

THE NON-FOUNDATIONAL EPISTEMOLOGY OF NICHOLAS
WOLTERSTORFF

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF MCMASTER DIVINITY COLLEGE
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARTS (CHRISTIAN STUDIES)

MCMASTER UNIVERSITY, HAMILTON, ONTARIO

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MAY 2004

MA (Christian Studies)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY

Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: The Non-Foundational Epistemology of Nicholas Wolterstorff

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NUMBER OF PAGES: 121



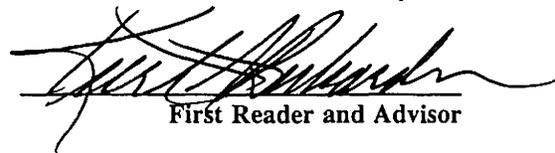
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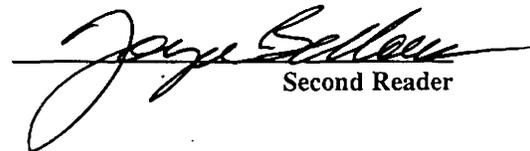
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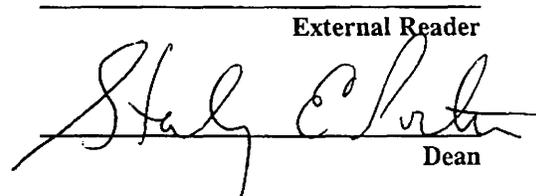
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is hereby accepted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MA (Christian Studies)


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Date: April 21, 2004

Abstract:

Nicholas Wolterstorff, working within the context of Reformed Epistemology, has come to an understanding of knowledge which more accurately reflects the process of knowledge and belief that people experience than the foundational system to which he responds. He reacts to Immanuel Kant and John Locke, using arguments put forward by Thomas Reid, and building on these arguments with his own understanding.

Kant, Wolterstorff argues, had put distance between a person and what she could perceive about and attribute to God. Since she cannot have an experience of God, she experiences what Wolterstorff calls the 'Kantian agony'—she cannot discuss God without first discussing God's existence.

Locke, Wolterstorff argues, had put distance between a person and what she could believe. Locke, to whom Wolterstorff responds quite extensively, had argued that a person must use reason to govern her beliefs, and base her system of knowledge on propositions which can be known with certainty.

Reid responded to this system, which he called the 'theory of ideas', arguing that it entailed a skepticism about the world which no one could live by. He argued that people must assume things about the world, such as that it exists, in order to be able to live and work in it. Responding directly to the way that the way of ideas theorists understood perception. }

Wolterstorff takes this understanding of perception and Reid's notion of belief-producing dispositions, and sets up a non-foundational^{a1} account of knowledge which has room for religious faith. His system is a situational system, in which every person must govern their beliefs based on the system of beliefs in which they find themselves. This system, he argues, more accurately reflects the way in which people come to knowledge, rather than the Kantian or Lockean (foundational) system.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The context in which Nicholas Wolterstorff works is a recent philosophical development. In order to come to a clearer understanding of his project, how he goes about it and why, it would be useful to see where he is situated. The immediate context which Wolterstorff works in is that of Reformed epistemology. But even though all of the philosophers who are involved in this development aid each other and work together, they do so in their own way. Wolterstorff, as a Reformed epistemologist, does his work not only in that context, but also in the context of his upbringing and his own development as a person and as a philosopher. His personal context supplements his philosophical context, and his philosophical context supplements his personal. In this way, both Reformed epistemology and how Wolterstorff understands his own personal context are excellent introductory elements to his account of epistemology.

Reformed Epistemology.

The year of 1983 saw the publication of a collection of essays edited by Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff. This collection, *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*,¹ was the culmination of a year-long project, hosted by the Calvin (College) Center for Christian Studies, in which participants attempted to delineate a new view of Faith and Reason, George I. Mavrodes, William P. Alston, George Marsden, D. Holwerda, Plantinga and Wolterstorff all contributed

¹ Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, editors. *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983.

to this collection of essays, with many other thinkers adding to the discussion throughout the year. This publication has the distinction of being a formal beginning of the work of Reformed Epistemology, a school of philosophy which flows from the Calvinist tradition. Although both Plantinga and Wolterstorff had written on this subject before, Wolterstorff in 1976 and Plantinga in 1967, it was not until the early 1980s that more philosophers began to follow their lead.

What brings together the essays collected in *Faith and Rationality* is the adherence to four fundamental themes:² the collapse of classical foundationalism, responses to evidentialism, the adherence to the Calvinist position, and the inevitable pluralism of the academy.³ Both Plantinga and Wolterstorff have written extensively on classical foundationalism and evidentialism, classical foundationalism being the dominant epistemological system over the past centuries and evidentialism being a derivation of that argument. The notion of pluralism in the academy, the fact that competent and knowledgeable people may disagree on, for instance, scientific conclusions, comes out in Wolterstorff's other writings as well; it is, in fact, one of the basic ideas of his epistemological system. The notion of Reformed Epistemology, though, is one that is not so clear. It is described, rather briefly, as an "affinity to positions long held on the relation of faith and reason by the Continental Reformed (Calvinist) tradition".⁴ This is not so clear, because rather than discuss Reformed Epistemology itself, the writers of these essays work *within* it, rather than write *about* it.

² Nicholas Wolterstorff. "Introduction." *Faith and Reason*. p. 1

³ Wolterstorff. "Introduction." p. 1-8

⁴ Wolterstorff. "Introduction." p. 7

This is not to say that the Reformed Epistemologist position is merely a reiteration of what has been written by Calvin and repeated ever since. Coming as it does at the tail end of a long and developed history, Reformed Epistemology takes into account both the tradition itself, and what has happened since the tradition began. Wolterstorff writes that before *and* after the evidentialist challenge was issued, it was an element of the Reformed tradition:

[W]ell before the evidentialist challenge was issued clearly and forcefully by Locke and his ilk, it was characteristic of those in the Reformed tradition to have taken up a position in opposition to the challenge. In short, the Continental Reformed tradition has characteristically been antievidentialist.⁵

Before the challenge had been issued, the Reformed tradition had reacted to the long practice of natural theology, and rejected the idea that humanity could come to know God through the application of reason to the world. After the challenge had been stated, though, “these essays *perforce* ally themselves with that impulse in the Reformed tradition ... [it] is by no means an unwitting alliance.”⁶ Plantinga and Wolterstorff especially work to find new ways of understanding and speaking about knowledge, as the foundationalist system, they argue, has collapsed.

This ‘resurgence’ of the Reformed tradition, because of the history behind it, does things differently than the tradition had. Merold Westphal summarizes this expression of the Reformed tradition as a way of responding to the evidentialist challenge that comes from a totally different angle:

The focus has been [on the claim that “religious beliefs are not supported by sufficient evidence and adequate argument”], with

⁵ Wolterstorff. “Introduction.” p. 8

⁶ Wolterstorff. “Introduction.” p. 8

defenders of religion trying to show that it can pass the requirements set for it by modern foundationalism and the evidentialism that it presupposes. Reformed epistemology is perhaps best understood as a totally different strategy for responding to this challenge. It disputes [that “religious beliefs are not among our properly basic beliefs”], claiming (negatively) that it is an arbitrary and indefensible restriction on what beliefs are properly basic and (positively) that it is, at least sometimes, perfectly rational to believe in God without basing that belief on an argument.⁷

Rather than working within the foundational system, and answering challenges through that system, Reformed Epistemology responds to the system itself, and shows how the foundationalist and evidentialist systems are not adequate to explain belief, and therefore not valid in arguing against belief. It is a reaction to ideas that have come before it, and an attempt to create new ideas that more adequately express the way in which belief and reason work. Negatively, it seeks to show how the previous accounts fail in what they set out to do, and positively it seeks to come to a more complete and accurate account of the relationship between what a person believes and what a person ‘knows’. It essentially shifts the burden of proof, saying that “a strong case is made for saying that belief in God should be treated as innocent until proven guilty rather than the reverse.”⁸ In this way they give theistic belief an equal footing with atheistic belief, denying the priority that atheistic belief (or at least assumption) has had through much philosophical history.

⁷ Merold Westphal. “A Reader’s Guide to ‘Reformed Epistemology’.” *Perspectives*. Vol. 7 No. 9, November 1992. p. 11

⁸ Westphal. “Guide.” p. 13

This project, though, has often been misunderstood and mistaken by many people. The two basic misunderstandings of Reformed epistemology, in its beginnings, come from both the philosophical right and the left:

[From the left] Reformed epistemology [has been charged] with isolating religious beliefs from life instead of treating them as expressive of a way of life, and in its discussion of *properly basic beliefs*, with isolating basic beliefs from each other instead of showing how they hang together with each other and with all the other religious beliefs of the person, and with treating basic beliefs as logically and pedagogically prior instead of showing that they are taught a child in and by teaching the child a certain way of life.

...From the right comes the charge that Reformed epistemology is useless—and worse, an irresponsible cop-out. Useless, in that in the polemic of Christians with unbelievers it is useless to announce that certain of one's central religious beliefs are to be held basically, without evidence or argument, and *this* it is proper for one to hold them thus. An irresponsible cop-out, in that Reformed epistemology allows the believer to rest snugly and smugly in her system of belief, rejecting all criticisms with the response, 'But I hold my beliefs basically and properly so; so I have no arguments for you to criticize, and my not having any arguments for you to criticize is also not something for you to criticize.'⁹

The argument from the 'left' charges Reformed Epistemology with divorcing religious belief from the rest of life, while the argument from the 'right' charges Reformed Epistemology with 'copping out' of the need for reasons and arguments for belief. These criticisms and objections, though, are not insurmountable to the Reformed epistemologist; they are just misrepresenting the project. To say that the Reformed epistemologists are separating belief from life, and beliefs from other beliefs, or relying on the 'irrationality' of their position is to miss the point of Reformed epistemology completely.

⁹ Nicholas Wolterstorff. "What Reformed Epistemology is Not." *Perspectives*. Vol. 7 No. 9, November 1992. p. 15

In the first place, Reformed epistemology, Wolterstorff writes, “is a polemical project,”¹⁰ which seeks to answer the evidentialist and foundationalist objections to theistic belief. Its project is not to explain how religious belief and religious experience work or to explain how religious ways of life are taught and expressed or to explain the role and use of arguments in religion, and most importantly, its task is “not to develop a whole philosophy of religion of a certain stripe.”¹¹ It began as a fairly narrow project, to answer the objections raised against theistic belief by the evidentialists and the foundationalists. In recent years it has become something larger than it started out to be, but insofar as these objections were raised early on in the Reformed epistemological project, they miss the point.

A second objection was raised against the apparent lack of foundational beliefs in the Reformed epistemologists’ project. This objection relies on the foundationalist system of knowledge which states that all knowledge must be based on foundational propositions, and argued to by certain rules.¹² This objection is answered by the notion that Reformed epistemology seeks to answer the evidentialist challenge “*in a certain way*.”¹³ That way is to switch the burden of proof from the theists to the evidentialists. For, “why should it be assumed ... that one is responsible in believing things about God only if one holds those beliefs on good evidence?”¹⁴ There are many things, Wolterstorff argues, that are not believed on the basis of other beliefs. The fact that there is another

¹⁰ Wolterstorff. “Reformed Epistemology.” p. 15

¹¹ Wolterstorff. “Reformed Epistemology.” p. 15

¹² The notion of Foundationalism will be dealt with in more depth in Chapter 2. See pp. 17ff

¹³ Wolterstorff. “Reformed Epistemology.” p. 16

¹⁴ Wolterstorff. “Reformed Epistemology.” p. 16

person in a room is believed immediately, not by evidence and argument.¹⁵ Reformed epistemology questions the assumption that theistic belief is not a belief of that 'properly basic' type.

These initial objections, however, would need to be answered eventually, for the modesty of the project became eclipsed as it continued. In recent years, the Reformed epistemologists have begun to expand the scope, and go beyond "its original brush-clearing polemic with evidentialism and classical foundationalism, to offer a positive account of the epistemology of religious belief."¹⁶ And once this original work was done, each of these thinkers took the remainder of the task on in their own way. Plantinga focuses more on the notion of theistic belief being a basic belief, and that it is warranted to be considered such, and Wolterstorff himself takes the approach that Thomas Reid took in the 18th Century and stresses the importance of *reasons* rather than reason, and the prior appearance of belief, before reasoning comes into play.

Reason being here the faculty that every person possesses which enables them to make judgments about propositions and beliefs, based on arguments and logical tools. Wolterstorff denies the central and largely important role that reason has in many epistemological systems, especially the foundationalist system as expressed by John Locke. But while he downplays the significance of reason as a 'master' faculty, he does not cut it out completely. What he does is

¹⁵ Evidence, in this context, is not merely the fact that one can simply see the other person. Evidence requires that there is some way to determine whether or not a person is entitled to believe that there is another person in the room; even for the simple argument that a person may not always be able to trust her own senses, i.e. the other person could be a robot, hologram, etc.

¹⁶ Wolterstorff. "Reformed Epistemology." p. 16

to humble the role of reason, put it in a place that is more fitting to it. He also gives more prominence to the role of *reasons* in knowledge, since, he will argue, that the reasons that a person holds certain beliefs are more important to those beliefs than the mere faculty of reason. And since the effects of sin work through the *whole* of life, then reason itself is not immune. But to get to that point, Wolterstorff first responds to Immanuel Kant and John Locke, as he sees in them important elements for his own account of knowledge: Kant's insistence that people cannot know what is beyond human experience, and Locke's insistence on the role of reason and evidence.

Nicholas Wolterstorff.

As one of the main proponents of Reformed Epistemology, Wolterstorff has his own 'agenda' and his own method of furthering the Reformed Epistemologist position. In a brief autobiography, Nicholas Wolterstorff discusses the role of faith in a person's life, in terms of objectivity and subjectivity. He mentions Abraham Kuyper, and brings attention to the fact that he had completely disagreed with the notion that the academic disciplines could 'free' themselves from the baggage and particularities of human or individual existence, and become as universal or objective as possible. Wolterstorff writes that Kuyper could not believe it was possible to separate a person's life into 'the faith part' and the 'academic part', for example. Instead, what he thought was that:

A person's religion ... was not an inference or a hypothesis but a fundamental determinant of that person's hermeneutic of

reality. Of course the hermeneutics of reality shaped by two different religions do not, by any means, yield differences of interpretation on everything; but unless the religions in question are very close, they yield enough differences to have consequences within the field of theorizing. Thus ... philosophy, and academia generally, is unavoidably pluralistic.¹⁷

That which a person believes is fundamentally and inseparably woven through the fabric of their thought, and cannot be removed. It either becomes an integral and creative element of their thinking, their theorizing, or it becomes a hindrance, a 'stumbling-block' to them in their studies. It can never be fully forgotten or erased, but as Wolterstorff will argue, it can be reflected upon and altered.

This is the point, it seems, of Wolterstorff's autobiography. Everything in his life somehow touches upon and colours everything else in his life. He tells how being "inducted into the public tradition of the Christian church"¹⁸ shaped the contours of his later life. The genuine faith with which he grew up is described as "the fundamental energizer of [his life]":

Authentic faith transforms us; it leads us to sell all and follow the Lord. The idea is not ... that everything in the life of the believer is different. The idea is rather that no dimension of life is closed off to the transforming power of the Spirit.¹⁹

The faith that he has, the beliefs that he holds are all an integral and central part of his life as a whole, not just the 'religious' elements. Indeed, to him there are no 'religious elements', but all of a person's life is religious, religion "is a way of life, not just a set of beliefs."²⁰

¹⁷ Wolterstorff. "Grace." p. 270

¹⁸ Wolterstorff. "Grace." p. 259

¹⁹ Wolterstorff. "Grace." p. 267

²⁰ Wolterstorff. "Reformed Epistemology." p. 15

This notion of the religious being a part of the *whole* of a person's life is, in a sense, central to Wolterstorff's epistemology. He develops, from his first work *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion*, through to his more recent epistemological work *Divine Discourse*, a view that can be called *situated rationality*. In this view, it is not reason that is prior to belief, but beliefs that are generally prior to reason, and it is the person's task to 'weed' through this garden of believed propositions, to remove those that do not fit, that do not work within the system, and to develop those that do. This view, unlike that of Locke, makes room for the religious in all aspects of life, even in reason.

Locke's view, a type of foundationalism, is a way of thought that presupposes the priority of reason, of *reasoning* to belief, and makes room for belief only if it has been considered by reason. Beliefs are only valid if they are built on the foundation of basic beliefs, basic propositions. This philosophy, though, does not leave room for religious belief, the kind of religious belief that Wolterstorff wants to have room for in his life.

It is a system of belief that holds to and desires a spiritual tone, one in which there exists a personal relationship with a personal saviour. It is a faith of whose confession still echoes in Wolterstorff's heart:

Q: What is our only comfort in life and death?

A: That I am not my own but belong to my faithful savior Jesus Christ.²¹

A faith like this has a relationship with reason that is not as simple as Locke and the Foundationalists make it out to be; reason is touched by this faith, it is not a mere observer. But it is not as divorced from reason as others have made it out

²¹ Wolterstorff. "Grace." p. 261

to be either. Wolterstorff uses his faith, the tradition he was raised in, to colour and shape his philosophy, and his philosophy to colour and shape his faith. To do this, he requires an epistemology that is different than the philosophical tradition has handed down to him. He requires a philosophy that accepts and works with his humanity, in all its failings and weaknesses, and all its strengths and glories.

Wolterstorff's Project

In order to make room in philosophy for faith, Wolterstorff sets up a non-foundational account of knowledge, one which denies the objective, external standard that the foundationalists and evidentialists assumed, and affirms a situational standard.²² But he first responds to the tradition of philosophy as he understands it, giving specific attention to Immanuel Kant, John Locke, and Thomas Reid. To do this, he focuses first on the rationality of belief in God, coming to the conclusion that theistic belief is as rational as atheistic belief, and therefore just as valid a 'starting point' in philosophical discussions, even scientific and non-academic discussions as well. There is no priority, he will be shown to argue, given to the atheistic position *or* the theistic position, except what a person comes into the discussion already assuming. Merely because belief in God does not seem to have as much evidence as unbelief in God does not mean that it must argue from a position of disadvantage.

²² The notion of a situational standard of judging rationality and justification will be discussed in Chapter Five: Wolterstorff's Non-Foundational Epistemology. See pp. 89ff

Part of the tradition that Wolterstorff responds to is what he calls the 'Kantian Agony' of modern theology. This agony he defines as the inability, because of the nature of knowledge that Kant set up, for a person to say things about God with any certainty except that of faith. Wolterstorff does not take much, if any, positive elements from Kant,²³ and sees in him a negative and 'disastrous' influence on theology, and religious knowledge in general. To counter this influence, Wolterstorff rejects Kant's notion that knowledge of the external world is gained through 'intuitions' and 'concepts', and insists that knowledge can be understood without intuitions, only concepts.

In terms of building knowledge systems, though, Wolterstorff responds extensively to evidentialism, and the model of rationality which it presupposes, namely foundationalism. Evidentialism, which Wolterstorff responds to as expressed by John Locke, is essentially the view that all knowledge must be built using appropriate evidence. Thus any knowledge claim must be backed up by sufficient evidence, based on foundational claims. Foundationalism, which comes in at the very base level of evidentialism, determines what propositions can be used as a foundation for knowledge systems, and attempts to produce a theory of rationality which is useful and prone to as little error as possible. Wolterstorff, aided by Alvin Plantinga, rejects the notion that knowledge must be developed in this way. The foundationalist position is, they argue, internally inconsistent and also does not accurately reflect the human experience of knowledge and belief.

²³ Wolterstorff. Personal correspondence, 01/29/2004.

