

REPLY TO CRITICS

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Reply to Plantinga

As always, I find these comments by Plantinga to be richly instructive. He has been bugging me about my practical rationality argument for some time, and, as will appear from my reply, I have profited from his efforts. But although he has helped me to see the error of my ways, I must take exception to various features of the way in which he has done so.

Before getting to practical rationality, let me say that I don't want to spend time here arguing about the details of the conception of epistemic justification I used in *Perceiving God* and elsewhere. In particular, I don't want to argue about whether every justified belief owes that status to being based on an adequate *ground*. As Plantinga makes clear, there are various kinds of beliefs a ground for which is difficult to locate. I will point out, however, that since in this book I deliberately abstained from imposing an internalist constraint of reflective accessibility on grounds, such as I have worked with elsewhere, we can't conclude that memory beliefs or *a priori* beliefs lack grounds from the fact that we can't introspectively discover any. Be that as it may, in this discussion you can think in terms of your favorite conception of epistemic justification, so long as it is such that a belief's being justified entails that there is an objective probability of its being true.

After Plantinga has finished upbraiding me for my account of justification, he moves to a consideration of my argument for the practical rationality of engaging in socially established doxastic practices. Unfortunately, he does this by saying that "the fact is, as Alston's book proceeds, *justification* tends to recede into the wings and *rationality* moves to center stage". This sounds as if, after having gone on at some length about justification and announcing that the main thesis of the book is that mystical experience is a source of justification for certain kinds of beliefs about God, I unaccountably forget about that and start talking instead about the practical rationality of engaging in doxastic practices. That would be a bizarre affair indeed, a considerable slip in proof reading.

The fact of the matter is that the discussion of practical rationality was squarely aimed at the issue of whether the Christian mystical doxastic practice is a source of justification. The way it goes is this. Since I work with a conception of justification according to which a belief is justified only if it is based on a reliable indication of the truth of the belief, we can show that a certain source of belief is a source of justification only if we can show that it is a *reliable* source of belief. I argue that since the attempt to show that our basic sources of belief are reliable inevitably bogs down in epistemic circularity, we are unable to show, in a satisfactory fashion, that any of these sources are reliable. (An argument for the reliability of a source of belief is epistemically circular when the argument draws some of its premises from that very source.) Hence we are forced to take a more roundabout route. That is where practical rationality comes in. I contend that though we cannot give an adequate, non-epistemically circular argument for the reliability of any of our basic doxastic practices, we can see that we have no rational alternative to engaging in the practices that we find to be established in our social milieu and firmly internalized psychologically. Then I argue that since in engaging in a doxastic practice we are *ipso facto* committed to regarding it as reliable, in showing that it is practically rational to engage in the practice, we are thereby showing it to be practically rational to take it to be reliable. Hence, if we can assume that other conditions for justification are satisfied, it is practically rational to take the practice to be a source of justification. This is how the discussion of practical rationality is directed to the overriding concern with justification, and that is why there is no diversion of concern from justification to rationality.

One more preliminary point before turning to my main concern here—Plantinga's discussion of my practical rationality argument. He enters onto this discussion as a way of determining what is the "de jure" question concerning Christian belief. He asks whether the question of practical rationality is *the* de jure question on one or another construal of practical rationality. But I take his question to be ill conceived, since it is clear to me that there is no unique de jure question concerning Christian beliefs or any other. On the contrary, there are a number of such questions, each of which is relevant in one or another context of inquiry. There are, for example, several questions that have to do with permissibility and obligation, at least one of which Plantinga touches on. The answer to the question of the permissibility of Christian belief is, as Plantinga points out, painfully obvious, but there may be other areas in which the answer is not so obvious. And a question with an obvious answer is still a question for 'a' that. Then there are questions about the reliability of the way in which a belief is formed and/or maintained, questions about the strength of the evidence or reasons one has for the belief, questions about, as Plantinga likes to say, whether the belief was formed by our cognitive faculties functioning properly, questions about whether the belief fits coherently into one's total belief system, questions about whether the belief, if true, is under the effective control of the fact that makes it true, etc., etc. Some of these questions may well

be more important than others; and some may be more important for some purposes or from certain perspectives than others. But we cannot assume that there is one and only one legitimate *de jure* question.¹

Hence I am not at all disposed to argue that my practical rationality question is *the* *de jure* question to ask about Christian beliefs, or any beliefs. Indeed, that follows from the fact that I ask this question only to throw light on another question—that concerning the *justification* of Christian beliefs. But now I want to look at what happens to my practical rationality question in Plantinga's hands.

