

## The epistemological limits of experience-based exclusive religious belief

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**Abstract:** Alvin Plantinga and other philosophers have argued that exclusive religious belief can be rationally held in response to certain experiences – independently of inference to other beliefs, evidence, arguments, and the like – and thus can be ‘properly basic’. We think that this is possible only until the believer acquires the defeater we develop in this paper, a defeater which arises from an awareness of certain salient features of religious pluralism. We argue that, as a consequence of this defeater, continued epistemic support for exclusive religious belief will require the satisfaction of *non*-basic epistemic criteria (such as evidence and/or argumentation). But then such belief will no longer be properly basic. If successful, we will have presented a challenge not only to Plantinga’s position, but also to the general view (often referred to as ‘reformed epistemology’) according to which exclusive religious belief can be properly basic.

### Introduction

Alvin Plantinga champions the view that certain religious beliefs can be ‘properly basic’ – i.e. can have epistemic merit not on the basis of other beliefs, arguments, or evidence, but rather on the basis of a kind of ‘divine testimony’ which is occasioned by certain of the believer’s experiences.<sup>1</sup> Here, we will use the term ‘reformed epistemology’ (RE) to capture the general view according to which belief in God, as well as particular creedal-specific religious beliefs, can be properly basic (and hence, rational or warranted for the believer), if not in the way Plantinga describes, then in some other similar way. A person who holds ‘creedal-specific religious beliefs’ accepts the truth of propositions associated with a particular religious tradition. These beliefs (with which we will be concerned) are ‘exclusive’, since their propositional content entails the falsehood of other, incompatible religious beliefs. While granting that RE may show how religious belief can be epistemically rational or warranted in a properly basic

manner, we argue that (1) such belief is subject to defeat, and (2) the epistemic resources of RE leave this defeater undefeated.

Some philosophers defend RE via a general strategy consistent with the one Plantinga adopts in *WCB* (for convenience, let's call this 'the standard defence'). We will first argue against the standard defence by focusing on a recent exchange between David Silver and Eric Vogelstein. Doing so will also enable us to explain how it is that religious belief can be defeated by an awareness of religious pluralism. We will then address Plantinga's own defence of his position.

David Silver<sup>2</sup> supposes that a person (call her Faith) accepts Christian belief in the basic way, roughly according to Plantinga's 'Aquinas/Calvin' model. Further, he continues, Faith's trustworthy friend, Victor, reports to her that he has had a religious experience and as a result has come to form religious beliefs incompatible with those of Faith. By the 'principle of testimony',<sup>3</sup> Faith forms the belief that Christianity is false. But then Faith realizes that she has two conflicting beliefs: the belief (a) that Christianity is true, and the belief (b) that Christianity is false. Which belief should she maintain, and which belief should she abandon? According to Silver, unless Faith has a defeater for Victor's testimony (other than her own basic belief in the truth of Christianity), her Christian belief will be defeated and thus cannot rationally be maintained. And the same will be true, *mutatis mutandis*, of Victor.<sup>4</sup>

Can Faith appeal to her additional belief that she has a special source of religious knowledge, such as the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit (IIHS)? No. If Faith's belief that she has the IIHS is true, then, as Silver explains, 'all, or nearly all, of Faith's religious beliefs will turn out true; however, if Victor's testimony is true, then a good many of Faith's religious beliefs will turn out false. ... Victor's testimony is not compatible with Faith's belief that she possesses a special source of religious knowledge'.<sup>5</sup> Hence, it turns out that Victor's testimony provides Faith with a defeater for both her belief that Christianity is true and her belief that she has the IIHS. Thus, it is illegitimately circular for Faith to use her belief that she has a special source of religious knowledge as a defeater-defeater for Victor's testimony – since she could have this source of knowledge only if Victor's testimony is false.<sup>6</sup>

Now one might object, *contra* Silver, that if something like Plantinga's externalist account of warrant is true, then as long as Faith's belief is really produced by the IIHS, it will have warrant in the basic way and she will not acquire the relevant defeater. This response will not do. To see why, note that Plantinga's externalist account of warrant includes the stipulation that a belief must be *internally rational* if it is to be warranted.<sup>7</sup> And he tells us that '[i]nternal rationality includes, in the first place, forming or holding the appropriate beliefs in response to experience'.<sup>8</sup> Because Faith has been given good grounds (via Victor's testimony) for thinking that her beliefs *weren't* produced by the IIHS, she cannot

simply assert the conditional claim that *if* her beliefs are produced by the IIHS, *then* they are warranted in the basic way. For, Victor's testimony calls into question the truth of the antecedent of that very conditional, and, on Plantinga's model, the consequent isn't true unless the antecedent (or something relevantly similar) is true. We have trouble understanding why so many philosophers seem to hand-waive this sort of conditional around as though it had the power to make any belief (specifically any religious belief) immune from epistemic defeat. In our experience, this manoeuvre is popular among epistemic externalists. But even from an externalist perspective, it is hard to see how a belief could come to be indefeasible in this sort of way.

