Can Belief in God Be Rational If It Has No Foundations?

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Central to Christianity, Judaism, and Islam alike is the conviction that we as human beings are called to believe in God—to trust in him, to rely on him, to place our confidence in him. To believe in God is our fundamental human obligation. Central also is the conviction that only by believing in God can the deepest stirrings of the human heart be satisfied. Duty and fulfillment here coalesce.

But is it rational for us to believe in God? Is it rational for us to place our confidence in him? Can a person believe in God without performing a *sacrificium intellectus*? One cannot belong to the intelligentsia of modern Western society without having that question come to mind.

Presumably it is rational for a person to believe *in* God only if it is rational for him to believe various propositions *about* God—in particular, that there is such a being as God. The rationality of trusting someone presupposes the rationality of believing that that person exists. And among the objections to Christian belief, as well as to Judaic and Muslim, characteristic of the modern intelligentsia is the objection that it is no longer rational, if ever it was, to believe that God exists. We must choose between treasuring our rationality and assenting to God's existence. We cannot have it both ways. The rational person will have to make his way in the world without supposing that there exists any God in whom he *could* trust. Kafka's castle is empty. The noises we hear are only echoes of our own voices.

Tacit in this characteristically modern objection to theistic conviction is the assumption that if it is not rational to believe some (affirmative) proposition about God, then one ought not believe it. There are a good many theologians in this century who—if I read them correctly—would contest this assumption. They would agree with the objectors that believing that God exists requires throwing overboard the demands of rationality, but they would nonetheless refuse to go along with the conclusion

of the objectors that we ought then to cease believing that God exists. Divine revelation, they say, has entered our existence, coming as an assault to our rationality. Accordingly, we must now choose by what principle we shall live our lives—reason or revelation. The believer has thrown in his lot with revelation, and rationality no longer has any claim on him. It is a matter of utter indifference to him whether his theistic convictions are rational. Rationality is only a siren tempter.

In my judgment this is a profoundly misguided response to the challenge I have cited, expressing an untenable view as the place of rationality in our human existence—at least when rationality is understood as I shall be understanding it in this discussion. In my judgment the charge that it is irrational to believe that God exists must be taken seriously by the theist. This is one of the theses I shall be defending.

But first let me formulate more amply the objection to theistic conviction which I see as characteristic of the modern Western intellectual. The objection can be seen as presupposing a challenge, call it the *evidentialist challenge* to theism. And 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. Someone who holds that this challenge is correct and, in addition, holds, concerning a given theistic believer, that the believer does not meet the challenge, may then be said to accept the *evidentialist objection* to the theistic convictions of that believer.

It is the evidentialist objection to theistic belief that I wish to consider in this paper, and especially the evidentialist *challenge* that lies behind the objection. My interest is not so much in whether the challenge is being met by some believers or in whether it can be met; my interest is more in whether the challenge itself is tenable.

An explanation is immediately in order. In what follows I shall often speak of someone *believing* that God exists rather than of someone *accepting the proposition* that God exists. I shall mean the same thing. Often "believe" is used in such a way that from the fact that someone believes something it follows that he does not know it. That is not how I shall be using it. When I speak of someone believing something, it is not implied that he does not know it. For—to say it once again—I shall use "believe" as a synonym for "accept." And surely if someone knows so-and-so, he accepts it.

As I have already tacitly suggested, the evidentialist challenge and objection to theistic conviction are not distributed evenly throughout mod-

ern society. They are found mainly among the intelligentsia. And as I have already said, they are peculiarly modern. One finds them not at all—or hardly at all—before the latter half of the seventeenth century. A corollary of this latter fact is that evidentialist apologetics, construed as the attempt to meet the challenge by offering arguments for various (affirmative) theistic propositions, thus to legitimize theistic belief, or by showing that the arguments theistic believers already have are sound ones, thus to show that theistic belief is legitimate, are also unique to modernity. Until the modern age, Christian apologetics consisted mainly, not in giving or defending arguments *for* Christianity, but rather in answering objections *to* Christianity. It is when the challenge to Christianity is the evidentialist challenge, and when one attempts to cope with the challenge by meeting it or showing that it has already been met, that the offering of "evidence" becomes relevant to the apologist's traditional endeavor. When Tertullian, in his famous and eloquent *Apology,* undertook to answer the objection (among others) that Christians were responsible for the decline in the economy of the Roman Empire, he did not undertake to offer arguments for the truth of Christianity, let alone for the truth of theism.

I

John Locke was among the first to formulate articulately the evidentialist challenge to theistic belief. It will help to set the stage for our discussion if we consider what he says. Reason, says Locke,

> as contradistinguished to faith, I take to be 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.
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> *Faith,* on the other side, is the assent to any proposition, not thus made out by the deductions of reason, but upon the credit of the proposer, as coming from God in some extraordinary way of communicating. This way of discovering truths to men we call *revelation.* (*An Essay concerning Human Understanding,* IV,18,2)

Reason is *reasoning* for Locke, and clearly he thinks of it as one among others of our belief-forming processes.[1] Faith is another belief-forming process. It, by contrast, consists in accepting something "as coming from God."

Does that mean, then, that reasoning plays no rightful role in faith? Not at all, says Locke. It is worth quoting him at some length on this point.

> But since God, in giving us the light of reason, has not thereby tied up his own hands from affording us, when he thinks fit, the light of revelation in any of those matters wherein our natural faculties are able to give a probable determination, revelation, where God has been pleased to give it, must carry it against the probable conjectures of reason; because the mind, not being certain of the truth of what it does not evidently know, but only yielding to the probability that appears in it, is bound to give up its assent to such a testimony, which, it is satisfied, comes from One who cannot err, and will not deceive. But yet it still belongs to reason to judge of the truth of its being a revelation, and of the signification of the words wherein it is delivered. Indeed, if any thing shall be thought revelation which is contrary to the plain principles of reason and the evident knowledge the mind has of its own clear and distinct ideas, there reason must be hearkened to as a matter within its province: since a man can never have so certain a knowledge that a proposition, which contradicts the clear principles and evidence of his own knowledge, was divinely revealed, or that he understands the words rightly wherein it is delivered, as he has that the contrary is true: and so is bound to consider and judge of it as a matter of reason, and not swallow it, without examination, as a matter of faith. (*Essay*, IV,18,8)
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> Whatever God hath revealed is certainly true: no doubt can be made of it. This is the proper object of faith; but whether it be a divine revelation or not, reason must judge; which can never permit the mind to reject a greater evidence to embrace what is less evident, nor allow it to entertain probability in opposition to knowledge and certainty. (*Essay*, IV,18,10)[2]

It is self-evident, Locke suggests, that whatever God has revealed is true. This is something on which we can base our reasoning, our inferring. It is not something for which we must *first* have evidence. But that a given deliverance from the mouth or hand of a human being is a revelation of God is something for which, if we are to be entitled to believe it, we must have other beliefs which constitute adequate evidence for it. If the *content* of the purported revelation is self-evidently or demonstrably false, then we must reject it as a revelation of God. If, on the contrary, it only has the status of improbability, then we must weigh up that improbability against the probability that it is a revelation from God. (Presumably it *is* such "weighing-up" that Locke has in mind. On this point he is not wholly explicit.)[3]

Why is this so? If we are entitled to accept without argument that what God reveals is true, then why may we not also accept without argument that the New Testament, say, is a revelation from God? Because,

says Locke, we would then have no way of showing that "the enthusiasts" are irresponsible in their believings. If we affirm the evidentialist challenge, we can then go up to the enthusiast and say, "Give us the evidence that your purported revelations are in fact from God." If he cannot comply, then we can justly conclude that he is believing irresponsibly.

> But to examine a little soberly this internal light and this feeling on which they build so much: The question here is, How do I know that God is the revealer of this to me; that this impression is made upon my mind by his Holy Spirit, and that therefore I ought to obey it? If I know not this, how great soever the assurance is, that I am possessed with, it is groundless; whatever light I pretend to, it is but *enthusiasm.* Does it not then stand them upon, to examine upon what grounds they presume it to be a revelation from God? (*Essay,* IV,19,10)[4]

Of course, this challenge to the enthusiasts is also a challenge to Christian believers: if they do not believe on the basis of adequate evidence that the Bible is God's revelation, they too must give up their religion. But Locke was confident that in the case of Christianity the challenge could be met. He himself undertook to meet it in his book *The Reasonableness of Christianity, As Delivered in the Scriptures.*

Thus far we have found Locke saying that a condition of someone's being entitled to accept so-and-so as a revelation from God is that he has inferred from other beliefs of his, which constitute adequate evidence for it, *that it is* a revelation from God. In fact Locke contends that the connection between this entitlement and this condition is even tighter. He holds that the firmness with which one accepts this proposition must be proportioned to the strength of the evidence for it.

> We may as well doubt of our own being, as we can whether any revelation from God be true. So that faith is a settled and sure principle of assent and assurance, and leaves no manner of room for doubt or hesitation. Only we must be sure that it is a divine revelation, and that we understand it right: else we shall expose ourselves to all the extravagancy of enthusiasm, and all the error of wrong principles, if we have faith and assurance in what is not divine revelation. And therefore in those cases, our assent can be rationally no higher than the evidence of its being a revelation, and that this is the meaning of the expressions it is delivered in. If the evidence of its being a revelation, or that this is its true sense, be only on probable proofs, our assent can reach no higher than as assurance or diffidence, arising from the more or less apparent probability of the proofs. (*Essay,* IV,16,14)

All that has been said thus far presupposes the acceptability of believing that God exists. What, on Locke's view, is the condition for that? Before a person is entitled to believe that such-and-such is a deliverance from God, he must have inferred from adequate evidence that it *is* that. But what about his prior belief that there *is* a God? Must it too be supported by adequate reasoning if the person is to be entitled to hold it?