Plantinga finds me offering two arguments for the rationality of engaging in SP and CMP. I don't see any basis for this distinction. The one argument, as I see it, is that given the impossibility of showing the reliability of a basic doxastic practice without epistemic circularity, there is no rational alternative to engaging in the undefeated practices we find ourselves socially and psychologically firmly committed to. But let's not quibble over counting arguments. His main contention in this part of his remarks concerns the beliefs of the subject by reference to which we are to decide what it is rational for the subject to do in the way of belief formation. We take it, he says, that the basic goal is "achieving some appropriate balance between avoiding error and believing truth". But what it is rational for me to do depends not only on my goals but also on my beliefs concerning the most effective ways to achieve those goals, and other beliefs that have a bearing on that issue. His main conclusion is that if these beliefs include the reliability of SP and CMP, then it is trivially true that it is rational for me to engage in those practices. While if those beliefs are not among those by reference to which rationality is being assessed, it would seem that engaging in SP and CMP is not rational. For why in that case, relative to what the subject believes, should s/he suppose that this is an effective way of achieving the goal in question? Hence if the question has the answer I proffer, it is only because that answer is antecedently built into the way of posing the question.

This is an ingenious argument, but I find that it makes no contact with what I was doing in the book. I bear a large share of the responsibility for Plantinga's supposition that it does, for I did not spell out the concept of rationality I was using there. My eye was firmly fixed on the specifics of my particular problem, so much so that I simply utilized an intuitive conception of rationality² and neglected to make explicit its contours. Let me hasten to remedy that. I never had any idea of working with a conception of rationality so subjective that the rationality of an action is a function of the subject's beliefs and goals, whatever their provenance or epistemic status. I was not using a concept such that Descartes' people who believe that their heads were made of glass were thereby being rational to wear football helmets at all times (assuming that this gives glass heads a significant degree of protection). No doubt, there is such a conception of rationality, but it was not the one in which I was interested. Mine is much more objective and normative.

My next move, obviously, should be to spell out the concept I was using. Unfortunately, given the variety of conceptions of (even practical) rationality and the diversity of the dimensions along which such conceptions vary, I am not able, within the bounds of this response, to go into the matter properly. But I can say this. According to my linguistic-conceptual phenomenology, the central weight of emphasis in assessments of rational action is on how well the agent reasons in determining what to do. (The reasoning need not be conscious, or otherwise explicit.) The action is rational or not, depending on the soundness of the reasoning that issued in it. We suppose ourselves to be using objective standards of soundness here. But doesn't it matter what the agent reasons from? If not, we are back with Plantinga's subjective conception. Here there are various options. Sometimes our assessment takes place relative to a set of background beliefs and values we are assuming the agent to have. Sometimes there is a less specific presupposition that the beliefs and goals of the agent are fairly normal, not too idiosyncratic or outré. Sometimes there is a still less specific presupposition that the agent acquired the relevant beliefs or goals in ways that satisfy certain standards we have (more or less definitely) in mind. And there are other possibilities. But on none of these approaches is it the case that anything goes with respect to what the agent reasons from. There are principles by which we distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable premises for practical reasoning. The conception I was employing fits somewhere in this thicket. Hence Plantinga's argument, which utilizes a conception of rationality according to which the rationality of a course of action depends on whether the agent's beliefs (whatever their status) would indicate that they are likely to reach the goal in question, makes no contact with my discussion.³

Can I say something more definite about how I was thinking of the background of the subject using my practical rationality argument? Yes, I can. I am, as Plantinga says, thinking of the chief goal as being the maximization of the proportion of true to false belief. As for beliefs, I was thinking of the subject as having a set of beliefs that would be normal for a reasonably intelligent current member of our society, including, of course, a very large number of beliefs acquired through one or another standard doxastic practice, and the belief that these practices are generally reliable. But I was also thinking of this subject as realizing that s/he is unable to show that any of these practices are reliable, and believing that this implies that s/he is unable to use beliefs in that reliability, or beliefs that presuppose that reliability, to determine the most rational course to take *vis-a-vis* belief formation. This forces the subject to have recourse to more indirect ways of making the decision, of the sort indicated in my argument, primarily the irrationality of discarding established practices for alternatives relative to which one would be, so far as one can determine, in no better position. *This* is how, as I took it, there is a non trivial conclusion that the rational thing to do, so far as doxastic practices are concerned, is to stick with what we have.