Wolterstorff views Locke's expression of the evidentialist position as the most articulate, and so responds to him quite comprehensively. Locke sets up an evidential account of knowledge since he considers knowledge, because of its nature, to be quite limited. Knowledge, he argues, is only certain when it comes to things that exist in the mind of the person. Anything that is introduced into a knowledge system that goes beyond the workings and contents of the mind is considerably less certain. Those faculties which produce such knowledge (or beliefs) are prone to error, and as such are untrustworthy. Locke goes on to say that these faculties must be governed by reason, which is the only faculty which does not err. Wolterstorff disagrees with Locke's account of knowledge in part for the same reason he disagreed with foundationalism: it does not adequately reflect the actual experience of coming to knowledge and belief.

Wolterstorff aligns himself with Thomas Reid, a Scottish philosopher who had reacted to Locke's system, which he saw as a form of the 'Theory of Ideas'. The philosophers who followed the 'way of ideas', whom Reid identified as Descartes, Berkeley, Locke and Hume, had made a major error in their thought, according to Reid. What they had done was to misunderstand how the mind relates to the external world, and in so doing had made philosophy a skeptical enterprise. In order to undo this skepticism, Reid takes issue with the way of ideas' notion of perception. He argues that the way in which these philosophers had understood perception was at the base of their error, and if a person were to understand perception properly, then she would be more inclined to view the rest of her knowledge system properly as well.

Wolterstorff takes this Reidian notion of perception, and adds to it a notion of belief-producing dispositions. These dispositions, while present in Locke as well, are given a more central role in knowledge, and the role of reason is humbled: it becomes one of these dispositions. In order to govern her beliefs, Wolterstorff argues that a person must govern these dispositions, and alter them so that they produce beliefs which are more accurate, more correct. Because of this, it is important to understand how these dispositions function, and where they come from. Belief governance, Wolterstorff will argue, does not come during or before beliefs are produced, as Locke would argue, but *after the fact*. Since beliefs are produced in people with little or no input or control, the situation in which people find themselves governing their beliefs is within the context of an extensive system of beliefs which are already in place.

People govern their beliefs and come to new beliefs, Wolterstorff writes, not through reason alone, but using reason within a context of control beliefs, data-background beliefs and data beliefs. Control beliefs he defines as those beliefs which a person will use to determine what she can or cannot accept. These beliefs are the 'core', so to speak, of her belief system, and other beliefs must cohere with these. Data-background beliefs are those beliefs which determine what a person will accept as data, as propositions. Thus a person will accept or reject ideas or theories which do not cohere with their control beliefs, and these beliefs will either be useful or useless as propositions. Data beliefs are those that, determined by the data-background beliefs, will themselves determine what data will pertain to whatever the person is considering.

After having gone through all of this, Wolterstorff will argue that theistic belief can now be placed on an equal footing with theistic unbelief, and that religious faith is as valid a beginning point in both academic and non-academic pursuits. A scientist can perform her experiments and come to her conclusions while working within a context of her faith, rather than trying to 'transcend' their faith to become as objective as possible. Everyone, Wolterstorff argues, works within their specific context, and the effects of that context cannot be ignored or wiped away. The task now is to understand and identify that context, so as to be able to defend one's position and to understand the effects that it will have on one's work.

Chapter Two: Preliminary Matters

In preparing to discuss how Wolterstorff works to make room in reason and knowledge for faith and belief, there are a couple of preliminary issues that help to ground the discussion. These issues; Wolterstorff's response to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and his formulation of the foundationalist world-view; set the stage for his work with John Locke and Thomas Reid, and his own philosophical views. The issue of foundationalism is a discussion that runs through most of Wolterstorff's works. It is the most commonly accepted epistemological tool used in the modern world. Kant uses it as well, but not in the same way as many others; he limits the role and use of reason to make room for belief and faith.

It is also important to note that Wolterstorff is not a solitary figure on this stage. As has been discussed previously, there are a number of prominent figures in Reformed Epistemology. Wolterstorff is aided by and aids Alvin Plantinga in many areas. While they differ in their approaches to the question of faith and reason, they both have an interest in proclaiming the 'death' of foundationalism, and presenting alternative epistemological views. This, though, cannot be done until they have shown where the previous views have failed.

Immanuel Kant.

Although not a central element of Wolterstorff's system of thought, how he responds to Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) does play a role. Specifically, how he

responds to what he calls the 'Kantian agony' of modern theology and Christian belief gives an insight into how his greater system of thought will unfold. This 'agony' that began with Kant is that in order for a person to discuss God, to say something *about* God, she has to first show that these things can indeed be said about God:

In Kant, it is ... our supposed *inability* to gain knowledge of God that is menacing to the religious life and to the understanding of God embedded therein; more menacing yet is the fact that it is not the least bit clear that even faith is possible, for it's not clear that we can get God well enough in mind even to believe things about God.²⁴

What Wolterstorff means by this comes clear in his discussion of Kant's epistemology. To Wolterstorff, what is fundamental in the relationship of Kant's theory of knowledge to theology is the notion of a *boundary*, or rather, *boundaries*. These boundaries both separate the different disciplines from each other, defining their scope, and also separate the known from the unknown, what can be experienced from what can only be rationally understood. This depends "crucially on his account of intuitions and on his account of concepts."²⁵

To Kant, intuition is the only way that objects external to a person can be known by that person. Intuition is the "one cognition that relates to [objects] directly, and to which all thought as a means is directed."²⁶ An object cannot be conceived of in the mind of a person without some sort of *method* through which it can affect the mind, thus the content of thought is distinguished from the

²⁴ Nicholas Wolterstorff. "Is It Possible and Desirable for Theologians to Recover From Kant?" *Modern Theology*. Vol. 14 No. 1, January 1998. pp. 16

²⁵ Wolterstorff. "Recover from Kant." p. 17

²⁶ Immanuel Kant. "Critique of Pure Reason." *Kant Selections*. Edited by Lewis White Beck. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998. p. 104

method of acquiring that content, and the object of thought is different than the object itself. Essentially, these intuitions are the *form* of whatever is that the person perceives, and what she perceives of the object through her sensations is the *matter* of the object. To Kant, the form of the object cannot be conceived of through the sensations that the object produces in a person, the form can only be conceived of through the intuitions that she has in mind *before* the actual perception of the object.²⁷

There is, however, another condition that needs to be met in order to make experience of an object possible; that of *concept*. A concept is a *representation* of the content of the intuition of the object.²⁸ In this way, a person will sensitively perceive an object, the intuition will place that experience into a form, which will be *fitted* into a concept, and only then will that person actually truly *experience* what that object is. Wolterstorff explains this using these examples: "I don't just hear something, I hear it as middle C; I don't just see something, I see it as a dog; I don't just have sensations, I experience my sensations as dizziness."²⁹ There can be no knowledge without concepts, and no concepts without intuitions.

Wolterstorff writes that "anyone who thinks along these lines, the metaphor of a *bound* is irresistible. There are bounds to the functioning of our categories and of the concepts belonging to those categories; and those bounds constitute the bounds of human knowledge."³⁰ To Kant, the notion of a bound is

²⁷ Kant. "Pure Reason." p. 105

²⁸ Kant. "Pure Reason." pp. 110-1

²⁹ Wolterstorff. "Recover from Kant." p. 9

³⁰ Wolterstorff. "Recover from Kant." p. 10

the limits of experiential knowledge, and a boundary is that which separates what lies within experience from what lies beyond it. He writes:

'Reason by all its a priori principles never teaches us anything more than objects of possible experience, and even of these nothing more than can be known by experience.' But this limitation does not prevent reason from leading us to the objective boundary of experience, namely, to the relation to something which is not itself an object of experience but is the ground of all experience. Reason does not, however, teach us anything concerning this same something in itself; it instructs us only as regards its own complete and highest use in the field of possible experience.³¹

While there are boundaries to knowledge derived from possible experience, reason *can* lead a person beyond, but only in a general sense, she can know that there is something beyond experience, but what that something exactly *is* is beyond her.

To Wolterstorff this means that in terms of knowledge (he discusses it in terms of knowledge of God) there will always be a gap between a person and her knowledge of anything that is outside of what is not within her experience. Thus any time a person would wish to say something about God, she "must address the question whether such thought and speech are ever really about God."³² Before attributing things to God, any person doing theology must first be sure, and give evidence to back up the claim that what she is saying *can* be attributed to God, and that what she is actually talking about *is* God. This is the Kantian agony, since God is in many respects beyond experience.

³¹ Immanuel Kant. "Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics Which Will Be Able to Come Forth as a Science." *Kant Selections*. Edited by Lewis White Beck. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998. p. 226

³² Wolterstorff. "Recover from Kant." p. 13

To counter-act it, he writes, we must, keep the notion of awareness of objects *under*, or through, concepts, since "we do interpret our experience conceptually."³³ He adds, though, that understanding the perception of the object is essential to getting past Kant's agony:

But notice that if we understand perception of an object as awareness of the object—rather than as awareness of a mental representation caused by the object—then it will not make sense to follow Kant in the further step he takes of thinking of concepts as rules for structuring the objects of our awareness.³⁴

Thus what a person experiences, what she is aware of, is not the mental representation of such things in her mind, but the actual things themselves. The notion of an *intuition* is no longer applicable in this understanding of awareness; knowledge does not depend on intuitions, it is not *confined* to them. A person can have an experience of an object that they have no intuition of, like the platypus, a mammal that lays eggs. Such an object seems too far-fetched, but once a person experienced this object, they could understand it, without needing to have a form of the object already in mind. Thus any object that a person is aware of can be known without some pre-existing *form* in her mind.

It is now a possibility that a person can experience God, and can say things about God. Wolterstorff can now say that people *can* get God in mind, can experience God enough to say things about Him, and to say meaningful things about Him. He writes that "one way we might get God in mind is by the use of definite descriptions ... 'Creator of the universe' [or] ... 'the one who

³³ Wolterstorff. "Recover from Kant." p. 17

³⁴ Wolterstorff. "Recover from Kant." p. 17

brought about all that might not have been',³⁵ people can, in this way, 'get God in mind' by considering attributes of God that are also attributable to God. What this also means is that "we now have to take seriously ... human beings might sometimes even have awareness of God."³⁶ In terms of other knowledge, this means that a person can be more *sure* of what she thinks that she knows. Instead of being aware of an object through the mediation of intuitions, a person can be directly aware of the object itself, since she can be sure that the thing *in itself* exists outside of her mental representations of it.

Wolterstorff illustrates this by using an analogy of a car: "if one believes that one's car is in good running order, one does not spend the whole day tinkering under the hood to determine whether it could possibly be in good running order, and if so, how. One gets in and drives off."³⁷ Essentially, when a person has reason to believe that she has an idea about God, has had an experience of God, then she can use that experience, use that idea. She does not first have to prove, or give ample evidence for the idea. She does not have to show *how* that idea can be attributed to some thing that is not within 'normal' experience. Once the idea or experience is there, it can be used.

This way of understanding perception is, Wolterstorff readily admits, the way in which Thomas Reid understood it. But before he discusses Reid, Wolterstorff finds it necessary to bring into the discussion that which Reid himself was arguing against, reacting to. To accomplish this, Wolterstorff must first

³⁵ Wolterstorff. "Recover from Kant." p. 18

³⁶ Wolterstorff. "Recover from Kant." p. 18

³⁷ Wolterstorff. "Recover from Kant." p. 18

respond to the philosophical concept that has existed since the days of the first philosophers, and has influenced most philosophers through history.

Foundationalism.

In his epistemology, the main philosophical concept that Wolterstorff argues against is foundationalism. He calls it *classical* foundationalism, and claims that it has had an extensive influence in philosophy and science since their first days. He writes that “the classic theory of theorizing in the Western world *is* foundationalism,”³⁸ and that:

foundationalism has been the reigning theory of theories in the West since the high Middle Ages. It can be traced back as far as Aristotle, and since Middle Ages vast amounts of philosophical thought have been devoted to elaborating and defending it.³⁹

New approaches to epistemology, then, must take into consideration the principles and arguments presented by foundationalism. They must also explain why foundationalism does not work as well as the tradition implies, and where its problems lie. It is a large task, but one that Wolterstorff does not undertake alone.

One of his chief collaborators has been Alvin Plantinga. In an essay in *Faith and Rationality*, Wolterstorff gives a very brief look at the weak elements of foundationalism, and endorses Plantinga’s more complete account and critique,⁴⁰

³⁸ Nicholas Wolterstorff. *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion*. 2nd Ed. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984. p. 28

³⁹ Wolterstorff. *Reason*. p. 30

⁴⁰ Nicholas Wolterstorff. “Can Belief in God be Rational If It Has No Foundations?” *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*. Edited by Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983. p. 142

essentially *appropriating* it for himself. Plantinga's account of foundationalism, however, takes the form of an argument against 'evidentialism'. Evidentialism, both Plantinga and Wolterstorff would argue, while it needs responding to as well, needs to be argued against, is a *type* of foundationalist argument. It relies upon and uses "a certain 'model' of rationality, a certain criterion for the application of the concept *rational*—the criterion being that of classical foundationalism."⁴¹ In this way, Wolterstorff can say that "almost always when you lift an evidentialist you find a foundationalist."⁴² The two are intimately linked, and arguments against the one can usually be used against the other as well.

In his account of the evidentialist objection to theistic belief, Plantinga states that it follows these basic lines:

- (1) It is irrational or unreasonable to accept theistic belief in the absence of sufficient evidence or reasons
and
- (2) There is no evidence or at any rate not sufficient evidence for the proposition that God exists.⁴³

Using these two premises, the evidentialist objection concludes that theistic belief is not as rational as theistic unbelief. The first premise assumes a theory of knowledge which bases belief and knowledge claims on sufficient evidence, thus working upwards from certain knowledge claims to less certain knowledge claims. The second premise assumes that evidence for an entity which does not exist within the realm of human experience is not as firm, not as certain, as evidence for things that *do* exist within the realm of human experience. Thus, to

⁴¹ Wolterstorff. "Belief in God." p. 142

⁴² Wolterstorff. "Belief in God." p. 142

⁴³ Alvin Plantinga. "Reason and Belief in God." *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*. Edited by Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983. p. 29 (--numbering my own)

believe in a God who deals with and acts in the world is less rational, less justifiable, than to *not* believe in such a being.

The theory of knowledge which the evidentialist assumes is the foundationalist theory. The 'model' of rationality and argument that the evidentialists use is the model which bases propositions on other propositions which are known with a high degree of certainty. It is a system which works from the bottom up, from the foundations to the peak. Plantinga summarizes the foundationalist criterion as a guide for a rational noetic structure, a structure of rationally held beliefs. He writes:

according to foundationalism: (1) in a rational noetic structure the believed-on-the-basis-of relation is asymmetric and irreflexive, (2) a rational noetic structure has a foundation, and (3) in a rational noetic structure nonbasic belief is proportional in strength to support from the foundations.⁴⁴

Since foundationalism is a "normative thesis ... about how a system of beliefs *ought* to be structured,"⁴⁵ this structure as Plantinga describes it is how a person will or ought to arrive at a properly rational and justified system of beliefs.

The rational noetic structure which foundationalism works toward would essentially look like an inverted pyramid, with the flow of ideas moving upwards, and only upwards. The basis of this pyramid are those propositions which need no support, the *basic* propositions. And it is on the foundation of these propositions that the rest of the pyramid is built, using proper rules and procedures, such as logical rules; inference, deduction, etc. These arrived-at

⁴⁴ Plantinga. "Reason and Belief." p. 55

⁴⁵ Plantinga. "Reason and Belief." p. 48

propositions or beliefs are the *nonbasic* propositions, those that are themselves not certain, but their certainty is derived from that of their foundations.

Foundationalism also includes some *degree* of belief, as the nonbasic belief is held as firmly as the foundations warrant. A person will have a much stronger belief that she is seeing a tree at a present moment (given that she *is* seeing a tree) than she would a belief that she saw a tree a number of days ago. Or, she will have a much stronger belief that she is seeing a tree than that the tree is an oak. If the nonbasic proposition has a foundation that is extensive, it will be able to be believed more strongly than a nonbasic proposition which is held on the basis of fewer foundational propositions.

It will also include a notion of the *depth of ingression* of beliefs.⁴⁶ This is essentially how 'rooted' a belief is in the greater belief structure. Some beliefs are of the nature that whether they are believed or disbelieved does not make much of a difference to the person holding them. However, there are others which, if disbelieved, would require an extensive reworking of the whole belief structure. These latter beliefs, then, require more foundations, more substantial evidence in order to change or discredit them. Thus, a belief like that of theistic belief needs ample evidence to support itself, as it is a very important, central belief.

Foundationalism, on Plantinga's terms, is essentially a normative theory of knowledge which requires that beliefs be grounded on *properly basic* beliefs in order to be rational. A properly basic belief is one that "must be capable of functioning foundationally, capable of bearing its share of the weight of the whole

⁴⁶ Plantinga. "Reason and Belief." p. 50

noetic structure.”⁴⁷ These are *self-evident* propositions, those that are simply seen to be true by whoever grasps it. Another way of defining them is through the notion of *immediate* beliefs. They are not believed on the basis of some type of mediator; such as deduction or inference; but seen to be true by their own nature. Any other belief or proposition is a nonbasic one, and must be founded on the evidence of these basic propositions in order for it to be rationally justified.

Plantinga, however, finds that the claims of foundationalism do not abide by the *rules* of foundationalism; it is internally inconsistent. He tries to reformulate the foundationalist claim to be more inclusive, but that does not relieve the inconsistency. The fundamental principle of foundationalism that Plantinga takes issue with is that “A proposition *p* is properly basic or a person *S* if and only if *p* is either self-evident to *S* or incorrigible for *S* or evident to the senses for *S*.”⁴⁸ The issue that Plantinga sees is not that proper basicity is outlined as being self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses, but that propositions are properly basic *if and only if* they meet these requirements. If this is true as Plantinga has outlined it, then “relative to propositions that are self-evident and incorrigible, most of the beliefs that form the stock in trade of ordinary everyday life are not probable.”⁴⁹ The issue then is not only that the foundationalist thesis is not in itself tenable, but also that the foundationalist thesis makes the propositions required to live in the world ungrounded and improbable.

⁴⁷ Plantinga. “Reason and Belief.” p. 55

⁴⁸ Plantinga. “Reason and Belief.” p. 59

⁴⁹ Plantinga. “Reason and Belief.” p. 59

To make the foundationalist thesis more inclusive, Plantinga reformulates it as: “ p is properly basic for S if and only if p is self-evident or incorrigible or evident to the senses for S , or is accepted as basic by nearly everyone.”⁵⁰ This claim, though, is itself not “self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses,”⁵¹ and since both Plantinga and Wolterstorff have issues with foundationalism, it is not necessarily accepted as basic by nearly everyone. If the fundamental claims of an epistemology do not cohere with the theory itself, what would compel people to follow its guidelines? If, then, the foundationalist theory is itself not a basic proposition, not a basic belief, what is it founded on, if anything? The point that Plantinga and Wolterstorff try to make is that the claims of foundationalism are both internally inconsistent and do not adequately reflect the actual experience that people have in coming to beliefs and propositions.

Wolterstorff, in an earlier work on the subject published in 1976, details foundationalism in terms of a theory of theorizing within a context of the natural sciences. Given that much of his later writing is concerned with the nature of *knowledge*, science here can be understood as a more general definition of *scientia*, science as general knowledge. He gives the core of foundationalism as:

A person is warranted in accepting a theory at a certain time if and only if he is then warranted in believing that that theory belongs to genuine science (*scientia*).

...

A theory *belongs to genuine science* if and only if it is justified by some foundational proposition and some human being could know with certitude that it is thus justified.