### **Eric Vogelstein's response to Silver and an evaluation of Vogelstein's critique**

In an interesting response characteristic of what we have called 'the standard defence' (of RE), Eric Vogelstein charges that Silver's reasoning depends on the truth of the following principle:

Principle of Testimonial Defeat (PTD) If I believe proposition P in the basic way, then if I hear testimony that  $\sim P$ , I ought to believe neither P nor  $\sim P$  (or equivalently, P and  $\sim P$  act as defeaters for each other) unless I have a defeater for  $\sim P$  other than P (in which case I ought to believe P), or a defeater for P other than  $\sim P$  (in which case I ought to believe  $\sim P$ ).<sup>9</sup>

But Vogelstein asks us to consider two counter-examples to PTD. First, suppose a person S receives testimony from you (and forms the corresponding belief in the basic way) that all his memory beliefs are false. In such a case, Vogelstein thinks that the only beliefs S holds that could effectively counter this testimony are based on S's 'memory of what the world is (contingently) like' – and that S consequently '[has] no candidate defeater for your testimony other than the very beliefs that your testimony calls into question'.<sup>10</sup> Second, suppose a moral realist receives testimony from a 'sociopath' that there are no moral truths. In such a case, '[the moral realist's] only defeater for the belief that moral truths are fictitious is [his] belief that there indeed exist moral truths'.<sup>11</sup> PTD, says Vogelstein, would wrongly entail that the memory beliefs in the first example and the moral beliefs in the second are defeated – and this is because PTD fails to accommodate the intuition that basic beliefs can vary in strength. Hence, he says, PTD is false and should be rejected in favour of the following:

Principle of Testimonial Evidence (PTE) If I believe a proposition P in the basic way, then if I hear testimony that  $\sim P$  and have no further defeater for P or  $\sim P$ , I ought to weigh the strength of my inclination to

believe that  $P$  against the strength of my inclination to believe that  $\sim P$  (based on that testimony) in order to determine whether to believe  $P$ ,  $\sim P$ , or neither  $P$  nor  $\sim P$ .<sup>12</sup>

Vogelstein maintains that, according to PTE, one's inclination to believe a proposition  $p$  (i.e. the strength of one's disposition to believe  $p$ ) counts as evidence for  $p$ . Thus, he says, when one is faced with two conflicting basic beliefs and has no candidate defeater for either of them, that person should adopt the belief that is associated with the stronger inclination (and hence, the stronger evidence). Consequently, Vogelstein thinks that in Silver's example, it may well be that Faith's inclination to believe that Christianity is true is stronger than her inclination to believe that Victor's testimony is true; if so, Faith does not acquire a defeater for her religious beliefs. And so the facts of religious pluralism need not threaten the rationality of basic religious belief.

Vogelstein's critique of Silver is flawed in several ways. First, note that his purported counter-examples to PTD are not really counter-examples at all. Consider the first example, where someone (call him Bill) tells another person (call him John) that all of his (John's) memory beliefs are false. Here, it seems that John would have reasons – not entirely dependent on the strength of his memory beliefs – to consider such testimony to be doubtful, at best. For example, John might reasonably believe that Bill could not possibly know that all his memory beliefs are false. Or, John might realize that this *one* person's testimony contradicts *all* of his experiences. These beliefs do involve memory, but do not acquire their epistemic status entirely on that basis. The objective probability that someone's testimony could at once be true and contradict all of one's experiences is extremely low, and could only take root in highly specific contexts, such as cases of complete amnesia or a mad scientist bringing it about somehow that all of one's memory beliefs are false. These reasons count against the credibility of Bill's testimony.