Thus I don't think that Plantinga has shown that my question of the practical rationality of engaging in CMP is not a *de jure* question about Christian M-beliefs. Nevertheless, since writing the book I have become somewhat disenchanted with this approach, a condition that is in no small part due to the probing questions Plantinga continues to raise about it. I can best set out my reasons for this change of heart by ringing some changes on the points Plantinga has made here. As I have indicated, I don't see that his remarks make direct contact with my enterprise, but I do think that some difficulties with that enterprise are reflected in those remarks.

The impression a reader naturally gets from my practical rationality argument is that I take this to be a way of giving a validation of our reliance on established doxastic practices, a validation that sidesteps the epistemic circularity difficulties we encounter in trying to give a straightforward argument for the reliability of such practices. The practical rationality argument is portrayed as immune from such problems. It is supposed to be a kind of rock bottom, ultimate foundation for the acceptability of forming beliefs in these ways, an Archimedean point from which we can survey actual and possible doxastic practices and determine which it is rational to engage in. And yet in the book itself I worry about the possibility that the practical rationality argument also runs into epistemic circularity. This worry comes up most obviously when we apply it to SP or to memory belief formation or to familiar forms of inference, all of which are involved in our reasons for supposing that any doxastic practice is socially established. There is not the same reason for supposing that the argument for the practical rationality of engaging in the Christian mystical practice exhibits epistemic circularity. I don't have to use mystical perception to determine that mystical practices are socially established.

Indeed, it is far from obvious that any practical rationality arguments suffer from epistemic circularity. The arguments for the *reliability* of SP (the sense perceptual doxastic practice) runs into epistemic circularity just because in using SP to get premises for the argument, we are assuming, in practice, that SP is reliable. But when we use SP as source of premises for a practical rationality argument, like the premise that SP is socially established, are we assuming, even in practice, that it is *practically rational* to engage in SP? That is not so clear. And it is only if the argument commits us to *that* assumption that it is epistemically circular. But even if no epistemic circularity is involved, it remains true that in putting forward any argument, we are relying on certain doxastic practices to furnish us with the premises of the argument. And that is enough to show that the recourse to practical rationality does not place us at some neutral, "God's eye" point of view from which we can critically examine the pretensions of all doxastic practices without any prior commitment to any of them.

But if that is the case, why suppose that my practical rationality approach is superior to what I called in the book a "hang tough" approach (better known nowadays as "naturalist epistemology"), in which we simply work, in uncritical

and unselfconscious fashion, within the doxastic practices to which we are accustomed, without any attempt at an external assessment? I have to admit that, in the light of the considerations just adduced, no such absolute authority can be claimed. That still leaves open the possibility that in one or another dialectical situation there is a point in taking certain doxastic practices for granted while subjecting others to critical scrutiny. But if we try to give this procedure an absolute status, we run afoul of Reid's "undue partiality argument", cited by Plantinga and cited by myself in the book. (If we just assume, e.g., the reliability of self-evidence and deductive inference, while demanding proof of the reliability of sense-perception, are we not guilty of arbitrary partiality?) Hence at the moment I am disposed to ditch the practical rationality approach and replace it with something much simpler. To wit, considerations of epistemic circularity show that there is no appeal beyond the doxastic practices to which we find ourselves firmly committed. We can make modifications within that sphere. We can tidy up some of them so as to minimize internal and external contradictions. And in extreme cases, we may have to abandon some in order to maintain the most coherent total position. But our starting place for any cognitive enterprise is the belief forming dispositions with which we find ourselves at the moment. This is a kind of negative coherentism with respect to doxastic practices, *not* with respect to beliefs. Needless to say, this shift of strategy does not involve abandoning the emphasis on doxastic *practices* in epistemic evaluation. It only involves dethroning practical rationality from the position given it in the book. (That is not to say that the practical rationality of doxastic practices is an incoherent or useless notion, or that there is never any point in making it the focus of discussion.) If I had chosen this alternative approach, Chapter 4 of the book would have been considerably shorter and less convoluted.