...

⁵⁰ Plantinga. “Reason and Belief.” p. 62

⁵¹ Plantinga. “Reason and Belief.” p. 62

A proposition is *foundational* if and only if it is true and some human being could know noninferentially and with certitude that it is true.⁵²

It could also be read by exchanging the term 'theory' with 'proposition', and 'science' with 'knowledge'. In short, a person is warranted in accepting a proposition if that proposition is appropriately grounded by an inferential chain to a proposition which is known, without inference, to be true and certain.

The central terms and ideas here are 'genuine science', 'foundational proposition', and 'know noninferentially and with certitude'. Genuine science, or genuine knowledge, is essentially that set of propositions which, in some way irregardless of its well-foundedness, are useful and necessary to know about the world. Propositions such as 'there are other people', ideas such as gravity, these are essentially claims and propositions of genuine science. However, since a large part of what makes a proposition part of genuine science is its foundations, these do play a role as well. A foundational proposition is, essentially, a basic proposition, as outlined by Plantinga. These are those propositions which are self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses. Basic propositions, of course, are those that are known 'noninferentially and with certitude'. They are just true, without any evidence needed.

Wolterstorff argues that the weak elements of this theory are that it does not adequately reflect the human experience of knowing, and that there are not adequate guidelines to show how to move up the foundational pyramid. "Perception" he writes "does not yield a rock-firm base for our theories. Rather,

⁵² Wolterstorff. *Reason*. p. 28-9

our theories must already be accurate if our perceptions are to be veridical.”⁵³

Perceptions do not occur in an intellectual vacuum, a person must already have some sort of intellectual theory in place in order to consider what she is experiencing or thinking. Foundationalism, on this point, requires that the theories that explain perception come *after* perception, while Wolterstorff observes that this is not generally the case.

He also states that there is a lack of guidelines in how to travel from certain propositions to acceptable inferential propositions:

even if there is a set of foundational propositions, no one has yet succeeded in stating what relation the theories that we are warranted in accepting or rejecting bear to the members of that set ... we are without a general logic ... for warranted theory acceptance and rejection.⁵⁴

Foundationalism, he argues, requires that there are ‘rules’ to acquiring new propositions; such as deduction, probability, and falsificationism. Wolterstorff concludes that none of them work as well as the foundationalists would argue. Deduction, he writes, does not work, as “many theories which seem warranted of acceptance are not deducible from any foundation.”⁵⁵ Probabilism fails since the foundationalist would have to assume a uniform nature, *with no foundational evidence for such an assumption*. Falsificationism fails because “it seldom instructs ... to reject a theory.”⁵⁶

To illustrate the lack of guidelines, Wolterstorff retells a story first told by Imre Lakatos (1922-1974), a scientist and philosopher:

⁵³ Wolterstorff. *Reason*. p. 52-3

⁵⁴ Wolterstorff. *Reason*. p. 45

⁵⁵ Wolterstorff. *Reason*. p. 37

⁵⁶ Wolterstorff. *Reason*. p. 42

The story is about an imaginary case of planetary misbehavior. A physicist of the pre-Einsteinian era takes Newton's mechanics and his law of gravitation (N), the accepted initial conditions, I , and calculates, with their help, the path of a newly discovered planet, p . But the planet deviates from the calculated path. Does our Newtonian physicist consider that the deviation was forbidden by Newton's theory and therefore that, once established, it refutes the theory N ? No. He suggests that there must be a hitherto unknown planet p' which perturbs the path of p . He calculates the mass, orbit, etc., of this hypothetical planet and then asks an experimental astronomer to test his hypothesis. The planet p' is so small that even the biggest available telescopes cannot possibly observe it: the experimental astronomer applies for a research grant to build yet a bigger one. In three years' time the new telescope is ready. Were the unknown planet p' to be discovered, it would be hailed as a new victory of the Newtonian science. But it is not. Does our scientist abandon Newton's theory and his idea of the perturbing planet? No. He suggests that a cloud of cosmic dust hides the planet from us. He calculates the location and the properties of this cloud and asks for a research grant to send up a satellite to test his calculations. Were the satellite's instruments (possibly new ones, base on a little-tested theory) to record the existence of the conjectural cloud, the result would be hailed as an outstanding victory for Newtonian science. But the cloud is not found. Does our scientist abandon Newton's theory, together with the idea of the perturbing planet and the idea of the cloud which hides it? No. He suggests that there is some magnetic field in that region of the universe which disturbed the instruments of the satellite. A new satellite is sent up. Were the magnetic field to be found, Newtonians would celebrate a sensational victory. But it is not. Is this regarded as a refutation of Newtonian science? No. Either yet another ingenious auxiliary hypothesis is proposed or ... the whole story is buried in the dusty volumes of periodicals and the story never mentioned again.⁵⁷

While this story illustrates the failure of falsificationism as a general principle of foundationalism, it also suggests something else, fundamentally important to Wolterstorff, namely that there is some other method of theorizing, or coming to knowledge, than the foundationalists accept. This alternative method is,

⁵⁷ Wolterstorff. *Reason*. p. 44-5

Wolterstorff will argue, that of Thomas Reid. Wolterstorff, through his understanding of belief and knowledge is influenced extensively by Reid, who reacts against the foundational, and skeptical character of much of modern philosophy (or much of *all* philosophy for that matter), and proposes a non-foundational account of knowledge. Wolterstorff as well calls for *non*-foundational theories of knowledge, since the foundational theories are not sufficient for explaining both the experience and the practice of coming to knowledge.

Non-Antievidentialism?

Having said all this, is Wolterstorff and Plantinga's system as antievidentialist as they have made it out to be? They propose to show the untenability of the evidentialist challenge to theistic belief, which is summarized as two fundamental claims:

this challenge can be thought of as consisting of two claims: first, if it is not rational to accept some proposition about God then one ought not accept it; and second, it is not rational to accept propositions about God unless one does so on the basis of others of one's beliefs which provide adequate evidence for them, and with a firmness not exceeding that warranted by the strength of the evidence.⁵⁸

Wolterstorff is an antievidentialist insofar as he considers the evidentialist challenge to be untenable. But is this claim warranted? Is Wolterstorff himself rational and justified in accepting the claim or belief that the evidentialist objection is not tenable?

⁵⁸ Wolterstorff. "Belief in God." p. 136

An objection to this antievidentialism is that it is a caricature of the evidentialist position, that it does not accurately reflect what evidentialists actually believe concerning their position. Since Wolterstorff endorses Plantinga's account of evidentialism, and the main objectors to this antievidentialism respond to Plantinga, it would be of worth to consider this account, and then see if Plantinga surpasses it.

As has been shown, Plantinga's account of evidentialism is essentially that:

- (1) It is irrational or unreasonable to accept theistic belief in the absence of sufficient evidence or reasons
- and
- (2) There is no evidence or at any rate not sufficient evidence for the proposition that God exists

Thus the evidentialist challenge to theistic belief relies on the notion that there must be adequate and sufficient evidence in order to be justified in believing a proposition. The question then becomes what does the evidentialist mean by the term 'evidence'?

The term evidence does not, Plantinga points out, mean that there is *proof* for the belief. Evidence, in the evidentialist objection, does not mean proof insofar as that proof is beyond doubt. Evidence here is having *reasons* for holding the belief, and whether these are good reasons will determine whether the belief is well- or ill-founded.

To illustrate this Plantinga uses an example of a 14-year old theist who had been raised in a theistic community:

This 14-year-old theist, we may suppose, does not believe in God on the basis of evidence. He has never heard of the

cosmological, teleological, or ontological arguments; in fact no one has ever presented him with any evidence at all. And although he has often been told about God, he does not take that testimony as evidence; he does not reason thus: everyone around here says God loves and cares for us; most of what everyone around here says is true; so probably *that is* true. Instead, he simply believes what he is taught.⁵⁹

Is this 14 year-old theist irrational, then, in his belief that God exists? Plantinga would argue that an evidentialist would say 'Yes'.

There is a sense, though, in which an evidentialist would not. An evidentialist might say that this 14 year-old is 'doing his best' in his beliefs, and that he cannot be held to a higher standard than he is capable of fulfilling:

The evidence [he] has, considered relative to [his] age and circumstances, is sufficient for his theism. Considered objectively, however, the sort of evidence [he] has is obviously insufficient for theism on the part of an educated, sophisticated adult. In any case, no evidentialist worth attending to would say that his theism was without any evidence at all.⁶⁰

Evidence, here, is not defined along narrow lines of purely objective, external evidence. It has as part of its nature an element of 'appropriateness' and 'relativity' to the nature and intelligence of the believer. Thus a person like Plantinga will be held to a higher standard of evidence than would the 14 year-old theist.

But it still has the element of objective-ness in it. Since the 14 year-old and Plantinga are being *held* to a notion of evidence that *is appropriate* for their age and level of study, they are then held to external judgments. They are not held to accountability as to whether the belief holds true with respect to their

⁵⁹ Plantinga. "Reason and Belief." p. 33

⁶⁰ Norman Kretzmann. . "Evidence Against Anti-Evidentialism." *Our Knowledge of God: Essays on Natural and Philosophical Theology*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992. p. 36

other beliefs. They are held to account as to whether their beliefs hold true with respect to the *external* standard of evidence and truth-value. Any discussion of appropriateness and relativity of evidence must still take place within a context of an objective standard. The evidence, or at least the means for judging the evidence, still exists external to the person, thus the propositions must be judged by their adherence to that external standard.

How can, though, all of the disciplines and knowledge systems be held to one single standard? Plantinga claims that “criteria for proper basicity must be reached from below rather than above; they should not be presented *ex cathedra* but argued to and tested by a relevant set of examples.”⁶¹ On this account, it may seem basic to a person that she saw a tree earlier in the day, since she did in fact see a tree. That proposition cannot be basic for another person, as the other did not see the tree. In this way, “there is no reason to assume, in advance, that everyone will agree on the examples.”⁶² In terms of the theistic argument, Christians will accept the existence of God as a properly basic belief, while atheists would not. “Must [the] criteria ... of the Christian community, conform to their examples? Surely not. The Christian community is responsible to *its* set of examples, not to [the atheists].”⁶³

In this way, while there is still evidence in Plantinga’s system, it is not of the evidentialist type. The evidentialist’s notion of evidence demands an external, objective standard, even if the adherence to the standard can be eased for certain cases. Plantinga’s evidence does not have an objective, external

⁶¹ Plantinga. “Reason and Belief.” p. 77

⁶² Plantinga. “Reason and Belief.” p. 77

⁶³ Plantinga. “Reason and Belief.” p. 77

standard. It relies on the experiences and the examples of the person or people involved in discussing their propositions. The theist is within her right to view her belief in God as properly basic; she may have believed in God her whole life, she may have had an experience of God, or she may require belief in God as a ground for many of her other beliefs. There are many reasons why a person might view belief in God as properly basic. There are also many reasons why some one would not. What is important here is that each person is accountable for their own examples, for their own arguments.⁶⁴

Conclusion.

Wolterstorff will argue the same point. What he does differently is that instead of setting up notions of proper basicity, or a 'differently' grounded set of propositions as Plantinga does, he sets up a *situational* theory of knowledge. In his discussion of Kant, Wolterstorff took issue with the notion of perception that Kant raised, that knowledge of some object depends on both intuitions and concepts, already present in the mind. Wolterstorff argues that while people do interpret experience conceptually, the notion that there must be a representation in the mind of the object being experienced is not correct. A person is aware of whatever it is that she is perceiving, not just the mental representation of it. This, he said, is the Reidian way of understanding perception.

Using Reid, Wolterstorff also argues against the foundationalist theory of knowledge. Developing the points that he made earlier, in *Reason Within the*

⁶⁴ While this may seem like a form of relativism, Reformed Epistemology does not fall under that category. Why this is will be discussed in Chapter Four, in the section titled "Is it Fideism?" p. 98ff. (Of specific interest is what Wolterstorff calls the 'taking a fancy' objection.)

Boundaries of Religion, Wolterstorff will take insights from Reid's 'Common Sense' philosophy, created as a reaction to the skeptical philosophies of Descartes, Hume, and Locke. It is Locke that Wolterstorff himself uses extensively, as he finds it necessary to fully develop the Lockean system in order to delve into Reid's system. It is to Locke that Wolterstorff turns next.

Chapter Three: On Locke

In building his own epistemological perspective, Wolterstorff spends a lot of time reacting to Enlightenment worldviews: the philosophic mindsets of the past four centuries. He pays attention particularly to those that accept and advance foundationalism, taking the work of John Locke (1632-1704) to be the chief example of the foundationalist epistemologies.

Locke lived in England in a time of political and religious crisis. Politically, there was movements to establish a Catholic king rather than the Protestant king already in place, and the attempted abolition of the monarchy altogether.⁶⁵ In this setting, Locke wrote his political works, *Two Treatises on Government* (1688), and the *Letters Concerning Toleration* (1680s-90s). In terms of the religious crisis, the differing Christian groups had become factions, and were tearing England apart in a civil war.⁶⁶ In an attempt to end this breaking up of the English population, Locke wrote his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) and *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695). To Locke it was important not to trust wholly the testimony of tradition, but for each person to judge for themselves, using their reason, whether or not what they believe ought to be believed.

Wolterstorff portrays Locke's work as being based on the model of foundationalism, which he expressed in terms of 'evidentialism'. The two terms

⁶⁵ J.R. Milton. "Locke's Life and Times." *the Cambridge Companion to Locke*. Edited by Vere Chappell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. pp. 13-4

⁶⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff. *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. p. 7

indicate a strategic overlap in content, for "evidentialists [accept] a certain 'model' of rationality, a certain criterion for the application of the concept *rational*—the criterion being that of classical foundationalism."⁶⁷ Although a different 'expression', evidentialism relies upon, and assumes the truth of the foundationalist claims.

What Wolterstorff takes from Locke is this: that knowledge can only be about mental representations (mental objects), and so it is very limited in terms of its usefulness for acting in the world; it is "short and scanty."⁶⁸ In order to have enough propositions to get by in life, to act and have certainty about the world around her (external objects), a person must add to these propositions using belief. However, since belief is 'taking something at someone's word'⁶⁹ it must be governed or guided properly in order for a person to be able to trust it. Reason must be used to govern belief, since it is the faculty which grants certainty. This is how Wolterstorff understands Locke's argument for reasonable belief. He does not, though, agree with him, except insofar as there is an obligation for people to govern their beliefs; a noetic obligation.

Locke rejected theistic belief claims that were grounded only on religious experience. He formulated his evidentialist objection to such theistic beliefs in the midst of a society torn apart by religious enthusiasts, many of whom thought that what they believed had been revealed to them by God, and that if any disagreed, they were disagreeing with God himself. To counter this trend, Locke proposed

⁶⁷ Wolterstorff. "Belief in God." p. 142

⁶⁸ John Locke. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1995. p. 550

⁶⁹ Locke. *Essay*. p. 556

his 'evidentialist objection', not to discredit belief in God, but to force people to consider their beliefs, and be sure that they beliefs that they have are correct and proper. To this end, he argues that if religion needed to be given to humanity through revelation, why would God have given to each person a faculty of reason? If God wanted a person to believe something, he would work with the rules of rationality:

If he would have us assent to the truth of any proposition, he either evidences that truth by the usual methods of natural reason, or else makes it known to be a truth, which he would have us assent to, by his authority, and convinces us that it is from him, by some marks which reason cannot be mistaken in.⁷⁰

Reason, Locke argues, is the 'candle of the Lord', through which humans can illumine the world around them and come to certain knowledge about it.

The Nature and Scope of Knowledge.

Fundamental to Locke's account of human knowledge is a distinction between knowledge and belief, out of which comes also the distinction between reason and faith. To him, knowledge is seeing something to be true or perceiving some fact, while belief, also called *assent* or *judgment*, is simply taking something to be true:

The mind has two faculties conversant about truth and falsehood,—

First, Knowledge, whereby it certainly perceives, and is undoubtedly satisfied of the agreement or disagreement of any ideas.

Secondly, Judgment, which is the putting ideas together, or separating them from one another in the mind, when their certain agreement or disagreement is not perceived but

⁷⁰ Locke. *Essay*. 595

presumed to be so; which is, as the word imports, taken to be so before it certainly appears.⁷¹

Knowledge and belief then are two separate notions, though closely related: knowledge is not a species of belief, yet belief typically accompanies knowledge.⁷²

This comes out further when Locke discusses the difference between faith and reason. Similar to his thoughts on knowledge and belief, Locke distinguishes between reason and faith, but at the same time places the two in an intimate relationship: faith is a "firm assent of the mind: which if it be regulated ... cannot be afforded to anything, but upon good reason; and so cannot be opposite to it."⁷³ The picture, as Wolterstorff paints it, is that humans have been created with various belief-forming faculties, like faith, but we must be sure that the beliefs we form are true, so they must be governed. It was, then "in good measure, for the purpose of such governance that God endowed us with the light of Reason."⁷⁴ Faith is a useful endowment that humanity has, but if it is not governed properly, it can lead to false knowledge claims, which means that a person will have false ideas about the world in which she lives. Reason is dependent on knowledge, and if properly governed, is "grounded on knowledge."⁷⁵ Faith, on the other hand, is a species of belief, not of knowledge,⁷⁶ and the two, while not mutually exclusive, are not the same things

⁷¹ Locke. *Essay*. p. 555

⁷² Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 13

⁷³ Locke. *Essay*. p. 582

⁷⁴ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 11

⁷⁵ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 12

⁷⁶ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 125

either: knowledge, and therefore reason as well, hold a degree of certainty which belief and faith can never reach.

What this means comes out in Locke's notion of knowledge as perception. Perception constitutes, or at the very least, leads us to knowledge. Perception, for Locke, is the phenomenon of 'just knowing' that something is true, or *intuitive* knowledge:

This part of knowledge is irresistible, and like the bright sunshine, forces itself immediately to be perceived, as soon as ever the mind turns its view that way; and leaves no room for hesitation, doubt, or examination, but the mind is presently filled with the clear light of it.⁷⁷

This knowledge is *immediate* or *direct*, it does not come to the knower through any other means than their own perceiving of it. A person is directly aware of the fact that she is hungry, or that she is dizzy; that when she sees a green object, she immediately knows it to be green, or on seeing a cow, knows it to be a cow. It is different than *mediate* knowledge, which is dependant upon other propositions to be known. For instance, when a person sees a car, she *immediately* knows that she is seeing a car, she is directly aware of it.⁷⁸ But when that same person begins to consider what *kind* of car it is, whether it's a Honda, Ford, or GM, she must consider other propositions that she knows, and the knowledge that she comes to is mediated, she comes to it *indirectly*.

⁷⁷ Locke. *Essay*. p. 433

⁷⁸ While these examples require prior knowledge (definition of car, cow, etc), the fact that the person is directly aware of what she is perceiving is the important element. The prior knowledge does not *mediate* her knowledge of her perception.

If knowledge is perception, then what is it perception of? To Locke, knowledge is the perception of the agreement or disagreement of ideas,⁷⁹ which he calls *facts*; positive or negative facts respectively.⁸⁰ When a person perceives some relationship between two or more of the ideas that they have, such as notions of the coldness and wetness of snow, then they are aware of some fact regarding snow, the *know* something about snow. The two ideas, being brought together in such a way, constitute a fact about snow. The concept of *ideas*, though, is something else that needs some explaining.

This concept, in Locke's philosophy, is complicated.⁸¹ Ideas are both purely *mental*, but also representations of entities distinct from the idea itself.

