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Epistemology in the Churches of Christ: An Analysis and Critique of Thomas B. Warren

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to understand at least one prevalent religious epistemology in the

Churches of Christ by exploring the work of Thomas B. Warren. To accomplish this goal,

I first offer a descriptive analysis of Warren's theory of knowledge followed by an

assessment of its strong and weak points. Ultimately finding his epistemology

unsatisfying, I conclude the thesis by highlighting recent developments in religious

epistemology that might point the way forward in accounting for knowledge of God in a

theologically and philosophically robust way.

Epistemology in the Churches of Christ: An Analysis and Critique of Thomas B. Warren

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To my dad, who exemplifies diligent and disciplined work satisfied with nothing short of excellence. And to my mom, who from the moment of my birth, constantly instilled in me a passion for knowing God. This project is dedicated to the two of you because, in so many ways, your unflagging love and support have allowed me to pursue what I love.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the Question

What are the conditions under which one can achieve knowledge of God? Over the past fifty years, this question has received renewed attention.[1] This has led to new and philosophically interesting ways of addressing the conditions under which Christian belief can count as knowledge. Thinkers and theologians in the Churches of Christ, however, have rarely, if ever, offered a formal and systematic answer to this essential theological prolegomenon. While the Churches of Christ have not been bankrupt of epistemological assumptions, these assumptions are usually expressed only as informal intuitions rather than formal epistemological categories.

Epistemology has recently seen an impressive development of epistemological categories. Significant work has been done to distinguish competing theories of knowledge, and consequently, each of these theories has become increasingly thorough and sophisticated. Yet the Churches of Christ have seldom sought to utilize these developments. If, then, the informal epistemological intuitions and presumptions of the Churches of Christ were systematized and analyzed, where would they fit in light of

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1. This question was reinvigorated by Alvin Plantinga's seminal work, *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), and ultimately culminated in his magnum opus, *Warranted Christian Belief (*New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Other major contributors to this question include William P. Alston, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Eleonore Stump, Peter van Inwagen, Richard Swinburne, et al.

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contemporary epistemology? And furthermore, would certain underlying epistemological issues rise to the surface upon formal analysis that have so far, by avoiding close scrutiny, remained obscure? It is these questions that are the focus of this thesis.

1.2 Account of the Issue

Though not as much work has been done on epistemology in particular, scholarly attempts have been made to understand the general philosophical assumptions operating in the Churches of Christ. There are three ways one might go about this task of analyzing the philosophical underpinnings of the Churches of Christ. One method would be to investigate the philosophical foundations upon which the Stone-Campbell Movement (of which the Churches of Christ are a part) was originally built. Let's call this the *historical roots project*. This project has seen a considerable amount of attention in the past several decades. In his book, *The Philosophy of Religion of Alexander Campbell*, J. Caleb Clanton seeks to identify the philosophical influences of Alexander Campbell and then goes on to demonstrate how those influences manifested themselves in particular theological desiderata.[2] Along similar lines, Richard T. Hughes and C. Leonard Allen, in their book, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ*,[3] trace the philosophical and theological roots of the beginnings of the Stone-Campbell Movement from the various streams of thoughts from which it grew, such as the Renaissance, the Age of Reason, Martin Luther, and the Anabaptists. These works and others like them in the historical roots project seek to uncover the theological and philosophical

2. J Caleb Clanton, *The Philosophy of Religion of Alexander Campbell* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2013). Samuel Morris Eames undertook a similar project some years earlier in his book *The Philosophy of Alexander Campbell* (Bethany, WV: Bethany College, 1966).

3. Crawford Leonard Allen, and Richard T. Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ* (Abilene: ACU Press, 1988).

commitments of the Churches of Christ by understanding their origins in the Stone-Campbell Movement. However, if one is hoping to understand Churches of Christ today, these sorts of projects will not be sufficient; there is a significant gap between historical figures or movements (such as Alexander Campbell or the Renaissance, as cited above) and any modern incarnation of the Churches of Christ.[4]

A second method of examining the philosophical assumptions of the Churches of Christ would be to track a certain idea(s) from the beginning of the Stone-Campbell Movement, recording its development all the way until the present. Let's call this the *historical development project*. In short, the historical development project seeks to understand assumptions and beliefs in the Churches of Christ today in light of their developments throughout the history of the Stone-Campbell Movement. This project has seen a fair amount of attention, though not as much as the historical roots project. In *Things Unseen: Churches of Christ In (and After) the Modern Era*, C. Leonard Allen traces the hermeneutical principles of the Stone-Campbell Movement from John Locke and Francis Bacon, continuing through Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone, and on through to the modern and postmodern eras.[5] In a similar vein, Jeff Childers, Doug Foster, and Jack Reese describe a changing culture in the Churches of Christ in their book, *The Crux of the Matter: Crisis, Tradition, and the Future of the Churches of Christ*.[6] In the *Crux of the Matter*, the authors seek to show from where the Churches of

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4. I want to emphasize that the historical roots project is immensely important. Not only does it provide understanding to the historical circumstances that have given rise to modern iterations of Stone-Campbell movement churches, it may also alert one to tendencies and trends in the theology, philosophy, and behavior of these churches that may still be observable today, if only in updated variations.

5. Crawford Leonard Allen, *Things Unseen: Churches of Christ in (And After) the Modern Age* (Siloam Springs: Leafwood Publishers, 2004).

Christ have come and how they have developed in order to show where they might go in the future. The historical development project, therefore, seeks to provide an intellectual framework for understanding the issues of the Churches of Christ today by studying the issues of the past and the answers that have been provided to them. These works are also important for understanding the intellectual heritage of the Churches of Christ and can also go a long way in the body's self-understanding.[7]

The final method for examining the philosophical underpinnings of the Churches of Christ is to illuminate the current philosophical assumptions prevalent in the Churches of Christ in light of modern philosophy and theology. Let's call this the *philosophical theology project*. Similar to the historical development project, the philosophical theology project seeks to understand the background philosophical assumptions and beliefs of the Churches of Christ, but instead of understanding those assumptions in light of the historical development of ideas, the philosophical theology project seeks to understand these assumptions by means of modern philosophical and theological categories in a formal and technical sense. Of the three projects I have listed, the philosophical theology project has by far received the least attention, particularly in the area of epistemology. Short essays have put Restoration principles in dialogue with modern epistemology, but substantive research in this area is sorely lacking.[8] Therefore in order to take a step

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6. Jeff W. Childers, Douglas A. Foster, and Jack Roger Reese, *Heart of the Restoration Series. The Crux of the Matter: Crisis, Tradition, and the Future of Churches of Christ*, (Abilene: ACU Press, 2002).

7. For examples of other projects in the historical development project, see Patrick Leon Brooks, *Lockean Epistemology and the Indwelling Spirit in the Restoration Movement* (Master's Thesis, Abilene Christian University), 1977; Thomas H. Olbricht, "Hermeneutics In The Churches of Christ." *Restoration Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (1995): 1-24.

8. For similar essays, see John D. Castelein, "Can The Restoration Movement Plea Survive If Belief In Objective Truth Is Abandoned," *The Stone-Campbell Journal* 1, no. 2 (1988): 27-44; Mark E.

towards addressing this dearth of research and to achieve the goal of this thesis to elucidate a prominent epistemology in the Churches of Christ, this thesis offers an analysis and critique of the epistemology of Thomas B. Warren.

1.3 Preliminary Remarks

Before proceeding, It will be helpful to do a certain amount of throat clearing. Namely, it is important to note that when I mention the "Churches of Christ," I am referring in this thesis to a particular strand of the Churches of Christ. The Churches of Christ are not a monolithic group; not every church that identifies as a Church of Christ is identical to the others. As such, whenever I refer to or describe the Churches of Christ, I should be taken to mean those American churches of Christ characterized by a principled objection to instrumental music in worship, a view of scripture as infallible (i.e., without factual error or internal contradiction), an understanding of the Bible as the only legitimate theological resource (i.e., not creedal statements, traditions, etc.), and a commitment to the restoration and replication of the church as it existed in the first century CE. It to these churches that Thomas B. Warren devoted his time and effort and that therefore bear his epistemic resemblance.

1. 4 Why Thomas B. Warren?

I have chosen to focus on Thomas B. Warren for three reasons. First, Warren both represents and forms many of the background beliefs of a particular strand of contemporary Churches of Christ. He represents the epistemological beliefs of the Churches of Christ in that Warren's epistemological convictions are paradigmatic of

Powell, "Canonical Theism and Theological Commitments in the Stone-Campbell Movement," *Restoration Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2009): 227-238.

those held by certain members of the Churches of Christ. But Warren also formed certain background beliefs of the Churches of Christ in that he formalized many of the inchoate epistemological views that were circulating in the Churches of Christ in a way that was accessible to the average member. He thus took important steps in developing a framework for understanding epistemological issues that had not before been expressed by members of the Churches of Christ.

It is difficult to understate the impact Warren had on the Churches of Christ. Gregory Allen Tidwell, editor of *The Gospel Advocate*, went so far as to call Warren a "towering figure in the Lord's church of the 20th century."[9] Indeed he was. Thomas B. Warren was editor of both *The Spiritual Sword* as well as *Firm Foundation*, two prominent periodicals that primarily circulate among Churches of Christ, for a combined thirty years. He was also a professor at Abilene Christian University for two years (1946-1947), Chair of the Bible Department at Fort Worth Christian College and also University President for three years, Chair of the Department of Bible at Freed-Hardeman University for seven years (1964-1971), Professor of Philosophy of Religion and Christian Apologetics at Harding Graduate School of Religion for eight years (1971-1979), and Executive Vice President, Dean of the Graduate School, and Professor of Philosophy of Religion and Christian Apologetics at Tennessee Bible College for four years. Furthermore, Warren's public speaking events were also widely attended. When he was in good health, Warren preached around twenty-five Gospel meetings a year,[10] and he also had public debates with such prominent figures as Reading University Professor of

9. "Testimonials," Warren Christian Apologetics Center, accessed May 20, 2016, https://warrenapologeticscenter.org/about-us/testimonials.html

10. Scott Harp, "Thomas Bratton Warren PhD," *History of the Restoration Movement*, accessed May, 20, 2016, http://www.therestorationmovement.com/_states/texas/warren,_tb.htm

Philosophy Antony Flew, Professor of Philosophy at the University of California at

Berkeley Wallace Matson, and University of North Texas Professor of Philosophy Joe

Barnhart.[11] In fact, Flew recalls that his debate with Warren was the most well attended

of any debate he had in his life, estimating that there were five to seven thousand people

in attendance.[12] Warren was and continues to be such a large figure in the Churches of

Christ that there is now a Christian apologetics institute that bears his name.[13] Warren's

numerous teaching positions at higher education institutions affiliated with the Churches

of Christ, his considerable number of books and publications, and his wide audience of

readers all combined to stretch Warren's influence not just throughout North America but

throughout the world.

The second reason I have chosen to focus on Warren is because he is a

contemporary figure. Because the philosophical theology project seeks to address

epistemological issues in the Churches of Christ as they exist today, it is necessary in this

thesis to identify a *contemporary* account of epistemological issues. Thomas B. Warren is

just such a figure. Warren's academic career was at its height in the '70s and '80s, and

continued even until his death in 2000. His works are still widely circulated, and the

Warren Christian Apologetics Center, which is dedicated to continuing Warren's legacy,

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11. David Lipe recalls that Warren had at least 18 public debates in his lecture "2008 Lecture on the Debates of Thomas B. Warren" (presentation, *2008 Freed-Hardeman Lectureship: Behold the Lamb—John's Gospel of Belief*, Henderson TN, February 3-8 2008).

12. Antony Flew, *There Is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind* (New York: HarperOne, 2007). These numbers are even more impressive considering the notoriety of others Flew also had discussions with such as C.S. Lewis, Alvin Plantinga, William Lane Craig, and Richard Swinburne. Charles Pugh estimates the crowd at the Warren-Flew debate could have been as great as 9,000 in "The Vision of Thomas B. Warren" *Warren Christian Apologetics Center*, accessed May 20, 2016, https://warrenapologeticscenter.org/resources/articles/miscellanea/the-vision-of-thomas-b-warren.html

13. More information about the Warren Christian Apologetics Center can be found at it the following website: https://warrenapologeticscenter.org

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continues to spread Warren's influence as far as possible. Because of his recent

contributions, therefore, Warren is relevant for understanding the Churches of Christ

today.

Third and finally, there have been few in the Churches of Christ more qualified,

intelligent, and articulate as Thomas B. Warren in the area of philosophy. Warren was a

trained philosopher having received his Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University in the area of

Philosophy of Religion. He is also widely lauded as one of the most important thinkers in

the Churches of Christ in decades. Charles Pugh, co-founder and writer for the Warren

Christian Apologetics Center, describes Warren as "one of the greatest apologists of all

time."[14] According to Pugh, Warren "possessed the rare combination of gifted logical

thinking, speaking, and writing done in the spirit of a true Christian Gentleman."[15] Pugh

is not alone in this opinion. David Lipe, retired Professor of Philosophy at Freed-

Hardeman University, considers Warren among the truly great teachers and preachers to

have ever lived.[16] Even individuals not affiliated with the Churches of Christ hold Warren

in high regard. William Sahakian, Chairman of Suffolk University's philosophy

department, considered Warren's work "as fine an apologetic for traditional Christianity

as any I have read."[17] Warren used his gifts of intellectual acumen and philosophical

training to elucidate and defend Restoration principles. This, combined with his intense

14. Charles Pugh III, "Warren Center: a Legacy," *Sufficient Evidence: A Journal of Christian Apologetics* 1, no.1 (2011): 47.