I should also point out that nothing I have said here or in the book is incompatible with Plantinga's stress on the dependence of epistemological issues on metaphysical or theological issues. I have said as much myself, with respect to knowledge anyway.⁴

Reply to Kretzmann

Norman Kretzmann has examined my book as thoroughly and as assiduously as anyone. As he mentioned, he gave a seminar on the book at Cornell while it was still in manuscript, and I am most grateful to him and to the students in the seminar for a wealth of critical reactions to the book, many of which were too late for me to take account of before publication. Hence Kretzmann should be in the best position to discern the argument of the book. And, indeed, he has given us here a perceptive reading of the most fundamental strand of my argument. But like many perceptive readings this one is informed by concerns that the reader brings to the text. And, as often happens, the author finds that those concerns have distorted the reading in certain ways. I find Norman's account, and criticism, to be a frustrating, but creative, blend of

misunderstandings with the identification of at least one crucial issue. In my response I will seek to separate those components, correct the former, and discuss the latter.

Kretzmann's "broadminded atheist" at first takes me to be using a "deontological" conception of epistemic justification when I formulate the central claim of the book by saying that *putative perception of God can provide justification for certain kinds of beliefs about God* ("M-beliefs"), an impression that is decisively dispelled from Chapter 2 on. So far, I take it, there is no criticism, except, perhaps, for the suggestion that I would have done well to lay more cards on the table earlier. Criticism begins in earnest when Kretzmann says that my way of defending my central claim "does 'weaken the concept of justification, disembowel it of its implications of likelihood of truth'."⁵ Moreover, and more surprisingly, the weakened concept he adopts is, I think, unmistakably a *deontological* concept of epistemic justification". This is a serious charge. Not only do I advocate, in Chapter 2, a "truth-conducive", non-deontological conception of epistemic justification, but I repeatedly insist that this is the one I am using. But fortunately, for me, Kretzmann's charge rests on a level confusion, or at least on a supposition that levels are more permeable than I take them to be, and more permeable than Kretzmann has given us any reason to suppose.

The reason Kretzmann offers in support of his charge that I abandoned ship is that my defense of my central claim is that it is "practically rational" to engage in the "doxastic practice" of forming M-beliefs on the basis of putative perception of God (MP),⁶ and that this amounts to claiming that the engagement is justified in a *deontological* sense of justification. Before considering whether this does support the charge in question, I want to make a couple of less central points.

First, my defense of the justificatory efficacy of mystical perception involves not only the practical rationality of *engaging* in MP, but also and crucially—what I claim to follow from this—the practical rationality of *taking MP to be reliable*. Interestingly enough, though Kretzmann's preliminary statement of his abandonment charge is in terms of "the justification of believing that the practice is reliable", he seems to forget this in the detailed presentation that follows and almost entirely restricts himself to discussing my claim that it is practically rational to *engage* in the practice. Hence he never addresses himself to my argument that the practical rationality of engaging in MP carries with it the practical rationality of taking MP to be reliable.⁷ Given his preliminary statement, I will assume that he realizes that my defense includes the claim that it is practically rational to take MP to be reliable.

Second, I don't agree that practical rationality amounts to deontological justification. The brief explanation of the former concept in my reply to Plantinga should make that clear. It is true that I am at pains to distinguish the practical rationality of taking MP to be reliable from being truth-conducively justified in so taking it. But deontological justification is not the only positive

epistemic alternative to truth-conducive justification. Indeed, I took care to avoid the term 'justification' altogether in presenting my case for MP. However, since the main point I want to make here is independent of this issue, I will go along with Kretzmann and talk as if I did claim that the belief in the reliability of MP is justified in a deontological sense.