Locke writes:

since the things the mind contemplates, are none of them, besides itself, present to the understanding, 'tis necessary that something else, as a sign or representation of the thing it considers, should be present to it: and these are ideas.⁸²

The mind, then, can only be aware of those things that are mental, it is not directly aware of anything else. In order for the mind to be, in some way, aware of what is going on outside of it, there must be some sort of representation of such things in the mind, and the only way to have this is for the representations to be purely mental. This is not to say, though, that all ideas are representations, either of external objects or of mental objects. For example, ideas regarding the concept of triangle; that it has three sides, and the sum of the angles adds up to 180 degrees; are not representations, but *archetypes*, ideas about non-

⁷⁹ Locke. *Essay*. p. 496

⁸⁰ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 20

⁸¹ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 14

⁸² Locke. *Essay*. p. 608

substantial things.⁸³ What is important to note, though, is that what knowledge is conversant about is the purely mental, whether these ideas are representations or archetypes, they are all mental entities, thus the mind is conversant only about those things that occupy the mind, its contents and its utilities.

It is through this that we come to see part of the nature of knowledge that Locke sets up: it is limited in what it can know with certainty, "knowledge is ... short and scanty."⁸⁴ Wolterstorff paraphrases Locke's view as this:

Reality is directly present to the mind only at that point where the individual mind thinks about itself and its own acts and objects ... the remainder of reality can be thought about only by the mediation of mental objects which, while themselves directly present to the mind, represent items of non-mental reality not directly present.⁸⁵

Real knowledge, then, is only that which, as the perception of the agreement or disagreement of ideas (which Locke calls certain knowledge), is known to agree with the reality of the things they are about. Real knowledge, knowledge of the world around the knower, depends on the certainty of the ideas that she holds.

To know something with certainty is an important element of Locke's epistemology, since it is what we can know with certainty that leads us to real knowledge. Wolterstorff illustrates this notion of certainty as a continuum:

the highest point is the certainty (evidence) of intuitive knowledge, below that, the lesser certainty of demonstrative knowledge, below that the yet lesser certainty of what [is called] sensitive knowledge; and then the probability and improbability of various degrees.⁸⁶

⁸³ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 15

⁸⁴ Locke. *Essay*. p. 554

⁸⁵ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 16

⁸⁶ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 45

It is a continuum, then, of truth-likelihood,⁸⁷ in which propositions that are high on the continuum are 'more likely' to be true than those that are lower on the continuum. Since intuitive knowledge is that which we know immediately, it is the most certain. It is not based on other propositions, but its truth is something that is merely *known* or *perceived*. Demonstrative knowledge is less certain, since it relies on the truth of intuitive knowledge, which is certain, but need to be derived through intellectual tools, which are not necessarily free of error. And the continuum follows this trend.

Due to Locke's ideas that certain knowledge can only be awareness of mental states and objects, then this continuum cannot be a continuum of real knowledge, as that is what is certain. If it is certain, then the continuum of truth-likelihood has no relevance to it. The continuum, then, refers to that which typically accompanies knowledge, namely *belief* or *assent*. What this means, for knowledge, is that when any person has knowledge of some fact, then the corresponding proposition will be *assented to*, or believed, with the highest possible certainty.⁸⁸ Although belief is not as certain as knowledge, and, to Locke, could never attain the level of certainty that knowledge has, it is still a necessary element to the life of every person.

The Necessity of Belief.

This necessity of belief comes out of the fact that the certain knowledge that humanity can possess is by its very nature extremely limited. Locke uses

⁸⁷ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 50

⁸⁸ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 59

the terms 'short and scanty', meaning that the breadth of our knowledge is smaller and its contents are less complete than most people realize. In order to function in the world, there must be something else that supplements knowledge. This is the role of belief. However, since belief is not as certain as knowledge, and could never become that certain, it must be governed. And human beings, as rational and intelligent creatures, have an obligation to govern their beliefs properly. Since beliefs are not subject to the will, though, this obligation is not an obligation to believe or not believe whichever proposition is being considered. It is instead an obligation to govern the *levels of confidence*, or the *degrees of firmness* we grant to the proposition.⁸⁹ If a person finds that, after proper consideration, a proposition which she had believed was not held on sufficient reason, then she would be duty-bound to believe that proposition less firmly than she had previously done.

There is such an obligation, Locke argues, because we are bound, by "our Maker, who would have him use those discerning faculties he has given him to keep him out of mistake and error."⁹⁰ It is a matter of human *dignity* that each person govern their belief, and failure to do so is both misusing the gifts that God has bestowed on his special creation, and, in a way, rejecting part of that which makes each person *human*.⁹¹ Locke, writing in a time of civil unrest caused by religious Enthusiasts, demands that they work with reason and govern their beliefs. He is "confident that God will play by the rules of evidence,"⁹² and so the

⁸⁹ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 62

⁹⁰ Locke. *Essay*. p. 582

⁹¹ Locke. *Essay*. p. 589

⁹² Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 121

obligation is even stronger. If God reveals himself to humanity by working within the rules of evidence, then humanity must know and use these rules in order to come to know God.

The rules that Locke places on the governance of belief Wolterstorff summarizes into three principles: the principle of evidence, the principle of appraisal, and the principle of proportionality. In order to properly govern belief, these principles must be followed in succession.⁹³ A person must *do her best*, using these principles, to see that her beliefs are held as firmly as the evidence allows or requires. However, doing one's best is not always feasible, especially if Locke is exhorting people to do their best *all the time for all of their beliefs*. This, though, is not what Locke is urging. The *alethic* obligation, or the obligation to find the truth of the matter, is a very situated obligation,⁹⁴ in which it is only those beliefs that are of great *concernment*, or those that have a great impact on the person's life, that she is obligated to intensely scrutinize.⁹⁵

The first principle, the principle of evidence, is that each person is required to "acquire evidence for and against the proposition such that each item of evidence is something that one knows and such that the totality of one's evidence is satisfactory."⁹⁶ A person is to begin to consider her beliefs by finding evidence that demonstrates both the validity and invalidity of the belief. And the evidence is to be of such a nature that it is *known* to the person. Wolterstorff

⁹³ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 67, p. 73, p. 79

⁹⁴ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 66

⁹⁵ Locke. *Essay*. p. 589

⁹⁶ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 67

explains this as the idea that the evidence must rely on perception, on certain knowledge:

Opinion is to rest on knowledge. All inferential ... knowledge rests on immediate knowledge; and immediate knowledge gets its 'justification' not from some basis in yet other propositions but from the fact that one just sees the proposition to be true.⁹⁷

In this way Locke would have each person start from a firm foundation of certain knowledge in order to properly ground belief.

Once that step is done, and there is a firm ground of evidence set, the person would then need to appraise that evidence. In this step, she would "examine the (satisfactory) evidence one has collected so as to determine its evidential force, until one has 'perceived' what is the probability of the proposition on that evidence".⁹⁸ In this step, it is the probability of the proposition, based on the evidence that the person has collected, that is at issue. This is also why she must acquire evidence for the proposition *and* against the proposition, in all honesty and truthfulness. For if she wishes to find a high probability for the proposition in question, she could easily skew the evidence in her favour. But then she would not be doing her best to govern her beliefs.

Once the probability has been set, the next step is the principle of proportionality, in which one must "adopt a level of confidence in the proposition which is proportioned to its probability on one's satisfactory evidence."⁹⁹ Wolterstorff sees some ambiguity in this step, for how is one to decide how much confidence to place in a proposition. Is it in relation to other propositions, or will

⁹⁷ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 69

⁹⁸ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 73

⁹⁹ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 79

there be a fitting and proper place along the continuum into which the proposition will fit best?¹⁰⁰ To get past this problem, he interprets Locke as intending the latter option, that there will be a place on the continuum for any proposition, a *set place*.

In the religious and political climate of his day, Locke's urgings for all to be "lovers of truth for truth's sake"¹⁰¹ and so to seek out these propositions which are the most likely to be true was also a call to religious toleration. For if all that a person can truly know is very limited, then what they can be somewhat sure about is what the different religious groups in England at the time would have been arguing about. Thus, if they went through the appropriate steps to honestly consider what they held to be knowledge, then they would find that there would either be fewer differences than they had thought, or that the differences, because they could not be held with maximal certainty, were not as important, and therefore they were tolerable differences.

This interpretation of Locke, however, is not without its difficulties. Wolterstorff's account of the principle of evidence comes from Locke's discussion of demonstrative knowledge, especially where Locke states that the "intervening ideas which serve to show the agreement of any two others, are called 'proofs',"¹⁰² adding that intuitive knowledge must be present in the whole process:

in every step that reason makes in demonstrative knowledge, there is an intuitive knowledge of that agreement or disagreement it seeks with the next intermediate idea, which it

¹⁰⁰ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 79-80

¹⁰¹ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 80

¹⁰² Locke. *Essay*. p. 434

uses as a proof: ... since without the perception of such agreement or disagreement there is no knowledge produced.¹⁰³

In this way, in order to come to real knowledge, the evidence used must be based on perception, on intuitive knowledge. Wolterstorff formulates this principle using the notion of evidence that “each item of evidence is something that one knows.”¹⁰⁴ But it is contested that this definition of evidence is necessarily about all knowledge, or at least that Locke would have argued that the evidence needs to be things that are *known*.¹⁰⁵ It can be argued that the evidence can “include items that can at best be believed but never known.”¹⁰⁶

Locke, in discussing the notion of probability, gives two grounds for holding a high level of probability: that the belief conforms to one’s own knowledge, and that it has been vouched for by the testimony of others.¹⁰⁷ The fact that he accepts testimony as a ground for probability suggests that Locke was not strictly demanding that evidence be what is completely and certainly known by the person going through this process; the evidence can also be what she might not know herself, but will trust that another person knows, and accept their testimony of it.

It is, though, testimony that is rationally considered. Locke writes that testimony can be accepted if it is considered in six ways:

(1.) The number. (2.) The integrity. (3.) The skill of the witnesses. (4.) The design of the author, where it is a testimony

¹⁰³ Locke. *Essay*. p. 435

¹⁰⁴ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 67

¹⁰⁵ Willem R. De Jong. and René Van Woudenberg. “Testimony and John Locke’s Principle of Evidence.” *Locke Newsletter*. No. 28, 1997. pp. 98

¹⁰⁶ Locke. *Essay*. p. 557

¹⁰⁷ Locke. *Essay*. p. 557

out of a book cited. (5.) The consistency of the parts and circumstances of the relation. (6.) Contrary testimonies.¹⁰⁸

It is not that just any testimony is considered appropriate for judging probability of a proposition or belief. It can only be testimony that is properly judged and considered itself. But testimony, nonetheless, can be used for judging probability.

Wolterstorff cites section 21 of John Locke's *The Conduct of the Understanding* as evidence for his formulation of this principle. This section states that 'intermediate principles' may be used in such cases as the demonstration of knowledge is a long process. These intermediate principles may be depended upon, *as if they were* certain knowledge, provided that they are arrived at properly:

These, though they are not self-evident principles, yet, if they have been made out from them by a wary and unquestionable deduction, may be depended on as certain and infallible truths and serve as unquestionable truths to prove other points depending on them by a nearer and shorter views than remote and general maxims.¹⁰⁹

But they must be arrived at in the proper manner, like is done in the mathematics and the sciences:

in other sciences great care is to be taken that they establish those intermediate principles with as much caution, exactness and indifferency as mathematicians use in the settling any of their great theorems. When this is not done, but men take up the principles in this or that science upon credit, inclination, interest, etc., in haste without due examination and most unquestionable proof, they lay a trap for themselves and as

¹⁰⁸ Locke. *Essay*. p. 557

¹⁰⁹ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. pp. 67-8

much as in them lies captivate their understandings to mistake, falsehood and error.¹¹⁰

Even here Locke, while he suggests that the criteria are not as strict as they could be, that all propositions must rest on certain knowledge, he qualifies by stating that any 'circumventing' the proper procedures must itself be done properly. Any improper proposition will weaken the whole structure of knowledge, thus it is in each person's best interests to follow these rational guidelines.

The issue with Wolterstorff's account of the three principles that he sets out, especially the principle of evidence, is that there are some Locke scholars who would argue that when it comes to Locke's discussion of belief, he is not as foundationalist as he is in his discussions of demonstrative knowledge.¹¹¹ In admitting the evidence of testimony, Locke is opening the definition of evidence wide enough to allow for propositions which are not certain knowledge to the person, but are believed on the basis of trustworthy testimony.

But even this 'opening' that Locke does is, in its own way, foundationalist. Locke began this discussion of belief and belief governance since he came to the conclusion that knowledge is 'short and scanty'. Thus what humans can come to in terms of certain knowledge must be supplemented by belief. People can believe more than they can actually know. In order to properly supplement knowledge, though, not just anything can be accepted; people have to be rational about what they assent to; it must be based on those propositions which are

¹¹⁰ John Locke. *The Conduct of the Understanding*. Online:
http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/publications/CESdigital/locke/conduct/sect/section_21.html

¹¹¹ De Jong et al. "Testimony." pp. 92-3

known with certainty. Both Wolterstorff and his respondents agree on this. Where they differ is whether or not Locke would have carried this system of rationality over to belief in general; such as belief in God, belief in Christ, etc. Wolterstorff argues that Locke indeed *did* carry this notion of rationality over, while some of his respondents argue that Locke considered belief claims and knowledge claims in different ways.

When it comes to general belief, Wolterstorff does make a compelling case for his understanding of Locke. He writes that “Locke is as good a representative of classical epistemology as any”:

And it is as clear as anything can be that Locke does not commit himself to universal justificationism. Opinion is to rest on knowledge. All inferential (demonstrative and sensitive) knowledge rests on immediate knowledge; and immediate knowledge gets its “justification” not from basis in yet other propositions but from the fact that one just sees the proposition to be true. ... So the evidence must consist of things known.¹¹²

In saying that Locke does not subscribe to ‘universal justificationism’ Wolterstorff means that Locke does not require that *all* propositions be justified, there are some that are just seen to be true; they carry their justification with them, so to speak. These propositions are those that form the foundation for all other propositions. Even in terms of belief, since Locke is concerned with how belief must supplement knowledge, there must be some guide as to how people are to perform this supplementing. Why should his discussion of belief be different than his discussion of demonstrative knowledge?

Locke wishes to come to an understanding of how the mind works, and what the mind contains. It is an attempt to understand how people come to

¹¹² Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 69

know, and how this knowledge is both formed and used. When Locke writes about testimony, he also adds that “when any particular matter-of-fact is vouched by the concurrent testimony of unsuspected witnesses, there our assent is also unavoidable.”¹¹³ Thus, while testimony plays a role, it is testimony of *unsuspected* witnesses. The principles of foundationalism are still being used, since the witnesses and their testimony must be considered thoroughly; and by what other basis can this be done, than by the system of rational knowledge that Locke has established?

It is important to note here that Locke, in his own treatment of Christianity, argued that Christians are to believe only what God reveals to them, they must:

believe the revealed truths of the Christian faith on the credit of Jesus of Nazareth, and the outward signs which make such belief reasonable are two: (1) fulfillment of the prophecies about the Messiah, and (2) the performance of miracles.¹¹⁴

It is a Christianity stripped down to its bare necessities. The testimony that Locke takes in this case is that of the Bible, which is the revealed Word of God. Locke writes that every divine revelation requires that each person believe it. But, since “every truth of inspired scripture is not one of those,”¹¹⁵ Locke demands only that each person must assent to those that are essential; the teachings of Jesus. He accepts only the testimony of God himself in this matter. And it is a testimony, and an assent to that testimony, that is based on what Locke believes about God and revelation. It is essentially an assent *founded* on the propositions that Locke

¹¹³ Locke. *Essay*. p. 562

¹¹⁴ I.T. Ramsey. “Editor’s Introduction.” John Locke. *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958. p. 13

¹¹⁵ John Locke. *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. Edited by I. T. Ramsey. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958. p. 75

takes to be true. Locke himself founds his beliefs on his evidentialist, and therefore foundationalist, system.

The Role of Reason.

Of course, to do this, one would need to properly apply reason through this whole process. The process itself relies on the faculty of reason, for without it we are little better than the animals.¹¹⁶ Reason is that by which the beliefs and propositions are *judged* or *guided* to their appropriate level of certainty, and to be held with the appropriate level of firmness. To Locke, reason is “the discovery of the certainty or probability of such propositions or truths, which the mind arrives at by deductions made from such ideas, which it has got by the use of its natural faculties, viz., by sensation or reflection.”¹¹⁷ It is distinct from *reasoning*, which to Locke is a lesser faculty than reason itself. Reasoning, he argues, merely produces the probability that a proposition is valid or invalid, while reason produces the *perception* of the validity or invalidity of a proposition.¹¹⁸

This is not to say, though, that if people were only to follow reason, then each would come to unfailingly true propositions, and never err in beliefs. Locke is not a naïve idealist. There are many instances when a person, following the guide of reason, will come to a mistaken conclusion regarding a proposition. This, though, is not because reason itself is flawed. To Locke, reason cannot be extinguished, it is always the whole and complete faculty that God has granted

¹¹⁶ Locke. *Essay*. p. 589

¹¹⁷ Locke. *Essay*. p. 583

¹¹⁸ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 89

humanity, and no one can limit or destroy it.¹¹⁹ He attributes these errors to judgment, saying that “knowledge being to be had about only visible certain truths, error is not a fault of our knowledge [here could be added reason], but a mistake of our judgment, giving assent to that which is not true.”¹²⁰ Wolterstorff calls the error producing judgments “wounds of the mind,”¹²¹ and states that these ‘wounds’ are not wounds of reason, which is invulnerable.¹²² Locke identifies these wounds as: want of proofs, want of ability to use them, want of will to use them, and wrong measures of probability.¹²³ Wolterstorff makes the most out of the fourth wound, which is the most considerable wound, the first three being ones that a person can do little about.

The notion of proofs is an important one to Locke, as it is how real knowledge is used to ground mediate knowledge. Thus, to say that three quarters of the wounds of the mind relate to the idea of proofs is to show that Locke thought that the people of his time did not understand knowledge properly. Basing beliefs on less than an adequate or satisfactory number of proofs showed how little a person concerned themselves with what should be foremost in their lives. Assuming, of course, that they were able to find or devote enough time and energy to acquiring these proofs. By ‘want of proofs’, Locke was writing about both those proofs which could not be acquired, those beyond the human mind or ability, and those that could be acquired, but were not, by either want of

¹¹⁹ Nicholas Wolterstorff. “John Locke’s Epistemological Piety: Reason is the Candle of the Lord.” *Faith and Philosophy*. Vol. 11 No. 4, October 1994. pp. 587

¹²⁰ Locke. *Essay*. p. 597

¹²¹ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. 94

¹²² While Locke and Reid do not discuss the effects of sin on the whole of human life, Wolterstorff will bring it into his notion of knowledge, although fairly implicitly. See p. 78ff

¹²³ Locke. *essay*. p. 597

time or understanding. For there are those people, Locke writes, that need to spend most of their waking hours “to still the croaking of their own bellies, or the cries of their children.”¹²⁴ He does go on to say, though, that even that is of little excuse:

No man is so wholly taken up with the attendance on the means of living as to have no spare time at all to think of his soul, and inform himself in matters of religion. Were men as intent upon this as they are the things of lower concernment, there are none so enslaved to the necessities of life, who might not find many vacancies that might be husbanded to this advantage of their knowledge.¹²⁵

He is thinking back to the matter of concernment, about how to decide which beliefs need consideration, and which do not, which beliefs have an *alethic priority* about them.