Now in all likelihood, John simply finds himself strongly inclined to believe that most of his memory beliefs are true. But even if inclinations to believe a proposition count as relevant evidence, as Vogelstein suggests, it is important to ask: 'Is the epistemic force of my inclination offset or even overridden by stronger evidence to the contrary, such that the inclination can no longer epistemically support the relevant belief?'. In the 'memory case', above, we think that the fact that John is probably very strongly inclined to believe that most of his memory beliefs are true certainly counts as relevant evidence. And the reason for this is captured by the 'principle of credulity', that *things are probably as they seem to be, in the absence of (relevant and sufficient) counter evidence*.<sup>13</sup> Now since John has been given no relevant counter evidence, he might reasonably appeal to the principle of credulity and argue that his inclination to believe the proposition about his memory beliefs counts as evidence in favour of that belief.

Such an appeal is *not* an appeal to John's own 'memory of what the world is (contingently) like' – for the principle of credulity is a general (and some say, a priori) principle about what is evidence for what.

(Things are very different, however, in the case of Faith and Victor. True, it is possible that Faith's inclinations count as evidence in the relevant way. But because Faith has received counter-evidence from a trustworthy source against the proposition that Christianity is true, her inclinations (which have also been challenged) are not sufficient for internal rationality in Plantinga's sense (the relevant sense here). If Faith had reasons or evidence that counted against Victor's testimony, then his testimony might not constitute relevant counter-evidence. But as the example is set up, Faith has no such reasons; her situation is epistemically symmetrical, as far as she can tell, with that of Victor. But then from an epistemic point of view, Faith will have no reason to think that her religious beliefs are true and those of Victor are false. And the verdict advocated by Silver – namely, that Faith give up her religious beliefs – would be the epistemically appropriate move to make.)

Hence, in the 'memory case' above, John has negative reasons against Bill's testimony that all of his (John's) memory beliefs are false and a positive reason (based on the principle of credulity) for thinking that many if not most of his memory beliefs are true. These reasons together constitute, in the language of PTD, 'a defeater for  $\sim P$  other than  $P$ '. Thus, the potential defeater provided by Bill's testimony is 'neutralized' (to use Silver's term) immediately and does not become an actual defeater for John. So Vogelstein is mistaken when he says that 'by PTD, [John] ought to believe neither that [his] memory beliefs are true nor that they are false'.<sup>14</sup> PTD has no such consequence. Hence, this first purported counter-example fails to hit its mark.

In the 'sociopath case', says Vogelstein, 'my only defeater for the belief that moral truths are fictitious is my belief that there indeed exist moral truths'.<sup>15</sup> This, however, looks more like an interesting but irrelevant psychological fact about Vogelstein than an indication of the epistemological case with respect to belief in moral realism. Given all the literature defending moral realism via argument and evidence, there are plenty of candidate defeaters for the sociopath's testimony and the relevant disagreement need not be adjudicated on mere intuition.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, it is questionable whether the sociopath's testimony should be taken seriously in the first place. Perhaps he is simply blind to moral realities, as some people are colour blind or tone deaf. What we really need is a sufficient reason to think that moral realism is false; simple testimony against moral realism amounts to little more than gainsay when there are respectable arguments to the contrary. So here again, there is 'a defeater for  $\sim P$  other than  $P$ '. Specifically, this defeater involves the conjunction of (1) the fact that there are good arguments for moral realism and (2) the fact that one person's testimony against moral realism is, given (1), of little epistemic value.

To be fair, Vogelstein is really suggesting that *if* the moral realist were to base his disagreement with the sociopath on ‘intuition alone’, PTD would issue the ‘counter-intuitive’ result that he is not rational in accepting moral realism. But the example fails to show this. If the sociopath’s testimony is not to be taken seriously, then because PTD concerns cases where a proposition (P) and counter testimony ( $\sim P$ ) ‘act as defeaters for each other’, the example itself is not relevant to PTD (and therefore does not show us a consequence of PTD). For, it is hard to see how a statement that is not to be taken seriously need act as a defeater for anything. On the other hand, if the testimony *is* to be taken seriously, then it serves as a potential defeater for the belief in moral realism. And the moral realist cannot appeal solely to his relevant inclinations in an effort to save his moral beliefs from defeat, since he has a good reason to think that those inclinations do not track truth.