Yes indeed, on Locke's view. God, says Locke, "has given us no innate ideas of himself." He "has stamped no original characters on our mind, wherein we may read his being." That God exists is not self-evident to us. Yet,

> having furnished us with those faculties our minds are endowed with, he hath not left himself without witness; since we have sense, perception, and reason, and cannot want a clear proof of him as long as we carry ourselves about us. Nor can we justly complain of our ignorance in this great point, since he has so plentifully provided us with the means to discover and know him, so far as is necessary to the end of our being, and the great concernment of our happiness. But though this be the most obvious truth that reason discovers, and though its evidence be (if I mistake not) equal to mathematical certainty; yet it requires thought and attention, and the mind must apply itself to a regular deduction of it from some part of our intuitive knowledge, or else we shall be as uncertain and ignorant of this as of other propositions which are in themselves capable of clear demonstration. (*Essay,* IV,10,1)

Locke then proceeds to argue that each of us knows intuitively that he himself exists, and that "nothing can no more produce any real being, than it can be equal to two right angles." From these two premises he concludes that there must be an eternal being, and he goes on to argue that that eternal being has the characteristics of God. He seems to be of the view that people do in fact believe that God exists on the basis of this argument, and that what he has done is only formulate the argument and show that it is sound.

II

I have said that the evidentialist challenge and objection to theistic conviction, along with the attempt to cope with that challenge by practicing evidentialist apologetics, are peculiar to modernity. Some will question this claim by pointing to the practice of natural theology among the medievals. The reply is that natural theology was a different project from

evidentialist apologetics – even though the same arguments may occur in both.

We may take Anselm and Aquinas as typical. Anselm's motto was that of Augustine: *credo ut intelligam.* In the opening pages of his *Proslogion* he makes clear what that means for him. His goal in the book was to come to know, or understand, what already he believed. "I have written the following treatise," he says, "in the person of one who strives to lift his mind to the contemplation of God, and seeks to understand what he believes." (Preface) "For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand." (Chapter 1)

Knowing a proposition was in general, for Anselm, a state of mind preferable to taking that proposition on faith. Hence Anselm's goal in constructing the ontological argument, as the remainder of the *Proslogion,* was to bring it about that what already he believed he now would know. In his view an essential component in this process of transmuting belief (faith) into knowledge (understanding) was constructing proofs.

Aquinas was no different on these matters. He explicated the concept of knowledge somewhat more rigorously than did Anselm: a person knows only what is self-evident to him or evident to his senses, or what has been demonstrated from such. Likewise he conceives faith somewhat more rigorously, as accepting propositions on the authority of God the revealer. But the goal of natural theology for Aquinas was exactly the same as for Anselm: to transmute what already one believed into something known. Demonstration was seen as indispensable to this transmutation project.

Taking Anselm and Aquinas as typical, it becomes clear, then, that the medievals were doing something quite different in their project of natural theology from meeting the evidentialist challenge. They were engaged in the transmutation project of altering belief (faith) into knowledge. No one in their milieu was claiming that it was permissible to believe that God existed only if one did so on the basis of adequate evidence, and with a firmness not exceeding the strength of the evidence. (Nonetheless Aquinas did, in chapter 6 of his *Summa Contra Gentiles,* defend the thesis "that to give assent to the truths of faith is not foolishness even though they are above reason.")

III

A variety of questions can be posed concerning the evidentialist challenge to theistic conviction. (Let us henceforth call this *evidentialism.*) One could ask, for example, what reasons the evidentialist has for holding his

position. That is what Alvin Plantinga does in his essay "Reason and Belief in God" in this volume. He there suggests that common to all, or almost all, evidentialists is a certain "model" of rationality, a certain criterion for the application of the concept *rational*—the criterion being that of classical foundationalism. Plantinga then goes on to argue that that criterion is unacceptable. I judge Plantinga to be correct in both these contentions. Almost always when you lift an evidentialist you find a foundationalist. But the careful formulation of classical foundationalism by a number of philosophers in recent years has been accompanied by a growing consensus that it is not a plausible criterion of rational belief.[5]

Another way of considering the tenability of evidentialism would be to formulate and defend a criterion of rational belief alternative to that of classical foundationalism, and then to test the truth of evidentialism by reference to this criterion. That is the approach I shall follow in this essay. If successful, it moves us a stage beyond where Plantinga's discussion leaves us. His discussion puts us in the position of seeing that the most common and powerful argument for evidentialism is classical foundationalism, and of seeing that classical foundationalism is unacceptable. But to deprive the evidentialist of his best defense is not yet to show that his contention is false. It is this next step that I shall undertake to execute.

But before a criterion can be offered for the application of the concept of rational belief, we must be sure that we have clearly in mind the concept itself. And here our situation is surely that our English word "rational" is unusually protean, having a large number of different, albeit connected, senses. We speak of many different sorts of things as rational: rational plans, rational strategies, rational actions, rational persons, rational remarks, rational beliefs. And a large number of different claims are made about these different sorts of entities when we say of them that they are rational. Here it is only rational and nonrational *beliefs* that we will have in view. And the fact that the evidentialist connects the nonrationality of a belief with the obligation not to hold it delimits for us the senses of "rational" relevant to our discussion.

An illuminating way to begin is to consider the following passage from John Locke:

> however faith be opposed to reason, faith is nothing but a firm assent of the mind; which if it be regulated, as is our duty, cannot be afforded to anything but upon good reason, and so cannot be opposite to it. He that believes, without having any reason for believing, may be in love with his own fancies; but neither seeks truth as he ought, nor pays the obedience due to his Maker, who would have him use those discerning faculties he has given him, to keep him out of mistake and error. He that does not this to the best of

> his power, however he sometimes lights on truth, is in the right but by chance; and I know not whether the luckiness of the accident will excuse the irregularity of his proceeding. This at least is certain, that he must be accountable for whatever mistakes he runs into: whereas he that makes use of the light and faculties God has given him, and seeks sincerely to discover truth by those helps and abilities he has, may have this satisfaction in doing his duty as a rational creature, that though he should miss truth, he will not miss the reward of it. For he governs his assent right, and places it as he should, who, in any case or matter whatsoever, believes or disbelieves according as reason directs him. He that does otherwise, transgresses against his own light, and misuses those faculties which were given him to no other end, but to search and follow the clearer evidence and greater probability. (*Essay,* IV,17,24)

What Locke assumes here is that there are duties and responsibilities pertaining to our believings. Just as it is not true that "anything goes" in our actions regarding other human beings, so too it is not true that "anything goes" in our believings.

What must at once be added, however, is that our believings may be subject to duties and responsibilities in a number of different *respects.* (This is a point made by Plantinga in "Reason and Belief in God.") Perhaps there are right and wrong ways of acquiring beliefs. Perhaps there are right and wrong ways of maintaining beliefs. Perhaps some beliefs we ought not to hold because of their injurious effects on our psyches. Perhaps sometimes we hold beliefs with more firmness than we ought (or with less firmness that we are permitted). And if there are obligations pertaining to believings at all, presumably there are some pertaining simply to the having or not having of beliefs.

It is clear that at the center of Locke's attention, and at the core of the evidentialist challenge as he issues it, is this last phenomenon: Some beliefs we ought not to *have.* Some we ought to *have.* Some we are permitted to *have.* Some we are permitted not to *have.* For the sake of convenience we might call these *possession obligations* with respect to our believings (and correlatively, *possession permissions*).

But Locke is also concerned, though less prominently so, with the fact that sometimes we hold beliefs more firmly than we ought—and correspondingly, less firmly than we are permitted. We may call such obligations as these *firmness obligations* with respect to our believings.

Not only does Locke assume that there are duties pertaining to our believings; he also makes a suggestion as to the ground of these obligations —or at least, of the possession obligations. He assumes that we human beings are capable of governing and regulating our assent with the pur-

pose in mind of getting more amply in touch with reality—of increasing our number of true beliefs and of avoiding or eliminating false beliefs. And his thought then is that possession obligations with respect to our believings consist in our obligation to so govern our assent as to get more amply in touch with reality. Fundamentally, then, he thinks of possession obligations along utilitarian lines: they consist in the obligations we have to get more amply in touch with reality, getting more amply in touch with reality being taken, in this context, as a good-in-itself.[6]

It may be remarked, parenthetically, that failure to live up to one's possession and firmness obligations and presumably to all other obligations pertaining to one's believings, when all other things are equal, amounts in Locke's view to disobedience to one's Maker. Living up to them, other things being equal, amounts to obedience. Possession and firmness obligations with respect to our believings are rooted in accountability to our Creator.

Now it would seem that if we have the ability to govern our believings with the goal in mind of getting more amply in touch with reality, then we also have the ability to govern them with other goals in mind. Perhaps we can to some extent govern them with the goal in mind of increasing our peace of mind, or with the goal in mind of staying out of trouble with our government. Correspondingly, perhaps we also have obligations for the governance of our believing with respect to some such goals. Kierkegaard thought, for example, that when it came to religious matters, we ought to hold such beliefs as would most heighten the passion in our lives. To distinguish such obligations from those pertaining to governance with the goal in mind of getting more amply in touch with reality, let us call these latter *reality-possession obligations.*

It is clear that Locke connects the concept of rationality he has in mind with the obligations that pertain to our believings—call such obligations our noetic obligations. The rational belief is the belief which does not violate our noetic obligations. The rational belief is the belief which, by reference to our noetic obligations, is permitted, is justified. But if obligations pertain to our beliefs with respect to different dimensions of those beliefs, the question comes to mind whether Locke is perhaps not working with a somewhat more constricted concept of rationality than this catchall concept. I think it clear that he is. For Locke the rational belief is the belief in accord with the reality-possession and firmness obligations that pertain to one's believings. Rationality consists in not violating *those* duties concerning one's believings. To be rational in one's believings amounts to doing as well in the firmness and reality-possession dimensions of one's believings as can rightly be demanded of one. Just as the morally permissible action is the action in accord with the norms for moral action, so

the rational belief is the belief in accord with the firmness and reality-possession norms for believing.[7]

Rationality, thus conceived, is connected with truth. Locke sees clearly, though, that the connection is indirect. Rationality is not to be identified with truth in beliefs, nor is it to be thought that the two coincide. Someone may light on truth by chance; about that Locke says, ironically, "I know not whether the luckiness of the accident will excuse the irregularity of his proceeding." Conversely, someone may seek "sincerely to discover truth by those helps and abilities he has" and "may have this satisfaction in doing his duty as a rational creature," while yet he misses truth. He will not miss his reward, though, says Locke. For he will, so far forth, have done his duty.