Now for the central issue. Does the fact that my defense of taking MP to be reliable does not amount to arguing that this is justified in a truth-conducive sense, show that I have abandoned that concept of justification? Not a bit of it. My announced, and carried out, intention was to use that concept in application to beliefs formed within a doxastic practice, more specifically to beliefs formed within SP (the standard practice of forming sense-perceptual beliefs) and MP. I never had any intention of using it with respect to beliefs *about* doxastic practices. Indeed, as Kretzmann is careful to bring out, I argue at length that it is impossible to be justified in that sense in supposing that any of our basic doxastic practices are reliable. Hence, my position involves assessing beliefs within MP and SP as justified or not in the truth-conducive sense, but assessing these practices (and the beliefs that they are reliable) rather as practically rational or not (or, to go along with Kretzmann, as justified in a deontological sense or not). Hence the fact that I espouse the latter in no way shows, indicates, or even suggests, that I renounce the former.⁸

Amazingly enough, Kretzmann evinces his awareness that I make the above distinction. He quotes me as saying:

So far as this charge is applied to perceptual beliefs, it is vitiated by a level confusion. The lower epistemic status we have settled for [practical rationality] attaches to the *higher-level* claim that SP is reliable, not...to the particular perceptual beliefs that issue from that practice. As for the latter, what we are claiming is still the full-blooded (prima facie) justification of Chapter 2 that involves likelihood of truth.

His response to this is *not* that I have, despite my protestations, settled for practical rationality at the lower level as well, the response he would need to back up his abandonment charge. Instead he says that "his settling for the lower epistemic status at the higher level also leaves us without *any* justification for believing that perceptual beliefs *are* non-deontologically, truth-conducively justified". This is quite a different thesis from the claim that I *substituted* a deontological concept of justification for the one espoused in Chapter 2. In saying what I have just quoted him as saying Kretzmann is, in effect, admitting that I continue to use my Chapter 2 concept in just the applications for which I intended it.

But though the charge of abandonment itself seems to have been abandoned, we are left with the charge that I have not provided *any* justification for the central claim of the book, that "perceptual beliefs *are* non-deontologically, truth-conducively justified". I am by no means disposed to accept this. 'Justification' is a protean term. If I have shown that certain beliefs are *rationally*

held, then I have provided *some justification* for them. Surely it is better, epistemically, to have a rational belief than to have an irrational belief.

To be sure, I have not provided justification for that central claim in my favored sense of 'justified'. But this is something that I repeatedly insist on in the book. I repeatedly point out that my claim that it is *practically rational* to take, e.g., MP to be reliable must not be confused with the claim that we have sufficient reasons for taking it to be true, or probably true, that MP is reliable. In fact, Kretzmann quotes one of the passages in which I say this. Hence it is passing strange to find him criticizing me for failing to do precisely what I have disavowed any aspiration to do and, in fact, have proclaimed to be impossible because of the pervasive influence of epistemic circularity.

He goes on, as he must, to argue that we are, after all, justified in believing MP to be reliable. ...the point of this passage [an argument for the practical rationality of engaging in familiar doxastic practices] is or ought to be to provide justification for the belief that this or that practice is reliable. Does it do so? Obviously not. ...the practically reasonable refusal to reject those beliefs [perceptual beliefs] is a far cry from truth-conducive justification for accepting them.⁹

These passages combine two claims: (1) I have set out to provide justification in a truth-conducive sense for the belief in the reliability of one or another doxastic practice; (2) I have failed to do this. The first is something I repeatedly disavow. And the second claim, so far being a criticism of my position, is an endorsement, since, as just pointed out, it is one of my main contentions, a fact that Kretzmann elsewhere recognizes. This is no more an objection to my position than pointing out that Kant did not provide us with a theoretical justification of morality, or a sufficient reason for supposing that the categories apply to things in themselves, is an objection to Kant's position. Another analogue would be pointing out that Hume did not give us a rational justification of induction. One could, of course, argue that Kant or Hume or Alston is mistaken in supposing that we can't have more than he offers, or that he has not shown that we can't have more. But it is no criticism of the position to reiterate it.

Now I turn to the important issue raised by Kretzmann's paper. It has to do with the relationship between the epistemic status of beliefs acquired by engaging in a certain doxastic practice and the epistemic status of beliefs about the reliability or other positive epistemic status of that practice. Once the misunderstandings exposed above are out of the way, we are left with a substantive claim, *viz.*, that "the justification of beliefs formed within a doxastic practice ultimately depends on the justification of believing that that practice is reliable". Kretzmann also speaks of "the ultimate epistemic justification for engaging in established doxastic practices, the foundational justification on which the justification of any particular belief depends". These remarks suggest that Kretzmann thinks that, e.g., M-beliefs formed within MP can be justified only if we are justified in supposing MP to be reliable. And so a failure to provide

truth-conducive justification for the latter would leave us without truth-conducive justification for the former. Let me explain why I do not agree with this position.