Moreover, the sociopath’s inclinations to believe that moral realism is false effectively make things epistemically symmetrical, as far as either party can tell. To appeal either to the very intuitions themselves, or to the fact that one holds one’s moral beliefs ‘in the basic way’ will not help to break the symmetry. The moral realist needs to provide *some* reason or evidence (even if the sociopath won’t be convinced)<sup>17</sup> – beyond his mere intuitions – in order rationally to maintain his moral beliefs. But then Vogelstein is mistaken when he says that ‘it certainly appears as if [the moral realist who bases his moral beliefs on intuition alone is] justified in maintaining moral conviction when confronted with the sociopath’s testimony’.<sup>18</sup> *Pace* Vogelstein, PTD does not have dramatically counter-intuitive results; this second purported counter-example also fails.

Since PTD at this point remains largely intact, Vogelstein’s PTE appears unmotivated. Moreover, PTE is flawed in at least two ways. First, PTE includes the provision that ‘if I have no further defeater for P or  $\sim P$ ’, then ‘I ought to weigh the strength of my inclination to believe that P against the strength of my inclination to believe that  $\sim P$ ’. But Vogelstein doesn’t tell us when and under what conditions one ‘has no further defeater’ and can rely on mere strength of intuition in adjudicating what to believe. In our discussion of the above examples, we saw that there were epistemically significant reasons (independent of mere inclinations to believe) which were relevant in determining how the conflicting basic beliefs were to be adjudicated – and these reasons functioned as ‘further defeaters’ in the relevant sense. Vogelstein has yet to present a plausible case in which one in fact ‘has no further defeater’.

In general, liberal estimates about how frequently such cases occur seem to be mistaken. And even if Vogelstein were to present such a case, the claim that inclinations to believe a proposition are sufficient to ward off defeat, *even in the face of serious counter-testimony*, is implausible. Such testimony, after all, calls into question whether those inclinations are tracking truth. Second, PTE seems to suggest that a person could rationally hold basic beliefs in the face of

counter-testimony simply by announcing that she ‘has no further defeater’ and claiming a stronger inclination to accept them than the counter-testimony. But this allows basic beliefs of this sort to be effectively immune from defeat, and reduces epistemology to dogged psychological prejudices.

But isn’t it still true that PTD ‘entails the highly implausible proposition that basic beliefs do not vary in strength’?<sup>19</sup> We concede that basic beliefs vary in strength. However, it seems that PTD could be amended in some way to accommodate this fact. And in any case, this concession will be of little help to Vogelstein’s critique of Silver. For, it is reasonable to suppose that basic beliefs (however strongly held), on reflection, can be supported by epistemically significant reasons. These reasons are independent of mere inclinations to believe, and bear importantly on how one ought to adjudicate between conflicting basic beliefs.

Plantinga himself acknowledges something very much like this, as follows:

Perhaps you have always believed it deeply wrong for a counsellor to use his position of trust to seduce a client. Perhaps you discover that others disagree ... . You think the matter over more fully, imaginatively recreate and rehearse such situations, become more aware of just what is involved in such a situation (the breach of trust, the injustice and unfairness, the nasty irony of a situation in which someone comes to a counsellor seeking help but receives only hurt), and come to believe even more fully that such an action is wrong.<sup>20</sup>

Notice that Plantinga does not simply pronounce that your belief (*p*) that a counsellor’s seducing a client is wrong is rational so long as your inclinations favour *p*. Instead, he also lists several *reasons* which, even if they won’t convince those who demur, bear importantly on the rationality of continuing to hold *p* in the face of disagreement.

### **Plantinga and religious pluralism**

Given the flaws we’ve identified in Vogelstein’s attempt to defend RE, Plantinga’s emphasis on the use of epistemically significant reasons to support a ‘contested’ basic belief seems more plausible. This improved defence may be characterized by means of the following argument.

- (1) If a person *S* (i) becomes aware (or more fully aware) of the facts of religious pluralism and their implications with respect to her particular religious beliefs,<sup>21</sup> and (ii) reflects more carefully on the epistemic support that her beliefs enjoy (via certain of her experiences) and more strongly believes that these beliefs are likely to be true, and (iii) forms and maintains her beliefs in the right way, then *S*’s beliefs can be warranted in spite of *S*’s awareness of the facts of religious pluralism.

- (2) Therefore, S's awareness of the facts of religious pluralism needn't defeat her religious beliefs.