Truth, though a merit in beliefs, is not an unfallible mark of praiseworthiness in the person, nor is falsehood such a mark of blameworthiness. By contrast, rationality in beliefs *is* an infallible mark of praiseworthiness in the person; irrationality, of blameworthiness.[8] Rationality, unlike truth, is a derivative merit in beliefs, deriving its meritoriousness from merit in the believer—that merit being present in the believer, however, only if he pursues as he ought the merit of truth. The merit of rationality in our beliefs is grounded in the proper governance of our assent. Noetic rationality is grounded in practical rationality.

IV

Locke assumes—rightly in my judgment—that we have an obligation to govern our assent with the goal in mind of getting more amply in touch with reality. Likewise he assumes—also rightly, I think—that this goal has the two sides of seeking to increase our stock of true beliefs and of seeking to avoid or eliminate false beliefs. Let us scrutinize these assumptions a bit, beginning with a consideration of that latter assumption. To do so it will be helpful to consider Roderick Chisholm's formulation of our intellectual duties. "Each person," he says, "is subject to two quite different requirements in connection with any proposition he considers: (1) he should try his best to bring it about that if that proposition is true then he believes it; and (2) he should try his best to bring it about that if that proposition is false then he not believe it."[9]

Now suppose one took the second of these two requirements seriously but not the first. That is, suppose one had it as one's sole goal to snare as few falsehoods in one's net of belief as possible. What strategy would then be appropriate? Quite obviously the strategy of undertaking to believe as few as possible of the propositions that cross one's mind.

There is nothing better than this that one could do (though even this might well not achieve the result of eliminating all falsehoods, for many of the things we believe, we do so ineluctably). If one wants above all to avoid catching trash fish, one goes fishing as little as possible. But though a serious pursuit of this strategy would be likely to diminish significantly the number of falsehoods believed, that merit would be purchased at the cost of missing out on a great deal of truth. And surely that is an important deficiency in this strategy of incredulity. The extent to which one had gotten in touch with reality would be severely limited.

Suppose, on the other hand, that one took the first of these two requirements seriously but paid no attention to the second. Suppose one had it as one's sole goal to snare as many truths as possible in one's net of belief. What strategy would then be appropriate? Quite obviously the strategy of undertaking to believe as many as possible of the propositions that come to mind—with this proviso: if one cannot believe both a proposition which comes to mind and its contradictory, then one strives to believe that member of the pair, if either, for which one has better evidence. There seems no better strategy than this strategy of gullibility for achieving the goal. If catching as many edible fish as possible is one's only goal, one nets fish indiscriminately—unless one has to make a choice here and there. But though the serious pursuit of this strategy would increase the number of truths one believes, it is also likely to increase substantially one's stock of false beliefs. And that, surely, is a deficiency. False beliefs mark a failure fully to get in touch with reality.

So both goals are necessary: the goal of increasing one's stock of true beliefs and the goal of avoiding or eliminating false beliefs. Accordingly, more subtle strategies will have to be adopted than either that comprehensive strategy of incredulity or that comprehensive strategy of gullibility.

Of course, once we allow that the pursuit of both these goals is necessary for getting in touch with reality, we must also acknowledge the possibility that in specific cases the two goals will yield conflicting results. Upon doing one's best to ascertain whether a proposition is true or false, one may discover that the evidence pro and con is equally balanced. In such a case one has to weigh up which is the worse outcome—that of missing out on truth or that of falling into error.

Yet another matter, pertaining to our obligation to get more amply in touch with reality, must be raised at this point. With respect to which propositions does one have an obligation to bring it about that one believes them if they are true and disbelieves them if they are false? The answer Chisholm gives is *any proposition one considers*. But that seems hardly correct on a couple of counts. Suppose, upon looking at a bean

bag, that the thought crosses my mind that it contains exactly 2019 beans. Suppose I then consider that proposition. Is it really the case, in ordinary circumstances, that I then have an obligation to bring it about that I believe this if and only if it is true? Is not the acquisition of true, and the avoidance of false, belief on this matter so unimportant to my life that I have no such obligation—not even *prima facie*? Of course propositions are not in general inherently trivial or important. There may be tasks which *you* have that make it important for *you* to seek to bring it about that you believe there are 2019 beans in the bag just in case there are. But I have no such tasks.

Neither is it the case that our obligation to attain truth pertains just to the propositions we *consider*. Some of the propositions we have never considered are nonetheless propositions that we ought to believe. It may be that we *ought* to have considered them—and having considered, to believe. Or alternatively, it may be that though we have no obligation to *consider* them, nonetheless we do have an obligation to *believe* them. After all, there are ways of coming to believe propositions which do not require *considering* those propositions. Many of the things we believe, and ought to believe, have never been *considered* by us. Considering is involved in only some modes of belief acquisition.

But concerning which propositions, then, do we have reality-possession obligations? Concerning the ones we each do in fact believe, I would say. But what beyond that? Chisholm is correct in his assumption that the propositions with respect to which we have such obligations are only a limited number and that they vary from person to person. We do not have obligations of rationality concerning reality's entire stock of propositions. And the ones each of us does have are always situated obligations. They are contextual obligations. What determines the variance, however, is not that which each person happens to consider. But if not that, what then?

It is difficult, indeed, to formulate an absolutely general answer to this question. And for our purposes here it is unnecessary to try. But worth observing is that one important factor determining the variance is the person's tasks and obligations in general. Some of my tasks and obligations are such that it becomes essential for their implementation that I seek the truth on certain matters and govern my beliefs accordingly. Of course each person's configuration of tasks and obligations is unique. That, then, is what accounts for a good deal of the variance in the obligations of rationality, and in noetic obligations generally. At the same time, it is true that these configurations do not differ in all respects from person to person, which accounts for a good deal of the commonality in obligations of rationality.

A characteristic error of epistemologists has been to suppose that our noetic obligations are disconnected from our other obligations. The truth is that in good measure the particular shape which the obligation to attain truth and avoid falsehood assumes for each person is determined by his obligations in general. Over and over our general obligations require, for their fulfilment, that we seek to get more amply in touch with some segment of reality. Perhaps there are some matters on which a given person ought to seek to attain true belief and eradicate falsehood whether or not those beliefs will serve some *praxis* of his. But that is not in general true. Our noetic obligations arise from the whole diversity of obligations that we have in our concrete situations. In this way, too, rationality is connected with *praxis*.

One last point. It seems in general not true that each of us has the obligation with respect to certain propositions *to do his best* to bring it about that he believes them if and only if they are true. Doing one's best may be more than can rightly be asked of one – well beyond the call of duty. Indeed, doing one's best with respect to some may interfere with doing one's duty with respect to others. What seems rather to be the case is that each of us has the obligation with respect to certain propositions *to do as well as can rightly be demanded* of us so as to bring it about that we believe them if they are true and disbelieve them if they are false.

Of course, the concept of doing as well as can rightly be demanded of one is, unlike that of doing one's best, a normative concept. This, then, is a second point at which we have found it necessary to introduce normative concepts and considerations where Chisholm had only nonnormative ones – the other being at that point where a determination is made concerning the propositions to which our obligations of rationality pertain.

V

The applicability of the concept of rationality that we are in the process of elucidating presupposes that we human beings are capable of governing our assent, in particular, capable of governing it with the goal in mind of getting more amply in touch with reality. The very image of governing suggests, however, that there are various belief-forming processes or "mechanisms" present in us. A ruler's governance of his subjects does not consist of calling them into existence. It will be important for our subsequent purposes to look more closely at these two phenomena of human nature, that of belief-forming "mechanisms" and that of the capacity for governing these.

It has to be said that the main representatives of the epistemological

tradition give us little help here. Though of course they all take for granted the existence of belief-forming "mechanisms" in human beings, they devote scant attention to this phenomenon as such. A characteristic result of this oversight is that the rules they give for "the direction of the mind" prove limited and myopic in application.

To these generalizations Thomas Reid, the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher, is the great exception. It was Reid's great genius to perceive that if we want to understand knowledge and rationality, we cannot talk only about the abstract relations holding among propositions, along the way making unreflective assumptions about the "mechanisms" which form our beliefs. We must look head-on at the psychological "mechanisms" involved in belief formation. Articulate epistemology requires articulate psychology.

At the very foundation of Reid's approach is his claim that at any point in our lives we each have a variety of dispositions, inclinations, propensities, to believe things—*belief dispositions* we may call them. What accounts for our beliefs, in the vast majority of cases anyway, is the triggering of one and another such disposition. For example, 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 all disposed, upon having certain sensations in certain situations, to have certain beliefs about the external physical world. Upon having certain other sensations in certain situations, we are all 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* disposition, as Reid rather fetchingly called it.

To the belief dispositions of which Reid took note we may add those rather ignoble belief dispositions of which Marx and Freud made so much: our disposition to believe what gives us a sense of security, our disposition to believe what serves to perpetuate our positions of economic privilege, our disposition to adopt clusters of beliefs which function as ideologies and rationalizations to conceal from our conscious awareness the ignobility of those other dispositions, and so on.

The belief dispositions which I have cited thus far are all dispositions which produce their effects *immediately.* We do not normally infer, from other beliefs of ours which we take as good evidence for it, that a person is before us. Rather, upon having certain sensations in certain situations we just immediately believe this. Likewise our memory experiences produce immediately in us certain convictions about the past. Remembering does not consist in going through a process of inferring a belief about the past from other beliefs.

There is, though, another disposition in us of which these remarks

are not true. In addition to the features of our constitution thus far mentioned, we are all so constituted that upon judging some proposition which we already believe as being good evidence for another proposition not yet believed, we are disposed to believe that other proposition as well. To this disposition Reid assigned the name of reason. Let me call it the *reasoning disposition.* What the tradition called *mediate* beliefs can now be singled out as those produced by the reasoning disposition, and what it called *immediate* beliefs, those produced by some one of our other belief dispositions.