The next two wounds are closely related, differing in only why the proofs are not being used properly, or used at all. The second wound deals with those people who cannot acquire the proofs because they lack the required mental agility or patience:

There are some men of one, some but of two syllogisms, and no more; and others that can but advance one step farther. These cannot always discern that side on which the strongest proofs lie, cannot constantly follow that which in itself is the more probable opinion.¹²⁶

This, though no fault of their own, limits their ability to judge the more probable propositions, and so properly use the proofs that they might have. But there are also those who are not so innocently ‘ignorant’, and these Locke does not look so favourably upon:

¹²⁴ Locke. *Essay*. p. 597

¹²⁵ Locke. *Essay*. p. 598

¹²⁶ Locke. *Essay*. p. 599

Their hot pursuit of pleasure, or constant drudgery in business, engages some men's thoughts elsewhere; laziness and oscitancy in general, or a particular aversion for books, study, and meditation, keep others from any serious thoughts at all; and some, out of fear that an impartial inquiry would not favour those opinions which best suit their prejudices, lives, and designs, content themselves, without examination, to take upon trust what they find convenient and in fashion.¹²⁷

These people, Locke surmises, have a low opinion of their souls, and so are not willing to pursue their obligation to govern their beliefs as they ought. They, unlike those that are ignorant through no real fault of their own, are *culpably* ignorant. One can almost see Locke thinking about the religious enthusiasts of his time, although he never mentions them in this section.

Locke spends the most space writing about the fourth wound, that of wrong measures of probability, since this seems to be a collection of the most common errors that people make. These wrong measures are identified as: propositions that are false taken for principles, received hypotheses, predominant passions or inclinations, and authority.¹²⁸ Wolterstorff discusses this aspect of error, ignoring the first three wounds. To him this wound, in its four 'parts' is the most important one, the one that needs explaining as it, out of the four that Locke identifies, "proves to have a devastating effect on Locke's vision."¹²⁹ This effect is that our perception of true propositions can be hindered.

The first category in this wound is essentially "the conformity any thing has to our own knowledge; especially that part of our knowledge which we have

¹²⁷ Locke. *Essay*. p. 600

¹²⁸ Locke. *Essay*. p. 601

¹²⁹ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 94

embraced, and continue to look on as principles.”¹³⁰ If there is a proposition that is being judged, and it closely relates to propositions or beliefs that a person already has in their mind, then it is likely that this proposition will be taken as true on that basis alone, rather than on its own merits. Locke uses the example of a ‘Romanist’ who had been brought up to believe the infallibility of the Pope, and that what the church teaches is undoubtedly true. When this person is more mature, if she had never seen these propositions questioned, then she will “be prepared easily to swallow, not only against all probability, but even the clear evidence of his senses, the doctrine of transubstantiation!”¹³¹ People who are taught certain things from childhood likely regard those as being true, rather than consider them by the light of reason, especially if they have been raised in situation which took them as truth as well.

The second category is closely related, as ‘received hypotheses’ are “understandings [that] are cast into a mould, and fashioned just to the size of a received hypothesis.”¹³² These differ from the preceding category since the people who hold these hypotheses are not *as naïve* as the former:

These are not at that open defiance of their senses as the former; they can endure to hearken to their information a little more patiently; but will by no means admit of their reports in the explanation of things, not be prevailed on by probabilities which would convince them that things are not brought about just after the same manner that they have decreed within themselves that they are.¹³³

¹³⁰ Locke. *Essay*. p. 601

¹³¹ Locke. *Essay*. p. 602

¹³² Locke. *Essay*. p. 602

¹³³ Locke. *Essay*. p. 603

They will do some considering of their propositions, but only, it seems, to bolster their position, rather than honestly considering its level of probability. Wolterstorff summarizes this category clearly, as he writes “a person may over the years have become so attached to a certain explanation of various phenomena that evidence which would sway him if he did not have that attachment has no effect on his assent.”¹³⁴ The person prefers their standard explanation to one that may be more probable.

Locke’s fourth category, as Wolterstorff deals most extensively with the third, is that of Authority. Locke describes this error as “the giving up [of] assent to the common received opinions, either of ... friends or party, neighbourhood or country.”¹³⁵ This error is fairly self-evident, as it is a common human practice, although Locke has little good to say about it.

It is, though the third category that Locke and Wolterstorff deal with in more depth: that of predominant passions or inclinations. Wolterstorff does this because it is best used to illustrate what he calls the ‘devastating effect’ on Locke’s system of thought. Locke, it seems, details this error more extensively than the others, as it is a category which needs more explanation, and which requires more work on the part of any person who wishes to counter its effects. Locke’s explanation of this error includes methods on how those within it evade the more reasonable probabilities, and this is where Wolterstorff’s commentary comes in to it.

¹³⁴ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 95

¹³⁵ Locke. *Essay*. p. 606

The category itself is illustrated through the use of a 'covetous man', or a man 'passionately in love':

Let never so much probability hang on one side of a covetous man's reasoning, and money on the other, it is easy to foresee which will outweigh. ... Tell a man, passionately in love, that he is jilted; bring a score of witnesses of the falsehood of his mistress; it is ten to one but three kind words of hers shall invalidate all their testimonies.¹³⁶

Whichever a person wants to believe more will be believed; if a person wants money rather than truth, she will believe whatever will make her richer; if a person wants to be in love with a woman (no matter how faithless), he will believe her words, rather than those who have seen her break his trust. In many cases it is a matter of convenience, in many others, of laziness or greed. But whichever the case, there are faculties within the human condition that work against the clarity of reason.

In order to evade assenting to more probable propositions, people who err in this way will, according to Locke, do one (or both) of two things: suppose fallacy, and suppose contrary, yet hitherto unknown, arguments.¹³⁷ Supposing fallacy means that the person considering her beliefs might have many reasons why hers is not the most probable, yet she may find one small inconsistency in the argument, and so state "Though I cannot answer, I will not yield."¹³⁸ Supposing contrary arguments is similar, yet instead of finding an inconsistency, no matter how small or inconsequential, the person states that although the

¹³⁶ Locke. *Essay*. p. 603

¹³⁷ Locke. *Essay*. p. 604

¹³⁸ Locke. *Essay*. p. 604

arguments are well-founded and could be convincing, she will not yield but will wait and see if any good arguments can be raised in her defence.¹³⁹

To Locke, the important thing here is that there can be an end of all of these errors, as long as the person herself adequately considers all of the necessary elements, then she cannot refuse assent to the most probable proposition, and discard the rest. He writes:

In propositions where, though the proofs in view are of most moment, yet there are sufficient grounds to suspect that there is either a fallacy in words, or certain proofs as considerable to be produced on the contrary side, their assent, suspense, or dissent, are often voluntary actions; but where the proofs are such as make it highly probable, and there is not sufficient ground to suspect that there is either fallacy of words ... nor equally valid proofs yet undiscovered latent on the other side ... there, I think, a man who has weighed them can scarce refuse his assent to the side on which the greater probability lies.¹⁴⁰

Locke here rests on the idea that those propositions which are, through reason, perceived to be true will impress themselves onto the mind of the perceiver, their assent being forced out of them, as it were, due to the mere certainty of the proposition itself, or at least its high factor of probability. For “as knowledge is no more arbitrary than perception, so, [Locke thinks], assent is no more in our power than knowledge.”¹⁴¹ The true or most probable proposition will always prevail over false ones, whenever reason has been applied properly.

¹³⁹ Locke. *Essay*. p. 604

¹⁴⁰ Locke. *Essay*. p. 604-5

¹⁴¹ Locke. *Essay*. p. 605

Can We *Decide* to Believe?

Wolterstorff, however, thinks otherwise. Having gone through Locke's system of thought, he then identifies where he thinks that Locke has difficulty. As has been seen, Locke gives great importance to the faculty of reason. Since human knowledge is very limited, it must be supplemented by the belief forming faculties. These, though, are such that they need governing; they cannot be trusted to always produce true beliefs. Reason, according to Locke, is the faculty which must govern them, as it is the faculty which is itself invulnerable to error. There are other factors, as has just been shown, that can cause a person to believe false propositions, but these are not due to reason, but work against reason, to place the person in such a state as to be susceptible to unreasoned arguments. If all were to work properly, in an ideal situation, then reason would be applied to all of those propositions which are of the most concernment to a person, and having discovered which are more and which are less probable, the person would discard the less, and more firmly believe the more.

Wolterstorff takes issue with the notion of the will's role in belief. More specifically, he finds that the principle of proportionality, used in governing belief, is where the problem with Locke's system lies:

Reason will not yield mistaken beliefs about the probability of a proposition on specified evidence. Nonetheless, some other faculty may produce mistaken beliefs on such matters. The effect of inculcated principles is that we have false beliefs about the evidence, including about what we know immediately. The effect of received hypotheses is that we have false beliefs about the probability of propositions on evidence. The effects of truth-irrelevant passions is that we have false beliefs about the quality

of our evidence and false beliefs (or no beliefs) about the probability of a proposition on evidence.¹⁴²

Because of the ‘wounds of the mind’, Locke’s system of governing belief is weak where he urges people to consider their beliefs for probability, and then *proportion* their firmness of holding that belief to the amount of probability that it has.

Locke writes this way, Wolterstorff argues, since he talks in a “thoroughly *externalist* fashion”¹⁴³ regarding the methods he urges people to use in governing their beliefs. Locke insists that people are to “proportion [their] level of confidence in a proposition to its actual probability on a set of propositions which are actually known and which actually constitute satisfactory evidence,”¹⁴⁴ rather than on the probability that the person *believes* the proposition to have. There is, it seems, an objective rule and measurement of probability that, through reason, each person can come to know. This does not necessarily work. Wolterstorff summarizes that point as each person needing to follow what they believe:

In one’s attempt to follow later stages of the rule, one has to go by what one believes to be the result of having attempted to follow earlier stages. One can attach conditions to these beliefs—for example, that the beliefs be formed reflectively. But still, one must go by what one believes.¹⁴⁵

Even with all of Locke’s planning and urging, the point seems to come back to belief. There are some things that people just have to deal with on terms of belief, rather than what Locke would want to call knowledge.

¹⁴² Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 107

¹⁴³ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 107

¹⁴⁴ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 107

¹⁴⁵ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 108

This brings up another aspect of this system that Wolterstorff finds dissatisfying, namely, “Is it in our power to do what the principle of proportionality presupposes that we are able to do?”¹⁴⁶ Can people, when they reflect on their beliefs, proportion their acceptance or assent to that belief as the principle of proportionality requires of them, in effect to *decide* to believe or disbelieve? He accredits this idea of Locke’s to an assumption he made regarding the various faculties which form beliefs; he “assumed that one will ineluctably believe or disbelieve a proposition according as one judges it probable or improbable on what one judges to be satisfactory evidence consisting of facts of which one is directly aware.”¹⁴⁷ Hume and Reid, Wolterstorff writes, argued against this point of Locke’s:

Our perceptual beliefs, our inductive beliefs, our memory beliefs have at best low probability on the facts of which we are (on Locke’s view) directly aware. Discerning that serves neither to dislodge those beliefs from our mind nor to place us in a situation where we can by direct act of will dislodge them.¹⁴⁸

While people can intellectually see that their beliefs may have a low probability, that, for example, memory may be flawed, it in many cases goes against human nature to stop believing these things, and replace them with more probable beliefs or propositions. It is Thomas Reid’s direction that Wolterstorff follows, in objecting to the ‘theory of ideas’ that Locke pursues, and Wolterstorff’s own epistemology is more closely aligned with Reid’s ‘Common Sense Realism’ than with Locke’s thoughts.

¹⁴⁶ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 109

¹⁴⁷ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 117

¹⁴⁸ Wolterstorff. *Locke*. p. 118

Chapter Four: On Reid

Thomas Reid (1710-1796) was born in Strachan, Scotland to a family well established in intellectual circles. In his days as a student, Reid studied under George Turnbull (1698-1749) who had done work in moral philosophy and was read by contemporary philosophers, including Berkeley.¹⁴⁹ After the early stage of his education, Reid went on to study theology, and in 1737 entered the ministry. This did not last long, however, as he spent most of his time studying philosophy, and writing his first work “An Essay on Quantity”, in which he “argued that virtue and beauty, like sensations, cannot be measured quantitatively.”¹⁵⁰ After he left the ministry, he held a number of teaching positions, and during those he published his first well-known work *An Inquiry in the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*. At the age of 70, he was freed of his teaching duties, and completed his next major and well-known works *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* in 1785, and *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind* in 1788. He died at the age of 87.

He is described as being “kind and humble”, giving as much credit as possible to the thinkers that he disagreed with, and fully summarizing their position and contributions before arguing against their position.¹⁵¹ The people that he argues against include Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, to whom he attributes philosophy’s skeptical stance: that perceptions of the external

¹⁴⁹ Peimen Ni. *On Reid*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2002. p. 3

¹⁵⁰ Ni. *Reid*. p. 3

¹⁵¹ Ni. *Reid*. p. 5

world are not to be trusted.¹⁵² Reid, on the other hand, wanted philosophy to uphold the ‘common sense’ knowledge of the non-philosophical layman, the belief in the external world and the belief that there can be accurate knowledge of that world, since “Philosophy ... has no other root but the principles of Common Sense.”¹⁵³ And if philosophy cannot uphold these principles, then Reid would “despise philosophy, and renounce its guidance—[letting his] soul dwell with Common Sense.”¹⁵⁴

Reid’s Reaction to the ‘Theory of Ideas’.

Reid, like Locke, did his philosophy in what he perceived to be a time of crisis. This crisis was one created by the skeptical methods of philosophy, like that of Descartes, Berkeley, Locke, and Hume. These philosophers, Reid argues, divorced philosophy from its roots in Common Sense, in this way causing the layperson to consider it ridiculous. Reid writes that “Des Cartes, Malebranche, and Locke, have all employed their genius and skill to prove the existence of a material world; and with very bad success.”¹⁵⁵ What “poor untaught mortals believe undoubtedly”¹⁵⁶ the philosophers have great difficulty proving. This Reid attributes to the skeptical philosophy started with Descartes, which he calls the ‘theory of ideas’. This philosophy had its most skeptical expression in the philosophy of David Hume (1711-1776), a contemporary of

¹⁵² Ni. *Reid*. p. 6

¹⁵³ Thomas Reid. *The Works of Thomas Reid*. Edited by Sir William Hamilton. Edinburgh: McLachlan and Stewart, 1863. p. 101

¹⁵⁴ Reid. *Works*. p. 101

¹⁵⁵ Reid. *Works*. p. 100

¹⁵⁶ Reid. *Works*. p. 100

Reid. Hume, according to Reid, argued that there can be no certainty regarding the external world, as there is no proof of its existence:

the result of his inquiry was a serious conviction that there is no such thing as a material world—nothing in nature but spirits and ideas; and that the belief of material substances, and of abstract ideas, are the chief causes of all our errors in philosophy, and of all infidelity and heresy in religion.”¹⁵⁷

Reid, to argue against this conclusion in philosophy, confronted it directly, while his continental contemporary, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) sidestepped the problem by using “a transcendental question, ‘How is our knowledge of the world possible?’ to replace the question, ‘How do we have knowledge about the world?’”¹⁵⁸ In this way, Kant could avoid the problem of confronting the theory of ideas and assuming it to be false, while Reid had to argue against it, not around it.

What Reid is reacting to is the ‘theory of ideas’, such as what Locke had argued, and which Reid argues found its most skeptical expression in Hume. It is the notion that all that people can be aware of are mental objects and processes, and thus the world is understood and encountered on the basis of mental representations. In this way, the actual knowledge and justified belief that a person can hold about the world around her is very limited, and any building up of a system of knowledge must be done according to strict intellectual rules, the noetic obligation to justify and reason to belief. It is the philosophical theory that perception and knowledge are only about mental *ideas* which Reid reacts to, and

¹⁵⁷ Reid. *Works*. p. 101

¹⁵⁸ Ni. *Reid*. p. 10

its inherent skepticism about the external world which Reid believed was placing the world into a period of crisis.

He argues against the theory of ideas on three counts:

First, we have no reason to believe that the theory is true. Second, even as a hypothesis, it does not help us to understand the operation of the mind any better. Third, we have reasons to believe that the theory is false.¹⁵⁹

These three ways of confronting the theory of ideas would, Reid believed, relinquish its hold on the world of philosophy, and bring philosophy back to its original task of upholding the principles of common sense.

The first objection begins with an understanding of the meaning of 'idea'. Reid states that the term has two meanings, one commonly understood and one created by the philosophers. The commonly understood meaning is 'thought', and in this way, "to have a clear and distinct idea is, in this sense, nothing else but to conceive the thing clearly and distinctly."¹⁶⁰ As the philosophers understood it, however, an idea is an object of thought: "Philosophers, ancient and modern, have maintained that the operations of the mind ... can only be employed upon objects that are present in the mind."¹⁶¹ thus the object has to be represented in the mind as an *idea*.

The first meaning of 'idea' requires no proof, for it is commonly understood and experienced. If the object of the idea, such as the sun, is an external object, and an idea of it is merely just some person thinking about it, then that is readily understood. But if idea is used in the way that philosophers have come to use it,

¹⁵⁹ Ni. *Reid*. p. 10

¹⁶⁰ Reid. *Works*. p. 277

¹⁶¹ Reid. *Works*. p. 277

then the object of the idea, the sun, is not the external object, but a representation of that object in the mind, an impression of it. To use the term 'idea' in this way requires proof, but also the entire notion of an external world in which the objects lie requires proof, since a person cannot be directly aware of these things, but only of their mental representations.

The theory of ideas, in understanding ideas as representations in the mind, does not explain how the mind actually works. Reid attributes this to the fact that philosophers have "tried to use the model of physical actions and reactions to explain the operations of the mind."¹⁶² However, since the mind cannot physically deal with the objects that are thought of, it must deal with an intermediary, thus what the mind works with becomes the mental representation of the object, rather than the object itself. But, says Reid, if this is how minds work with objects, through something akin to physical actions, then "we might as well conclude, that minds may be measured by feet and inches, or weighed by ounces and drachmas, because bodies have these properties."¹⁶³ Since the mind cannot be measured in this way, trying to understand its workings in this way does not work either.

The theory of ideas, Reid argues, does not work, for a number of reasons. One of Reid's arguments is that the theory of ideas leads to an oversimplification of the workings of the mind. He argues that the theory of ideas philosophers lump all of the human experiences of sensation, feeling, thought under the

¹⁶² *Ni. Reid.* p. 12

¹⁶³ *Reid. Works.* p. 301

general idea of 'perception'.¹⁶⁴ But then this would draw no distinction, or very little distinction, between any number of mental acts that are considerably different. However, the main reason why Reid argues against the theory of ideas is that it leads to an extreme form of skepticism, which he finds untenable. From Descartes methodological doubt and his insistence that the only certain thing is that *cogito ergo sum*, to Hume's extreme skepticism regarding the external world, Reid argues that no matter how skeptical or doubting philosophers are in their thought, they cannot possibly live that way. He writes that:

Pyrrho the Elean, the father of this philosophy, seems to have carried it to greater perfection than any of his successors: for, if we may believe Antigonus the Carystian, quoted by Diogenes Laertius, his life corresponded to his doctrine. And, therefore, if a cart run against him, or a dog attacked him, or if he came upon a precipice, he would not stir a foot to avoid the danger, giving no credit to his senses. But his attendants, who, happily for him, were not so great skeptics, took care to keep him out of harm's way; so that he lived till he was ninety years of age.¹⁶⁵

In this, Reid quite humorously illustrates what he considers to be the greatest failing of this theory of ideas; that it engenders a form of skepticism that the adherents cannot both teach and live. And if a person cannot be expected to live in the world according to a philosophy, it cannot be very accurate or useful; nor very compelling.

Reid on Perception.