However, in order for S's greater conviction in (2) to be rational, she must take it that her religious beliefs are not epistemically inferior to, or on a par with, the religious beliefs of those who disagree with her. Here, Plantinga agrees:

She may agree that she and those who dissent are equally convinced of the truth of their belief, and even that they are internally on a par ... . Still, she must think ... that somehow the other person has made a mistake, or has a blind spot, or hasn't been wholly attentive, or hasn't received some grace she has ...; she must think that she has access to a source of warranted belief the other lacks.<sup>22</sup>

The fact that she thinks she has a source of warranted belief denied to the other person functions as an epistemically significant reason for believing that the relevant beliefs are not on an epistemic par. Plantinga then makes the important admission: 'If the believer concedes that she *doesn't* have any special source of knowledge or true belief with respect to Christian belief ... *then*, perhaps, she will have a defeater'.<sup>23</sup> In the remainder of the paper, we argue that absent the use of relevant evidence, etc., a person in Faith's situation will indeed have 'nothing not available to those who disagree with her' and will have a defeater for her belief.

### **Silver's example revisited**

Victor's testimony provides Faith with a defeater, not only for her belief that Christianity is true, but also for her belief that she has a special source of religious knowledge. Hence, Faith cannot legitimately cite her belief that she has the IHS (or something similar) so as to break the apparent symmetry between the relevant beliefs. And so it seems thus far that Plantinga's defence of RE will fare little better than Vogelstein's. But perhaps there is some other way for Faith to reasonably deny that Victor's testimony has greater or symmetrical credentials in relation to her religious beliefs. For example, Faith might think that she has better grounds (given by her relevant experience) in support of her beliefs than she has (given by Victor's testimony) in support of Victor's beliefs.

Now it *may* be that another's testimony is insufficient to defeat the beliefs one forms from one's own lived experiences. Still, that Victor is entirely truthful and a friend of Faith's gives Faith more reason for taking his testimony seriously than would be the case if the testimony came from a stranger or even an acquaintance. Also, a thorough knowledge of the facts of religious pluralism implies an awareness that there are millions of epistemically virtuous people who report profound and transformative experiences upon which they come to form mutually exclusive religious beliefs. This spreads the quality of testimony across a larger quantity of testifiers, through different religious traditions. Even if Faith were to amass

testimony from many epistemically virtuous Christians, there would, in all probability, be just as many (or more) honest and sincere individuals who could provide counter-testimony. And this sufficiently casts doubt on Faith's belief that her religious beliefs are epistemically better grounded than Victor's; at the very least, it makes it likely that there exists epistemic parity between hers and Victor's beliefs.

But if Faith's religious beliefs are on a par with (or inferior to) those of Victor, her beliefs cannot be rationally maintained. Given the above discussion, it is very hard to see how Faith's beliefs could escape the symmetry and avoid defeat apart from, at a minimum, *some* argumentation, evidence, or inference to other beliefs.<sup>24</sup> But if evidence, etc. thus becomes necessary, then we have secured the first of our two central theses: that *basic* religious belief is subject to defeat.

One might then object: 'Even if basic religious belief is initially defeated, once the defeater is itself defeated, such belief can again be held in a properly basic way.' To show the inadequacy of this suggestion, we need to briefly articulate two kinds of responses to defeaters.

First, there is what we'll call the 'Drain-O' response (because it works like Drain-O in un-clogging a kitchen sink): once the 'garbage' (the defeater) is disposed from the pipes, as it were, the sink functions normally as before and no longer needs the Drain-O. Second, there is the 'table-leg' response, following the manner in which a table leg upholds a table. Here, the presence of what effectively defeated the defeater is continually necessary for the once-defeated-belief to be rational again.

For example, suppose Jim mentions that he saw Sue at the dance last night, and you form the belief (*p*) that Sue was there. Then another colleague of yours, Paul, reports to you that Jim was out of town on business last night, and that, since she usually avoids social dances, Sue was probably not at the dance. Given that you believe Paul to be trustworthy (and that you don't know anything one way or another about the trustworthiness of Jim), you realize that you have a defeater for your original belief (*p*), and so now form the belief that Sue probably did not go to the dance. But suppose you come to recognize that Paul is intoxicated. Your reason for doubting Jim's testimony is no longer well-grounded and you are now rational in believing *p* in the same manner in which you were when you first formed this belief. Your belief that Paul is drunk does not itself support your belief *p*, but instead (like Drain-O) 'flushes out' Paul's testimony and makes it unable to defeat *p*.