15. Ibid. Elsewhere, Pugh wrote, "Thomas B. Warren was one of the great gospel preachers of the 20th century. Few matched him in ability and influence. As a thinker, writer, debater, teacher, scholar, and preacher, he had few equals." in "Tribute to Brother Warren—Friend of God," *Therefore Stand* 16, (2000): 76.

16. David Lipe, "2008 Lecture on the Debates of Thomas B. Warren," Lecture, accessed May 20, 2016, http://www.therestorationmovement.com/audio/Warren%20Debates.mp3

17. Cited in *Gospel Advocate 64*, no. 47 (November 1972).

commitment to the Church, resulted in a robust philosophy that undergirded Warren's

vision of Christianity. By examining Warren's particular epistemology, we see an

epistemology in the Churches of Christ in its most polished form.[18]

1.5 Thesis Outline

In order to achieve the goal of this thesis to describe and critique a prevalent

epistemology in the Churches of Christ, this thesis proceeds as follows. It begins in the

second chapter by unpacking the epistemology of Thomas B. Warren, whose particular

work on epistemology functions to represent the epistemology of the Churches of Christ.

I will primarily be interested in Warren's account of knowledge; that is, Warren's

account of what criteria must be satisfied in order for a belief to count as knowledge.

Warren does not offer a formal and systematic epistemology himself, so this thesis first

systematizes Warren's epistemology and also offers an analysis of his epistemological

framework in light of contemporary epistemology. This is done by mining Warren's

writings for insight as to what he sees as the criteria of knowledge. However, this is not a

purely descriptive task; it is also constructive. In one sense, Warren is very clear about

his epistemological views; he takes great pains to articulate his arguments in a precise

and organized fashion. But in another sense, his epistemology is somewhat opaque.

Warren rarely uses words such as "knowledge" or "justification," preferring instead to

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18. This is not to say that Warren's is the best or most satisfying epistemology in the Churches of Christ—indeed, I argue in this thesis that his epistemology is deeply flawed—rather, for purpose of this thesis of examining a thoroughly expressed epistemology in the Churches of Christ, Warren provides the most useful example due to his willingness to fully explicate his epistemological positions by way of his philosophical expertise. Furthermore, it may not be that Warren is the *most* representative of the Churches of Christ in regards to epistemology, but he is at least adequately representative for the purposes of this thesis.

discourse about what one *ought* to believe or how one *should* behave intellectually.[19] While these sorts of normative claims are no doubt important, they do little to address which beliefs objectively count as knowledge. In the few cases that Warren does talk about knowledge, it is often about what one does *not* know, rather than what does in fact count as knowledge.[20] Instead, most of Warren's epistemological claims concern what is or is not rational. He certainly never straightforwardly delineates what he sees as the necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge in any formal and systematic way.

These difficulties don't just obscure Warren's background epistemological framework in a way that requires a more careful and thorough reading of his written work—it also calls for a constructive element. Due to the situational nature of his writings, certain aspects of Warren's epistemological framework never get straightforwardly addressed, leaving anyone interested in illuminating Warren's meta-epistemology to fill in the gaps as closely as possible in a way that coheres with his explicit epistemological statements. Of course this constructive element is not just guesswork, but it is also not simply an orderly arrangement of his ideas. It is conjectural by nature.

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19. Numerous statements throughout Warren's *Logic and the Bible* demonstrate this point: "Every person should strive to give good reasons for his conclusions," 14; "All men should recognize the truth of and honor the law of rationality (men should draw only such conclusions as are warranted by the evidence). Further, as has been pointed out in this present chapter, all men should recognize the truthfulness of and honor the 'laws of thought.'" 25-26; "Men should draw only such conclusions as are a part of arguments which are valid and have true premises." 79; "We ought to justify our conclusions by adequate evidence." 14; "Men should use their power to think validly to 'prove all things' and to 'hold fast' to what is true." 42.

20. For example, Warren devotes an entire chapter of *Logic and the Bible* to attacking various iterations of the atheists' claim "I know that God does not exist." In it, Warren repeatedly charges that unless atheists can provide a valid argument that proves their claim, they do *not* have knowledge of the claim they are making. See *Logic and the Bible*, 109-124.

Once a complete picture of Warren's epistemology is laid out, I then offer a critique in the third chapter. This involves an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of Warren's epistemology. It will be the claim of this chapter that there are decided weaknesses in Warren's epistemology. These weaknesses are fatal to the point that Warren's epistemology, if taken to its logical end, results in skepticism in general and agnosticism in particular. This is no doubt a bold claim, so to make good on my argument, this chapter identifies and delineates three separate problems with Warren's epistemology all of which lead to skepticism. But there are also certain strengths of Warren's epistemology. As such, I will also highlight the considerable strengths of Warren's epistemology, especially as it relates to knowledge of God.

This thesis concludes in the fourth chapter by offering a way forward in religious epistemology. Such an account must avoid the pitfalls of Warren's epistemology but should also seek to utilize its strengths. Religious epistemology has seen a surge of interest over the last half decade, so I highlight in this chapter recent developments in epistemology that may provide valuable insights as to how one ought to think about knowledge of God. While it is not within the purview of this thesis to offer a complete account of knowledge of God, I do at least hope to pave the way for this important task to be done by providing what I see as some helpful starting points.

1.6 Contribution

This thesis contributes to current scholarly discussion in two ways. First, it takes a step toward bridging the gap in research concerning a formal description of the epistemology of Churches of Christ as it exists today. Given the emphasis in the Churches of Christ on hermeneutics, apologetics, and knowledge of absolute truth, there

is a distinct culture of attention to epistemological concerns. Yet despite this tradition of epistemological reflection in the Churches of Christ, unfortunately little work has been done to describe or unpack this epistemology in any formal way. Consequently, this thesis aims to aid in providing an understanding of an epistemology prevalent in the Churches of Christ today.

Second, despite his considerable influence on the Churches of Christ, no critical study has been done to analyze the work of Thomas B. Warren. Research is lacking that explores Warren's particular philosophical worldviews, in what ways Warren has affected the Churches of Christ, in what ways his ideas still exist in the Churches of Christ, or in what ways his ideas have been disseminated even among those members who may not be directly familiar with Warren or his writings. In light of this dearth of research, this thesis seeks to offer a deeper understanding of Thomas B. Warren and his work.

CHAPTER II

THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF THOMAS B. WARREN: AN ANALYSIS

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I aim to provide a framework for understanding the epistemology of Thomas B. Warren. Although Warren wrote and spoke extensively about epistemology, nowhere does he clearly and systematically lay out what he sees as the criteria for knowledge. Rather, Warren tends to address epistemology only as it relates to specific questions that crop up either in society or in his churches. For instance his book, *When Is An Example Binding?*, is replete with epistemological claims but only as they relate to adjudicating whether examples in the Bible are instructive for contemporary churches with regard to doctrine. This sort of situational epistemology might be helpful for his readers who have rather practical concerns about how to interpret and apply the Bible in a modern context, but it leaves open the question of what theoretical framework animates Warren's answers to such specific epistemological issues.

In order to provide this descriptive analysis of Warren's epistemology, this chapter is organized into three sections, each dedicated to explicating a defining aspect of Warren's epistemology. The first section defines two theories—internalism and externalism—regarding the fundamental nature of epistemic justification and then identifies Warren's epistemology as exemplifying one of these theories. The second

explores Warren's understanding of how a person's beliefs must relate to each other in order to count as knowledge. Specifically, I briefly delineate three standard ways epistemologists have thought about the structure of belief: foundationalism, infinitism, and coherentism. I then relate Warren's epistemology to one of these three theories, namely foundationalism. Finally, the third section synthesizes the components of Warren's epistemology described in the previous sections along with other relevant aspects of Warren's epistemology in order to offer a unified account of his epistemology. The chapter concludes by employing this explanation of Warren's general epistemology toward the end of understanding his religious epistemology.

2.2 Warren: Internalist or Externalist?

In this section, I aim to shed light on Thomas B. Warren's conception of the fundamental nature of epistemic justification. By *justification*, I mean that property which differentiates mere true belief from knowledge. A belief could be true but not count as knowledge. Suppose I have a friend who has a bag of marbles in his backpack and he tells me that if I can tell him how many marbles are in it, he will give them to me. If in a stroke of good luck I guess there are 37 marbles and it just so happens that my guess is exactly right, did I *know* there were 37 marbles in his bag? No, despite the fact that I formed a true belief, it does not count as knowledge. The difference is that I was not *justified* in believing there were 37 marbles in his bag. In other words, to say that a belief is justified is to say that the belief is acceptable, proper, or up to standard. But what is it that makes a belief justified? The answer to this question is the subject of no little debate, and though there about as many answers to this question as there are epistemologists, it is commonly agreed that these answers fall under one of two general theories: internalism

or externalism. In this section, I define these two epistemic theories and identify

Warren's epistemology as either internalist or externalist.

Let us first consider internalism about knowledge. According to internalists, the

factors that justify a true belief in a way that counts as knowledge are solely internal to

the knower. A minimal definition of internalism (MDI) could be stated as follows:

> (MDI) Subject S is justified for Proposition P at time t iff S is able to explain upon
> reflection at t how S knows P to be true.

In other words, S must have cognitive access to the grounds of S's knowledge.[21]

Suppose I believe that my eyes are green. I am internalist-justified in believing my eyes

are green only if I have access upon reflection to the reasons I believe my eyes are green

(e.g., I have seen in a mirror my eyes are green, a trustworthy person told me they are

green, etc.). If I believe that I have green eyes but I am not aware of the reasons I believe

I have green eyes, I am not justified, even if I happen to be correct. A view counts as a

version of internalism only if it endorses this awareness requirement.

Externalism, on the other hand, is perhaps best understood in contrast to

internalism: the factors that justify a true belief in a way that counts as knowledge are *not*

solely internal to the knower. Instead, externalist accounts of knowledge emphasize the

importance of factors outside the control of the knower such as properly functioning

faculties, a truth-conducive environment, and/or whether the belief is caused by the state

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21. This is a strong version of internalism. There are weaker versions of internalism, but for the purpose of time and space, and because Warren is not a weak internalist, I will not use the space in this chapter for drawing out such a distinction. In short, awareness internalism, a strong version of internalism, requires that the subject have access to the grounds of her knowledge at the time of belief. Mentalism on the other hand, which is a weak version of internalism, maintains that one must merely *be able* to access the reasons for beliefs, but does not require that one be able to do so at the time of belief in order for the belief to be justified. This is a distinction made by Michael Bergmann in *Justification Without Awareness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 45-75.

of affairs that makes it true.[22] Furthermore, unlike internalists, externalists about

knowledge reject that a person must have cognitive access to the grounds of her

knowledge. For example, suppose that in my contribution to a discussion about the Civil

War, I throw out a factoid, but when asked how I know such an obscure thing, I cannot

remember where I heard it. For the externalist, my belief may still count as knowledge as

long as the belief was formed by reliable processes, even if I do not remember on what

basis the belief was originally formed. Furthermore, I never had to know why I believed

it in the first place. As long as my belief was formed by the operation of properly

functioning faculties (or some other externalist criteria), it does not matter if I am aware

of the reasons for my belief—I know it anyway. This is the fundamental difference

between externalism and internalism.[23]

Given these definitions of internalism and externalism, Thomas B. Warren's

epistemology should be thought of as an internalist one. For Warren, certain truths can be

known and the gaining of that knowledge "necessarily involves the reasoning of men."[24]

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22. For more extensive discussion of the differences of externalism and internalism, see Hilary Kornblith ed. *Epistemology: Internalism and Externalism* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2001); Matthias Steup ed. *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 324-350.

23. It is perhaps counter-intuitive to refer to this as "externalism." After all, so-called externalist criteria such as properly functioning faculties are nonetheless "inside" the mind of the knower, and, for that matter, so are all the rest of the beliefs that the knower might hold. For this reason, "internalism" and "externalism" should not be thought of as geographical descriptors for the location relative to the knower of the factors that justify belief. Rather, they should be understood in terms of volitional control. Whether or not my faculties function properly or my environment is truth-conducive is outside of my control, so therefore they are "external" justifiers, whereas whether or not I do my due diligence to only believe those things for which I have access to good reasons is within my control, and are therefore "internal" justifiers. For more on the meaning of "internalism" in contrast to "externalism," see Ted Poston, "Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed May 20, 2016, http://www.iep.utm.edu/int-ext/

24. Thomas B. Warren, *When Is An Example Binding?* (Jonesboro: National Christian Press, 1975), 6.

In *Logic and the Bible*, which is the most explicitly epistemological of his books, Warren sets out an account of logic and its relationship to the Bible. In it, he dedicates a chapter to refuting naturalism and evolution. He concludes this chapter by challenging the naturalist claim that they know naturalism to be true, and in so doing reveals his internalist position about knowledge. He writes, "If you have not formulated a sound argument which proves that [naturalism is true], then you do not know (as you claim to) that all human beings now living on earth owe their ultimate origin to evolution (by purely naturalistic forces) from non-living matter."[25] He also writes that if a person claims to know that the Bible is the word of God, "he comes under the obligation to explain *how* he came to know that at least one human being knows that the Bible is the word of God."[26] For Warren, in order for a belief to be justified, a person must have internal access to a sound argument that proves the belief that they hold. If this condition is not met, even if the belief is true, it does not count as knowledge. As Warren so starkly puts it, a person who "contends that a given position is true without knowing that such is the case is, in fact, guilty of falsehood and, even if the position is true, then he is still not excused or justified in asserting that to be true which he did not know to be true."[27]

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25. Thomas B. Warren, *Logic and the Bible* (Jonesboro: National Christian Press, 1982), 114.

