, but many others arise from non-cognitive, biological bases which in turn influence propositional attitudes. The assumption I make is that emotions, desires, and inclinations influence belief formation and vice-versa.

    10.  Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

    11.  *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 310.

    12.  My summary of Plantinga's position is based upon his "Is Belief in God Rational?," in C.F. Delaney and David Burrell, eds., *Rationality and Religious Belief* (Notre Dame: University of  Notre Dame Press, 1979), pp. 7-27, and his "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?," *Nous* 15 (1981), pp. 41-51.

    13.  "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?," p. 50.

    14.  "Criterion," as opposed to "condition," suggests something that is directly recognizable to the inquirer. We can't look directly at our design plan to see what it dictates, though we can have a sense of what is plausibly included in our design plan.

    15.  In "Religious Diversity and Perceptual Knowledge of God," *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988), pp. 433-448.

    16.  "Pluralism: a Defense of Religious Exclusivism," *The Rationality of Belief and the Plurality of Faith*, ed. T. Senor (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 191-215. Plantinga's paper addresses a number of challenges which diversity might be taken to pose for exclusive religious belief, including the charges that the exclusivist *qua* exclusivist exhibits moral failings such as arrogance, arbitrariness, dishonesty, imperialism, or oppressiveness. He shows that these charges either are unfounded or that they apply equally well to the pluralist, and indeed to anyone who takes *any* position towards a proposition with which others disagree. Plantinga also addresses the *epistemological* challenge of diversity with

respect to rationality, justification, and warrant, but doesn't address the "best-explanation" argument against exclusive beliefs. Nor does he identify the kind of evidence which *could* undermine a firmly held basic religious conviction.

17.  An "E-proposition" is an ethical or religious proposition about which there is widespread and seemingly irreconcilable disagreement. An "E-belief" is a firm and basic belief in such a proposition, and a case of "E-knowledge" is an instance of "E-belief" in which one knows the E-proposition.

18.  The terms introduced in this paragraph were suggested to me by an anonymous reviewer of this journal.

19.  As Plantinga points out in "Pluralism: a Defense of Religious Exclusivism," a person who nonculpably believes that he has a successful demonstrative or conclusive proof for his E-belief would not be susceptible to the usual formulations of the Epistemological Challenge of Diversity. Such a person would disagree with my way of formulating the facts of diversity, but the Epistemological Challenge of Diversity is aimed at those who hold E-beliefs while acknowledging that they have no conclusive, demonstrative proof for them.

20.  Below I describe two explanations which might accompany the No Warrant Challenge. The second would accompany this weaker form of the No Truth Challenge.

21.  I am addressing the Epistemological Challenge of Diversity in broad terms. While the focus of this paper is on the version that challenges the warrant of E-beliefs, the argument that follows also applies to the claim that one cannot be justified or rational in holding an E-belief. The term "defeat" is so defined below that one belief defeats another if it causes that belief to not be warranted, justified, or rational.

22.  I am using "defeat" here in an internalistic sense. The No Warrant Challenge is then claiming that it is *when a person becomes aware* of the facts of diversity, etc., that her E-belief is defeated. Another version of the No Warrant Challenge might use an externalistic version of defeat. On this view the facts of diversity and their best explanations constitute a defeater for the E-belief, even if the believer is not aware of them. Another possible variation is that the facts of diversity and their best explanations constitute a defeater for the E-belief if the believer *should* be aware of them. While I am addressing the first version of the No Warrant Challenge, the arguments below will apply equally to any of these variants.

23.  Another variant of the No Warrant Challenge would claim that the facts of diversity show that one can't be *warranted* (or *justified* or *rational*) in the belief *that one knows* something of ethical or religious significance. The arguments that follow will not apply directly to this variant, because in this case, though one can make a good case that the higher level belief is warranted, it may not, like the lower level belief, be properly basic. It may be that in order to know that I know that e.g. Jesus is God, I may need to know some epistemology in addition to knowing that Jesus is God.

24.  "Undisputed facts" as I use the term, refers to the propositions that are accepted by all or most of the reasonable parties in a given dispute. Given this definition, the "undisputed facts" could actually turn out to be false, though most parties would think this very unlikely.

25.  Another interesting possibility is the view that particular E-beliefs concerning God are in fact indefeasible. Suppose that God did design us with a *sensus divinitatis*, a faculty which produces in us a basic belief in God. Might He not have designed us so that we should never withhold or have less than full confidence in that belief? According to this view, there are no genuine defeaters for such E-beliefs because the design plan makes no provision for withholding them or holding them less firmly. While one might make this response to the

Epistemological Challenge of Pluralism, I will not explore it in this paper since most reformed epistemologists appear to reject it. Also, it seems to me that the cognitive design plan would countenance the rejection of an E-belief if the evidence against it were as strong as that arrayed against the hiking belief in the second theft scenario. The believer does not have direct access to the design plan, so how can she be expected to hold to an E-belief that is totally discredited by such powerful evidence?

26. Plantinga has coined the terms "impulsional evidence" and "doxastic evidence" to refer to the experience you have upon considering a proposition that impels you to believe the proposition, that makes it seem to you "right, compelling, acceptable." (*Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 104)

27. The presentation of contrary evidence and an explanation that includes a non truth-conducive source for my memory belief is only one way such a belief might be defeated. The evidence and explanation might also point to the falsity of the basic belief or to its extreme unlikelihood. It may be the case that I am crippled and unable to hike, or that the place in which I claim to have hiked has been inundated with a lava flow for the past week. The natural explanations of such facts would entail that my hiking belief is false, and would be obviously more plausible than any other explanation that allowed for the truth of my hiking belief. In such cases the Defeat Test would be satisfied, and my hiking belief would be defeated.

28. This is the view promoted by John Hick and others. Hick's explanation of the facts of diversity "postulates a divine Reality which is itself limitless, exceeding the scope of human conceptuality and language, but which is humanly thought and experienced in various conditioned and limited ways." (John Hick, *God Has Many Names*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982, p. 49)

29. In "Pluralism: a Defense of Religious Exclusivism," Plantinga writes, "No matter what philosophical and religious beliefs we hold and withhold (so it seems) there are places and times such that if we have been born there and then, then we would not have displayed the pattern of holding and withholding of religious and philosophical beliefs we *do* display.... What can we infer from it about what has warrant and how we should conduct our intellectual lives? That's not easy to say. Can we infer *anything at all* about what has warrant or how we should conduct our intellectual lives? Not obviously."

30. The *endoxa* are the received opinions of the community on what is right and wrong, on what is valuable, on what should or should not be done in certain circumstances, on how different people in the community should be treated in different instances, and so on.

31. The Christian version of the R/A view is separable from the R/A view. It adds to the R/A view beliefs drawn from the Christian tradition, such as that God has created us in his image, and with a faculty for knowing the truths of the gospel of Christ in a basic way upon being presented with that gospel, etc. One could embrace the R/A view without embracing Christianity.

32. The relevant environment for determining whether a person's belief has warrant will be that environment or those environments which in fact have the determining influence on the formation of a given belief. If the combined actual influence of the environments in which a subject finds herself deviates too much from that envisioned by the design plan for the formation of that kind of belief, then her belief will fail to be warranted.

33. A version of this paper was presented at a conference of the Society of Christian Philosophers held at Arizona State University in Tempe, AZ, in April 1998. I am thankful to the editor of this journal and to anonymous referees for their many helpful comments and suggestions.