Not only does Reid call to our attention the various belief dispositions which we actually do, at a given moment in our lives, possess; he also speaks about the origins of these dispositions. It was his conviction, in the first place, that somewhere in the history of each of us are to be found certain belief dispositions with which we were simply "endowed by our Creator." They belong to our human nature. We come with them. They are innate in us. Their existence in us is not the result of conditioning. It must not be supposed, however, that all such nonconditioned dispositions are present in us at birth. Some, possibly most, emerge as we mature. We have the disposition to acquire them upon reaching one and another level of maturation. He says, for example:

> Perhaps a child in the womb, or for some short period of its existence, is merely a sentient being: the faculties by which it perceives an external world, by which it reflects on its own thoughts and existence, and relation to other things, as well as its reasoning and moral faculties, unfold themselves by degrees; so that it is inspired with the various principles of common sense, as with the passions of love and resentment, when it has occasion for them. (*An Inquiry into the Human Mind*, V,7)

But in addition to our innate, nonconditioned, belief dispositions, we adults all have a number of belief dispositions which we have acquired by way of conditioning. Reid calls attention to a certain range of these as being belief dispositions induced in us by the working of the *inductive principle.* The inductive principle is not itself a belief disposition; it is an innate, nonconditioned disposition for the acquisition of belief dispositions. Reid says, "It is undeniable, and indeed is acknowledged by all, that when we have found two things to have been constantly conjoined in the course of nature, the appearance of one of them is immediately followed by the conception and belief of the other." (*Inquiry,* VI,24) And he adds that it is "a natural, original and unaccountable propensity to believe, that the connections which we have observed in times past, will continue in time to come." (*Inquiry,* II,9) An example that Reid offers, of a belief

disposition inculcated in us by this inductive principle of our native constitutions, is this: "When I hear a certain sound, I conclude immediately without reasoning, that a coach passes by. There are no premises from which this conclusion is inferred by any rules of logic. It is the effect of a principle of our nature, common to us with the brutes." (*Inquiry,* IV,1)

Reid's thought concerning the workings of the inductive principle can readily be stated in the language of contemporary psychology. What accounts for some of our beliefs is that a process of classical, or Pavlovian, conditioning has taken place. A regular "schedule" has been established in one's experience between phenomena of type A and phenomena of type B, and now one has the disposition, upon experiencing a phenomenon of type A, to believe that there is also a phenomenon of type B. Hence one has acquired a new belief disposition. It is the disposition to acquire belief dispositions in this manner that Reid calls *the inductive principle.*

Vast numbers of our noninnate belief dispositions are not acquired in this way, however, but rather by way of what we would nowadays call *operant* conditioning, working on our native belief dispositions. In Reid's own thought this comes out most clearly in what he says about the credulity principle. It is a moot point whether the credulity disposition is present in us at birth. But very little maturation is required for it to put in its appearance. "The wise Author of nature," says Reid, "hath planted in the human mind a propensity to rely upon human testimony before we can give a reason for doing so. This, indeed, puts our judgment almost entirely in the power of those who are about us in the first period of life; but this is necessary both to our preservation and to our improvement. If children were so framed as to pay no regard to testimony or authority, they must, in the literal sense, perish for lack of knowledge." (*Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man,* VI,5)

It was Reid's view that the working of the credulity principle "is unlimited in children" (*Inquiry,* VI,24), in the sense that whatever a child apprehends someone as asserting, he believes. But shortly the principle begins to be "restrained and modified," as Reid puts it. What induces the restraint and modification is the discovery that sometimes the principle produces false beliefs in us. "The principle of credulity is unlimited in children, until they meet with instances of deceit and falsehood." (*Inquiry,* VI,24) Notice: a person's conviction that some of the beliefs produced in him by testimony are false does not *destroy* his disposition to give credence to testimony. Rather, it results in that disposition's becoming restrained and modified. The credulity principle becomes more finely articulated.

We can think of this too in terms of modern conditioning theory.

The original, unqualified credulity principle is altered by way of operant conditioning. One's discovery, or conviction, that certain of one's beliefs thus produced are false, functions as an *aversive* consequence, diminishing to the point of extinguishing the workings of the disposition in such cases. That new, slightly altered disposition is then in turn submitted to the same sort of testing, with the person's convictions, concerning some of the beliefs thus produced, that they are false, again functioning as aversive consequences, and his independent discovery that others are true, functioning as reinforcing consequences, until yet another alteration takes place; and so on and on. Eventually the person is no longer disposed to believe what persons of type P speaking under conditions of type C say on topics of type T, whereas other sorts of testimony he is disposed to believe more strongly than ever (and perhaps more strongly disposed to believe than ever).

I find it surprising that Reid does not emphasize that we are constantly acquiring new belief dispositions by the working of operant conditioning on our other innate belief dispositions as well, not only by its working on our credulity disposition. Reid himself notes about memory that we tend to place more confidence in our memories the more vivid, or distinct, they are. But this is almost certainly a matter of learning. And there is much more that can be said than just this. Other things being equal, one learns to place more confidence in one's memories of yesterday's occurrences than of occurrences in the distant past. One learns to place less confidence in the details of one's memory when one was agitated and upset than when one was observing carefully and calmly. And so on. In short, gradually one learns that one's memory is reliable on certain sorts of matters under certain sorts of conditions, and unreliable on other matters or under other conditions; that modifies the belief dispositions attached to one's memory experiences. The revision can be seen as a selective strengthening and weakening of the original disposition, weakening to the point of disappearance for some cases.

The same sort of thing happens in the case of perception. When, as a child, I rode down a paved road on a hot summer day, I often believed that there was water standing on the road ahead, in the distance, because it definitely looked that way. Now I no longer believe that, even when I am in those same circumstances. For I have learned that it *looks* that way as the consequence of heat waves rising from the pavement without really *being* that way. In general what can be said is this: our native belief dispositions all go through stages of increasing articulation as the result of our experience that some beliefs produced by these dispositions are false, others true.

With this picture in mind of our belief-forming dispositions, let us

now look at our capacities for governing the workings of these "mechanisms"—in particular, at our capacities for governing their workings with the goal in mind of more amply getting in touch with reality. As we now move to this second level, we leave Reid behind.

To a great extent it is in our power to *govern* the workings of our belief dispositions—not now to alter them, but to govern their workings. And often it is because it is in our power to govern their workings that we are culpable for our believings and our failings to believe. For one thing, it is often in our power to determine whether a triggering event for some disposition will occur. For example, it was in my power to go over and look at the tire; if I had, the sensations received would have triggered in me the belief that the tire was flat. There are also more subtle and interesting examples than ones like this, however. Often it is in our power to bring it about that we will *notice* something when in situations where that is noticeable. For example, 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 likely that one will. It is for this reason that police officers are often right in holding us accountable for not knowing what the speed limit in a given village is. So too one can try, or fail to try, to *remember* something; and making an effort to remember often makes it much more likely that one will. For this reason one can often rightly be held accountable for not remembering something—for not having correct beliefs on a certain matter. (Strictly speaking, this last case is a case, not of having it in one's power to determine whether a certain belief disposition will be triggered, but of having it in one's power to determine whether a certain belief is *sustained.* Believing is not an event but an enduring state. A full discussion of the matter would systematically distinguish between factors *initiating* such a state and factors *sustaining* such a state.)

Not only is it often in our power to determine whether a certain triggering event for some belief disposition will occur; likewise it is sometimes in our power, even when an event does occur that characteristically would trigger the disposition, to determine whether or not the disposition will become operative. We can *resolve* or *determine* that a disposition will not become operative, and sometimes at least such a resolution is effective. For example, one can resolve to resist the workings of one's credulity disposition and come to no belief as to what transpired in marital disputes until one has heard out both parties; in the absence of the resolution one would have believed the tale of the first party. Or again: one can resolve to resist the workings of one's memory disposition and no longer to believe that what one seems to remember as having happened when one was in situations of great stress did in fact happen. So, too, one can resolve to resist the workings of one's reasoning disposition and hold no belief

about the size of one's checking-account balance until one has gone over the figures at least twice. Obviously, repeatedly resolving to resist the operation of some belief disposition in certain sorts of situations may eventually result in that disposition's being extinguished for those sorts of cases.

The resolve to resist the activation of a belief disposition, even in the presence of an event which, were it not for this resolve, would trigger the disposition, may sometimes take the form of leaving one, not in a state of suspension of belief, but in a state of continuing to believe as one did. Suppose, for example, that a certain belief of Vern's is deeply embedded in the whole structure of his personality, his life-style, his career, and so on. It gives him great comfort. Or he has spent twenty years of work in physics on the premise that this is true. In short, he has deep motivations for hanging on to this belief. Suppose that then someone comes along and presents him with evidence that this belief is false. It would seem that in some such cases it is in Vern's power to accept the evidence and change his mind, but equally in his power to resist changing his mind. That is to say, it is true not merely that in some such cases his mind *is changed* but also that in some such cases it is in his power *to change* his mind, or at least to *let* his mind *be changed.* It is in his power to acknowledge the force of the evidence, give up his resistance to the conclusion, and change his mind; but equally it is in his power to cling stubbornly to what he has always believed and treat the evidence as not conclusive.[10]

And now what about the case so dear to the heart of the classical epistemologist: the case of a person considering some proposition and then deciding to believe it, or to disbelieve it? Perhaps the *considering* is here unimportant. Does it ever happen that we *decide* to believe something? Must a full picture of our belief-forming processes, and of our capacity to govern them, have this sort of case in mind as well?