26. Ibid., 111, emphasis original.

27. Ibid., 73

2.2.1 Warren as a Deontological Internalist

It is clear that Warren is an internalist, but can we parse Warren's internalism further?[28] After all, the definition of internalism given above is only a minimal one. There are almost always additional components to any full-blown internalist theory of knowledge. Indeed, not just any reason for a belief can count as justification. I am not justified in believing my wife is having dinner with her friend Noemí just because she is out of the house. She could be doing any number of things—buying groceries, working in the library, or going on a run. Even if my belief happened to be true, I would need additional or better reasons in order to know (i.e. be justified in believing) that she is indeed getting dinner with Noemí. So despite the fact that I have internal access to the reason for my belief that my wife is at dinner with Noemí, there is still something missing about my belief that is necessary for it to be justified in a way that counts as knowledge. So where have I gone wrong?

One way of answering this question is what we will call *deontological internalism*. Deontological internalism fundamentally involves fulfilling one's epistemic duties or obligations. More technically, a person is justified on deontological internalism

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28. I have found nothing in any of Warren's writing that indicates he is anything but an internalist, except for the following: ""Surely everyone can see by this time that while there are many things we can know. For instance, I know that I have three children. I do *not* have to set out a syllogism in order to know that I have three children. But there are many things that I *do* have to set out in a syllogism. I have to *reason* about it *correctly* or we simply could not *know* it" *The Warren-Flew Debate on the Existence of God: A Four-Night Debate Held in the Coliseum on the Campus of North Texas University, September 20-23, 1976* (Jonesboro: National Christian Press, 1977), 246, emphasis original. Here Warren seems to hint that there are perhaps certain contexts where internal access to good reasons is not necessary for knowledge. However, it is not clear whether Warren thinks some other internalist requirement is necessary for certain beliefs (such as the belief that he has three children) to count as knowledge, or whether one might know this in an externalist way. My inclination is towards the former rather than the latter, but Warren never again addresses the issue, so other possibilities remain open (I will explain what I consider the other internalist requirement later in this chapter). Regardless, it seems these instances are exceptional rather than typical in Warren's mind.

if and when she regulates her beliefs in such a way as to conform to the doxastic duty not

to affirm a proposition unless she perceives it with sufficient clarity and distinctness.[29] To

fulfill this objective, epistemic duty is to have done one's due diligence, only to behave

as is intellectually permissible, and to be in no way blameworthy for any epistemic

wrongdoing.[30] Suppose again that my wife is out of the house and I form the belief that

she is getting dinner with Noemí. This belief is justified for me in a deontological way if I

have done my duty to find out the truth of it. Perhaps I have inquired to the right people

(maybe even my wife) as to my wife's whereabouts or possibly I happened to see for

myself that my wife and Noemí are at dinner together. There are a number of ways I

could fulfill my epistemic duty, but no matter which way I choose, I must have

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29. This is the definition given by Alvin Plantinga, in *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 13. Or as Roderick Chisholm puts it, "We may assume that every person is subject to a purely intellectual requirement: that of trying his best to bring it about that, for every proposition that he considers, he accepts it if and only if it is true" in *Theory of Knowledge* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 14.

30. One might also call this conception of justification "classical justification." As Plantinga again puts it, "Indeed the whole notion of epistemic justification has its origin and home in this deontological territory of duty and permission, and it is only by way of analogical extension that the term 'epistemic justification' is applied in other ways. Originally and at bottom, epistemic justification *is* deontological justification: deontological justification with respect to the regulation of belief." *Warrant: The Current Debate*, 14. This notion of justification stretches back through Locke and even to Descartes. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, A.C. Fraser (New York: Dover, 1959), IV, xvii, 24, pp. 413-14, John Locke's describes justification:

 Faith is nothing but a firm assent of the mind: which if it be regulated, as is our duty, cannot be afforded to anything, but upon good reason; and so cannot be opposite to it. He that believes, without having any reason for believing, may be in love with his own fancies; but neither seeks truth as he ought, nor pays the obedience due his maker, who would have him use those discerning faculties he has given him, to keep him out of mistake and error. He that does not this to the best of his power, however he sometimes lights on truth, is in the right but by chance; and I know not whether the luckiness of this accident will excuse the irregularity of his proceeding. This at lest is certain, that he must be accountable for whatever mistakes he runs into: whereas he that makes use of the light and faculties God has given him, and seeks sincerely to discover truth, by those helps and abilities he has, may have this satisfaction in doing his duty as a rational creature, that though he should miss the truth, he will not miss the reward of it. For he governs his assent right, and places it as he should, who in any case or matter whatsoever, believes or disbelieves, according as reason directs him. He that does otherwise, transgresses against his own light, and misuses those faculties, which were given him.

intentionally set out to justify my belief in such a way as to be virtually certain of the truth of it; my belief is not nor can it be the product of mere luck or accident.

Thomas B. Warren's epistemology is best understood as exemplifying deontological internalism. Warren certainly sees duty as fundamental to epistemology. This deontological epistemology is expressed implicitly in his frequent use of "ought" language about belief; Warren's writings are rife with claims about how one "must," "should," or "ought to" behave intellectually.[31] But Warren's deontological epistemology is also expressed explicitly. He repeatedly refers to the obligation of human persons to "recognize and honor the law of rationality."[32] For Warren, to make a claim that one knows a proposition is to "put oneself under the obligation to demonstrate that proposition (that is, prove it to be true),"[33] and especially concerning religious claims, "one is under the solemn obligation to put the doctrine to the appropriate test."[34] Therefore, if a person has not fulfilled this objective epistemic obligation to explain how he came to know whatever proposition he believes, he does not have knowledge. More formally, justification, for Warren, is that state in which one forms and holds his beliefs in accord with his epistemic duty to honor the law of rationality.

This epistemic duty to honor the law of rationality is an obligation to God to do one's due diligence with regard to intellectual matters. For Warren, just as morality is objectively grounded in God's will, so also is epistemology.[35] Though perhaps some

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31. See footnote 18.

32. This specific phrase is so central to Warren's epistemology that he repeats it over fifteen times in *Logic and the Bible* alone.

33. Warren, *Logic and the Bible*, 71.

34. Ibid., 87.

people may be inclined to form beliefs on the basis of no or little evidence, this manner of

action is "not pleasing to God," and instead, God requires that claims be "put to the

test."[36] Indeed, it is God's will that the human mind be used rationally.[37] Both the Bible

and humans' natural predispositions indicate, Warren argues, that one must honor the law

of rationality; no one can do otherwise and be pleasing to God.[38] While this obligation is

especially binding as it relates to religious beliefs, this objective duty to form beliefs only

on the basis of adequate evidence also holds in "ordinary life."[39] This obligation exists

because God has created humans with "intelligent minds," able to recognize, to observe,

and to properly consider the evidential basis for those beliefs which he holds.[40]

And how does one fulfill her epistemic duty to honor the law of rationality? She

does it by drawing only such conclusions as are warranted by the evidence.[41] This

fundamentally involves appropriately gathering and considering the relevant evidence for

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35. Regarding grounding ethics in the existence of God, Warren writes, "if the theistic view is true, then our creator is God, there is real objective right and wrong, there is real objective moral good and evil. If God is, if the theistic view is true, then we do have a real obligation to recognize it, to recognize the evidence for God and to obey God." *Warren-Flew Debate*, 10. Note the hint of epistemology there. If God is real, we have an obligation *to recognize the evidence for God*. Warren's ethics are connected to his epistemology.

36. Warren, *Logic and the Bible*, 90. Elsewhere, Warren states that every person "shoulders the burden of proof" with regard to the beliefs that they hold, in "Christians Must Oppose and Reject Agnosticism" in *Spiritual Sword* 8 (July 1977): 1.

37. Warren writes, "God intends the human mind to be used rationally, with each person recognizing that he should only draw such conclusions as are warranted by the evidence." *Jesus—the Lamb Who is a Lion* (Jonesboro: National Christian Press): 210.

38. Warren, *Logic and the Bible*, 86.

39. "Even in ordinary life, one should draw only such conclusions as are warranted by the evidence. And God demands—by making such clear in the Bible—that men should draw only such conclusions (as to what the Bible teaches) as are warranted by the explicit evidence of the Bible," Warren, *When Is an Example Binding?* 30.

40. Warren, *When Is an Example Binding?* 31. As Warren describes it elsewhere, "There is not one thing which God expects men to hold as a constituent element of their faith except that for which He (God) has provided adequate evidence," *Logic and the Bible*, 41.

41. Warren, *Logic and the Bible*, 4.

any belief that one might hold. To say that there is adequate evidence for a given belief is to say that the evidence is relevant to and also sufficient for the conclusion to which it is directed.[42] Furthermore, the conclusions that I draw must never "outrun or be out of harmony with the evidence which is relevant to the truth of the question which I am considering at any given time."[43] Until one has considered the relevant evidence properly, he only has mere opinion, not knowledge.[44] It is only when a person has fulfilled his objective, epistemic duty to appropriately gather and consider the relevant evidence in such a way as to entail the truth of the proposition in question that he can justify his belief in a way that counts as knowledge.

2.3 Warren on the Structure of Belief

We have so far explored Thomas B. Warren's conception of the fundamental nature of justification, but that is only one aspect to consider in the pursuit of understanding Warren's epistemological framework. In this section, I examine how Warren thinks about the structure of belief or how beliefs ought to relate together. Almost every belief that a person has relies on or is related to other beliefs that she has. I may believe that my dog is hungry, but this one belief involves all sorts of other beliefs. I must have beliefs about what it means to be a dog, I must believe that I own a dog, and I must have beliefs about what would indicate that my dog is hungry, among other such beliefs. So the question arises: if I were to *know* that my dog is hungry, how must all of these

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42. Ibid., 14

43. Ibid., 4.

44. Ibid., 121. "[A belief] will be nothing more than a matter of mere speculation (a mere 'leap into the dark'), a matter of mere opinion only until one comes to know what the relevant evidence is and then reasons about that evidence correctly."

beliefs relate together? What is the nature of these relationships, and how do they function epistemically speaking? Answers to these questions are essential to any epistemic theory. In this section, therefore, I briefly define three standard theories regarding the architecture of knowledge and then situate Warren's epistemology under one of these theories.

Before defining any theories, it is first important to make a distinction between two kinds of beliefs. Suppose I look outside my window and see the trees in my backyard swaying, each leaf showing one side one moment and the other the next. Because I am familiar with this view, suppose I infer that the wind is blowing. In this instance, I have formed at least two beliefs. First, I formed the belief that the trees are moving in a certain way (call this belief X), and then because of belief X, I then formed the belief that the wind is blowing (call this belief Y). Clearly belief Y is dependent on belief X, but not visa versa; belief X is not dependent on belief Y. So there are two kinds of beliefs here. On the one hand there seem to be beliefs that are formed in response to other beliefs that we hold, and on the other hand, there are those beliefs that are in some way more fundamental than others. Given this distinction, we can begin to understand the three theories about how beliefs must relate to each in order for belief Y to be justified.

Let's start with the first theory: foundationalism. A person is a foundationalist if belief Y in the above scenario can only be justified if (1) belief X is properly basic and (2) belief Y is appropriately formed on the basis of belief X. A belief is a *basic belief* if it is not formed on the basis of any other beliefs; the belief is immediate, non-inferential. If the belief is both held independently of any other beliefs, or in other words if it is basic, and if it is justified, then it is *properly basic*. Typically, beliefs are considered to be

properly basic beliefs if they are evident to the senses or if they are beliefs that are self-evident, such as the laws of logic (e.g., the law of excluded middle, the law of non-contradiction, etc.) or laws of mathematics (e.g., the distributive law, the associative law, etc.). For the foundationalist, in order for any inferential belief (i.e., non-basic beliefs) to be justified, it must be formed on the basis of basic beliefs. Perhaps an inferential belief could just be one in a chain of inferential beliefs, but the foundation on which all of the other inferential beliefs are supported must be a properly basic belief. So in the above scenario, belief Y is justified because it is formed on the basis of a belief that is itself non-inferential—it is properly basic.