In an attempt to undo this skepticism, Reid understands perception differently than the philosophers he reacts to understand it. They understood all

¹⁶⁴ Ni. *Reid*. p. 14

¹⁶⁵ Reid. *Works*. p. 102

that happened in the human mind as perception, without carefully analyzing these things.¹⁶⁶ Reid, however, makes a very clear distinction between sensation and perception. He distinguishes between the two in three ways: to him, sensation has no object while perception *needs* an object to perceive, perception can admit error while sensation cannot, and perception also requires beliefs about the external world while sensation does not.¹⁶⁷ Reid carefully distinguishes sensation from perception in order to avoid the mistake that he sees the theory of ideas philosophers making, the mistakes that he sees, for example, Locke making when he discusses perception. If sensation and perception are confused, then what is said about perception will not always be right; there will be misunderstandings.

Sensation, in being mere *sensing*, requires no object that exists independent of the sensation. There is no distinction between “the act of mind by which it is felt” and the sensation itself.¹⁶⁸ The phrase ‘I feel a pain’ does not denote that there is a thing, called pain, which is being perceived by a person. If the person does not feel pain, then pain does not exist; there is no distinction between the sensation and the act of sensing it. To Reid, “when [a person feels] warm, dizzy, or hungry, there’s not some object—be it mental or whatever—to which [she bears] the relation of *feeling* it,” it is just felt.¹⁶⁹ There is no external object that gives her a perception of being dizzy, hungry or warm.

¹⁶⁶ Ni. *Reid*. p. 17.

¹⁶⁷ Ni. *Reid*. p. 17ff

¹⁶⁸ Reid. *Works*. p. 183

¹⁶⁹ Nicholas Wolterstorff. “Thomas Reid on Rationality.” *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition*. Edited by Hendrik Hart et al. Boston: University Press of America, 1983. p. 81

Perception, however, requires “an object distinct from the act by which it is perceived; an object which may exist whether it be perceived or not.”¹⁷⁰ Perception is not a sensation except that a person can have a sensation that they are perceiving something. Perception itself requires that there be an object external to the person who is perceiving. Perception, like sensation, is a simple experience, one that all human beings share, but one that “is too simple to admit of an analysis.”¹⁷¹ But even though the two are very simple and difficult to explain, that does not mean that they are the same, or that explaining one explains the other.

Perception differs from sensation in that, since perception requires an external object to perceive, and sensation is mere sensing, it requires no external object. Thus perception is liable to error, while sensation is not. Sensation, in this respect, is exactly what it seems. If a person feels a pain, she feels a pain, no matter whether that pain is from some cause or not. Or, if she feels an itch, she can properly say that she feels an itch, whether there is something that is causing that itch, like a mosquito, or not. Perception, however, since it works with both the mind and an external object, can admit of some error. When feeling some thing, for example a pain, a person cannot deny that she is having the sensation of ‘pain’, but in terms of perceiving that pain, she can be mistaken as to what may be causing it, where it exists, and so on. She can be mistaken about the ‘signs’ through which she perceives that pain:

The appearance of things to the eye always corresponds to the fixed laws of Nature; therefore if we speak properly, there is no

¹⁷⁰ Reid. *Works*. p. 183

¹⁷¹ Reid. *Works*. p. 183

fallacy in the senses. Nature always speaketh the same language, and useth the same signs in the same circumstances; but we sometimes mistake the meaning of the signs, either through ignorance of the laws of Nature, or through ignorance of the circumstances which attend the signs.¹⁷²

Sensation cannot be mistaken, since it is not really *about* anything, and is only the working of the senses. Perception, though, building on this foundation laid out by the senses, can be mistaken, as it *interprets* the sensory data, and says something about that which is being sensed. Thus a pain, while the sensation is always that of a pain, and no more, the perception of that pain may be that it is being caused by a stubbed toe. The sensation of pain is something different than perceiving the cause or 'location' of that pain.

Perception, understood in this way, involves *judgment*.¹⁷³ Reid defines judgment as "an act of the mind whereby one thing is affirmed or denied of another."¹⁷⁴ It is not the *act* of affirming or denying, it is prior to those acts, since they are merely expressions of judgments already made. Locke, as an example of the 'theory of ideas' philosophers, thought that perception did not involve judgment, it was just the act of perceiving. Perception for Locke was direct, immediate knowledge. Reid disagrees, arguing that even sensation involves judgment, even though it is of a very immediate kind; it is a belief that the sensation is true.

Perception, though, uses judgment in terms of judging whether the perception is true or false. And judgment *necessarily* accompanies

¹⁷² Reid. *Works*. p. 194

¹⁷³ Ni. *Reid*. p. 19; Reid. *Works*. p. 414

¹⁷⁴ Reid. *Works*. p. 413 (*italics removed*)

perception.¹⁷⁵ Reid writes that judgment, as a term, has never been able to be defined independent of any notion of perception or sensation:

Philosophers have never been able to give any definition of judgment which does not apply to the determinations of our senses, our memory, and consciousness, nor any definition of simple apprehension which can comprehend those determinations.¹⁷⁶

Judgments of this kind, Reid adds, are a gift of nature, bestowed upon humans so that they can live in the world.

These judgments, which both sensation and perception share, are used differently by both. Even though judgment, as the act of affirming or denying, is common to both, with sensation, which requires no object, it is merely the belief or judgment that the sensation is true. Once this sensation is regarding some thing which is not a part of the person, then it is perception of some object, and this judgment, while still affirming or denying, will have something to say about the world around the person. Perception, in Reid's account, entails beliefs about the world-at-large, while sensation does not.¹⁷⁷

Perception, understood in this way, is divided into two kinds: acquired perception and original perception. Original perception is that which is received through the senses, without any interpretation; hardness, softness, etc. Acquired perception is that which is built upon the original perception. Reid identifies some of these perceptions as "the taste of cider, that of brandy; ... the smell of an apple, that of an orange; ... the noise of thunder, that of the ringing of the

¹⁷⁵ Reid. *Works*. p. 414

¹⁷⁶ Reid. *Works*. p. 416

¹⁷⁷ Ni. *Reid*. p. 20

bells.”¹⁷⁸ The original perceptions are the smells, the feels, the sounds, the tastes, and the sights. This differs from sensation insofar as sensation is the act of sensing, while perception is the act of sensing *something*. The acquired perceptions are the smells *of* something, the feel *of* something, the sound *of* something, the taste *of* something, and the sight *of* something. They are the senses *interpreted*. The acquired perceptions are accumulated throughout an entire lifetime; people do not stop acquiring this type of perception. Every new situation that a person is in will add to her acquired perceptions, since she will see new things, and put together new sensations with new things, or even old sensations with new objects.

Perception, both original and acquired, is not only distinct from sensation, in Reid’s view it is also distinct from “that knowledge of the objects of sense which is got by reasoning.”¹⁷⁹ Reasoning, to Reid, leads a person to knowledge that cannot be directly attained from perception. While perception does entail some amount of knowledge (especially if it is judged to be true) this is different than reasoning insofar as these beliefs, or the knowledge acquired by perception is merely “instinct”:

When I look at the moon, I perceive her to be sometimes circular, sometimes horned, and sometimes gibbous. This is simple perception, and is the same in the philosopher and in the clown: but from these various appearances of her enlightened part, I infer that she is really of a spherical figure. This conclusion is not obtained by simple perception, but by reasoning.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Reid. *Works*. p. 184

¹⁷⁹ Reid. *Works*. p. 185

¹⁸⁰ Reid. *Works*. p. 185

Reason here depends on perception to have something to reason about. And mere, simple perception works the same with everyone; the moon will look different shapes to any person who sees it in its different phases. But only to a person who is aware of three-dimensional space, geometry and the like will the moon, through reasoning, be known to be spherical. It takes more effort on the part of the perceiver to understand the moon's spherical shape than it does to perceive the moon in its different phases.

Mere perception cannot err, since the moon *does appear* to be shaped differently. But if a person, seeing the moon in this way, were to reason to the fact that there are different moons which appear at different times of the month, they would be wrong. To travel from the sensation of seeing the moon, to the perception that the moon is shaped differently requires that a person first believe that the sensation is true, then secondly believe that the perception of the moon's shape is true. These two movements require no reason, they require just the senses and the faculty of judgment. To travel beyond these ideas, to the notion that the moon is spherical, while based on the sensation and perception, requires more than mere judgment. It requires reason, and to come to a correct understanding, it also requires a reasoning that possesses the knowledge necessary to make such a knowledge claim.

This is how, through his account of perception, Reid understands knowledge:

All that we know of nature, or of existences, may be compared to a tree, which hath its root, trunk, and branches. In this tree of

knowledge, perception is the root, common understanding is the trunk, and the sciences are the branches.¹⁸¹

Thus all of knowledge is based on what can be perceived, a person's perceptions, which in themselves rely on sensation. But this is not the same understanding of it as those that Reid argues against had. Locke, as one of these philosophers, held that while knowledge is based on perceptions, these perceptions are only mental objects, copies in the mind of the external object. The human intellect can only be conversant about the workings of the mind, and therefore perception was all mental.

Reid rejects this notion of perception on the grounds that, while a person may not be able to irrefutably prove that the external world exists, she must start with the 'assumption' that it does, or risk thinking absurdities. Reid, as has been shown, demanded that philosophy uphold the principles of common sense, and so used philosophy to try to reinforce these principles. His account of perception is a fundamental aspect of this philosophy. He writes that:

Perception, whether original or acquired, implies no exercise of reason; and is common to men, children, idiots, and brutes. The more obvious conclusions drawn from our perceptions, by reason, make what we call *common understanding*; by which men conduct themselves in the common affairs of life, and by which they are distinguished from idiots. The more remote conclusions which are drawn from our perceptions, by reason, make what we commonly call *science* in the various parts of nature, whether in agriculture, medicine, mechanics, or in any part of natural philosophy.¹⁸²

Perception is that on which people base their understanding and acting within the world. The obvious conclusions of perception, as Reid calls them, would be like

¹⁸¹ Reid. *Works*. p. 186

¹⁸² Reid. *Works*. pp. 185-6 (Reid's italics)

a person stubbing her toe and realizing that the pain that she feels (mere sensation) comes from her toe, which had just contacted a table leg (perception). The more remote conclusions would be similar to perceiving that coffee seems to wake people up, but then coming to the understanding, through research and study, that it is the caffeine in coffee produces this result. Through reason people can come to knowledge about this world, and so act and live within it more accurately and effectively. This notion of perception is accented by an aspect of Reid's philosophy which affirms the effect of belief dispositions. He writes there exists within every person belief dispositions through which they will come to have knowledge about the object of their perceptions, and the world around them.

Wolterstorff's Account of Reid on Belief Dispositions.

As has been seen, Locke himself, as an element of his theory of knowledge, admitted the existence of 'belief forming faculties' with which a person will form her beliefs concerning the world. To Locke, though, these faculties were prone to error, and needed guidance. Reason was the only guide that could be trusted, as it cannot err, and every human has reason, and can use reason, even if they need some proper training. Thus reason guided the faculties to come to proper and true beliefs, *if* there were no other faculties which could erode the efficacy of, or *wound*, reason.

Reid, in this respect, starts out in the same place; in fact, the central foundation of his thought is the existence of these belief forming faculties, or

“*belief-dispositions*.”¹⁸³ Where Reid departs from Locke, and significantly so, is that instead of these dispositions being guided by reason, reason is merely one of them. Reason is a belief disposition which produces *mediate* beliefs, rather than the *immediate* beliefs produced by the other dispositions.

Immediate belief dispositions are those that have their effect upon a person right away, or without any intervention. Wolterstorff describes some of these as memory, physical sensations, and credulity:

we are all so constituted that upon having memory-experiences in certain situations, we are disposed to have certain beliefs about the past. We are disposed, upon having certain sensations in certain situation, to have certain beliefs about the external physical world. Upon having certain other sensations in certain situations, we are disposed to have certain beliefs about other persons. Likewise we are all so constituted as to be disposed in certain circumstances to believe what we apprehend people as telling us—the *credulity-principle*, as Reid ... called it.¹⁸⁴

Many beliefs, then, rather than being the result of an intellectual process, people just find themselves believing. These belief dispositions do not operate through the intellect, through reason, or the like but, within their specific circumstances, just produce belief.

Reason, or the reasoning disposition as Wolterstorff names it, is different. Reason works in roughly the following manner: “if we judge that some proposition we already believe is good evidence for another proposition not yet believed, we are disposed to believe that other proposition as well.”¹⁸⁵ Reason finds relationship between different beliefs, and gives evidence for inferred beliefs from

¹⁸³ Wolterstorff. “Belief in God.” p. 149

¹⁸⁴ Wolterstorff. “Reid on Rationality.” p. 47

¹⁸⁵ Wolterstorff. “Reid on Rationality.” p. 47

among immediate beliefs. A person looking outside sees the sun shining, and believes, without inferring from other beliefs, that it is day rather than night. However, if that same person, believing that it was day, saw a clock, and noticed that the time was 3:00, she would then believe that it was 3:00 in the afternoon, rather than in the morning. This would not be an immediate belief, but a mediate belief, inferred through what that person believed about the time having looked outside, and what she believed about the location that they live in (that it is not an arctic summer, for instance).

These belief dispositions are acquired, Wolterstorff shows, in three ways: some are an element of human nature, innate to each person, others are acquired by way of conditioning, and still others are acquired through *operant* conditioning.¹⁸⁶ The credulity principle, it seems, is one that is innately human, as Reid writes “the wise Author of nature hath planted in the human mind a propensity to rely upon human testimony before we can give a reason for doing so.”¹⁸⁷ Children use this principle extensively while growing up, as they trust the adults around them.

Other belief dispositions, not innate, are acquired, through conditioning, by the *inductive principle*. “The inductive principle is not itself a belief disposition; it is an innate, nonconditioned disposition for the acquisition of belief dispositions.”¹⁸⁸ The example Reid uses is that of a person hearing a certain sounds, and immediately believing that a coach is passing the window.¹⁸⁹ These

¹⁸⁶ Wolterstorff. “Belief in God.” p. 150-1

¹⁸⁷ Reid. *Works*. p. 450

¹⁸⁸ Wolterstorff. “Belief in God.” p. 150

¹⁸⁹ Reid. *Works*. p. 117

two events had been so related in the past to the person, that when the noise is heard, then right away the following idea will occur; that a coach is passing by. Wolterstorff likens this principle to Pavlovian conditioning, expressing it in terms of a *schedule* being established in which a person acquires the “disposition, upon experiences a phenomenon of type A, to believe that there is also a phenomenon of type B. Hence one has acquired a new belief disposition.”¹⁹⁰

These two ‘sources’ of belief dispositions do not account for all of them, however. “Vast numbers of our noninnate belief dispositions are not acquired in this way ... but rather by way of what we would nowadays call *operant* conditioning, working on our native belief dispositions.”¹⁹¹ The credulity principle, perhaps innate in the human mind, is a disposition which, while not acquired over time through operant conditioning, is “restrained and modified.”¹⁹² A child, gaining beliefs through the credulity principle, will soon find herself believing things that are not true. They may have been tricked or misinformed, but at some point in life, a person will have to realize that some of the beliefs that they held are or were not true.¹⁹³

When this happens, they will modify their credulity principle to incorporate a qualification which will help them sift out the false beliefs, and keep hold of the true ones. What does not happen, though, is the complete abolition of the credulity principle:

Notice: a person’s conviction that some of the beliefs produced in him by testimony are false does not *destroy* his disposition to

¹⁹⁰ Wolterstorff. “Belief in God.” p. 151

¹⁹¹ Wolterstorff. “Belief in God.” p. 151

¹⁹² Wolterstorff. “Belief in God.” p. 151

¹⁹³ Reid. *Works*. p. 450-1

give credence to testimony. Rather, it results in that disposition's becoming restrained and modified. The credulity principle becomes more finely articulated.¹⁹⁴

Reid writes that through life, a person will learn to reason about this confidence put into testimony, and so "see it to be a childish weakness to lay more stress upon them than ... reason justifies."¹⁹⁵ But at the same time he writes that people are more prone to trust testimony than to do the exact opposite; "the natural propensity still retains some force."¹⁹⁶

This also works with the rest of the belief dispositions. They are all under constant modification as a person matures and grows in understanding. Some dispositions are modified to the point of disappearing, while others are considerably strengthened. Belief dispositions are constantly being 'created' and 'destroyed' in the human experience, and it is up to the individual person to see that what they believe has been produced properly, and is considered fully.

Conclusion.

Thomas Reid, in order to counter the skepticism inherent in the 'theory of ideas', rejected the notion of perception that it entailed. He distinguished between sensation and perception, arguing that the theory of ideas philosophers, like Locke, had not properly understood the distinction. He also gave more power to belief producing dispositions, those that Locke had argued needed governing, since they were fallible. Reid made this movement to anchor philosophy in 'common sense'. This was important, he argued, since

¹⁹⁴ Wolterstorff. "Belief in God." p. 151

¹⁹⁵ Reid. *Works*. p. 450

¹⁹⁶ Reid. *Works*. p. 451

philosophy's task is to uphold the principles that common sense possesses. The theory of ideas philosophers had created a rift between common sense and philosophy, and therefore the common man and the philosopher. For how could a philosophy that doubts the existence of an external world, or even merely makes this external world nearly impossible to experience accurately, actually say something about this world? Reid charges these philosophers with making philosophy seem ridiculous to those people who live in and work with the world around them.

Wolterstorff takes Reid's lead, both in terms of defining perception and in positing the existence and power of the belief producing dispositions. What remains for him to do yet is to define how he sees these beliefs to be rational and justified. In Wolterstorff's system, these two terms, rational and justified, are not the same thing. A belief, he argues, can be rational without be justified, and justified without necessarily being rational. It can be rational in the sense, he will argue, that it coheres with the rest of a person's belief system. But it may not be justified, as the person's belief system may not be as extensive as may be necessary to justify the belief. A belief, on the other hand, may be justified in the sense that it is correct, but not rational as it may not cohere with a persons' belief system. To come to this point, though, a person must be in control of their belief system, she must govern her beliefs.

Chapter Five: Wolterstorff's Non-Foundational Epistemology

One element of Locke's philosophy that Wolterstorff discusses and agrees with is the notion of the need to govern beliefs. For many reasons, people are prone to error, mistaken beliefs readily enter their belief systems. To deal with this, Locke taught that reason needed to control beliefs in a certain way, an evidential way. Wolterstorff, since he agrees with Reid's insistence that reason is merely one of the belief dispositions, cannot have merely reason govern belief. Reason plays a role, but it is a very humbled role. Instead, he will argue, beliefs must be governed *before* they are produced. To govern belief, in Wolterstorff's system, means to govern the dispositions which produce belief.

Wolterstorff on Belief Governance.

Having gone through Reid's system of belief dispositions, Wolterstorff turns to the capacities for governing these dispositions "with the goal in mind of more amply getting in touch with reality."¹⁹⁷ This, he argues, is the ideal goal for governing beliefs. But there can be others. As has been seen in Locke, there are 'wounds of the mind' which can impair the workings of reason for a person. This, though not as critical, is similar; "one can presumably conduct such governance with other goals in mind",¹⁹⁸ such as being efficient about time, for social reasons, financial reasons, etc. Getting in touch with reality, though, is the

¹⁹⁷ Wolterstorff. "Belief in God." p. 153

¹⁹⁸ Wolterstorff. "Belief in God." p. 156

goal that philosophy would most openly espouse, as one of the goals of philosophy is to come to terms with the world at large.

Wolterstorff argues that there are five ways in which to govern these belief dispositions: at the 'trigger event', in what is noticed or observed, in memory, in sustaining a belief, and to a much lesser extent, in the operation of the disposition itself. When he considers belief governance using these elements, it is important to note that whatever can be done must be within the person's power. They cannot be altered, he writes, but because they can be governed to some extent, it is in this that he begins to discuss normative noetic obligation: "it is because it is in our power to govern their workings that we are culpable for our believings and our failings to believe."¹⁹⁹ In fact, Wolterstorff repeats the phrase 'it is often in our power' throughout his discussion of governing, since there are cases where it most definitely is *not* in someone's power to govern their belief dispositions.