First, even if I were to agree with the first claim just mentioned—that M-beliefs formed within MP can be justified only if we are justified in supposing MP to be reliable—his second claim would not follow, *viz.*, that the latter justification has to be of the same sort as the former. Indeed, where we have level differences of this sort, it is often the case that justification at one level is of a different sort from that at the other. Suppose, as I have elsewhere argued not to be the case, that it is possible to provide an *a priori* justification for the reliability of sense perception. This would satisfy the principle that justification within a practice requires justification of the practice; and yet the former is empirical and the latter *a priori*. Again, suppose that reliance on induction can be justified by pointing out that possessing enough of standard inductive support is what it *means* for an empirical generalization to be justified. In that case our reasons for supposing that generalizations can be justified inductively would not be inductive ones. Both of these claims are, of course, controversial, as would any other examples I could have chosen. And I do not accept either of them. I trot them out here only to make the point that we cannot rule out the possibility that one might justify the claim that beliefs formed in a certain way (by engaging in a certain doxastic practice) are thereby justified, without the former justification being of the same sort as the latter. This means that even if the justification for taking SP or MP to be reliable is *deontological*, as Kretzmann claims, it does not follow without more ado that what is thereby justified is that beliefs generated by SP and MP are justified (only) in a deontological sense. Indeed, quite the opposite follows. If what is justified, deontologically, is that the practices are reliable, then the justification they are shown (deontologically) to confer on their products, if any such is shown, is precisely *truth-conducive* in character.

But second, and more fundamentally, I do not agree that there are any such higher-level requirements on justification. I have argued elsewhere¹⁰ that any such requirement leads to the conclusion that one can be justified in any belief only if one can be justified in all the beliefs in an infinite hierarchy. For if the belief that *p* can be justified only if one is justified in supposing that *p* was formed in a reliable way, then that latter belief in turn is justified only if one is justified in supposing that *it* was formed in a reliable way, and in turn.... Thus I cannot accept the view that beliefs formed by MP can be justified only if we are justified (in whatever way) in supposing MP to be reliable. That does not mean, of course, that we, as reflective thinkers, are not interested in whether our doxastic practices are reliable. Of course we are. It is a question of the greatest urgency. In the book I indicated the way of tackling this question to which I was led by the line of thought expounded there. What I offered, in terms of practical rationality, is less than many thinkers, including myself, would like to have, and Kretzmann obviously finds it radically unsatisfactory. I am sorry

about that, but I have given reasons for thinking it is the best we can do. One can, of course, criticize those reasons and argue that we can do better. But it is no criticism just to express a *preference* for something better. Sometimes we just can't get what we want.

Perhaps when Kretzmann made the claim I have been criticizing, he misspoke himself. When he says, as quoted above, that "the justification of beliefs formed within a doxastic practice ultimately depends on the justification of believing that that practice is reliable", the natural reading, the one on which I have been proceeding, is that it is a necessary condition of beliefs within the practice *being justified* that the higher-level belief in question be justified. But perhaps what Kretzmann meant to say has to do not with what is required for *its being the case* that the beliefs formed within the practice are justified, but rather with what is required for *our being justified* in supposing that those beliefs are justified. On this reading he would be saying that we can be justified in supposing that M-beliefs are (truth-conducively) justified only if we are justified in supposing that MP is a reliable doxastic practice. But that is something that I whole-heartedly accept both in the book and elsewhere. I have been arguing against the claim that M-beliefs' *being justified* depends on the subject's being justified in supposing MP to be reliable.

The above is my response to the main thrust of Kretzmann's paper, but I do want to comment on a couple of smaller points. First, he repeatedly speaks of an argument for the conclusion that many putative experiences of God are veridical as the "main argument of the book". But that argument is only alluded to at the outset and never developed. I freely admit to having suggested it, and it is certainly something that can be discussed. But it gives a very misleading impression of the book to suggest that the book is centrally concerned, or concerned at all, with developing any such argument. What deserves to be called the "main argument of the book" is the argument for the thesis that *M-beliefs can be justified by being based on putative perception of God*.