Perhaps so. Of course it may be that some cases of resolving to resist the working of some belief disposition are also cases of deciding to believe or not to believe so-and-so. Perhaps that is true of the last case considered, the case of Vern. But be that as it may, let us consider a case in which a resolution to resist is not in the picture. Suppose that one is a member of a jury and has agonized long hours over which of two conflicting witnesses to believe on a certain matter. May it be that eventually one *decides to believe* what one of them said and to disbelieve what the other said? One could have made the opposite decision, but as a matter of fact this is what one decides to believe. In some cases of conflicting testimony one just finds oneself persuaded that one witness is speaking truth and the other not. May it be that in other cases one decides? If so, that decision is probably accompanied by a decision to the effect that the *evidence* for the veracity of the one witness is slightly stronger than the evidence for

the veracity of the other. This would then be a second point at which a decision to believe occurs in such a case.

So the full picture that emerges is something like this: 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 (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.

It must be clearly noted that rationality, thus conceived, is in good measure person specific and situation specific. When I was young, there were things which it was rational for me to believe which now, when I am older, it is no longer rational for me to believe. And for a person reared in a traditional tribal society who never comes into contact with another society or culture, there will be things rational to believe which for me, a member of the modern Western intelligentsia, would not be rational to believe. Rationality of belief can only be determined in context—historical and social contexts, and, even more narrowly, personal context. It has long been the habit of philosophers to ask in abstract, nonspecific fashion whether it is rational to believe that God exists, whether it is rational to believe that there is an external world, whether it is rational to believe that there are other persons, and so on. Mountains of confusion have resulted. The proper question is always and only whether it is rational for this or that particular person in this or that situation, or for a person of this or that particular type in this or that type of situation, to believe so-and-so. Rationality is always *situated* rationality. (Some thinkers in the modern world seem to have concluded from the fact that a nonsituated theory of rationality is untenable that the concept of rationality itself must be discarded. They have become historicists. We have seen, and will see, no reason whatsoever to draw this conclusion.)

VI

And now it is easy to see why the theist cannot simply dismiss out of hand the charge that his theistic convictions are nonrational. Nonra-

tionality in one's beliefs is the sure sign that some of one's obligations have been violated. Accordingly, a person cannot meet the charge that one of his beliefs is nonrational by announcing that he has chosen not to live by the canons of rationality, anymore than he can meet the charge that he has acted immorally by announcing that he has chosen not to live by moral obligations. He can meet it only by *contesting* the charge.

There is yet a deeper reason why the theist, at least if he is a Christian, Jew, or Muslim, cannot just dismiss out of hand the demands of rationality. Such a person will always perceive our human obligations as related, in one way or another, to the will of God. God wills that we do what we ought to do. When a theist believes nonrationally, he acts in violation of the will of the very God in whom he believes—unless it be the case that there are extenuating circumstances.

However, it is also easy to see now that the charge lodged against the theist, that he holds his theistic convictions nonrationally, is not a *decisive* charge, in the sense that it does not *follow* from the nonrationality of the belief that he ought to give up believing that. We can see, in short, that one of the two principal components in the evidentialist challenge to theistic conviction is untenable.

The most obvious, and perhaps least important, point to make here is that what grounds the nonrationality of some beliefs is not *what* is believed but *how* it is believed: it is believed with the wrong degree of firmness. Hence, from being told that someone holds some one of his beliefs nonrationally one cannot infer that he ought not to believe that.

But second, the nonrationality of a belief—as, following Locke, we have conceived it—results from the fact that one has not done as well as one ought to have done in governing one's belief-forming "mechanisms" toward the goal of getting more amply in touch with reality. But as we have already seen, one can presumably conduct such governance with other goals in mind; and perhaps with respect to such alternative governance there are also obligations. If so, it may well be that though a given belief represents inadequate governance with respect to the goal of getting more amply in touch with reality and is, accordingly, a nonrational belief, it represents *adequate* governance with respect to some other goal. Further, it may well be that governance with respect to that other goal has priority over governance with respect to getting more amply in touch with reality. We in the West for several centuries now have assumed that nothing could take priority in belief governance over our obligation to expand our hold on truth and to avoid or eliminate falsehood in our beliefs. It is difficult to perceive, though, what defense could be given for this. And if the assumption is in fact false, then here is a second way in which it may come

about that a person is permitted to believe something that is not rational for him to believe. Maybe in some cases it is even true that he *ought* to believe it in spite of its nonrationality.

Lastly, there is more to life than governing aright the *what* and the *how* of one's assent—and so too there is more to life's obligations than the obligation to govern aright one's belief-forming "mechanisms." Sometimes these other obligations of life take precedence over those governance obligations, again with the result that one is permitted to believe something that is not rational to believe. Perhaps I did not calculate my bank account figures carefully enough for me to believe rationally that the balance is $53.09. But perhaps I had to choose between spending more time calculating and taking my son to see the Phillies play in the World Series. In this conflict of obligations I may have made the right decision, to calculate quickly and go off to the game. Our obligation to govern our assent aright often takes time to carry out, and sometimes the time taken is wrongly taken from the time needed to carry out some other obligation. For this reason, too, from the fact that someone holds a belief nonrationally it does not in general follow that he ought not to hold it.

When we speak of a person as *justified* in holding some belief, often, perhaps always, what we mean is that the person is *permitted* to hold that belief. So another way of putting the point above is that a person may be justified in holding a belief even though he does not hold it rationally. What is true, of course, is that if a person holds a belief rationally, then *other things being equal,* he is justified in holding it—or to put the same point in other words, then he is *prima facie* justified in holding it. But other things may not be equal, with the result that though he holds it rationally, he is nonetheless not justified in holding it. It will sometimes be convenient in what follows to say of the person who believes some proposition rationally that he is *rationally* justified in holding it—from which it does not follow that he is justified *tout court* in holding it.

Now that we have introduced the word "justified" into our discussion, a few cautions should be sounded. For one thing, *being justified* in one's belief that so-and-so is different from *justifying* one's belief that so-and-so. To be justified in believing that so-and-so is to be in a certain *state.* To justify one's belief that so-and-so is to perform a certain *action.* Most of the beliefs we are justified in holding are such that we never justify them—never even attempt to do so. Probably most are such that we could not do so—depending, of course, on the standards adopted for success in performing the action of justifying.

Second, we speak sometimes of one proposition justifying another, but that too is a different matter. One proposition justifies another when

it is good evidence for the other. But justification, on the concept I am using, is not a relation between propositions. It is a relation between a *person* and some one of his *believings*.

Last, an unjustified belief of a person is, not one that he ought to give up, but one that he ought not to have had. Thinkably, now that he has it, he *cannot* give it up. Similarly, the immoral act is not the act that the person ought to undo, nor, always, the act that the person ought to cease doing. It is the act that the person ought not to have done.

VII

Up to this point we have been trying to get before us, as clearly as possible, that concept of rational belief which is characteristically used in the evidentialist objection to theistic conviction. It is not at all an idiosyncratic concept. Though no doubt there are other concepts attached to our English word "rational," there can be little doubt that this is one of them. It is time now that we move to the second stage of our project — that of trying to formulate a *criterion* for the correct application of this concept.

Given our discussion thus far, we can now put somewhat more precisely the contention of the evidentialist. His claim is that theistic conviction, to be rational, must be arrived at, or at least reinforced, by the process of inference. Each of us has a wide variety of belief dispositions, innate and learned. From this whole array the evidentialist picks out the *inference* mechanism as that which must evoke or reinforce theistic conviction if it is to be rational. Only that will do. And of course he adds that the premises from which the inference proceeds must in fact provide adequate evidence for the conclusion.

This provocative contention raises all sorts of questions as to which sorts of beliefs may serve as premises for the inferences. What sorts of propositions are candidates for evidence? With respect to which sorts of propositions must theistic beliefs be evident? Obviously theistic propositions are themselves not eligible. Which ones are? These questions pose many interesting issues, some of which are explored by Plantinga in his essay in this volume. For our purposes we can set them off to the side. For we wish to test evidentialism by matching it up against a criterion for rational belief.

The criterion I propose will actually be a criterion for a somewhat narrower concept than that of rationality as thus far delineated. Here I shall not at all attempt to specify conditions for permissible *firmness* of conviction. I will attempt only to specify conditions for rationally accept-

ing a proposition at all. We are looking simply for the justifying circumstances for the acceptance of propositions.

A criterion which has recently entered the arena of philosophical discussion, after the collapse of classical foundationalism, is that of *reliabilism.* Reliabilism says, roughly, that a given belief of a person is rationally justified if and only if that belief was produced or is sustained in him by a reliable process or mechanism. Just as some thermometers are reliable and some unreliable, so too some belief-producing and belief-reinforcing mechanisms are reliable and some unreliable. Our rationally *justified* beliefs are those produced or reinforced by the reliable mechanisms. Here is how Alvin Goldman, one of the first proponents of the theory, states its basic contention:

> Granted that principles of justified belief must make reference to causes of belief, what kinds of causes confer justifiedness? We can gain insight into this problem by reviewing some faulty processes of belief-formation, i.e., processes whose belief-outputs would be classed as unjustified. Here are some examples: confused reasoning, wishful thinking, reliance on emotional attachment, mere hunch or guesswork, and hasty generalization. What do these faulty processes have in common? They share the feature of *unreliability:* they tend to produce *error* a large proportion of the time. By contrast, which species of belief-forming (or belief-sustaining) processes are intuitively justification-conferring? They include standard perceptual processes, remembering, good reasoning, and introspection. What these processes seem to have in common is *reliability:* the beliefs they produce are generally true. My positive proposal, then, is this. The justificational status of a belief is a function of the reliability of the process or processes that cause it, where (as a first approximation) reliability consists in the tendency of a process to produce beliefs that are true rather than false.[11]

One thing to be kept in mind in reflecting on this theory is that it is not fully accurate to speak simply of reliable and unreliable mechanisms. The situation is rather that a given mechanism is reliable under certain conditions and for certain ranges of inputs and outputs and is unreliable under other conditions and for other input ranges and output ranges. Another thing to be kept in mind is that a mechanism which has produced mainly truth under certain conditions and for certain ranges of inputs and outputs is not yet, thereby, a *reliable* mechanism with respect to such conditions and ranges. For it may be that though it is unreliable for such conditions and ranges, yet, as luck would have it, when it did in fact operate under those conditions and within those ranges, it pro-

duced mainly truth. The mechanism which is genuinely reliable for given circumstances and ranges is the one which *would* produce mainly truth under such circumstances and for such ranges. Reliability is an implicitly counterfactual concept.