These governings are often *actions* that a person performs which either limit or expand the efficacy of the belief disposition. It is often in a person's power to determine if a *trigger event* will cause a belief. If she were to take the time to check some thing, maybe a door to see if it is locked, then she would receive sensations which would cause her to believe that the door is locked. It is often in a person's power to *notice* something. Wolterstorff's example is speed limits. He writes that "one can set oneself, or fail to set oneself, to notice speed-limit signs when entering villages; and setting oneself to do so makes it highly

¹⁹⁹ Wolterstorff. "Belief in God." p. 153

likely that one will.”²⁰⁰ It is, as well, often in one’s power to consciously remember something, to set oneself, so to speak, to remember an important date or meeting. This, though, is more a *sustaining* of a belief, rather than the acquisition of a belief, but it is still governing.

In the last case, Wolterstorff states that it is sometimes in a person’s power to “*resolve or determine* that a disposition will not become operative, and sometimes at least such a resolution is effective.”²⁰¹ This is a type of *agnostic* state regarding some belief, such as deciding not to hold a belief about the condition of a used car until one has test-driven it, or refusing to take sides in an argument until the matter has been researched more. This is the least certain of the ways to govern belief, as Wolterstorff is still grappling with the question of whether a person can *decide* to believe, or if “one just finds oneself persuaded”²⁰² regarding a certain belief; just finds oneself believing.

In terms of acquiring beliefs, then, Wolterstorff stands with Reid: beliefs are acquired through belief dispositions, or belief producing mechanisms. These belief dispositions can, to some extent, be governed, and so each person has a noetic obligation to believe true and rational beliefs:

we each have a variety of belief dispositions, some of which we share with all normal mature human beings, some of which we do not; some of which we have as part of our native endowment, some of which are the result of one and another form of conditioning, and probably some of which are the result of having resolved to resist the workings of some native or conditioned disposition. In addition, we each have a variety of capacities for governing the workings of these dispositions. To some extent it is in our power to determine whether a certain

²⁰⁰ Wolterstorff. “Belief in God.” p. 153

²⁰¹ Wolterstorff. “Belief in God.” p. 153

²⁰² Wolterstorff. “Belief in God.” p. 153

(sort of) triggering event for a disposition will occur. And to some extent it is in our power to determine whether the disposition will be activated even if an event does occur which characteristically would activate it. Perhaps we also have the capacity in certain (relatively rare) circumstances to *decide* whether to believe something.²⁰³

And all of this must work within a *situated* context. It is a question of whether a particular person in a particular situation is rational in holding a particular belief. To consider these questions in abstract, nonspecific ways, Wolterstorff argues, is to create “mountains of confusion”.²⁰⁴

A *rational* belief, then, is one that a person believes, having worked through their noetic obligation. If they have governed their belief dispositions properly, for the proper reasons (i.e. getting more in touch with reality), and they have found no reason that the belief is wrong, or irrational, considering the beliefs that they hold *around* the belief in question. This is not to say that the belief is *justified* though. A rational belief and a justified belief, while related intimately, are two different concepts, and must be considered separately.

A Brief Discussion of Sin

What Wolterstorff does not do, however, is discuss extensively the result of sin on these dispositions, or even on the psychology of a person which affect these dispositions. He identifies this as a deficiency in the common sense philosophy of Reid, but then Wolterstorff does, although only in a small way, discuss the ‘ignoble’ sources of belief, those sources which cause a person to believe in order to maintain their position of privilege, whether economic or

²⁰³ Wolterstorff. “Belief in God.” p. 155

²⁰⁴ Wolterstorff. “Belief in God.” p. 155

political. All that Wolterstorff does is to draw the attention to Abraham Kuyper and John Calvin, and how they incorporated the destructive power of sin into their thought.²⁰⁵ In coming to an understanding of Wolterstorff's notion of rational belief, it is important, then, to come to an understanding of Calvin's and Kuyper's use of sin.

Calvin, in his theology, posits a *sensus divinitus* by way of which people were to come to know God, or at least come to know that God exists. He also holds that the natural world serves to bring a person's thoughts to God, but sin, however, has taken the focus of these revelatory 'senses' away from God and placed them in almost anything else. "As humans created in the image of God, we have been given both the objective revelation and the subjective noetic faculties we need in order to know God, but due to sin we culpably fail to use them to their proper ends."²⁰⁶ This 'distortion' must be compensated for when a person considers the natural world, as humans are not *in tune*, so to speak, with the created reality.

Kuyper's acknowledgement of the destructive work of sin is similar in its universality to the whole of the human race.²⁰⁷ He is more specific, though, with respect to how he sees the effect of sin working in the human life. He observes that sin effects the human intellectual occupation in five general areas: in the investigative activities, moral motives, relationship to reality, relationship to the

²⁰⁵ Wolterstorff. "Reid on Rationality." p. 66

²⁰⁶ Sloane, Andrew. *On Being a Christian in the Academy*. Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002.

p. 91

²⁰⁷ Sloane. *Academy*. p. 91

self, and knowledge of God and thereby the whole of created reality.²⁰⁸ All of these areas cause the human intellectual pursuits to be in some way misguided or ignorant. Kuyper writes that “ignorance wrought by sin is the most difficult obstacle in the way of all true science.”²⁰⁹

These insights into the workings of sin play a significant role in Wolterstorff’s notion of situated rationality. Andrew Sloane, in his work on the Wolterstorff’s philosophy writes that the effect of sin provides some explanation of rationality being situated, rather than external:

All of these effects [of sin] need to be overcome to the best of our ability if we are to be rational in our believings. This means that a belief ceases to be rational if *S* either knows or ought to know that it is the function of the epistemic distortions outlined above. However, we are only obliged to modify our belief-dispositions to the best of our ability, which then means that some of these influences of sin will not, indeed can not, be overcome. This in turn provides a partial explanation for the phenomena of rational false beliefs and of a belief’s being rational for one person but not another.²¹⁰

Because the effects of sin are so pervasive, it would be impossible, he argues, to account for them all. Thus, like Locke argued that the noetic obligation was in place for those beliefs that had maximal concernment to the person, so too does the knowledge of the effects of sin. A person cannot be obligated to search out and counter the effects that sin has had on his or her beliefs or belief-acquiring process; it is too much.

²⁰⁸ Sloane. *Academy*. p. 92

²⁰⁹ Sloane. *Academy*. p. 93

²¹⁰ Sloane. *Academy*. p. 94

Wolterstorff on Justification of Beliefs.

As a result of his confrontation with the theory of ideas, Reid set up a view of justification and rationality “within the context of a theory of human nature which delved into the actual psychology of the human being.”²¹¹ In this way, it is a theory of “*situated rationality*”:

Rationality is always situational, in the sense that what is rational for one person to believe will not be rational for another to believe. Thus in general we cannot inquire into the rationality of some belief by asking whether *one* would be rational in holding that belief. We must ask whether it would be rational for *this particular person* to hold it, or whether it would be rational for *a person of this type in this situation* to hold it.²¹²

Although Reid himself, Wolterstorff writes, may never have considered his theories as regarding *situated rationality*, that is how it has come to be understood, especially in comparison with the *external* objectivity of Locke’s system. Wolterstorff follows Reid in this as well; his theory of rationality and justification is also a theory of *situated* rationality and justification.

Wolterstorff speaks of justification of beliefs as a type of *permission*.²¹³ He uses the term not as a relation between propositions (one proposition justifies another by being good evidence for it), but “as a relation between a *person* and some one of his *believings*.”²¹⁴ With this notion of relation, Wolterstorff’s theory is a *normative* theory of rationality and justification; it prescribes how such things ought to be done.²¹⁵ For though Wolterstorff does not prescribe as extensive a

²¹¹ Wolterstorff. “Reid on Rationality.” p. 65

²¹² Wolterstorff. “Reid on Rationality.” p. 65 (Wolterstorff’s italics)

²¹³ Wolterstorff. “Belief in God.” p. 157

²¹⁴ Wolterstorff. “Belief in God.” p. 158

²¹⁵ Wolterstorff. “Belief in God.” p. 170

program as Locke did, he still discusses the concept of an *obligation* to have beliefs which are rational, and if there is an obligation, people ought to fulfill it.

Justification as *permission* to hold a belief is a central idea to Wolterstorff's notion. But what beliefs can we be justified or unjustified in holding? He makes the distinction between *eluctable* and *ineluctable* beliefs; eluctable beliefs being those that a person *could have* refrained from believing, and ineluctable beliefs *could not have* refrained from believing.²¹⁶ A person cannot be held culpable in believing something over which she had no power, and can be held accountable for believing something which she could control. This is the “ought implies can’ principle”²¹⁷ which is fundamental to any discussion of justification.

Another central element to Wolterstorff's account is the idea that beliefs are “innocent until proven guilty” rather than the other way around.²¹⁸ He takes this idea from Reid's description of the credulity principle:

At first, on Reid's view, this disposition is undifferentiated and unarticulated—as children we believe whatever we apprehend people as telling us. But gradually we discover that what certain sorts of people tell us on certain sorts of topics is false. What the rational person then does, says Reid, is resolve to resist the workings of the credulity principle in such cases and no longer accept such testimony. (Eventually this results in the disposition itself being modified.)²¹⁹

In most cases, people do not find themselves in a situation where they have to decide whether to believe a proposition or to disbelieve it. It seems the most common human experience, Wolterstorff argues, that people just find themselves believing some proposition; they just find themselves persuaded.

²¹⁶ Wolterstorff. “Belief in God.” p. 162

²¹⁷ Wolterstorff. “Belief in God.” p. 162

²¹⁸ Wolterstorff. “Belief in God.” p. 163

²¹⁹ Wolterstorff. “Belief in God.” p. 162

Humans are not, as Locke would argue, blank slates that are filled as they mature. Every person finds themselves, at least at one point in their life, just believing things. What Wolterstorff is doing here is not telling people “whether to believe a certain proposition or whether to keep ... from believing it.”²²⁰ Rather he is giving people tools to use to govern their beliefs, seeing which are rational and justified, which are not; he is giving instructions, so to speak, on how to weed the garden of beliefs that people find themselves possessing. Wolterstorff’s theory is always, first and foremost, a theory of *situated rationality*. It is a theory that speaks from within and to a situation, rather than in and to the abstract.

A justified rational belief, then, is one that a person is permitted to hold, unless there is adequate reason to cease from believing it. Wolterstorff writes that:

If a person does not have adequate reason to refrain from some belief of his, what could possibly oblige him to give it up? Conversely, if he surrenders some belief of his as soon as he has adequate reason to do so, what more can rightly be demanded of him? Is he not then using the capacities he has for governing his beliefs, with the goal of getting more amply in touch with reality, as well as can rightly be demanded of him?²²¹

A person cannot be held accountable beyond what is in her power. Locke as well discussed what it meant to ‘do one’s best’, and how people are held accountable to do that, but nothing beyond. For who can do more than their best?

At the same time, however, there are those people who do *not* do their best. Wolterstorff, akin to Locke’s notion of ‘wounds of the mind’, discusses

²²⁰ Wolterstorff. “Belief in God.” p. 161

²²¹ Wolterstorff. “Belief in God.” p. 163

noninnocent belief dispositions. He had already dealt with the “innocent-until-proven-guilty principle for beliefs.” Now he qualifies that with *noninnocent belief dispositions*: “[for] it seems evident that the outcomes of a *noninnocent* disposition should not be accorded the honor of innocence until their guilt has been proven.”²²² These dispositions he describes as a person undertaking to alter a native belief disposition for perverse reasons. A person can, in some circumstances, take it on themselves to alter their dispositions to either come to a pre-arranged conclusion, or to prevent a belief that they do not wish to have. Wolterstorff uses the example of a person disbelieving anything another person says, merely because they dislike that person. Thus they are culpable in their disbelief, it is an unjustified belief. He calls this *culpable revision*.

The final outcome of Wolterstorff’s discussion of justification and rationality concerning beliefs is the formulation of a ‘rule’ of rational belief that stresses personal accountability:

A person *S* is rational in his eluctable and innocently produced belief *Bp* if and only if *S* does believe *p*, and either:

- (i) *S* neither has nor ought to have adequate reason to cease from believing *p*, and is not rationally obliged to believe that he *does* have adequate reason to cease; or
- (ii) *S* does have adequate reason to cease from believing *p* but does not realize that he does, and is rationally justified in that.²²³

There is also a mirror formula for the cases in which a person is rationally justified in *not believing* a certain proposition, since Wolterstorff’s criterion apply to both believing and not believing.

²²² Wolterstorff. “Belief in God.” p. 163

²²³ Wolterstorff. “Belief in God.” p. 168

What Wolterstorff means when he says *adequate reason* is that there must be another proposition that acts as evidential support, *in conjunction* with other beliefs that the person might have. This is a distinction between another use of reason, as a term denoting the trigger event of a belief; a person feels dizzy, and so believes that she is dizzy, or a person sees a red car, and so believes she is seeing a red car.²²⁴ Reid's epistemology downplays the significance of reasoning, it relegates it to the status of a belief forming disposition. Yet reason itself plays a prominent part both in his and Wolterstorff's criterion, as it is a faculty which is common to all (or at least most) people, and the a person's most useful epistemological tool.

To Wolterstorff, though, *reasons* occupy a more central role.²²⁵ This is so "simply because the contents of our minds have a special accessibility to us and ought accordingly to be taken note of."²²⁶ A person cannot be required, obligated, to "range over the whole world in search of what might inhibit his beliefs."²²⁷ A person can only be held accountable for what is in her own mind, not for anything that she does not know.

He concludes this matter by very briefly stating what he has come to show, that:

There is in all of us a complex and natural flow of belief formation. In this natural flow we can and do, and sometimes should, deliberately intervene. The rules of rationality are in effect the rules such intervention. They instruct us, in effect, to bring our other relevant beliefs into consciousness. Once we have done this, our created nature then once again does its

²²⁴ Wolterstorff. "Belief in God." p. 164

²²⁵ Wolterstorff. "Belief in God." p. 173

²²⁶ Wolterstorff. "Belief in God." p. 174

²²⁷ Wolterstorff. "Belief in God." p. 174

trustworthy work of dispelling the original belief or confirming it (or neither)—provided that we do not culpably interfere.²²⁸

He is at a point now where he can say that people most usually ‘just find themselves’ believing things, due to the belief dispositions that they have. And in order to govern these beliefs and dispositions, there are certain normative guidelines that are in place. A person has a noetic obligation to come to true beliefs, and to, insofar as it is in her power, to cease believing those beliefs which are not rationally justified, and believe those that are.

Faith and Beliefs.

What, however, are these beliefs? There has been much discussion of how people come to have beliefs, how they are to govern them, and what it means for a belief to be rational and justified. Wolterstorff distinguishes three ‘types’ of belief; data-background beliefs, data beliefs, and control beliefs; and places these in a context of *commitment*. His specific context is *authentic Christian* commitment, but this can be generalized to mean commitment as any person might have it, whether it is of the Christian variety or not.

The discussion of commitment is essentially a discussion of faith.²²⁹ It is the background to the beliefs that any person holds. Without this background, a person could not come to or hold beliefs, since there would be no way of coming to terms with them. Within Wolterstorff’s idea of commitment, there are also two ‘types’: *actual* commitment and *authentic* commitment. Actual commitment is the commitment that a person has to a world-view or way of life. Wolterstorff writes

²²⁸ Wolterstorff. “Belief in God.” p. 175

²²⁹ Wolterstorff. Personal correspondence. 16/01/2004

that “one cannot have [a] fundamental commitment without its being realized in some specific and definite complex of action and belief.”²³⁰ In committing to a certain way of viewing the world, a person will have to express that view in how she thinks and acts in the world. If she is committed to a pessimistic view of the world, then she may take an untrusting view of much of what she sees or hears around her, and rely on what she can know and judge for herself. If, on the other hand, she is committed to an optimistic view of the world, then she may take a more expansive view of the world around her, and trust what she sees and hears. In either case, there will be certain beliefs and actions that must be fulfilled by virtue of the commitment alone.

Authentic commitment, however, takes this one step further. When appropriating the complex of action and belief for oneself involved in the actual commitment, each person will have beliefs and ideas regarding how these actions and beliefs ought to be realized. In appropriating the complex of actions and beliefs of a pessimistic world-view, the person will have ideas herself about how to realize these in her own life. The same goes for the optimistic world-view. And this, Wolterstorff writes, “is relative to persons and times.”²³¹ The actual commitment may very well remain the same from time to time and person to person, since it can be, as in Wolterstorff’s description, a commitment to the Scriptures and Creeds of the Christian Church. It itself does not determine how that the commitment should be expressed. Authentic commitment must be different for each person and time, as it is situated within them; it does not exist

²³⁰ Wolterstorff. *Reason*. p. 72

²³¹ Wolterstorff. *Reason*. p 74

outside of any giver person. It is, so to speak, a personal appropriation of an impersonal commitment.

Perhaps a person will commit herself to finding and believing true propositions. She will have committed herself to the complex of action and belief that goes along with that commitment; that true propositions are more desirable than false ones, that a true proposition is one which most adequately corresponds to the world around her, to name a few possibilities. However, she will have a couple of options to choose from when deciding how to express this commitment, or rather, how to go about *realizing* this commitment. She could use, for instance, the principle of gullibility or the principle of skepticism. The first would enable her to get as many true propositions as possible but also many untrue ones. The second principle would enable her to restrict the amount of untrue propositions that she would believe, but it might also mean that she misses many true ones.²³²

What is to be noticed here is that out of the actual commitment she has, there is no real rule as to how to express that commitment in her life. But when she herself comes to see how the principles expressed in her actual commitment *ought* to be expressed, then she has an authentic commitment as well. There cannot be an authentic commitment without an actual, but it seems likely that there can be actual commitment without authentic.

It is also important to note that the commitments are not to be identified with a subscription to dogmas.²³³ The belief content of authentic exists, but it is

²³² Wolterstorff. "Belief in God." pp. 145-6

²³³ Wolterstorff. *Reason*. p. 73

not the focus of the commitment. It is more a way of organizing and prioritizing beliefs rather than a subscription to any set of beliefs. Wolterstorff makes this point by stating that commitment “is not to be identified with the believing of propositions, dogmatic or otherwise. But notice ... that it does *incorporate* this in several ways.”²³⁴ A commitment to a certain way of life would entail that a person believes what they have committed to, and they will also believe certain things that go along with their commitment. Thus, while commitment is not a subscription to any dogma, it will necessarily involve these beliefs and propositions, as there must be some guiding element to the commitment. A person cannot be committed to nothing.

These beliefs that are incorporated in a commitment are three ‘types’ that Wolterstorff has distinguished, although the distinction is between different functions of beliefs, rather than their essence.²³⁵ Data-background beliefs are those that determine what a person will accept or reject as data concerning whatever it is that they are considering. Data beliefs are those beliefs which a person accepts as propositions pertaining to the issue at hand. Control beliefs are those that in some way determine the outcome of the considerations that the person is performing. When a person considers a proposition, these three types of belief are how they are considered.

It is a background belief of Wolterstorff’s, for example, that there are belief dispositions that each person has. Using this background belief, he comes to the conclusion that reason is one of these belief dispositions, thus he has a data

²³⁴ Wolterstorff. *Reason*. p. 73

²³⁵ Wolterstorff. *Reason*. p. 69

belief concerning reason. It is, so to speak, up to his control beliefs as to whether or not he can accept this belief, whether or not it will fit into his system of belief as a whole. In this case it does, but there may be other cases in which it does not. If it did not, he would have to reject the belief that reason is a belief disposition; he would have to disbelieve it.