Second, he contends near the end of his paper that though my claim that "there are no alternatives [to continuing to engage in established doxastic practices] that commend themselves to rational reflection as superior" may tell in favor of the rationality of engaging in SP, it does not provide analogous support to MP. His reason is that while the deliverances of sense perception are mostly [not invariably] coercive, the same is definitely not true of the deliverances of mystical perception. True enough. But my practical rationality argument was based primarily not on ineluctability, but on the point that if a doxastic practice is firmly established, whether in the whole population or in some segment thereof, and if it is not discredited in the ways I spell out in the book, there is no rational basis for abstaining from it (or trying to abstain) rather than sticking with it.

Reply to Audi

I greatly appreciate and approve of Audi's enterprise of extending and improving what I was up to in PG. It is his remarks on the phenomenology of the

perception of God that I find most interesting. Let me first acknowledge the justice of his remarks on my treatment of what I called "indirect perception" of God. He correctly points out that in my portrayal the perception of something in the natural world functioned only as a "facilitator" of a direct perception of God, rather than as something "through" or "in" which God is perceived. But though the rest of his comments are powerfully suggestive and instructive, I find myself unable to accept them without qualification.

Audi says, again quite correctly, that in my example of sensory indirect perception there is a functional dependence of the way the indirect object appears on the way the direct object appears. He seems to take this as a necessary condition for the application of the term 'indirectly perceive'. And, as he says, my examples of indirect perception of God do not satisfy this condition. I don't want to get hung up on terminological squabbles here, but let me report that I am disinclined to restrict 'indirect perception' in this way. Audi suggests that "a case in which a musical melody carries with it a kind of echo, or even a voicing, of God's speaking to one" might be a case in which this condition is satisfied. An even better case would be "hearing" God speaking to one in reading the Bible or hearing a sermon, where what one perceives God as saying to one is functionally dependent on what the preacher or the book "says". But I shouldn't want to restrict 'indirect perception of God' to such cases. This category naturally covers any case in which one could properly be said to experience God "in" something in the natural world, including what Hopkins was talking about in the passages Audi quotes. In this connection I must report some bafflement at Audi's intuitions about 'in' and 'through'. Sometimes he associates 'through' with "facilitated" perception and sometimes with indirect perception. As I use the term I perceive X through perceiving Y whenever it is by virtue of perceiving Y that I perceive X. This will cover all ways of perceiving God except the direct way. As for 'in' I am content to use it whenever it is natural to speak of perceiving X in Y. This leaves me with a somewhat simpler scheme than Audi's. There is (1) maximally direct perception of God with no sensory trigger, (2) direct perception of God with such a trigger (Audi's "facilitated" perception), (3) indirect perception of God (seeing God "in" something else). Then outside this scheme as not strictly constituting a perception of God is (4) seeing something *as* related to the divine in a certain way (Audi's aspectual theistic perception).

At the risk of further muddying these waters, and since Audi has treated us to those powerful verses of Hopkins, I will respond in kind with Wordsworth, as an example of the difference between (3) and (4). First the familiar lines at the beginning of Wordsworth's famous "Ode on Intimations of Immortality".

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream
 The earth, and every common sight,
 To me did seem
 Appareled in celestial light.

This is clearly (4). There is no suggestion that God was presented “in person” to the poet’s consciousness. Now, by contrast, consider these lines from “Tintern Abbey”.

And I have felt
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy
 Of elevated thoughts, a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man...

Here it seems clear that the poet is reporting perceiving God *in* the natural objects mentioned.

I have no objection whatever to the second part of Audi’s remarks concerning doxastic practices. He may have missed the point that I too, in the book, express the view that “parity, in the relevant sense of sharing the general features of doxastic practices, does not entail epistemic equality; it implies epistemic credentials of the same kind, perhaps...but not necessarily of the same breadth of strength”. In more than one place I acknowledge that the *prima facie* justification conferred on M-beliefs by mystical experience is less than that conferred on sense perceptual beliefs by sense experience, though I admit that I did not emphasize or highlight the point as much as I might have.