As we have seen, foundationalists believe that most beliefs are justified on the basis of other, more foundational beliefs, but they also assume a belief can be justified independently of any other beliefs that a person might hold. But what if one rejects that a belief could possibly be justified in such a way? Perhaps we rarely reflect on the reasons we form perceptual beliefs, but if we did, we would see that perceptual beliefs are themselves merely one stop on a long line of beliefs. Perhaps there is no such thing as a basic belief after all. If this is the case, one is then left with two basic ways to think about the architecture of belief.[45] The first of these alternatives to foundationalism is *infinitism*. The infinitist holds that a belief can, without exception, be justified only if it is based on good reasons. Suppose I believe a certain proposition P^1. On infinitism, P^1 can only be justified it is appropriately related to my belief P^2. However, P^2 is only justified if it is appropriately related to my belief P^3, and on it goes *ad infinitum*. Furthermore, in this infinite chain of beliefs, no proposition may ever repeat itself. For example, the

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45. Really I should say one is left with two *typical* ways to think about the architecture of belief, because while there are perhaps a number of other ways to think about this issue, the three ways I have outlined are the three standard ways to think about the architecture of belief.

inferential chain could never be something like P^1, because P^2, because P^3, because P^1. If

the chain ever did repeat, it would be circular, and circular reasoning can never justify a

belief in a way that counts as knowledge. Therefore, the inferential chain necessarily

extends infinitely (thus the name infinitism).[46] Of course we may never consciously

follow the belief chain infinitely backward, but on infinitism, we conceivably could were

we given an infinite amount of time.

Given this definition of infinitism, it should be clear that Thomas B. Warren

cannot be an infinitist. Recall that Warren is an internalist about knowledge; a belief can

only be justified if a person has internal access to the reasons for the justification of that

belief. But if Warren were an infinitist, no belief could be justified. If I am justified in

believing P^1, according to Warren, I must conform with the law of rationality and believe

P^1 only if I have access to good reasons for P^1. Suppose I cite P^2 as evidence for P^1.

Clearly this is a reason, but is it a good reason? Well, according to the law of rationality,

P^2 is only a good reason if I have access to good reasons for believing P^2, so of course I

would also need to have access to P^3 as evidence for P^2, which is evidence for P^1, and so

this chain goes on infinitely. But of course I am only finite. By definition it is impossible

for me to have access to an infinite chain of reasons all at once. Even if it were

theoretically possible for me to follow the infinite belief chain given an infinite amount of

time, this is not enough to satisfy an internalist conception of justification.[47] A belief is

justified at time *t*, if and only if I can explain upon reflection at *t* how I know a certain

46. For thorough accounts of infinitism, see Jeremy Fantl, "Modest Infinitism" in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 33 (2003): 537-62; Peter D. Klein, "Infinitism and the Epistemic Regress Problem" in Stefan Tolksdorf, ed. *Berlin Studies in Knowledge Research*, vol. 4, *Conceptions of Knowledge* (Berlin: De Gruyter).

47. This is a similar argument to that of Richard Fumerton in *Metaepistemology and Skepticism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995).

belief to be true. So Warren could not simultaneously be an internalist and an infinitist, and since it is clear that he is indeed an internalist, this rules out infinitism as the framework for understanding Warren's conception of the structure of belief.

This brings us to *coherentism*. Like the infinitist, the coherentist maintains that a belief can, without exception, be justified only if it is based on good reasons. However, coherentism differs from infinitism in the following way. Coherentists hold that a belief can be justified only if it coheres with the total set of beliefs already held by the knower. On this view, a belief could not possibly be justified independently of any other beliefs, because a belief is only justified if it coheres with a larger set of beliefs. Foundationalists would have us think of the structure of belief like a skyscraper, with basic beliefs forming the foundation upon which every subsequent floor of the building must be supported. But coherentists see the structure of belief more like a machine, with each belief being a cog in the greater whole; if a new cog is introduced, it must fit in the grand mechanical scheme or else it just will not work. If this is right, no belief is more critical than any other. Perhaps certain cogs are larger or pull a heavier load, but ultimately, it takes every cog available for the machine to function properly. So if I look outside and form the belief that the wind is blowing based on the movement of the tree branches, that belief is justified for me only if it coheres with an enormous number of beliefs I have about the way trees work, perhaps including past experiences on windy days, what I understand about the weather, and a number of other beliefs I might have. If my belief coheres with those beliefs in the appropriate way, it is justified.[48]

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48. For an extended account of coherentism, see Laurence BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

On the face of it, conceiving of Warren's epistemology as coherentist supplies significant explanatory power. After all, Warren is adamant that one must *only* "draw such conclusions as are warranted by the evidence."[49] Based on this statement, there seems to be no room for a belief to be both basic and justified; beliefs must be based on antecedent evidence. Furthermore, viewing Warren's epistemology as coherentist begins to make good sense of his apologetic strategy. In arguing for the existence of God, Warren typically makes several different arguments supporting the existence of God that could each stand alone, but when considered together, cohere in such a way as to make the case for the existence of God that much stronger.[50] If we are to understand this method in terms of coherentism, it seems that what justifies each of these arguments is their coherence within a larger belief system.

There are, however, other aspects of Warren's epistemology that do not fit the coherentist pattern. For one, Warren seems to indicate at times that certain beliefs may not actually rely on a preponderance of evidence for their justification. Of course there are many things one can only know by honoring the law of rationality, but for others he

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49. Warren, *The God Question*, 22, Emphasis mine.

50. In "We Can Know That God Is," (Vienna, WV: Warren Christian Apologetics Center, 2010): 3-4, Warren writes of many arguments that together demand the conclusion that God exists:

> When one considers the evidence which he himself constitutes he might consider his intellect (his ability to learn facts and to reason in a logical way about those facts), his conscience (the conviction that he ought to act in harmony with what he believes is right), his emotional capacity (ability to feel strongly, to love or to hate something), and his thoughts (which can evaluate a past action as to whether it was right or wrong). When one considers his body, he is aware of the fact that it is a marvelous mechanism—a single system which is comprised of a number of sub-systems, all of which must work together in concert if one is to live or even to be very healthy. When one considers the item of his experience outside himself, he is aware of the non-living physical universe—the earth and other planets and stars. The contingency of one's self (and of the world in which each of us lives) is such as to warrant the deduction that the necessary being (God) exists.… Any one of the above facts can be formulated into a sound argument the conclusion of which is: God exists.

"does not have to set out a syllogism" in order for that belief to count as knowledge; evidence is not necessarily required.[51] On foundationalism, this makes sense. For example, Warren's belief that he has three children is a self-evident one (this is the belief he uses as an example in the Warren-Flew debate), immediately available to him by his senses, and so it is therefore a basic belief. Furthermore, Warren sees knowledge as built on particular presumptions that must be certain. At one point, Warren rails against atheists who hold a "Stratonician presumption" (i.e., that the burden of proof lies on theists rather than atheists). Warren agrees that the atheist that the burden of proof lies on the shoulders of the theist, but disagrees that the atheist does not also shoulder the burden of proof. Rather, no person can be allowed to base his claims on any "foolish presumptions," but instead the theist and atheist must each build his case on the certainty of beliefs.[52] Only chains of argumentation that begin with "self-evident truth, such as the law of rationality, the law of inference and/or implication, and the laws of thought" can count as justified.[53] Finally, Warren himself refers to foundational arguments that, if refuted, collapse the rest of the argument with it. As Warren puts it, if a theory is founded on an untrue argument, the entire theory collapses.[54]

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51. Warren-Flew Debate, 246

52. Thomas B. Warren, "Atheism—Our Greatest Foe—And How to Deal With It," *Spiritual Sword* 8, no. 4 (1977): 2.

53. Thomas B. Warren, "Some Things I Know," *Spiritual Sword* 13, no. 4 (1982): 43. Furthermore, Warren, clearly revealing his foundationalist epistemology, says that without the self-evident truths of logic, which can ultimately ground belief, no one could know anything, in *Logic and the Bible*, 22.

54. Thomas B. Warren, *The Warren-Fuqua Debate* (Fort Worth, TX: J.E. Snelson Printing Company, 1985) 15-16. In his refutation of Fuqua, Warren writes, "To destroy a foundation is to destroy the building which rests upon it. The theory that salvation does not depend upon the dissolving of 'sinful relationships' (as viewed by the law of Christ) which were entered while the parties involved were in the world is founded upon the idea that the world, not being subject to the

2.4 Warren's Epistemology: A Unified Account

We have so far explored two essential components of Thomas B. Warren's epistemology: internalism and foundationalism. To this point, these two components have been considered separately. In order to get a complete picture of Warren's epistemology, it is the task of this section to present a *unified* account of Warren's epistemology, connecting both Warren's internalism and foundationalism as well as unpacking any other relevant aspects of Warren's epistemology. Once we have a grasp of Warren's epistemology in general, we will finally examine how Warren's general epistemology functions towards the pursuit of what is for Warren a particularly important desideratum: knowledge of God.

2.4.1 Knowledge as Indubitable

So what would a unified account of Warren's epistemology look like? Such an account starts with the view that, for Warren, beliefs are justified internally. That is, beliefs are justified only if the knower has taken the appropriate actions to consider the belief in the right way. So whether a belief is justified or not is within the volitional control of the agent (i.e., it is internally justified). This justification can come about in two ways. The first way a belief can be justified is if it is properly basic: it is, in other words, formed immediately by the senses or it is self-evidently true. The second way a belief can be justified is if it is appropriately inferred. An inferential belief is justified if it fulfills two criteria: first, it must be one belief in a series of justified, inferential beliefs that are ultimately based on a properly basic belief, and second, the belief must be formed

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law of Christ, cannot violate the law of Christ. If it can be proved that *one* person in the world violated the law of Christ, this foundation is thereby destroyed. When the foundation is destroyed, the whole theory is destroyed."

on the basis of good reasons that are accessible to the knower. This involves a person

fulfilling her epistemic duty to do her due diligence in consideration of the belief,

examining the issue as thoroughly as possible, not being in any way blameworthy should

the belief be untrue, and honoring the law of rationality, which requires drawing only

such conclusions as are warranted by the evidence. If a belief is to be justified, it can only

be justified in these two ways.

Together, Warren's deontological internalism and his foundationalism function in

such a way that for a belief to count as knowledge, that belief must be indubitable. In

other words, for Warren, knowledge is certainty to the degree that one is beyond even the

possibility of being mistaken.[55] Warren is unmistakably clear about this. He writes,

> I know that the Bible is the inspired word of God. Let me make it abundantly
> clear that I am not claiming to know merely that there is a "high probability" that
> God exists or that the Bible is the word of God: I am saying that I *know* that God
> exists and the Bible is the word of God. By this I mean that I have such certainty
> about these matters that I cannot be wrong about them.[56]

If we understand Warren's epistemology in light of the internalism and foundationalism

described above, it becomes clear why Warren's sees knowledge as indubitable.

Suppose we sketch a genealogy of belief on Warren's epistemology. According to

Warren's foundationalism, knowledge must start with a properly basic belief. Call this

belief B^1. By definition, B^1 is self-evident. Based on this self-evident belief, a person may

infer another belief. Call this B^2. But such an inference is only justified if that person

does his due diligence, is in no way epistemically blameworthy, and honors the law of

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55. Warren, *The God Question*, 22. Elsewhere, Warren states that knowledge is a matter of certainty, not of mere guessing or even of strong probability; it must be certain See "The Challenge of Agnosticism in the Church Itself," *Spiritual Sword* 11 (July 1980): 1.

56. Warren, "Some Things I know," *Spiritual Sword* 13 (July 1982), 43.

rationality. If he fulfills these epistemic obligations, he will have made this inference in such a way as to entail the necessity of it; it will be a necessary inference, held together by sound reasoning based on evidence. Perhaps he draws yet another inference B^3, which is based on B^2, which is based on self-evident belief B^1. But this inference is also only justified if it is a necessary inference held together by sound reasoning. And so on the belief chain could go, but no matter how far down the chain we proceed, every inferential belief must be made in such a way as to be certain. Because each of these inferences must be made necessarily, each belief is as strong as the belief on which it is based. Furthermore, since the entire series of beliefs is based on a self-evident truth, every subsequent belief can also be held with absolute certainty.

2.4.2 Warren's Religious Epistemology

How does this apply to religious beliefs? After all, knowledge that God exists is a rather complicated proposition. There are many different issues one must consider in order to arrive at the conclusion that God exists. It seems clear then, that knowledge of God is not basic; it is inferential.[57] How then does Warren suppose one comes to know that God exists? We have explored his *general* epistemology, but what is his *religious* epistemology? Understanding belief in God as an inferential belief is the first step in understanding Warren's religious epistemology. Since it is inferential, belief in God can only be justified if it is based on adequate evidence.[58] So to demonstrate that knowledge

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57. At least for Warren, knowledge of God is not basic. It should be noted, though, that this is not an uncontested claim. Some epistemologists have argued at length that knowledge that God exists is in fact properly basic. Most notably, Alvin Plantinga makes this argument in *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Nicholas Wolterstorff makes a similar, but more abbreviated argument in "Can Belief in God Be Rational If It Has No Foundations?" in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

of God is possible, Warren takes it upon himself to show that there is indeed adequate

evidence to warrant the conclusion that God exists. He does this by constructing multiple

arguments, each of which could stand as a pillar on its own to warrant the conclusion that

God exists, but when considered together, form such a strong foundation of support as to

make it overwhelmingly clear that God must in fact exist. Warren bases each of these

arguments on the self-evident truths of logic, such as the law of non-contradiction (i.e.,

no proposition can be both true and false). From the law of non-contradiction, for

example, one may infer that God either exists or he does not exist. From this point,

Warren then goes on to construct a number of syllogisms. One is the teleological

argument in which Warren argues that the degree of complexity and functionality of the

universe is so great that it can only be accounted for if God created the universe.[59] He

also makes another variation on the teleological argument in which he argues that there

are two ways to account for the existence of such a complex organism as human beings:

evolution or spontaneous creation by a divine agent (based on the law of excluded

middle). Warren argues that evolution is both evidentially bankrupt and also

philosophically contradictory, and therefore human beings were created by a divine

agent.[60] Warren also makes an argument from the existence of objective morals. He

argues that objective morality can only exist if it is grounded in God, and since there is

agreement that objective morality exists, God must therefore exist.[61] These arguments

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58. No other way of going about it can be acceptable. As Warren puts it, "It is not pleasing to God for any man to draw conclusions (in regard to God's will) for which he does not have adequate evidence" *Logic and the Bible*, 91.