Perhaps the main challenge facing the reliabilist in the articulation of his theory is that it is not the least bit evident how we are to pick out the mechanism which produced a certain belief – indeed, it is not the least bit evident that in general there is such a thing as *the* mechanism. What, for example, is the mechanism in the case of the child in the primitive tribe who believes something on the say-so of his elders? Is it that of believing something on the say-so of someone else? Of believing something on the say-so of one's elders? Or believing something on the say-so of *those* elders? If the reliabilist theory is to be applicable, we must be told how, for a given belief, we are to pick out the mechanism that we are to scrutinize for reliability, and how we are to select the sort of conditions, and the input/output ranges, with respect to which that mechanism would have to yield mainly truth for the belief to be rationally justified. I understate the point when I say that this is a *daunting* challenge.

But even without that challenge having been met, I think it can be seen, relying on our ordinary intuitive notion of these matters, that reliabilism, no matter how formulated, will not be a correct criterion of rational belief. In the first place, though it is true that a good many more of the beliefs that we intuitively feel to be rationally justified will turn out justified on this criterion than on the criterion of classic foundationalism, nonetheless, the criterion is still too constrictive. For there are unreliable mechanisms which yield rationally justified beliefs. Suppose, for example, that some belief is produced by an unreliable mechanism, but the agent has no good reason to believe it unreliable – and, more strongly yet, has adequate reason to believe that it was produced by a reliable mechanism. Whatever instructions the reliabilists eventually give us, telling us which mechanisms under which circumstances we are here to check out for reliability, it seems possible that such a situation would arise. And if it does, is not the person in whom that unreliable process produces that belief rationally *justified* in thus believing? Is he not doing as well in the use of his belief-governing capacities, toward the goal of getting more amply in touch with reality, as can rightly be demanded of him? If a scientist develops an instrument for acquiring certain information, and if all the evidence available to him points to the reliability of that instrument, even though it is in fact unreliable, is he not rationally justified in believing the deliverances of that instrument? Was he anywhere remiss in the use of his assent-regulating capacities? What more could rightly have been demanded of him?

Just as there can be rationally justified beliefs produced by unreliable mechanisms, so too there can be rationally unjustified beliefs produced by reliable mechanisms. Suppose that some belief of some person is produced by a reliable mechanism, but all the evidence available to the person points to the conclusion that it is unreliable. Suppose, in fact, that the evidence is so strong that the person would be rationally unjustified in believing the mechanism reliable. It would seem that such a situation could in fact arise; if it did, the person would not be rational in continuing to believe the deliverances of that reliable mechanism. Perhaps the case is just the reverse of that considered in the preceding paragraph: A scientist has developed an instrument for obtaining information on certain matters, but on the evidence available to him, the results are largely in error. In fact, however, they are highly accurate—something which is not discovered until, say, fifty years later. If the scientist, against the evidence for his discovery's unreliability, nonetheless continues to believe its deliverances, surely he is rationally unjustified in his belief.

Last, suppose that some belief is produced and sustained in a person by a reliable process, but in this particular case the person has adequate evidence that the belief is false—not evidence that the process producing it is in general unreliable, just evidence that in this particular case the belief produced is false. Surely in this case too the person would not be rational in believing what was in fact reliably produced. And there can be such cases: I may believe something on the say-so of what I know to be a thoroughly reliable authority; nonetheless, I may acquire evidence that in this particular case what I thereby came to believe was mistaken. If so, I ought to give up my belief. (This would be a case in which one reliable process yields the belief B*p*, and another the belief B*not-p*.) If I fail to do so, I would not be using my belief-governing capacities as well as can rightly be demanded of me.

For these reasons, reliabilism is incapable of filling the void left by the demise of classic foundationalism.[12]

As I now propose to offer my own criterion for rationally justified belief, we must keep clearly in mind the project on which we are engaged. Our project 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 we are 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. We are after, not rules for the direction of the mind, but a criterion for separating one's rational beliefs from one's nonrational beliefs.

At the outset a few words should be said about the "ought implies can" principle in its application to beliefs. A rather natural formulation

of this principle is that if it is not in a person's power at a given time to cease from believing a certain proposition, then he is rationally justified in believing that proposition. But probably most beliefs are of this sort; I cannot just up and decide to believe that I am not now awake. On the other hand, most of the beliefs a person has at a given time are such that there are some things he *could have done* such that if he had done them, he would not then have the belief. And sometimes these are things he *should have done*. Exactly when they are that is by no means easy to say, however.

The connection between beliefs, volition, and justification is a large dark area, and it would seriously distract me from my main purpose here to enter that area so as to be able to say exactly what the "ought implies can" principle comes to in the area of belief. I think we all feel intuitively that it does come to something. But what exactly that something is, is surely going to prove difficult to say. Let us suppose, though, that some explanation of "could not have" is possible, and let us suppose that some qualifications can be added, so that it turns out true that if a person could not have refrained from believing *p*, then he is rationally justified in believing *p*. Let us then call any belief of a person which, in that sense and with those qualifications, is one he could not have refrained from believing an *ineluctable* belief of his. And let us call the remainder of his beliefs his *eluctable* beliefs. My concern here will be to formulate a criterion for rationally justified *eluctable* beliefs.

One way to get hold of the central contention of the criterion I wish to propose is to note the structure of the objections I have lodged against the reliabilist criterion. The objections were of this sort: If a person has *adequate reason* to cease from some one of his beliefs, then he is rationally unjustified in holding it even if it was produced in him by a reliable process. And if a person *lacks adequate* reason to cease from some one of his beliefs, then he is rationally justified in holding it even if it was produced in him by an unreliable process. The phenomenon of *adequate reason to cease believing* was central in my objections. I suggest that this phenomenon is in fact the central determinant of rationality in beliefs.

Another way to get hold of the theory's central contention is to return to something that Reid said. It will be remembered that Reid thought that there is in all of us a *credulity disposition*—a disposition to believe what we apprehend people as telling us. At first, on Reid's view, this disposition is undifferentiated and unarticulated—as children we believe whatever we apprehend anyone 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.)

Says Reid: "when our faculties ripen, we find reason to check that propensity to yield to testimony and to authority, which was so necessary and so natural in the first period of life. We learn to reason about the regard due to them, and see it to be a childish weakness to lay more stress upon them than reason justifies." (*Essays on the Intellectual Powers,* VI,5)

Thus it is Reid's view that we are *prima facie* justified in accepting the deliverances of the credulity disposition until such time as we have adequate reason in specific cases to believe the deliverances false, or until such time as we have adequate reason to believe the deliverances unreliable for certain types of cases. Our situation is not that to be rationally justified in accepting the deliverances of the credulity disposition we need evidence in favor of its reliability. Rather, we are rationally justified in accepting its deliverances until such time as we have evidence of its *un*reliability for certain types of cases. The deliverances of our credulity disposition are innocent until proved guilty, not guilty until proved innocent.

So, I suggest, it is in general—with one important exception to be mentioned shortly. A person is rationally justified in believing a certain proposition which he does believe unless he has adequate reason to cease from believing it. Our beliefs are rational unless we have reason for refraining; they are not nonrational unless we have reason *for* believing. They are innocent until proved guilty, not guilty until proved innocent. 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?

The exception to which I alluded was this: Suppose that someone has undertaken to alter some native belief disposition, or to cultivate some new belief disposition, for perverse reasons, or for reasons having nothing to do with getting in touch with reality. The extent to which such undertakings, such resolutions, can be successful seems to me severely limited. But no doubt they sometimes have their effect. For example, it may well be that if some person undertakes to disbelieve everything another says, not because of his experience that what the other says is often false, but rather because of his hostility to that person, this will eventually result in his granting the speech of that person less credibility than otherwise he would—*and less than he ought.*

Above I affirmed the innocent-until-proved-guilty principle for beliefs. Here we are dealing with noninnocent belief *dispositions.* And it seems evident that the outcomes of a noninnocent disposition should not be accorded the honor of innocence until their guilt has been proved.

I suggest that, from the standpoint of rationality and its governing

goal of getting in touch with reality, the only acceptable reason for undertaking to revise one of one's belief dispositions is that one justifiably believes it to be unreliable. (It is to be remembered here that many of our belief dispositions *get* revised by conditioning; we do not *undertake* to revise them.) If one undertakes to revise it for some other reason, and succeeds, then the disposition, with respect to the points of revision, is no longer innocent with respect to rationality. It has been *culpably revised.* Now if a given belief is produced by a culpably revised disposition, and *solely* by such a disposition, then it is not a belief rationally held. Correspondingly, if a person's *not* believing something in a certain situation is due to the working, or the nonworking, of a culpably revised disposition, then his *not*-believing is not rational.

The innocent-until-proved-guilty principle which I have affirmed for beliefs must be understood as applying just to those not produced by culpably revised dispositions. A person may well find himself in the situation where he does not have adequate reason to surrender a belief produced by a culpably revised disposition. Nonetheless the belief is not held rationally, for the disposition producing it was not innocent on this matter.

What we have so far then is this:

(I) A person S is rational in his eluctable and innocently produced belief Bp if and only if S believes p, and it is not the case that S has adequate reason to cease from believing p.

Rationality in one's beliefs does not await one's believing them on the basis of adequate reasons. Nonetheless, the phenomenon of having reasons does play a central and indispensable role in rationality—a rationality-*removing* role.

But formula (I) is only a first approximation. A number of revisions are necessary before we have a satisfactory criterion. First, though, an explanation is necessary of what I have in mind by "adequate reason." Perhaps it can rightly be said of a person who has the belief that he feels dizzy that he has a *reason* for that belief—namely, *his feeling dizzy.* In that case his reason would be a particular event. Perhaps, too, it can rightly be said of a person who believes that he is seeing a red car, in an ordinary case of perception, that he has a *reason* for this belief—namely, *its seeming to him that he is seeing a red car* (that is, his having a red-car-seeing experience). In this case, too, his reason would be a particular event. In short, sometimes the reason for a belief of ours may be the event which caused the belief (the event which triggered the operative disposition).