This can be added to the list of methods used to govern beliefs. Insofar as it is in a person's power, she must govern her beliefs so that each belief that she has (or has at least considered intellectually) coheres with the system of beliefs that she has already in place. If that means rejecting that belief, then she must do that. If that means altering the belief system that she has, then she must do that. For every one "ought to seek consistency, wholeness, and integrity in the body of his beliefs and commitments."²³⁶ If there is no external, objective method of justification, then the only remaining method must be an internal, situated method. And, as Wolterstorff has been arguing, this is what humanity has, so this is what humanity must work with.

Is it Fideism?

This is how Wolterstorff's theory of knowledge also avoids the charge of fideism. Fideism is the view that faith is a type of knowledge, or at least on par with knowledge, and that reason plays little role in it. Plantinga defines it as "reliance on faith rather than reason, in matters philosophical and religious; and ... may go on to disparage and denigrate reason."²³⁷ It is, as Kierkegaard would

²³⁶ Wolterstorff. *Reason*. p. 76

²³⁷ Plantinga. "Belief in God." p. 87

argue, something that is just taken to be true, trusted to be true, rather, on no basis other than that the person believes it; it is a leap, rather than a ladder. Wolterstorff's theory of situated rationality seems at first glance to either subtly follow along these same lines, or assume the truth of fideism. Neither is the case.

Wolterstorff does not argue that a person is rational in believing certain propositions on the basis of having that belief alone. He does not argue that belief in God, for example, is to be taken on faith alone. He does argue that it is rational, but not for reasons that a fideist would, if a fideist would at all. What Wolterstorff does argue is that people gain beliefs through certain belief dispositions, both innate and non-innate, before reason has much to do with them. The belief that God exists, while not arrived at through reasoning, is not a fideistic belief because while reason did not play a role in it, reason can and probably should play a role in discovering whether the person ought to keep that belief, or attempt to discard it. He also does not argue that beliefs are accepted on the terms of reason or faith; he does not argue for any except human nature. A person would not accept the belief that God exists on the basis of reason, nor on the basis of faith alone. She would just accept the belief without really considering it (or rejecting the belief as the case may be).

Due to the nature of Wolterstorff's situated rationality, he does not need to consider, to the extent that Locke did, where these beliefs may come from, he needs merely to propose a way in which people ought to be responsible for their own beliefs, and obligated to keep them rational and justified. On the other hand,

Locke, because he was considering an abstract, external view of rationality, had to posit a method of gaining true beliefs and propositions, since these would, in effect, come from without a person, and not from within.

Wolterstorff, insofar as belief dispositions are concerned, stated this objection as the 'taking a fancy' objection. "Suppose" he writes "a person takes a fancy to a proposition and just up and believes it. Suppose, further, that he neither has nor ought to have any adequate reason to give up that proposition. Then by our criterion he is rational in his belief."²³⁸ This is not the case, he argues, since the belief mechanism that acquired the belief is an untrustworthy one:

certainly any normal adult human being not only ought to know but also does know that this is a most unreliable 'mechanism' of belief formation. Knowing that, he has a very adequate reason indeed for giving up that belief.²³⁹

Just as a person cannot just 'up and believe' something, she cannot just believe something on 'nonrational' standards. A belief is not justifiable if it cannot be rationally considered.

Wolterstorff's project, as he writes, "is not to give advice to the person who is wondering whether to believe a certain proposition or whether to keep himself from believing it. Rather [he] is looking at the person who already has an array of beliefs, so as to give him and others a criterion for picking out those which it is rational for him to hold from those which are not."²⁴⁰ There must be some standard, then, that determines whether a belief, in its situated context, is rational

²³⁸ Wolterstorff. "Belief in God." p. 172

²³⁹ Wolterstorff. "Belief in God." p. 172

²⁴⁰ Wolterstorff. "Belief in God." p. 161

or not, justified or not. If a person could, so to speak, 'plead fideism' and so keep those beliefs that cannot be rationally justified within their other beliefs, the structure would be in grave danger of collapsing or being made ineffective.

Chapter Six: The End of the Matter

In one of his more recent religious and epistemological works, *Divine Discourse*, Wolterstorff brings together much of what he has discussed in a philosophical work on the issue of God speaking. He opens this work by recounting a story about Augustine, in 386, in which Augustine takes part in a conversation with a few friends in which the topic of God speaking to certain people was raised. In the three episodes of God speaking which were discussed, God spoke in different ways: by a child's voice raised in song, and through sacred text.²⁴¹ While it was not explicit in these contexts that it was indeed God speaking, none of the participants had any doubt that when it happened to them, that God was communicating to them. This could be, since the many religious traditions have many accounts of divine speech through their history. Judaism and Christianity are no exception. These especially require the notion of God's speech, since they profess that their sacred texts are Divinely inspired. Without the act of God speaking, at some point in time to some person, these religious texts would not have the impact and the influence that they have enjoyed through their history.

However, Wolterstorff also notes that philosophy, as a discipline, has not been too eager to pursue this topic. He writes that most philosophers "would regard the topic as 'off the wall' for a philosopher—or something that one would have to be slightly mad to take seriously."²⁴² There has been, though, a

²⁴¹ Nicholas Wolterstorff. *Divine Discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. p. 7

²⁴² Wolterstorff. *Discourse*. p. ix

resurgence of religious-ness in society, a resurgence that Wolterstorff identifies in part as a conviction that the hostility of the modern age to religious tradition is perhaps “ill-advised and self-defeating.”²⁴³ Wolterstorff, in this work, works within the system of rationality and justification that he had expressed, and through the course of his discussion of Divine Speech, concludes that “it is possible for an intelligent adult of the modern Western world to be entitled to believe that God has spoken to him or her.”²⁴⁴ He can, in a sense, come to this conclusion because of the space that he has created for faith and belief; that space which he has opened through his work with Kant, Locke, and Reid.

From Kant and Locke.

Wolterstorff writes that, regarding *Divine Discourse*, he just begins and starts talking about God.²⁴⁵ In response to the ‘Kantian Agony’ of theology, Wolterstorff finds himself at a position, philosophically, where he can just begin attributing things to God, and talking about experiences of God. People can have knowledge of God, and even of God speaking to them, since they can assume that what they experience actually corresponds to some *thing* that exists apart from them; that their knowledge of the external world is trustworthy. The person who has this experience of God speaking, Wolterstorff argues, can trust that their experience is of the object itself, rather than their understanding of the object.

²⁴³ Wolterstorff. *Discourse*. p. ix

²⁴⁴ Wolterstorff. *Discourse*. p. 280

²⁴⁵ Wolterstorff. “Recover From Kant.” p. 1

Kant, Wolterstorff wrote, understood knowledge to have two basic components: intuition and conception. It is through intuition that a person can relate to an object that is not her self. Any external object that she experiences must be experienced through intuition, or else it cannot be experienced at all. It is the *method* through which objects can be thought of. This, though, requires that there be a *concept* already existent in the mind, which the mind then uses to understand the object of experience. It is, essentially, a representation of the *content* of the experience, while the intuition is the *form* of the experience. A person, hearing a sound (intuition) will interpret that sound through the concepts that she has in her mind (conception). Thus, she won't just see something, she will see a dog, she won't just feel something, she will feel a table, etc.

What Wolterstorff has done is to remove one of the 'steps' that Kant established: he removes the notion of intuition. Every person, he argues, still experiences objects using concepts, it is just that instead of these concepts being fitted to a mental representation of the object that exists in the mind, the concepts are being fitted to the object itself, through the person's perception of it. In this way, when a person experiences God speaking to her, she can experience that act directly. However, if she does not have a concept of God being able to speak, then she may not experience the act as God speaking, since she may be closed to the idea.

In his discussion of and response to Locke, Wolterstorff makes this clearer. Locke had posited that people begin to exist as a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, which is imprinted on through experience of the world. Like Kant, though,

Locke held that knowledge can only be about mental objects; the agreement or disagreement of ideas. Since this is all that people can be sure about, certain knowledge is a limited affair. It must be supplemented by belief, which 'bridges the gap' between mental objects and external objects. But, since belief is not a wholly reliable faculty—it often leads to error—it must be guided, governed, by the human faculty of reason. People have an obligation to govern their beliefs properly; a *noetic* obligation.

This obligation, Locke argues, takes the form of principles which ought to be used in properly guiding belief. Belief-propositions must be founded on propositions known to be true, it must be built upon these foundations through appropriate evidence, and these propositions must only be held as strongly as the evidence allows, they must be proportionate. Knowledge, being 'short and scanty', must work together with belief to produce enough propositions for a person to be able to work and act in the world effectively.

Wolterstorff takes issue with Locke on Locke's insistence that reason ought to be the guide, since reason cannot err. Wolterstorff, as a Christian, sees the effects of sin everywhere in human life, and reason, like all other faculties, is prone to error as well. Wolterstorff also disagrees with the implicit message that Locke seems to express: that what one believes can be governed by the will. If a person finds that one of their beliefs doesn't hold up to the standards that Locke demands, then he argues that she ought to get rid of that belief, or proportion her firmness of belief so that it more accurately reflects the nature and extent of the belief's foundations. Wolterstorff argues that many times, if not all, people do not

have wilful control over their beliefs; they merely 'find themselves believing'. Even if a belief does not meet the requirements of rationality or justification, the person might just alter the rest of her beliefs to 'insulate' the one; she just might not want to give it up.

To Reid and Wolterstorff.

Thomas Reid, the philosopher that Wolterstorff most closely follows, reacted strongly to the skepticism that he saw in the idealist philosophies of Descartes, Berkeley, Locke, and Hume. To Reid, these philosophers had broken the 'rules' of common sense when they relegated human knowledge to mental ideas and representations. His own philosophy was created as a reaction to these others, and an attempt to heal the wound that they had created between the principles of common sense and the principles of philosophy. To Reid, philosophy began to go wrong when philosophers doubted the existence of anything which they could not prove. Descartes, using his methodological doubt, started the process when all that he could know with absolute certainty was the he, as a thinking thing, existed. From this point he attempted to prove, or at least show the possibility of, an external world. But he was less than successful.

Philosophers that came after him took his principles further, and showed that Descartes was wrong when he thought he could show the existence of anything other than mental ideas. Locke, as we have seen, could not prove the existence of the external world, and so his philosophy was full of skepticism and doubt; there was much to do in order to have a rational justified belief. Reid

argues that this type of philosophy came to its peak with Hume, who argued that we can only experience ideas, and external objects have no real relationship with any person. Reid was horrified that this was seriously considered.

To put philosophy back on the right track, Reid states that a person just has to assume that the external world exists, because she cannot rid herself of that belief anyways. He argues that anyone who honestly held to the principles that the 'theory of ideas' philosopher held to would be considered mad and locked away for their own safety, or they would not live very long lives. It is an untenable position, and one that an appeal to common sense can rectify.

In order to reinforce this position, he understands the notion of perception differently; perception involves judgment. He distinguishes between perception and sensation, and shows that perception, as a human act, is not a merely passive act, but one that each person also actively engages in, through *interpreting* their perceptions. There can be no perception without interpretation, since each person must judge, at a basic level, whether or not the perception is true. These judgments, then, are performed by the person in *her own intellectual context*. One person cannot judge for another whether the latter's perceptions are true or false. These perceptions must be judged by the person who has them.

Reid also develops a notion of belief-dispositions which Wolterstorff uses quite extensively. Since perception involves judgment, people find themselves having beliefs about the world which they did not necessarily come to rationally. Instead of Locke's notion of 'belief being governed by reason', Reid places

reason among these belief-dispositions, and argues that people are disposed to formulate beliefs without any real guidance. Where the guidance aspect comes in is 'after-the-fact', so instead of it being a kind of seed-planting, in which reason plants the right and proper seeds for belief, it becomes more of a weeding, in which each person has to consider those beliefs which are of great importance, and pick out those which do not fit, and keep those that do. And, again, a person can only do this for herself; she cannot do this for anyone else, or have anyone else do it for her.

Wolterstorff, in following Reid's lead, takes the concept a little further. He uses Reid as a foundation for his own account of knowledge and belief, and sets up what he considers to be a *non-foundational* epistemology; an epistemology which is situational. While Locke had established an external, and therefore objective, standard for guiding belief, Reid had taken that standard and placed it within the person. Wolterstorff, though, takes that internal standard, and argues that it is not objective. His notion of rationality of belief requires a situated context, and in a situated context, objective measures do not necessarily work as they are supposed to. It is a subjective notion,²⁴⁶ but not one that is immune to some type of standard.

The standard that Wolterstorff uses, then, is not an external standard. Beliefs must be judged on the basis of the other beliefs which the person already has, such as Control beliefs; thus a belief that one person holds may be rational

²⁴⁶ I am grateful to Dr. Kurt Richardson for this idea. His explanation of Reformed Epistemology as a type of Kierkegaardian extreme subjectivity made a lot of sense to me. It is, in this understanding, a standard that has become so subjective that it has attained an internal idea of objectivity. (Theology of Creation lecture 06/04/2004)

for her to hold, but not rational for another person to hold. Based on the difference in the whole system of beliefs, this judgment of rationality can be reached. The standard is a standard of *situated* rationality, and each person is accountable for their beliefs and belief systems. There are different ways in which these beliefs can be governed, but each of them requires that the person do it herself, and reflect on those beliefs that she chooses to reflect on, in the context of the rest of the beliefs that she holds.

The View From Here.

Since this is the path that Wolterstorff took, it is rational for him to come to the conclusion that people are entitled to believe that God has spoken to them. This, though, must be qualified by stating that a person is only entitled to believe that God has spoken to her, *if her belief system allows for such an experience*. An atheist is not entitled to believe that God has spoken to her, unless she then believes in God. If she believes that God has spoken to her, but still denies the existence of God, then one of those beliefs is not rational. In the same way, a theist can believe that God has spoken to her, even if she cannot prove it to an atheist friend; for the theist must be accountable for her own beliefs, not those of others. The belief that God has spoken is a situated belief, one that exists within a context of other beliefs that either support it or deny it.²⁴⁷ Wolterstorff can draw

²⁴⁷ Wolterstorff would not say, though, that belief (or disbelief) in God determines the existence (or non-existence) of God. Whether God exists or not is independent of whether he is believed in or not, thus the notion of God speaking is independent of whether people are open to his voice. Wolterstorff is not discussing, in this context, if God *will* or *does* speak, but whether people are *entitled* to believe it. It is a discussion of entitlement, not of fact.

this conclusion since, through his belief system, “the possibility seems to [him] to have been actualized.”²⁴⁸

It was actualized to Wolterstorff in at least two ways, one which is a specific account for him, and another in which all Christians can share. The more specific account is a story in which a woman the Wolterstorff knows claims to have had a message from God for another person. Wolterstorff is entitled to believe this account, and so are the people involved in it. So are, in fact, all Christians who profess the possibility of God speaking.

The other way that this Divine speech has been actualized is in terms of the Inspiration of the Bible. This is the account in which all Christians can share more readily and easily. If God can speak, then God has indeed spoken on a number of occasions, if the belief in the Divine Inspiration of the Scriptures is to be upheld. In this way, any Christian who believes that the Bible is the Word of God is entitled to believe, at the very least, that God has, at some point in history, made his voice known to different people so that they could write down his words. The Scriptures, even though they are full of God's speaking, are themselves another aspect of God's speech. And Christians are entitled to believe in this Inspiration, even if they cannot give evidence or proof of it.

Wolterstorff, through his work, has brought himself to a place in which he can incorporate his faith into his philosophy and his philosophy into his faith. He has come back to his upbringing in the Reformed Church, and is entitled to look at the world through the eyes of his faith as well as through the eyes of his understanding, since the two have now, essentially, become one. Faith instructs

²⁴⁸ Wolterstorff. *Discourse*. p. 280

understanding and understanding instructs faith. Wolterstorff is entitled to see the world through the confession that 'he is not his own but belongs both body and soul to his faithful saviour Jesus Christ.'

Unresolved Matters.

Wolterstorff's system is a refreshing system, one that works better with religious belief than the foundational system that Wolterstorff seeks to replace. Reason still plays a role, but it is a role that is at the same time more limited than it had been before, but more liberated as well. It is limited in the sense that reason is no longer the master of the epistemic domain. But it is liberated insofar as reason can now hold more and different beliefs, and consider them rational and justified. It can work within the domain of faith and belief as well, not merely to correct and restrain, but can now itself grow and develop; it is not a restrained role, it is a humbled role. It is reason which begins to understand the reasons of the heart.

In a sense, Wolterstorff's account of the relation between faith and reason, while upholding the validity and importance of religious belief, also upholds Calvin's teaching that knowledge involves not only reason and intellect, but trust and reverence. In Wolterstorff's account knowledge that begins with doubt does not meet the requirements of trust that true knowledge demands, while knowledge that trusts unreservedly does not meet the requirements of a reason which has been granted by God.

What would be interesting to follow is this link, implied in the name Reformed Epistemology; namely the link between the theology of John Calvin and the non-foundational philosophy of these philosophers. Is the name 'Reformed Epistemology' an accurate and apt name or is it, as Wolterstorff himself says, an 'infelicitous' name?²⁴⁹ He suggests that the name may not be as fitting to some 'Reformed' epistemologists, as they are not necessarily from the Reformed tradition. The trend that he considers the 'reformed' element of this philosophy is the antievidentialism that it espouses, and that the reformed tradition has espoused throughout its history.²⁵⁰

Another question that has come up during this process of coming to understand Wolterstorff's epistemology relates it to Alvin Plantinga. While the two work closely together, and use each others work to strengthen their own, the approach that they use, and the way they express their own systems is still quite different. While Wolterstorff investigates the role of faith and belief in reason and knowledge, Plantinga's project seems to be to establish belief in God as a ground for other beliefs, as a properly basic belief. Superficially it seems that the two are doing the same work, but once one reads each, and begins to delve into their thoughts, differences arise. Plantinga's project, on the cursory reading that has been done here, seems to be more objective and external than Wolterstorff's. Wolterstorff seeks to find rationality and justification for belief in each person's system of beliefs; in a situated context. Plantinga takes the

²⁴⁹ Wolterstorff. "Introduction." p. 7

²⁵⁰ Wolterstorff. "Introduction." p. 8

approach of placing belief in God outside of the person, and onto those basic beliefs that can then be basic for everyone.

It would also be of interest to compare Wolterstorff's non-foundationalism with a non-religious account, such as Wittgenstein's. Wittgenstein struggles with belief and certainty of knowledge through his works, within the context of a philosophy of language. He comes to the idea that language has meaning, not because it pictures reality, but because it is used in contexts which give it meaning; it is an empirics of language. But while he also writes that there are some things which cannot be expressed in language and have to be passed over in silence, he obviously affirms the existence of such things, even those things which may be beyond human experience. How would a non-religious non-foundationalism compare to a religious non-foundationalism?

This process, contained within these pages on Wolterstorff's epistemology, is a good basis from which to begin to answer other questions that it raises, and to explore more deeply what Wolterstorff has in fact done. This epistemology is only one aspect of a life of philosophy; he also writes political and aesthetic philosophy and spends much energy on educational philosophy as well. To get a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of a scholar who has spent much of his life on these pursuits, it would be necessary to also study these other areas of his thought as well. But, having studied one area, the other areas will be more accessible to delve into as well. And what would most likely be found there is the same commitment and dedication to his faith and beliefs, and to all the aspects of his life, that has been found in this small area.

Nicholas Wolterstorff, who wished to make room in his philosophy for his faith, will also make room everywhere in his life for his faith, since it is not merely a subscription to a set of beliefs, but a lifestyle, a world-view. And one that he has committed to fully.

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