59. Warren, *Warren-Flew Debate*, 207-221.

60. Ibid., 135-141.

61. Ibid., 236-238; See also Thomas B. Warren, "We Can Know That God Is."

and others like them are all founded on self-evident truths and then reasoned, so it is argued, in a sound way that necessarily demands the conclusion that God exists.[62]

Not only does Warren maintain that these arguments are more than enough to support the conclusion that God exists, he further argues that atheism is without any support at all. For Warren, it is not as though there are decent arguments to be weighed on both sides but that the weight of theistic arguments outweigh atheist ones. Rather, Warren argues that atheistic arguments have no weight at all.[63] Warren sets out to show that all of the supposed pillars on which the conclusion of atheism is founded are easily knocked over if they are only exposed to the light of critical inquiry.[64] In this way, Warren's religious epistemology supposes what I call the *imminent rationality* of Christian belief. By that I mean that Warren's *modus operandi* in arguing for the existence of God is to build an argument for the existence of God, answer any and all

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62. These arguments together are not a cumulative case argument. Rather Warren sees these arguments as self-supporting and sufficient for belief in God to be indubitable. On a rhetorical level, Warren hopes that if one argument is not convincing, another will be persuasive enough to convince an unbeliever of the existence of God.

63. Warren writes of those who do not believe in God or that the Bible is the word of God, "It is simply a fact that the more a teacher of false doctrine is pressed to give the sound argument which proves his basic affirmation, the more he will turn against and castigate logic in general and the law of rationality in particular…. Again it should be noted that it has well been said that no man turns against reason until reason turns against him." *Logic and the Bible*, 115.

64. In one instance, Warren writes of atheists' impossible task to set out a good argument for their beliefs saying, "I have written to a number of natural scientists (who hold full professorships in the various departments of the natural sciences in the prestigious universities of this country) asking them to set forth such an argument [to show atheism is true]. To this date I have not received even one attempt by any of these scientists to do so. Instead of setting forth the argument these scientists either attempt to explain why they are under no obligation to do so or they attempt to avoid the whole affair by some facetious remark…. I submit *no evolutionist* can offer a valid argument, with true premises, the conclusion of which affirms that the theory of evolution is true. I am further persuaded that evolutionists will not face up to their obligation of setting forth a precise and valid argument for their theory because they *cannot* do so" in "Responses to Evolution," *Sufficient Evidence: A Journal of Christian Apologetics* 1, no. 1 (2011): 19.

objections to his argument, and refute all arguments against the existence of God.[65] In so

doing, Warren believes his arguments to be so impenetrable and his critiques of atheism

to be so devastating as to make belief in God imminently reasonable. As Warren puts it,

> While we recognize the possible complexity which might be involved in
> argumentation for the existence of God, we insist that the evidence is so obvious
> and, in a sense, so simple that everyone in the world (of sufficient intelligence to
> be held accountable for his actions) is capable of seeing that evidence and of
> drawing the conclusions which it warrants, namely that God does exist. [66]

For Warren, no rational person could consider his arguments for the existence of God

without also realizing the truth of them. In this way, belief in God is imminently

reasonable.

Warren, therefore, claims that belief in God is justified because it is based on self-

evident truths, such as the laws of logic. These laws form the foundation of further

inferences that together are built in such a way as to demand the conclusion that God

exists. Furthermore, the arguments of atheism are profoundly tenuous according to

Warren. These facts (i.e., the overwhelming case for the existence of God and the tenuous

case against it) together make belief in God imminently rational—no rational person

could consider Warren's arguments without also realizing the truth of them. This brings

together the various components of Warren's general epistemology in a succinct way. It

relies on self-evident truths as the foundation of a series of inferential beliefs. That chain

is itself held together by necessary inferences, formed in fulfillment of one's epistemic

obligations to do his due diligence, not to be in any way intellectually blameworthy, and

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65. Basil Mitchell makes some interesting observations about this strategy in Christian apologetics in his essay "How to Play Theological Ping-Pong" in *How to Play Theological Ping-Pong: Essays on Faith and Reason* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990): 166-183.

66. Thomas B. Warren, "We Can Know That God Is," 4.

to honor the law of rationality. If these obligations are kept, the beliefs in the inferential series of beliefs will each logically necessitate the truth of the belief before it, reaching back ultimately to the self-evident belief on which they are all founded.[67] Knowledge therefore, and even knowledge of God, is indubitable; it is beyond the possibility of being doubted.[68]

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided a descriptive analysis of the epistemology of Thomas B. Warren, its main components being his deontological internalism and his foundationalism. I have not, however, *critically* examined this epistemology that underlies Warren's apologetic method; that is, I have only sought in this chapter to give the facts of Warren's epistemology, but I have yet to offer anything like an assessment of its strong and weak points. In fact, as far as I can tell, because Warren's epistemology has not before been laid out in a formal and systematic way, his epistemology has so far avoided close scrutiny. If one were to critically analyze this underlying epistemology then, what would be uncovered? Do some of Warren's fundamental epistemological commitments have fatal flaws? And if so, what are they? It is to these questions that we now turn.

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67. Warren is what Alvin Plantinga would call a "classical foundationalist." Plantinga describes classical foundationalism and its relation to religious epistemology in "Reason and Belief in God," *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983): 16-93. My analysis of Warren's particular epistemology is deeply informed by Plantinga's analysis of classical foundationalism. Nicholas Wolterstorff also traces the history of this tradition in "Epistemology of Religion," *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology,* John Greco and Ernest Sosa, eds. (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1999): 303-324.

68. Warren's internalist foundationalism is also expressed in his biblical hermeneutic. William Abraham describes a similar kind of hermeneutic as "theological foundationalism." See *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998): 111-138.

CHAPTER III

THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF THOMAS B. WARREN: A CRITIQUE

3.1   Introduction

I have so far framed Warren's epistemology in terms of his foundationalism and

his deontological internalism. That is, knowledge of God is ultimately founded on and

justified by non-inferential, incorrigible belief(s). With these beliefs as the foundation,

additional inferential beliefs can count as knowledge only if a person fulfills his

epistemic obligations to do his due diligence, only to behave as is intellectually

permissible, and to honor the law of rationality, which involves drawing only such

conclusions as are warranted by the evidence. I argue in this chapter, however, that some

of these criteria lead to an epistemic dead end; the strong internalist conditions essential

to Warren's answer to questions regarding knowledge of God not only doom his religious

epistemology to agnosticism, but, if taken to their logical end, doom it more generally to

radical skepticism as well. To demonstrate this claim, this chapter is organized into three

sections, each articulating a separate and distinct problem with Warren's epistemology.

Namely, these three problems are Warren's definition of knowledge as indubitable, his

conception of internalist foundationalism, and his view of knowledge of God as

imminently reasonable. Each of these three critiques could stand on their own to

demonstrate the fatal weaknesses of Warren's epistemology, but, when considered

together, they provide an even more compelling rationale for rejecting certain aspects of

his epistemology.[69]

3.2   The Problem of Certainty

Thomas B. Warren sees knowledge as indubitable. Probability is not enough; as

he puts it, knowledge requires that a person be certain about a proposition to the degree

that he could not possibly be wrong about it.[70] Warren is not merely claiming that for a

belief to count as knowledge that it must be true. This would hardly be controversial. One

cannot know that the earth is flat because the earth is round. In other words, a proposition

can only be known if it is a true one. Warren's claim about the certainty of knowledge is

much stronger. Warren's conception of knowledge as certainty can be formally defined

as follows:

> (KaC) Subject S knows proposition P iff S's belief that P must be true, in that S's
> reasons for believing that P entail or guarantee the truth that P.

In order for the reasons for a particular belief to necessarily entail the truth of it, there can

be no possible proposition that would contradict the belief in question. For example, I

believe the proposition "2+2=4." If I am to be certain that this proposition is true, there

can be no other possible propositions that would contradict it and I must also be aware

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69. I want to note from the outset that although I spend this chapter pointing out the weaknesses of Warren's epistemology, I will take up the strengths of Warren's epistemology in the following chapter and offer some suggestions for ways to build on those strengths in productive ways. So although Warren's epistemology has decided weaknesses, I will not advocate rejecting it wholesale.

70. In an article for the *Spiritual Sword*, Warren writes, "I know that the Bible is the inspired word of God. Let me make it abundantly clear that I am not claiming to know merely that there is a "high probability" that god exists or that the Bible is the word of God: I am saying that I know that God exists and that the Bible is the word of God. By this I mean that I have such certainty about these matters that I cannot be wrong about them," in "Some Things I Know," 43.

that there are no possible contradictory propositions of "2+2=4." If I am aware that there are no possible contradictory propositions, I can be certain of it.

The above definition (KaC) makes a bold claim in that it requires a lot of a person in order for her to have knowledge. Suppose I go to the zoo one day to visit the lone zebra housed there. I go directly to the zebra enclosure, I see the sign that reads "zebra," and right before me I see an animal that looks like a zebra. In this scenario, there is an extremely high probability that what I am looking at is a zebra; I regularly visit this zebra enclosure, have talked to the zookeeper on numerous occasions about this particular zebra, and receive a newsletter detailing any relevant news about changes at the zoo. Based on the substantial evidence I have to consider, it would seem that I am well within my epistemic rights to believe there is a zebra before me. But can I be *certain* I am looking at a zebra? Perhaps the very night before this visit, one of the new zookeepers, Kurt, who was responsible for feeding the zebra, inadvertently fed the wrong food to the zebra resulting in its death. Kurt, not wanting to lose his job, secretly painted a mule to look exactly like the old zebra.[71] Obviously this scenario is highly unlikely, but it is not altogether impossible, and in order for me to be certain that this very scenario did not happen, I would need to believe that the animal before me is a zebra in such a way as to necessarily eliminate the possibility that Kurt painted a mule to look like a zebra. In short, what seems like a rather simple belief quickly becomes quite involved if it must be certain in order to count as knowledge. It is theoretically possible that I could still justifiably believe that what is before me is a zebra in a way that cannot be doubted— maybe I have followed the zebra around its whole life in order to ensure there is no foul

71. This thought experiment is originally laid out by Daniel Howard-Snyder, Frances Howard-Snyder, and Neil Feit, "Infallibilism and Gettier's Legacy," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 2003, 304-327.

play involved—but this of course would practically never happen. Herein lies the primary

issue with defining knowledge as certainty about a given proposition.

The consequence of knowledge as certainty (KaC) is that very few of the beliefs

that we ordinarily hold count as knowledge. In order for the reasons for a particular belief

to necessarily entail the truth of it, there can be no possible proposition that would

contradict the belief in question. But what beliefs satisfy this criterion? Perhaps certain

self-evident beliefs satisfy it. Beliefs such as that I felt pain when I hit my head yesterday,

the belief that the wall in my office appears white to me, and the belief the propositions

"X is Y" and "X is not Y" are mutually exclusive are all beliefs that no possible

proposition could contradict.[72] But very few other beliefs cannot be contradicted by some

possible proposition. Even perceptual beliefs could be refuted by other possible beliefs.

As long as beliefs must be certain in order to count as knowledge, Descartes's evil demon

will continue to plague epistemology.[73] But even such theoretical possibilities aside, we

know from experience that perceptual beliefs can be deceptive. What I thought was a cat

behind the bush in my yard might only have been a shadow, or what seemed like an oasis

in the desert might have simply been a mirage. But the grips of skepticism do not stop

there. Even beliefs that seem patently obvious have trouble standing up to such a radical

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72. The wall in my office appearing to me to be white is different than the wall actually being white, it should be noted.

73. In his *Meditations*, Descartes speculated that there could be an evil demon that has undertaken to constantly deceive him. He writes, "Accordingly I shall now suppose... that some malignant genius exceedingly powerful and cunning has devoted all his powers in the deceiving of me; I shall suppose that the sky, the earth, colors, shapes, sounds and all external things are illusions and impostures of which this evil genius has availed himself for the abuse of my credulity; I shall consider myself as having no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, nor any sense, but as falsely opining myself to possess all these things." Descartes, translated by Norman Kemp Smith, *Descartes: Philosophical Writing* (New York: Random House, 1958), 181. The possibility of the existence of such an evil demon, Descartes argues, prevents him from having knowledge about perceptual beliefs since perceptual beliefs can be doubted.

demand that a belief must be certain in order to count as knowledge. Think again about the proposition "2+2=4." Even if there were no possible propositions that could contradict it, how would I know that? Could we really rule it out that there is not some instance where "2+2=4?" is contradicted by some proposition that has so far alluded me? After all, I do not have access to all possible propositions; I am not omniscient. A number of beliefs in the past were considered blindingly obvious, such as that the earth is the center of the universe, that bacteria appears spontaneously on food, and that the earth is flat, but all of these beliefs turned out to be false. So if beliefs in the past that were considered obvious turned out false and if one does not have access to all possible propositions, then how would one rule out the proposition "there is a possible proposition that contradicts '2+2=4?'"[74]

If it is not possible to be certain about beliefs as simple as "a cat is under the bush," more complex beliefs, such as "the God of the New Testament exists," are even less qualified to count as knowledge. Perhaps there really is a God, but he takes sole delight in deceiving human beings. As such, maybe he set it about that many books would be written about him, including the Bible, the Quran, and the Homeric Hymns, but all of which say almost nothing true about him. This, of course, seems highly unlikely, but it is not outside the realm of theoretical possibility, so one could not be certain about it. While Warren's criterion that knowledge entails certainty does not itself doom his epistemology to universal skepticism, it is so pervasive that it does eliminate the

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74. On this point, Robert Audi offers the helpful distinction between the infallibility of a belief and certainty of it. He writes, "In a way, uncertainty cuts deeper than fallibility: for even if I believe a theorem of logic that cannot be false and so have an infallible belief, I may not be warranted in my proof and cannot be justifiedly certain. Uncertainty arises where one's grounds are not conclusive, and it can arise even when one's belief is infallible. Thus, even the infallibility of a belief is not enough to render it knowledge." See *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 2011): 294.

possibility that a large majority of our beliefs could count as knowledge and severely

restricts the number of beliefs that do count as knowledge. Furthermore, it dooms his

religious epistemology to agnosticism if taken to its logical end.