But when here I speak of "reason," that is not what I have in mind. I do not mean the disposition-triggering event. What I mean by "reason" is to be explained by reference to the workings of Reid's reasoning disposi-

tion. Sometimes what accounts for our believing some proposition *p* is that we believed some other proposition *q* which we judged to be good evidence for *p*. When that occurs, I shall say that the person believes *p for a reason*. And the reason is just the already believed proposition *q*.[13] Someone believes *p* for an *adequate* reason, then, if he believes *p* for a reason, if that reason is evidential support for *p*, and if the conjunction of that reason with the other things *S* believes that are relevant to *p* is also evidential support for *p*. And last, a person *has* an adequate reason for believing *p* if there is some proposition *q* which he believes such that *if* he believed *p* for the reason that *q*, he would believe it for an adequate reason.

It is to be noted that whether a person's belief that *q* provides him with an adequate reason for his believing *p* depends, in general, on the other beliefs that person has. Accordingly, it is never strictly speaking true that the reason on the basis of which he believes *p justifies* him in believing *p*; by itself it does not do that. Suppose, for example, that I believe my brother is on campus, and I do not believe I have ever seen or heard of a close look-alike to him. If I now believe that my brother is standing in the courtyard outside my office, and believe this for the reason that I see someone who looks just like him standing out there, I might very well be rationally justified in my belief. The belief that I see someone who looks just like my brother standing out there might be an adequate reason for believing that my brother is in the courtyard. But suppose now that in addition to all those beliefs I also have the belief that my brother is sitting with me in my office engaged in conversation with me. Then my belief that I see someone who looks just like my brother standing out there in the courtyard would not be adequate reason for believing that he is in the courtyard. If I believed the latter proposition for the reason that the former is true, I would not thereby be rationally justified in believing that latter proposition.

Let us return now to that initial approximation, formula (I). I said that a person is rational in holding some belief of his if and only if it is not the case that among his beliefs there is adequate reason for him to cease from that belief. But this will not quite do. For suppose that though *S* does not have adequate reason to not believe *p*, he *ought to have*. The fact that within the totality of his beliefs there is not to be found adequate reason for him to cease from believing *p* is a fact which itself marks a failure to govern his assent as well as can rightly be demanded of him. For example, perhaps his not having adequate reason to cease from believing *p* is due to the fact that his calculations were done very hastily, when he *knows* that they were done hastily, knows that hasty calculation is a most unreliable method of arriving at truth, and had it in his power

to be less hasty. As a second approximation to a satisfactory criterion we can say this:

> (II) A person *S* is rational in his eluctable and innocently produced belief B*p* if and only if *S* believes *p*, and *S* neither has nor ought to have adequate reason to cease from believing *p*.

This revision of our initial formulation was made in the light of the conviction that sometimes a person ought to have adequate reason to give up some one of his beliefs when in fact he does not. But may it not sometimes be that the converse is true? May it not sometimes be that a person has adequate reason to cease from some one of his beliefs, when in fact he ought not to have? Suppose that the totality of his beliefs does contain adequate reason to cease from believing *p*, but suppose that some of those beliefs he ought not to have. He has them only in violation of his rational responsibilities. If that were altered, the totality of his beliefs would no longer constitute adequate reason to cease from believing *p*. Surely a person in such a situation is in fact justified in believing *p*.

The point is correct, but no emendation is required. For by definition if *S* has *adequate* reason for believing *p*, then within the totality of what he believes there are certain propositions such that if he believed *p* on the basis of those, his doing so would place him in a *prima facie* justifying circumstance with respect to his belief B*p*. But if he is not *prima facie* justified in believing those, then his believing *p* on their basis cannot make him *prima facie* justified in believing *p*. Or so at least I shall assume. I shall assume that a person's believing *p* on the basis of *q* makes him *prima facie* justified in believing *p* only if he is *prima facie* justified in believing *q*. If a person is not justified in holding some one of his beliefs, that defect is passed on to the third and fourth generations of those beliefs that he holds on the basis of that one.[14]

But there are other reasons for revising our formula (II). In making the revisions we shall have to take a fateful step whose full significance will not become evident until later, in section IX.

VIII

Consider the case in which a person has adequate reason to cease from believing *p* but does not realize that he does. This sort of case comes in two versions. It may be that in failing to realize that he has adequate reason to cease from believing *p*, he has failed to use his belief-governing capacities as well as can rightly be demanded of him. There it is—right before his eyes. But he does not realize it. And his failure to realize it

is due to inexcusable absent-mindedness on his part, or haste, or whatever. On the other hand, his failure to realize the nature of his situation may be wholly excusable. The fact that among his beliefs there is adequate reason to cease from believing *p* may be so subtle, or the connections so hard to grasp, that he could not rightly be expected to have noticed it.

It is obvious that these two sorts of cases must be treated differently. The latter leaves his justification in believing *p* unaffected; the former does not. So a third approximation to our desired criterion can be formulated as follows:

(III) A person *S* is rational in some eluctable and innocently produced belief B*p* of his 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*, 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.

One more qualification is required to reach our final formulation. Suppose a person believes *p*, and in addition holds the belief, call it C, that his other beliefs provide adequate reason for him to cease from believing *p*. Suppose also that he is mistaken in that belief C. What does this do to the epistemic status of his belief that *p*?

Note that this type of case comes in three varieties:

(i) The person is mistaken and rationally unjustified in the belief C. The belief C is not rationally permissible for him.
(ii) The person is mistaken but rationally justified in the belief C. It is rationally permissible for him to believe C. But it is not rationally obligatory that he believe it. It is rationally permissible for him not to believe it.
(iii) The person is mistaken in the belief C but would not be rationally justified in ceasing from holding C. It is rationally obligatory that he hold it.

It is obvious that case (i) leaves the status of the belief B*p* unmodified. A person's believing that he has adequate reason to cease from believing *p*, when in so believing he is violating his duties of rationality, does not remove rational justification from his belief that *p*.

It is not so clear what is to be said about case (ii). We are to suppose that a person believes *p* but also happens to hold the belief C that his other beliefs constitute adequate reason to cease from believing *p*. And we are to suppose that he is mistaken, though rational, in that upper-level

belief – rationally permitted to hold it, though not obliged to do so. What is permitted of him in this situation?

Ought he to give up his belief that *p*, a belief which he would be fully rational in holding if he did not also have the belief that he has adequate reason to cease from holding it? Does his permissibly, though mistakenly, having that upper-level belief C that his believing *p* is nonrational put him in the situation where he is no longer rational in holding B*p*? Well, why would it do that? Why is it not equally permissible for him to go the other way and surrender that upper-level belief of his? What reason indeed would there be for his being obliged to go one way rather than the other?

Does that mean, then, that he is permitted to go either way? And what about the possibility that he is permitted to continue to believe both?[15] Without decisively resolving the issue, let me assume for our purposes here that it *is* permissible for him to hang on to his belief that *p* – leaving open the issue of whether this is permissible only if he surrenders the upper-level belief that *p* is not held rationally. There will be no great difficulty in revising our criterion as necessary if this assumption proves incorrect.

Case (iii) clearly does alter the epistemic status of believing *p*, however. If the person is not only justified in believing but also rationally obliged to believe that his other beliefs constitute adequate reason to cease from believing *p*, then he has but one choice: to give up his belief that *p*.

Our criterion then becomes this:

(IV) A person *S* is rational in his eluctable and innocently produced belief B*p* 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.[16]

My central thesis, now, is this: *S* will have done as well as can rightly be demanded of him in the use of his belief-governing capacities toward the goal of getting more amply in touch with reality if and only if all of his beliefs are innocently produced and none of those is nonrational on this criterion.[17]

Throughout I have been assuming that we are rational and nonrational not only in our believings but also in our *not* believings. The criterion for rationally not believing is wholly parallel to that for rationally believing:

(V) A person S is rational in an eluctable and innocently produced case of not believing p if and only if S does not believe p, and either:

(i) S neither has nor ought to have adequate reason to believe p, and is not rationally obliged to believe that he *does* have adequate reason to believe p; or

(ii) S does have adequate reason to believe p but does not realize that he does, and is rationally justified in that.

IX

The criterion I have offered for rationality in beliefs openly and unabashedly makes use of normative concepts in its formulation. Indeed, it makes use of the very same normative concept for whose application it is a criterion. Accordingly, to understand the criterion one must already grasp the concept, and to apply the criterion one must already know how to apply the concept. These features of our criterion will give some readers pause in accepting it. They will feel that what is wanted out of a criterion has not been achieved.

When one's goal is to *introduce* a concept to someone, then of course one must avoid using the concept in one's introduction. That has not been my aim here. I have presumed that we already have the concept of being rational, of being rationally justified in one's beliefs. Earlier in my discussion I made some clarifying comments about that concept, pointing out its connection to responsibilities, in that way trying to make as clear as possible which concept I had in mind. My hope was that thereby the reader either would acquire the concept or would acquire a clearer view of a concept which already he had. Here in this section my goal has been to formulate a criterion for the application of this concept that the reader already has in mind. It is true, of course, that in trying to formulate a criterion for the application of a normative or evaluative concept one may set as one's goal to make use of no normative or evaluative concepts. That has not been my goal. My goal has simply been to find a criterion which is correct and illuminating. Whether or not the criterion itself makes use of the concept for whose application it is a criterion is, in principle, irrelevant to that goal. A criterion which does not make use of the concept may prove unilluminating; a criterion which does make use of the concept may prove illuminating.

In that it uses the very concept for which it is a criterion, my criterion is similar to the now customary way of thinking of necessity: It is

said that a necessarily true (that is, not-possibly-false) proposition is one which is true in all possible worlds. But no one supposes that this formula can be used to introduce the concept of necessity to someone who lacks it; its circularity makes it useless for that purpose. Furthermore, to apply this formula for the not-possibly-false proposition, one must already be able to apply the concept of possibility. Nonetheless, it is evident from the philosophical literature of the last decade and a half that this way of thinking about necessity and possibility has proved extraordinarily illuminating. I intend my criterion to function in a similar way: namely, to provide us with an illuminating way of thinking about rationality and its conditions.