I do have some questions about Audi’s treatment of faith, and of the relation of justification and rationality, in his last section. Unfortunately I don’t have time to go into these topics properly, and I will have to content myself with a few scattered remarks. Audi suggests that “Alston’s religious epistemology can be applied even more successfully to the rationality of theistic beliefs than to their justification”. This may well be true. But there are two reasons for my concentration on justification. First, on Audi’s own account, justification has to do with a belief’s “resting on” certain grounds. And my central concern was with the epistemic upshot of a belief’s resting on a certain kind of ground—mystical experience. Second, I felt that the question of whether the way of forming M-beliefs I was discussing is a *reliable* doxastic practice is of primary interest. And I take it from what he says that Audi agrees that a belief can be rational even if not formed in a way that makes it likely to be true.

It is not clear to me that, as Audi suggests, there is a straightforward contrast in terms of degree of stringency between requirements for rationality and for justification of beliefs. I am inclined to think that the requirements for rationality are in some way less stringent but in others more stringent than those for justification. To be sure, this depends on our concept of justification (and on our concept of rationality as well, though this may be less variable), and I am even less inclined than I was when I wrote *Perceiving God* to suppose that

there is an unique subject matter here.¹¹ If we take justification but not rationality to be truth-conducive, that is one way in which it is easier for a belief to be rational than justified. On the other hand, if rational belief requires that one's reasoning satisfies objective standards of good reasoning, whereas justification, on this point, requires only that one has done as well as could reasonably be expected of one, on this point justification might be easier to attain. And so, I suggest, the matter is more complicated than Audi would have us believe.

Audi also suggests that my framework might be used to discuss the justification and/or rationality of religious *faith*, in a sense of that term in which it does not, even with a propositional object, entail belief. He and I have had a number of discussions about his concept of "non-doxastic propositional faith", and I am still hazy about it. However I am clear that he has advanced some intuitively compelling examples. I am particularly intrigued with the idea that I might have faith that a student would complete her dissertation by a certain date, without really believing that she will. Whether there is a viable and important concept lurking behind such examples remains to be seen (at least by me). If so, the application of my epistemology, and others as well, to the assessment of non-doxastic propositional faith is an important task, but, I fear, one for the future.

ENDNOTES

¹For more on this see my "Epistemic Desiderata", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. LIII, no. 3, September, 1993.

²At least one I supposed to be intuitive.

³In thinking about rationality I have been much influenced by Audi's work on this subject, though he would dissent from a great deal of what I have just said.

⁴"Knowledge of God", in *Faith, Reasons, and Skepticism*, ed. Marcus Hester (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); "On Knowing That We Know: The Application to Religious Knowledge", in *Christian Perspectives on Religious Knowledge*, ed. C. Stephen Evans & Merold Westphal (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1993).

⁵This quote inside the quote was my statement of what I chose *not* to do.

⁶The focus in the book is on a particular form of MP, the practice within the Christian community of basing Christian M-beliefs on putative perceptions of God (CMP). But I will ignore that further complexity in this discussion.

⁷It is presumably his neglect of this argument that is responsible for what seems to me a wholly gratuitous claim that "the kind of acceptance of a doxastic practice as reliable that is dictated by considerations of practical rationality amounts simply to *acting as if* that practice is reliable".

⁸I should also mention one other reason Norman gives for the abandonment charge, *viz.*, that on my own account of justification, justification requires that there be no sufficient

overriders of *prima facie* justification, and overriders include not only beliefs of the subject but also facts that the subject “could ascertain fairly easily”. He then claims that this latter clause is “plainly deontological”, thus introducing a deontological element into my chosen brand of justification. It is not plain to me that this is a deontological element, but even if it is, that feature plays only a peripheral role. The non-deontological requirement for *prima facie* justification (being based on an adequate ground) is still in the center of the picture. Moreover, I could simply omit the rider in question without significant damage to the concept.

⁹Thinking of the charge that I have not provided *any* justification for supposing that MP is reliable in the light of passages like these, it looks as if, ironically enough, Norman has bought my concept of justification to such an extent that he does not recognize anything else as being real justification.

¹⁰*Epistemic Justification* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell U. Press, 1989), pp. 210-11.

¹¹See “Epistemic Desiderata” for a radical view on this.