Given the resulting pervasive skepticism, it is worth considering whether an

appropriate definition of knowledge must require that beliefs be certain in order to count

as knowledge. If the result of such a criterion is counter-intuitive ways of thinking about

knowledge, and if there is no *a priori* reason for including such a criterion, rejecting this

requirement allows for the possibility that many of our beliefs do in fact count as

knowledge. If it is not necessary that certainty, as a subjective state, is a precondition for

knowledge, one could even know that God exists. The idea that knowledge entails

certainty (KaC) should therefore be rejected.

3.3   The Regress Problem

Warren's deontological internalism is problematic as well. More specifically, it is

subject to the infinite regress problem. In short, the regress problem is an argument that

claims internalism about knowledge necessarily demands that in order for one to be

justified, one must hold an infinite number of beliefs of ever-increasing complexity.[75]

The argument goes as follows. Internalism requires by definition that subject *S* is justified

in holding belief *B* only if (1) there is something, X, that contributes to the justification of

B and that (2) *S* is actually aware of X in such a way that *S* justifiably believes that X is in

some way relevant to the appropriateness of holding *B*. Based on this definition, in order

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75. The following version of the regress problem is articulated by Michael Bergmann in *Justification Without Awareness: A Defense of Epistemic Externalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 14-19.

for *S*'s belief *B* to be justified on the basis of something, X, *S* must further believe the

following proposition:

P$_1$: X$_1$ is in some way relevant to the appropriateness of holding of *B*.

But in order for P$_1$ to be justified, *S* must further believe yet another proposition:

P$_2$: X$_2$ is in some way relevant to the appropriateness of holding the belief that X$_1$ is in some way relevant to the appropriateness of holding *B*.

But in order for P$_2$ to be justified, *S* must believe yet another proposition:

P$_3$: X$_3$ is in some way relevant to the appropriateness of holding the belief that X$_2$ is in some way relevant to the appropriateness of holding that X$_1$ is in some way relevant to the appropriateness of holding *B*.

And so on the belief chain could go infinitely, with each subsequent belief becoming

increasingly complex. Since no person could possibly hold an infinite number of

infinitely complex beliefs, no person could be justified in believing anything.

This version of the regress problem is supposedly solved by appealing to some

version of internalist foundationalism, wherein the belief chain does not run on infinitely

because it can ultimately rest on a belief that requires no antecedent belief(s) in order for

it to be justified. In other words, a series of inferential beliefs can ultimately be founded

on a basic belief. But appealing to properly basic beliefs as the foundation of knowledge

does not provide a satisfactory answer to the regress problem either, as Wilfrid Sellars

argues in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind."[76] The internalist foundationalism

answer to the regress problem assumes that a belief can be justified on the basis of a

properly basic belief. But how would one know that a belief can in fact be justified by an

antecedent justified, non-inferential belief? First of all, one would need to hold the belief

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76. "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science, 1: Foundations of Science and the Concepts of Psychology and Psychoanalysis*, ed. H. Feigl and M. Scriven (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), 253-329.

B_1 that there is something, X, that justifies the idea that a belief can be justified by another, non-inferential belief, but in order to hold that belief, one would need to hold a further belief B_2, that there is something, X_2, that justifies B_1, that a belief can be justified by another, non-inferential belief. And so on the chain could go infinitely.

To understand Sellars' argument in less formal terms, consider the following example. Suppose Mary forms a belief even as simple as that there is a bird outside her window. According to internalist foundationalism, Mary's belief that there is a bird outside her window is only justified if (1) she has access to a good reason for believing there is a bird outside her window and if (2) Mary knows why the reason for her belief is a good one. Imagine Mary's reason for believing that there is a bird outside her window is that she actually saw it there. According to foundationalism, this satisfies the first condition (1). But there is still intellectual work for Mary to do in order for the belief to be justified; she must also know why seeing a bird outside her window counts as a good reason.[77] Mary, being the good student that she is, knows from her philosophy class that her perceptual belief is a good one because perceptual beliefs are basic and can count as the foundation of knowledge. It may initially seem that this is enough to justify Mary's belief that there is a bird outside her window, but as Sellars argues, in order for Mary to know that perceptual beliefs can count as the foundation of knowledge, she must further justify *that* belief based on a good reason. And if she could find a good reason for believing that perceptual beliefs can be the basis of knowledge, she would also need to know why that reason counts as a good one. On and on this problem could regress

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77. If a person denies this claim and instead holds that the belief can be justified so long as it is based on a basic belief, regardless of whether Mary knows why perceptual beliefs count as knowledge, then he is an externalist, not an internalist.

infinitely. Sellars' argument, therefore, demonstrates that even if internalist foundationalism were true, there would not actually be any way to know that it is true because knowing such would involve holding an infinite series of beliefs of ever-increasing complexity. And if one cannot know that internalist foundationalism is true, one cannot know any other beliefs are true, since by definition, in order for a person to know any other belief, he must have internal access to *how* he knows it—something Sellars regress argument shows is not possible.

This does not mean that internalism is untrue or that foundationalism is untrue.[78] What it *does* mean is that if a person is both an internalist *and* a foundationalist, by his own definition, he cannot actually know anything and is doomed to radical skepticism; internalist foundationalism is self-defeating with regard to the belief that a person can have knowledge of at least some of his beliefs. If one believes that knowledge is possible, internalist foundationalism cannot be the answer. Thomas B. Warren's epistemology, as I have argued, is a version of internalist foundationalism, and as such, it is subject to the infinite regress problem. Consequently, Warren's epistemology is doomed to radical skepticism and, by extension, agnosticism as well. Like the conception of knowledge as certainty (KaC), there must also be significant modification to internalism and foundationalism, or one (or both) must be rejected entirely.[79]

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78. It is possible to be an internalist but not a foundationalist, and visa versa, it is possible to be a foundationalist but not an internalist.

79. William Alston offers a helpful distinction between classical foundationalism and what he calls "modest foundationalism" that could potentially save foundationalism from the problems stated in this section. See *Beyond "Justification:" Dimensions of Epistemic Evaluation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005): 230-235; William Alston, "Has Foundationalism Been Defeated," *Philosophical Studies* 29, no. 5 (1976): 287-309.

3.4   The Disagreement Problem

Warren sees belief in God as imminently reasonable—no rational person could

consider his arguments for the existence of God without also realizing the truth of them.[80]

A person is rational, according to Warren, if he conforms with the law of rationality,

which is to draw only such conclusions as are warranted by the evidence.[81] If the

proposition that God exists is so imminently reasonable that any rational person will see

the truth of it upon consideration, the implication of this is that if a person denies that

God exists, he is either uninformed about the evidence or he has ulterior motivations for

denying that God exists to the degree that his judgment about the evidence is severely

clouded.[82] Therefore, the fact that many people continue to (at times, strongly) deny that

God exists sets up a philosophical dilemma. This dilemma can be expressed in an

inconsistent set of four propositions, one of which must be denied in order to solve the

dilemma. These propositions can be stated as follows:

I.   Any rational subject *S*, when presented with the evidence, will see that
       God exists.

II.   *S* is informed and reasons well.

III.   *S* desires the truth and wants to follow the evidence where it leads.

IV.   *S* denies that God exists.

If belief in God is indeed imminently reasonable, all four propositions in the above

inconsistent set cannot all be true. Denying any one of the propositions in the above set

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80. See footnote 64

81. See footnote 31

82. See footnote 61 and 62

will solve the dilemma, but such a denial of any one of them potentially leads to undesirable consequences.

It is conceivable that in some cases if a person denies that God exists, it is because he is either uninformed or he does not reason well (i.e., proposition II is false). In this case, belief in God may indeed be imminently reasonable and the non-believer may genuinely desire to follow the evidence where it leads, but he simply does not have the necessary evidence to draw such a conclusion; perhaps he has only been presented one side of the issue and/or has not seen atheism critically engaged. This could conceivably be the case in some instances, but it certainly not always the case. It is a strong claim to say that there are no cases where a highly informed and intelligent individual denies the existence of God. There are atheists whose entire lives are devoted to considering all of the possible evidence both for and against the existence of God, such as Michael Martin,[83] Richard Gale,[84] Daniel Dennett,[85] and Paul Draper.[86] It does not seem to be the case that if individuals such as these do not believe that God exists it is because they are unaware of the arguments for his existence or are not capable of understanding them; they are certainly aware of the arguments. Perhaps there are those that would nonetheless

83. See Michael Martin, *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

84. See Richard M. Gale, *On the Nature and Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

85. See Daniel Dennett and Alvin Plantinga, *Science and Religion: Are They Compatible?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

86. See Paul Draper, The Problem of Evil," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (Oxford University Press, 2011).

insist that even these individuals are uninformed about the issue, but this seems a difficult claim to maintain.[87]

If, then, one is committed to the idea that belief in God is imminently reasonable and if she also recognizes that there are in fact intelligent and informed people who deny God's existence, she is left with only one other option: intelligent people who deny the existence of God do so because they are intellectually dishonest. That is, one could solve the inconsistent set by denying proposition III. This is perhaps an enticing solution, since it allows one to maintain that belief in God is imminently reasonable and that there are well-informed individuals who nonetheless deny the existence of God. This way of solving the inconsistent set accounts for non-belief by claiming that there are some ulterior motives that cloud the judgment of those who deny the existence of God so that, despite having access to the relevant evidence for the existence of God, they consciously or subconsciously desire that God does not exist, which results in wrongly propping up some arguments while disregarding others. On this view, non-believers wish that God did not exist and so seek out the evidence to confirm their predeterminations and ignore evidence to the contrary.

There are, however, certain problems with this way of solving the inconsistent set. First, it is not demonstrable. No one could show that every intelligent person who denies the existence of God does so out of extreme bias or bad motives; after all, I only have access to my own motives and no one else's.[88] By Warren's own standards, then, he

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87. It has been brought to my attention by Matt Hale that there are reasonable ways one might argue that atheism is necessarily irrational. However, as Hale made the case, this argument is predicated on a different definition of rationality than Warren's. At least on Warren's definition of rationality, my claim stands.

could not *know* that bad motives are the reason that atheists deny the existence of God.

He may have suspicion that it is the case—he might strongly believe it—but he could not

know it. Second, it cuts against experience. While no doubt there are some atheists that

are intellectually dishonest as it relates to belief in God, others are deeply motivated to

understand the ultimate truths of the universe as objectively as possible. There are even

some atheists who are biased in the opposite direction; they were once devoutly religious

but who, despite wishes to the contrary, simply cannot find it in them to believe in God

anymore. It is plausible, I suppose, to insist that atheists are subconsciously biased

against belief in God, even if they do not realize it. This, it seems, is the only way to

maintain that belief in God is imminently reasonable despite the fact that some continue

to doubt the existence of God. But if one believes that there is at least one atheist (or even

agnostic, for that matter) that is both intelligent and intellectually honest who does not

believe in God, he can only conclude that belief in God is not imminently reasonable.

So what does it mean if belief in God is not imminently reasonable? First, it

should be noted that belief in God may still be reasonable; it just might not be *imminently*

reasonable. That is, there may be good arguments for the existence of God, but it may not

be the case that those arguments are so overwhelmingly obvious that just anyone would

accept them upon consideration. Perhaps there are even good arguments for atheism or

agnosticism; there could be certain individuals with a particular set of experiences and

expertise whereby they are within their epistemic rights in accepting non-belief.[89] In this

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88. And sometimes I am not even aware of my own motivations. They are sometimes accessibly only through a great deal of self-reflection and soul searching.

89. For example, I imagine it is possible that Jews that suffered through the Holocaust would have been within their epistemic rights to deny the existence of God based on their circumstances and the inordinate amount of evil they had experienced during that time. That is not to say that they

case, there may be good arguments on both sides of the debate about God. Maybe the weight of the evidence objectively leans in favor of one view or the other, but at the least, there are compelling arguments on both sides to consider. Furthermore, the weight of the evidence may not lean so heavily in one direction so as to make the issue unquestionably obvious. On the one hand, the upshot here is this way of thinking provides an account for why there is widespread disagreement among those who are reasoned and intellectually honest who have considered the issue of the existence of God. The downside, on the other hand, is that if there are indeed good arguments on both sides, belief in God is not imminently reasonable. This is a problem because, on Warren's epistemology, if belief in God is not imminently reasonable, it cannot count as knowledge. If knowledge must be certain but the belief that God exists is not imminently reasonable, then the necessary result is agnosticism.