By contrast, in 'table-leg' cases, the belief is not rational apart from the defeater-defeater. And this, we have been arguing, is the case with respect to Faith: in the absence of relevant evidence, etc., Victor's testimony gives her a defeater. The continued rationality of her religious beliefs depends on that evidence (the defeater-defeater) – even if she doesn't or needn't have such evidence continually before her mind.

## Conclusion

According to RE, while evidence, argumentation, and/or inferences to other beliefs may be useful, these are not *required* for a religious belief to be rational. This is part of what it means for such a belief to be ‘properly basic’. Hence, if (as a consequence of the defeater we’ve developed here) a religious belief cannot be rational apart from evidence (etc.), that belief can no longer be ‘properly basic’. This presents a challenge for Plantinga’s position in particular, since one of his central claims in *WCB* is that specifically Christian religious belief, at least, can be properly basic. If there are other versions of RE that allow for a basic belief’s rational dependence on non-basic elements, we don’t know about them (and aren’t sure why they should really be called versions of RE). RE may accurately describe how religious beliefs are often formed and how they can be rational apart from the sort of defeater presented here. Once this defeater is acquired, however, epistemic support for such beliefs will have to come by way of evidence, arguments, and/or the satisfaction of other non-basic epistemic criteria. And of course, many adherents among the different religious traditions claim that these are available.<sup>25</sup>

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## Notes

1. See Alvin Plantinga *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), hereafter *WCB*. In what follows, we assume the reader is familiar with the general arguments in this work.
2. Silver (2001).
3. This principle states that the testimony of others is properly to be believed in the absence of counter-evidence. See Plantinga (1993b, 77–82). Plantinga argues, plausibly, that beliefs formed on the basis of testimony are ‘properly basic’ beliefs (in the absence of defeaters).
4. If belief is involuntary, it may be wondered how Faith’s belief could be rationally defeated if she takes seriously Victor’s testimony but continues to find herself believing that she is right and that he is mistaken. However, giving up a belief *p* might be the most fitting doxastic response to a given cognitive situation – even if one can’t voluntarily give up *p*. A person in such a case is not to be blamed for holding *p*; nevertheless his belief is irrational (from an epistemic point of view). See, e.g. Conee and Feldman (2004, 85).
5. Silver (2001), 7.
6. *Ibid.*, 8–11.

7. Plantinga (2000), 110–113. Internal and external rationality are two forms of rationality understood as proper function – a central element of his account of warrant.
8. *Ibid.*, 111.
9. Vogelstein (2004), 189.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.* Vogelstein thinks arguments aren't relevant here, since the disagreement is 'fundamental' and 'based on intuition alone'.
12. *Ibid.*, 190.
13. This principle, in Swinburne's words, 'is one that seems to almost all of us in our non-philosophical moments to be self-evidently true. If you don't trust experience in the absence of counter-evidence, you will have to be massively sceptical about the external world, other minds, and everything else. And since virtually none of us are that sceptical, we must recognize the foundation of that lack of scepticism: the principle of credulity'; ('Which kinds of rational religious belief are worth having?', *Society of Christian Philosophers* address, February, 2004). See also Swinburne (2001).
14. Vogelstein (2004), 189.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Philosophical defences of moral realism are legion. For particularly interesting and forceful arguments, see Shafer-Landau (2003).
17. And such reasons and evidence are certainly available even if one is not aware of the philosophical arguments for moral realism. Below, we cite an example from Plantinga which illustrates how simple reflection on a moral situation can reveal reasons for believing in moral truths.
18. Vogelstein (2004), 189.
19. *Ibid.*, 191.
20. Plantinga (2000), 457.
21. Because different religious traditions affirm the truth of mutually exclusive sets of propositions in their descriptions of reality, at most only one such set can be true.
22. Plantinga (2000), 453.
23. *Ibid.*
24. The evidence in question will typically be in favour of one's religious beliefs. In some cases, however, it could be negative. If you (whom I trust) tell me that you have had a religious experience that you believe to be of X but I nevertheless have good evidence E against X, your testimony needn't give me a defeater for my contrary religious belief Y (which, say, I have thus far been holding in a properly basic way). *Absent* such evidence, (*ceteris paribus*) our basic beliefs X and Y would act as defeaters for each other.
25. Our thanks to David Silver for reading and commenting on earlier drafts of this paper and for his e-mail correspondence – both of which were very helpful to us. Similar thanks are also due to Charles Hughes.