This is perhaps a practical dilemma as much as it is a philosophical one. It is an open secret in the Churches of Christ that there is a significant chance that a member will enter college as a Christian but leave it as an unbeliever.[90] There are no doubt many factors for this change, including social pressure and the intellectual climate on college campuses (among others), but it is worth considering if there are also epistemological reasons for this trend. If a person operates with Warren's epistemology, he may believe that belief in God is not just reasonable, but imminently reasonable. However if he eventually encounters a non-believer whom he considers intelligent and intellectually

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objectively *should have* rejected belief in God based on *all* the possible evidence (indeed, many maintained belief in God), but it seems they at least had access to some good reasons to do so based on their experiences.

90. According to a 2014 "Religious Landscape Study" by Pew Research, only forty-five percent of those raised in a "Restorationist" church still identify as a member. Fifteen percent consider themselves religiously unaffiliated. See http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/chapter-2-religious-switching-and-intermarriage/pr_15-05-12_rls_chapter2-04

virtuous, he is faced with the dilemma described above. He must either discover evidence that the non-believer(s) is uninformed or intellectually dishonest, or he must reject that belief in God is imminently reasonable. And it does not stop there. Even if he does not know any non-believers, if he so much as judges an argument against the existence of God to hold considerable weight, he will no longer be able to hold onto his belief that belief in God is imminently reasonable. Consequently, if he maintains his epistemology except for the belief that belief in God is imminently rational, he will be forced to conclude that no one can actually know God exists; he will be resigned to agnosticism.[91]

3.5   Conclusion

There are, I have argued, serious problems with certain aspects of Warren's epistemology. When examined critically, Warren's definition of knowledge as indubitable, his combination of internalism and foundationalism, and his claim that belief in God is imminently rational, all ultimately result in agnosticism. At best, one may strongly believe in God, but by Warren's own epistemology, he could not have *knowledge* about his convictions. Still worse, he could not know anything. The problems with Warren's epistemology are so critical that they result not just in agnosticism but also in radical skepticism. Despite these fatal problems, however, other aspects of Warren's

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91. Given the argument I have made, there remains a rather glaring counter-argument: If Warren's epistemology leads to skepticism, why wasn't Warren, who was clearly pressed on all sides to substantiate his epistemological claims, a skeptic? The answer to this is complicated, but I think there are at least a couple of helpful responses. First, I am not arguing that Warren's epistemology necessarily leads to skepticism in particular, subjective cases. That is, that there are many who hold to Warren's epistemology (or something similar) and still believe in God has no bearing on my argument. I have only argued that Warren's epistemology is logically inconsistent. Whether anyone subjectively realizes this or not is of no significance to its objective truth or not. Second, while it is true that Warren was pressed on all sides *evidentially* to defend the existence of God, it is not clear to me that he was ever pressed to defend his more foundational epistemological assumptions. Warren's internalist foundationalism was entirely standard in his day amongst both theists and atheists. That epistemological framework, as far as I can tell, was never challenged; what was challenged was only the evidence for the existence of God. What Warren's response would have been to challenges to his actual framework can only be guessed at.

epistemology are quite strong. Additionally, the last fifty years of epistemology have seen a surge of interest in accounting for knowledge of God, which has resulted in new and philosophically interesting ways of achieving this task. Therefore, the time is ripe to imagine new alternatives in religious epistemology by mining Warren's epistemology for its strengths and incorporating them into the recent philosophical advancements in religious epistemology. Is there a way to preserve the strengths of Warren's epistemology but avoid its pitfalls by engaging with these recent philosophical developments? It is to these questions that we now turn.

CHAPTER IV

A WAY FORWARD IN RELIGIOUS EPISTEMOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

I have argued in this thesis that the epistemology of Thomas B. Warren should be

understood as a version of internalist foundationalism; a person's belief counts as

knowledge if she is aware of good reasons for holding the belief, if she has fulfilled her

epistemic obligation to honor the law of rationality, if the antecedent beliefs on which it

is based are themselves justified and ultimately founded on a basic, self-evident belief,

and if the belief is formed in such a way that it could not possibly be wrong. If pressed,

however, Warren's epistemology results in skepticism in general and agnosticism in

particular. Given this problem, it seems there is a need to re-think religious epistemology.

Such an epistemology ought to utilize the strengths of Warren's epistemology but avoid

its pitfalls. Fortunately, the time is ripe for this sort of project. There has recently been a

surge of interest among epistemologists in accounting for knowledge of God in a

philosophically and theologically robust way. It is therefore the task of this chapter to

point the way forward for such a project by highlighting some strengths of Warren's

epistemology as well as by drawing attention to new developments in epistemology that

may aid in sufficiently accounting for knowledge of God. Toward this end, the chapter

proceeds as follows. The first section underscores particular strengths of Thomas B.

Warren's epistemology that ought to be considered in a fully elaborated religious

epistemology. The second section draws attention to new developments in epistemology

that may aid in accounting for knowledge of God. Finally, the third section concludes the

chapter and the thesis by looking ahead to the future of religious epistemology and by

making closing remarks that aim to capture the trajectory of this thesis as a whole.

4.2 The Strengths of Warren's Epistemology

Despite the weakness spelled out in chapter 3, Warren's epistemology also has

decided strengths. The first of these that I will highlight is Warren's emphasis on the

moral aspect of the intellectual life. For Warren, what one believes and how one behaves

intellectually is not just an epistemic issue, but also a moral one.[92] A person is morally

obligated to fulfill her epistemic duty; that is, she must do her due diligence in drawing

conclusions, she should behave only as is intellectually permissible, and she ought to be

in no way blameworthy for any epistemic wrongdoing. The epistemic component of these

obligations is that if these obligations are not fulfilled, one's belief cannot count as

knowledge. But the moral component is that, according to Warren, if these obligations

are not fulfilled, one is not pleasing to God.[93] There may be philosophical reasons to deny

that these obligations are a necessary criterion of knowledge, but the impulse to connect

the intellectual life with morality is a good one.[94] Indeed, Warren may have been ahead

of the curve in this respect. A growing sub-discipline of epistemology known as

responsiblist virtue epistemology has developed out of an interest to explore the

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92. See footnote 35

93. See footnote 34

94. For a fully elaborated rejection of the view that a person must necessarily fulfill his epistemic obligations in order for his belief to count as knowledge, see Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993): 1-51.

connection between the intellectual life and morality.[95] Epistemologists have sought to

account for intellectual virtue by paralleling and/or drawing from accounts of moral

virtue,[96] others have explored whether or in what way moral virtues may contribute to the

formation of true beliefs,[97] and some have considered whether there is an ethical

dimension to knowledge and whether a person can be wronged qua knower.[98]

This connection between moral and intellectual virtue may even bear particularly

strongly on religious epistemology. Certain intellectual virtues may be more important in

perceiving the divine than they are in perceiving the natural world. Open-mindedness to

belief in God, for example, may be essential (or at least important) for one to be in a

position to know God.[99] And in contrast, there may be negative noetic consequences

associated with immoral activity; sinful behavior may impair one's ability to come to

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95. See Jason Baehr, "Virtue Epistemology," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed May 20, 2016, http://www.iep.utm.edu/virtueep/; John Greco, "Virtues in Epistemology," *Oxford Handbook of Epistemology*, ed. Paul Moser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

96. See Jason Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Robert Campbell Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007); Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry Into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Heather D. Battaly, ed. *Virtue and Vice, Moral and Epistemic*, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

97. See Jason Baehr, "Character Virtue, Knowledge, and Epistemic Agency: a Debate with Ernest Sosa", *Current Controversies in Virtue Theory,* ed. Mark Alfano (Routledge, 2015): 74-87; Michael R. DePaul and Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, eds. *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2003); Guy Axtell, ed. *Knowledge, Belief, and Character: Readings in Virtue Epistemology*, Studies in Epistemology and Cognitive Theory (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000); Michael Brady and Duncan Pritchard, ed. *Moral and Epistemic Virtues* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

98. See Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

99. See Paul K. Moser, *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

knowledge of God.[100] Selfishness, pride, hatred, vanity and obstinacy may all be significant obstacles in the pursuit of knowledge of God in a way that they are not for the pursuit of, say, science. The connection between morality and knowledge of God has not been fully cashed out, but this line of inquiry is ripe for exploration. Given this intuitive connection, therefore, it is worthwhile to continue in the tradition of Warren's epistemology concerning the connection between the moral and intellectual life.

Another of Warren's strengths is his attention to theological prolegomena. Of foremost importance to Warren is the clear elaboration of his theological and epistemological presumptions.[101] He puts every effort into clearly defining his theological resources, his method of interpretation, and his foundational beliefs. In turn, this clarity allows Warren to streamline his apologetic method. If one disagreed with Warren's views, Warren had a way of getting at the essence of the disagreement. For example, if there was a disagreement about the nature of divorce, Warren would seek to understand what assumptions motivated his interlocutor's disagreement (e.g., a different method of interpreting the Bible, differing views about appropriate theological resources, etc.) and then debate the merits of those assumptions, rather than just the result of those assumptions (e.g., a certain view of divorce).[102] Because Warren had such a clear view of his own interpretive method and theological resources, he was consequently better equipped to identify when someone differed from him on those core starting points. This

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100. Alvin Plantinga, Warranted Christian Belief, 199-240

101. By "presumption" I do not mean that his epistemological beliefs are unfounded or unreasoned. I only mean to indicate that some of Warren's beliefs are more foundational than others and that he always sought to defend these foundational beliefs thoroughly before proceeding onto others.

102. For an example of this kind of engagement, see Roy Deaver, ed. *The Warren-Fuqua Debate*. Fort Worth: J. E. Snelson Printing Co., 1955.

is a considerable strength in the way Warren went about his religious epistemology and is regrettably missing from many contemporary religious epistemologies and theologies. Many would do well to learn from Warren's example.

A final strength to be gleaned from Warren's epistemology is his foundationalism. A significant majority of contemporary epistemologists endorse at least a modest version of Warren's foundationalism.[103] That is, it is generally accepted that at least some beliefs can be properly basic and that any subsequent justified beliefs must ultimately be founded upon those properly basic beliefs.[104] This is a good starting point for religious epistemology. While there is a disagreement about which beliefs can count as properly basic, there is at least a general consensus that foundationalism is the right view about the structure of knowledge. This means that instead of being lost in a debate about foundationalism, coherentism, or any other competing theories about the structure of knowledge, one can focus on which beliefs count as properly basic and how other inferential beliefs may relate to them in accounting for knowledge of God. It may even be that foundationalism as the basis of religious epistemology offer promising avenues in accounting for knowledge of God.[105] This direction of inquiry has drawn more interest of late, but there is still much left to explore.

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103. For a distinction regarding modest foundationalism, see footnote 77. As Michael Bergmann puts it, "Almost all epistemologists endorse the following foundationalist thesis: There can be noninferentially justified beliefs," *Justification Without Awareness*, 184.

104. For a full defense of foundationalism, see Michael Bergmann, "Foundationalism," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, ed. William Abraham and Frederick Aquino (Oxford University Press, forthcoming); James van Cleve, "Why Coherence Is Not Enough: A Defense of Moderate Foundationalism," *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, ed. Matthias Steup and Ernest Sosa (Oxford: Blackwell): 168-80.

105. These possibilities have been of particular interest of the burgeoning field of Reformed epistemology. See Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*; Plantinga, "On Reformed Epistemology," *Reformed Journal* 32, no. 1 (1982): 13-17; William Alston, *Perceiving God: The*

4.3 New Directions in Epistemology

Certain aspects of Warren's epistemology may benefit future projects that seek to adequately account for knowledge of God, but there are other tools that may aid in this task as well. Namely, there has been a growing interest in exploring how religious epistemology benefits from the interaction of theology and philosophy. Religious epistemology, despite being "religious" and "epistemology," has not always been an interdisciplinary enterprise. The following overstatement might help make the point: in the past, religious epistemology has either been strictly theological or strictly philosophical. The theologian would conceive of knowledge of God using theological resources, but without much consideration of or interaction with philosophical projects, and visa versa, the philosopher would conceive of religious epistemology through the lens of philosophy and/or epistemology, but without paying much attention to the theologian. The reason for this distance, so the thinking goes, is that theology and philosophy should be taken on their own terms, and to combine one with the other would be to reduce both to their lowest common denominator and instead of mutual enhancement, this adulteration would ensure mutual ruin. This chasm can perhaps most notably be seen in two intellectual contemporaries: theologian Karl Barth with his categorical rejection of natural theology and philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein with the logical positivism that followed in the wake of his work. While there are historical reasons for such a divide, the distance between these disciplines has outrun its usefulness. It is therefore the goal of this section to highlight recent developments in epistemology that make interdisciplinary work between theology and philosophy possible. These new

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Epistemology of Religious Experience (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993); James K. Beilby, *Epistemology as Theology: An Evaluation of Alvin Plantinga's Religious Epistemology*, Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology, and Biblical Studies (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2005).

directions in epistemology open untapped potential for theology and philosophy to mutually benefit from each other and together provide new and effective ways to account for knowledge of God.

4.3.1 The Turn from the Project of Vindication to the Project of Explanation

Epistemology has changed substantially over the past fifty years.[106] Two recent developments in epistemology are particularly relevant to the interests of this chapter. The first of these developments is a shift in epistemology from what John Greco has identified as the *project of vindication* towards the *project of explanation*.[107] The project of explanation is concerned with explaining what knowledge is.[108] It asks questions such as the following. What is knowledge? What do we intuitively count as knowledge under ordinary circumstances? What are the necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge? And how does knowledge differ from mere true belief? These questions are by no means original to twenty-first century epistemology; questions like these were raised by the likes of Socrates and Aristotle, but at least since Descartes' *Meditations* until only recently, epistemology (and especially religious epistemology) has been dominated by the project of vindication.[109] The project of vindication is to prove that we do indeed have knowledge, or, in the case of the skeptic, to show that we do not have knowledge.

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106. These changes have been sparked due largely in part to Edmund Gettier's "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis* 23, no. 6 (1963), 121-23, which challenged the nature of the epistemology of his day.

107. See John Greco, "Religious Knowledge in the Context of Conflicting Testimony," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 83 (2009): 61-76.

108. These projects also relate to Alvin Plantinga's distinction between the *de jure* question and the *de facto* question regarding knowledge of God in *Warranted Christian Belief,* vii-x.

One reason this recent turn from the project of vindication to the project of explanation is important is because it disentangles epistemology from the constraints of skepticism. The project of vindication demands a non-circular defense of knowledge in such a way that does not at any point presuppose knowledge in the course of its vindication.[110] This constraint that the project of vindication must be non-circular stems from its fundamental connection to skepticism; for the skeptic, to presuppose knowledge in order to demonstrate that we have knowledge would be to beg the very question at issue. But this constraint virtually dooms epistemology to skepticism from the outset. How is it possible, for example, to demonstrate the reliability of sense perception without appealing to sense perception itself?[111] Or, to take another example, how would one demonstrate the truthfulness of the proposition "2+2=4" without employing the knowledge one has of mathematics? If these pursuits are indeed futile, then why would a non-circular defense of knowledge be desirable in the first place? Many epistemologists now conclude it isn't. Consequently, the resulting shift towards the project of explanation is not concerned with non-circular explanations, and so is not necessarily constrained by the concerns of skepticism.

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109. In Plato's *Meno*, Socrates contemplates the difference between "knowledge" and "true opinion." In *Theaetetus*, Socrates asks, "What is knowledge?" Aristotle inquires about the nature of knowledge as well in *Metaphysics*.

110. John Greco, "Religious Knowledge in the Context of Conflicting Testimony," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, vol. 83 (2009): 69. He writes that the Project of Vindication "demands a 'fully general and non-circular' vindication of the knowledge we claim to have. Such a vindication must be 'fully general' in the sense that it must cover all the knowledge we claim to have. It must be 'non-circular' in the sense that it does (sic) not presuppose that knowledge in the course of its vindication."

111. This question is addressed extensively by William P. Alston in *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1993). Alston ultimately concludes it is not possible.

The implications of this shift substantially change the landscape of religious epistemology. Before, to vindicate knowledge of God, one first had to demonstrate from premises anyone could accept that knowledge is possible and then that certain propositions, when taken together, are so convincing that God exists as to be indubitable. Thomas B. Warren's epistemology is an excellent example of this methodological approach. His strategy was to build an argument for the existence of God, answer any and all objections to his argument, and refute arguments against the existence of God. In so doing, Warren believed his arguments to be so impenetrable and his critiques of atheism to be so devastating as to make belief in God imminently reasonable. Among Christian apologists of his time, Warren is certainly not unique in this approach. Within the project of vindication, these dialectic maneuvers make good sense; if Warren were correct that belief in God really is imminently reasonable, this would be enough to show that knowledge of God is indeed attainable. But as it turns out, this epistemological strategy results in skepticism.

If the goal is explanation rather than vindication, however, where the skeptical constraint of non-circular accounts is absent, new and philosophically interesting accounts of knowledge of God become possible. William J. Abraham's book, *Crossing the Threshold of Divine Revelation*, is an example of just this strategy.[112] In it, Abraham argues that "divine revelation exists and that our possession of such revelation constitutes knowledge."[113] Furthermore, Abraham does not develop a general theory of knowledge and then test how Christian belief fares on his model, as would have been expected when

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112. William J. Abraham, *Crossing the Threshold of Divine Revelation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. 2006).

113. Ibid., 5. Besides an experience of divine revelation counting as knowledge, Abraham later adds, "I also think belief in divine revelation can also be both rational and justified."

the project of vindication dominated religious epistemology; he instead begins from a particular view of divine revelation and then goes on to show how such a view can be epistemically justifiable by utilizing recent work in analytic epistemology. Abraham's account is therefore fundamentally and particularly Christian but also philosophically robust. In terms of the project of vindication, which demands a fully general and non-circular defense of knowledge, Abraham's methodological approach might be deemed fundamentally wrongheaded, however this is not necessarily the case if the aim of the project is explanation.[114] Only on the project of explanation rather than the project of vindication would this approach be considered legitimate.[115] In short, Abraham's book, *Crossing the Threshold of Divine Revelation*, represents the sort of new methodological possibilities in religious epistemology resulting at least partially from the shift from the project of vindication to the project of explanation.

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114. In fact, Abraham notices just this point: "If there are serious difficulties in the standard strategy (the project of vindication, as Greco calls it), it is time to look for an alternative. What I propose is quite simple. Let us reverse the way we proceed. Rather than securing a method and then seeing what results it gives us, let us identify a particular brand of theism and then ask what would be the appropriate way to adjudicate its intellectual status." Ibid., 13.

115. Consider what James Beilby writes about Alvin Plantinga's methodology in *Warranted Christian Belief*, "Obviously, from the standpoint of a methaphysical naturalist (or even from the perspective of the methodological naturalist), Plantinga's proposal is hopelessly misguided and woefully inadequate. Critics will undoubtedly point out that it is circular reasoning to invoke the Holy Spirit's role in the formation of faith in any argument for the warrant of Christian beliefs. Of course, any attempt to argue for Christianity on the basis of an account that presupooses Christianity would be viciously circular. But Plantinga is shouldering no such task. It is not part of his project to argue for the truth of Christianity on the basis of premises deemed acceptable by all. In fact, Plantinga insists that such a project would be both unsuccessful and wrong-headed." *Epistemology as Theology: An Evaluation of Alvin Plantinga's Religious Epistemology* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), 114.

4.3.2 The Turn from Internalism to Externalism

Another recent shift in epistemology is the turn from internalist accounts of knowledge to externalist ones. Knowledge has traditionally been defined as justified, true belief, where 'justification' was whatever property differentiated mere true belief from knowledge. In the past, there have been various accounts of what is entailed in 'justification,' but nearly all of them involved a strong internalist component: the factors that justify true belief in a way that counts as knowledge are solely internal to the knower. In recent years, however, there has been a shift away from internalism. Instead, epistemology is now dominated by externalist accounts of knowledge. Externalists claim that there are relevant factors that contribute to knowledge that are external to the knower. Furthermore, unlike internalism, externalism about knowledge rejects that a person must have cognitive access to the grounds of her knowledge. Instead, externalist accounts emphasize the importance of factors outside the control of the knower, such as properly functioning faculties, a truth-conducive environment, and/or whether the belief is caused by the state of affairs that makes it true.[116]

 Like the shift from the project of vindication to the project of explanation, the shift from internalism about knowledge to externalism has important consequences on religious epistemology. Whereas on internalism, questions about knowledge are concerned with the state of the subject (e.g. her past experience, what she can deduce necessarily, etc.), externalism raises different sorts of questions. In religious epistemology in particular, numerous questions become philosophically interesting on an

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116. For more extensive discussion of the differences of externalism and internalism, see Hilary Kornblith's *Epistemology: Internalism and Externalism* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2001) and *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 324-350.

externalist account that focuses not only on the subject but also factors outside her control

(i.e. external factors). Might humans have an innate faculty for perceiving the divine?[117]

Are there characteristics of God that might be relevant to human persons gaining

knowledge about him?[118] What contribution might religious experience make towards

achieving knowledge?[119] On internalism, these questions are all philosophically

uninteresting, but on externalism, they are potentially critical to a full account of

knowledge of God.

An example will serve to demonstrate the difference this turn in epistemology

makes. Alvin Plantinga's general epistemology is a version of virtue epistemology that is

based on proper function, which means it is an externalist model. This gives rise to his

religious epistemology, which relies on what he calls his Aquinas/Calvin model. In short,

Plantinga argues that it is not even necessary that a person's beliefs about God be formed

on the basis of reasons or evidence. Instead, according to Plantinga, it is conceivable that

beliefs about God may arise naturally and spontaneously within us by the operation of the

sensus divinitatis. For Plantinga, the *sensus divinitatitis* is a belief-forming faculty

inherent to human persons, which, when functioning properly, spontaneously produces in

them beliefs about God. It is easy to see how Plantinga's religious epistemology is

fundamentally informed by theological commitments, but these commitments only make

sense on an externalist (as opposed to an internalist) account of knowledge, which

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117. See Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

118. See Paul Moser, *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

119. See William J. Abraham, Crossing the Threshold of Divine Revelation (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. 2006); William Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

focuses on factors outside the control of the knower, such as the proper function and deliverances of the *sensus divinitatis*.

4.4 The Emergence of "The Epistemology of Theology"

There are many ways forward for future accounts of religious epistemology. Strengths of Warren's epistemology such as his foundationalism, his attention to theological prolegomena, and his connection between morality and epistemology all offer potential for accounting for knowledge of God. Additionally, recent developments in epistemology have opened new opportunities for addressing knowledge of God. One upshot of these developments is that theology and epistemology are not mutually exclusive enterprises. Whatever reasons for the divide between theology and philosophy in the past, it is clear that there is a growing interest in seeing the two interact again. The two examples given in this chapter of the recent developments in epistemology, William Abraham's *Crossing the Divine Threshold* and Alvin Plantinga's *Warranted Christian Belief*, are by a theologian and philosopher respectively. Far from relying only on theological or only on philosophical resources, both of these examples are explicit that each discipline stands much to gain from substantive dialogue. Furthermore, given the sorts of epistemological developments I have described, there is no *a priori* reason to reject or set aside theological commitments before one can conceive of a robust religious epistemology.[120]

The new possibilities afforded by the strengths of Warren's epistemology and recent developments in contemporary epistemology are perhaps most prominently on

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120. William J. Abraham makes a similar claim in "Soft Rationalism," *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, Michael Peterson, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, David Basinger, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996): 84-93.

display in the growing sub-discipline of the epistemology of theology. This discipline,

which will be examined at length in the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Epistemology*

of Theology, represents the collaborative work between theologians and philosophers that

is ripe for exploration.[121] As Frederick Aquino puts it in his proposal for the volume,

"The boundaries between philosophy and theology have been transgressed in productive

ways. This creates space for creative work in epistemology as it crops up within

theology."[122] This does not mean that theologians must eat from the scraps that fall from

the philosophers' table, nor must the philosopher kowtow to the commitments of the

theologian. But rather, it is worth asking if there are certain unexamined epistemological

assumptions held by theologians and also whether certain theological resources might

bolster philosophical accounts of religious epistemology. At least as it pertains to the

epistemology of theology, theologians and philosophers are on an even playing field.

Aquino again:

> We strive to make it clear in this volume that the Christian tradition encourages,
> rather than inhibits, the pursuit of epistemological questions. Along these lines,
> recent work in epistemology can help theologians make relevant distinctions and
> alert them to epistemic components in the Christian tradition that have been
> ignored, neglected, or not formulated adequately. When the epistemic proposals,
> insights, and suggestions embedded in the canonical heritage of the Christian
> tradition are brought to life, we hope that other theologians and philosophers will
> join us in pursuing these matters carefully, rigorously, and thoroughly.[123]

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121. William Abraham and Frederick Aquino, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

122. Frederick Aquino and William Abraham, "The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology," on *Academia*, accessed May 20, 2016, https://www.academia.edu/4069912/The_Oxford_Handbook_of_the_Epistemology_of_Theology_eds._William_J._Abraham_and_Frederick_D._Aquino

123. Ibid.

In other words, the time is now ripe for new engagement between theology and philosophy, and it is precisely this sort of dialogue that may contribute to accounts of knowledge of God in new and profound ways.

4.4 Conclusion

There is in the Churches of Christ a distinct culture of attention to epistemological concerns, such as how one can know that God exists, what hermeneutical principles ought to inform one's reading of the Bible, and how one can know anything about God and his will for humankind. However, the epistemological framework that undergirds contemporary answers to these kinds of questions in the Churches of Christ has rarely, if ever, been examined. At least as they are expressed in the work of Thomas B. Warren, it turns out this standard epistemology in the Churches of Christ has fatal problems if the goal is accounting for knowledge of God. Fortunately, new perspectives in epistemology have paved the way for theologically and philosophically robust accounts of knowledge of God that have not before been expressed. That, combined with the strengths of Warren's epistemology, provides potentially fruitful ways forward for religious epistemology. Disciplines such as the epistemology of theology have been devoted to exploring this uncharted territory, but there is much work left to do in order to explore all of the facets involved in knowing God. Long may the work continue.

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