It may be added that reliabilist and foundationalist criteria, if they are to come anywhere near being satisfactory, must also make use of some normative concept. Consider, for example, the reliabilist criterion: *S* is justified in his belief B*p* if and only if *S* does believe *p*, and B*p* was produced (or is sustained) in *S* by a reliable mechanism. Suppose that though B*p* was not produced in *S* by a reliable mechanism, nonetheless *S* believes that it was and is rationally justified in that belief. Surely then *S* would be rational in believing *p*. Suppose, conversely, that B*p* *was* produced in *S* by a reliable mechanism, but *S* ought to believe it was produced by an unreliable mechanism. Surely *S* is then *not* rational in believing *p*.

Or consider the criterion of the classic foundationalist. Suppose that *S* believes *p* on the basis of certain incorrigible and self-evident beliefs of his. And suppose that though these beliefs do not provide adequate evidence for *p*, nonetheless *S* believes they do and is rationally justified in that. Surely then *S* is rational in believing *p*. Suppose, conversely, that those basic beliefs *do* provide adequate evidence for *p*, but *S* ought to believe they do not. Surely then *S* is not rational in believing *p*.

I conclude that any satisfactory criterion for rational belief will have to be not only a *noetic* criterion, making explicit or tacit reference to the beliefs of the person but also a *normative* noetic criterion, making explicit or tacit use of of some such normative concept as that of justification or obligation. In recognition of these facts the criterion I have offered not only takes the phenomenon of *not having adequate reason to surrender one's belief* as the key phenomenon determining rationality; it adds to this an explicitly noetic-normative component.

X

Let me comment briefly on a few other features of the criterion. (1) The criterion does not assist us in sorting out adequate from in-

adequate reasons for refraining from beliefs. If at a certain point one is uncertain as to how to make this discrimination, the criterion will not help to resolve that uncertainty; it will not instruct one to resolve it in a certain way. In that respect the criterion is purely formal. But of course the criterion as a whole is not purely formal. It tells us what relation must obtain between a person and some one of his beliefs for him to be rational in holding that belief. In that way it tells us what to look for when trying to determine whether a certain belief of a certain person is rational. Begin, it says, by scrutinizing that person's beliefs to see whether they contain adequate reason for him to give up the belief in question. This is different from what the reliabilist would say, and different from what the classic foundationalist would say.

It would seem that an adequate reason to surrender a certain belief will always be of one or the other of two sorts: It will be evidence that the proposition believed is false or evidence that the disposition which produced the belief is unreliable (for that sort of triggering event, and that sort of outcome, under such circumstances).[18] If that is so, then the next step to take in fleshing out this criterion is to develop a theory of evidence and a theory of reliable belief-producing dispositions. (Incidentally, if it is true that adequate reasons to cease from a belief often consist of evidence that the disposition accounting for the belief is unreliable, then the reliabilist was on the right track in suggesting that rational justification in beliefs has something to do with reliability of belief-producing mechanisms. What it has to do with it, however, is different from what he thought.)

(2) Given its "innocent-until-proved-guilty" posture, the criterion does not say that only those beliefs which a person holds for reasons are ones which he is rational in holding. Beliefs are induced in us by a variety of dispositions; rationality does not attach only to those produced by our reasoning-disposition. Nonetheless, it may well be the case that many of our beliefs are such that we are not rational in holding them unless we do so for reasons. We must not allow our conviction that this is not true of all beliefs to lead us into supposing that it is true of none.

(3) On the criterion I have offered, a person is rationally justified in all his beliefs until such time as he has acquired certain conceptual equipment and the ability to make use of that equipment. Before that time his system of beliefs may lack a variety of merits, but until, for example, he has grasped (or ought to have grasped) the concept of a reason, he is doing as well in governing his believings as can rightly be demanded of him. Accordingly, there is probably a time in the life of each child when he is rationally justified in all his beliefs. Increase in knowledge makes noetic sin possible.[19]

(4) The criterion offered is clearly not a foundationalist criterion. Fundamental to the foundationalist's vision of the structure of rational belief is the distinction between immediate beliefs and mediate beliefs. As the reader will have surmised, I judge this to be a tenable distinction. And for many purposes it is an important distinction to have in mind. Traditional theories of justified belief and of knowledge, traditional disputes between skeptics and antiskeptics—these often cannot be understood without an understanding of the immediate/mediate distinction. But for a criterion of rational belief the distinction proves otiose. The criterion I have offered is a unified criterion, applying in the same way to mediate and immediate beliefs alike.

Is it then a coherence criterion? Yes, perhaps so. In the central place that it gives to the phenomenon of *no adequate reason to surrender one's belief* it is an example of what John Pollock has called "negative coherence theories." However, in its incorporation of a normative component it goes beyond traditional coherence theories. Perhaps the time has come for us to discard the supposition that the foundationalist/coherentist dichotomy is an illuminating principle of classification.

XI

Frequently an objection of the following sort is lodged against the criterion I have proposed. Suppose 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. But surely he is not.

The truth is that by our criterion he most assuredly is not rational in his belief. The "mechanism" operative in this imaginary case—one may well doubt whether there really is any such "mechanism" and whether anybody really can believe in this fashion, but let that pass—the "mechanism" operative is that of believing what one takes a fancy to. But 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.

XII

Our Reidian approach to epistemology downplays the significance of reasoning. Reasoning is but one among many modes of belief formation. And it is not unique in producing rationally held beliefs. Other "mechanisms" of belief formation produce rational beliefs as well.

Yet in spite of this, *reasons* occupy a central role in the criterion I have offered. Is there not some oddity, some discrepancy, in this? Granted that *having reasons* is not the same as *reasoning*. But they are not unrelated. How does downplaying the role of reasoning fit with emphasizing the role of having reasons?

Well, suppose one wants to dislodge some belief that someone has—perhaps the person just took something on someone else's say-so which one believes to be false. How might one proceed? If it is a matter whose truth can be determined by perception, one might do what one can to put the person in the situation where he himself can determine by perception the truth of the matter. Upon being put in that situation, the person might very well believe the testimony of his senses over the testimony of that other person. He may be so made or conditioned that the perceptual disposition (coupled with the disposition to "see" that the deliverance of the perceptual disposition is in conflict with the deliverance of the credulity disposition) operates more powerfully than the credulity disposition. A hierarchy in the strength of these dispositions would operate in such a case.

Depending on the case, another thing one might try to do is give the person a *reason* for supposing that what was said to him is false. *That* may induce him to give up the belief—the situation again being that whatever are the dispositions behind the reasons, they prove to be more powerful than those which produced and/or sustained the belief in question. Now sometimes when we give someone reasons for believing or not believing so-and-so, we induce new beliefs in that person. Perhaps the person comes to believe things on *our* say-so. Or what we say prods him into "seeing" connections among his beliefs which he had not seen before. In this latter case, even though what we say induces the belief, the person does not accept it on our say-so. Of course, giving reasons for believing or not believing something does not always induce new beliefs in the person. Sometimes one just brings forcefully to the person's attention what he believed anyway. (Maybe he did not *believe* that he believed it; sometimes that is what one changes.)

I think we can see now why reasons have a special status. It may be that some available perceptual experience would dislodge what a person believes on testimony. I, on the outside, may know of the availability of that experience and may see to it that the person has that experience. But how could the person himself be obliged to obtain this experience without so much as believing, or being obliged to believe, that the experience is available? By contrast, if there is amongst his *beliefs* adequate *reason* to surrender that belief of his which he accepted on testimony, then we can demand of him that he take note of that—unless the connections

are too subtle to expect a person of his intelligence to notice them. Reasons have a special status simply because the contents of our minds have a special accessibility to us and ought accordingly to be taken note of. If amongst those contents there are certain beliefs such that if the person becomes fully aware of them and of their connections to that original belief, that original belief (in the absence of culpable resistances) would be inhibited, then he should let that happen. He cannot be expected to range over the whole world in search of what might inhibit his beliefs. He can be expected to range through his own mind, however.

Let us dig deeper yet in these somewhat speculative reflections. Suppose someone believes *p*, and also has an adequate reason *q* to believe *not-p;* and suppose further that the person sees all the logical and evidential connections involved in this. Add to this that the dispositions involved have not been culpably revised. Then his situation is that one innocent disposition yields the belief that *p*, another yields the belief that *q*, and yet another yields the belief that *p* conflicts with *q*. What reason is there in this situation for him to go one way rather than another? Why not give up the belief that *q* and keep the belief that *p*, rather than vice versa? Or why not give up the belief that *p* and *q* conflict?

Usually we have no choice in the matter. We come with various innate belief dispositions. These gradually become revised, and in good measure they are revised because the deliverance of one disposition conflicts with that of another, and the one yields. Gradually hierarchies of forcefulness develop. We trust vision more than testimony in some circumstances and on some matters; we trust one kind of memory, and one kind of perception, more than another; and so on. And these facts of our nature are the end of the matter. Deeper we cannot go. We cannot *show* that the totality of these dispositions leads us to truth. Of course we can rail against these native dispositions and the hierarchies of forcefulness that gradually emerge. We can undertake to revise these for some reason other than that they have proved unreliable. The Christian, though, will have a reason for not thus railing, for accepting our native and naturally developed noetic dispositions as trustworthy. He believes that we have been made thus by a good Creator. (Of course, in this very process the Christian is trusting the testimony of inference.) It is true that he may well acknowledge that some of our dispositions are signs of our fallenness, not part of our pristine nature, so that they are unreliable. The dispositions of which Marx and Freud made so much are examples. But the Christian will trust that the unreliability of such as these will show up.

To some this will look alarmingly slippery. Should we not *establish* the reliability of a belief disposition before we trust it – provided, of course, that we *can* restrain our trust in it? Well, how, if we are going to trust

no belief disposition whatsoever until proved reliable, are we going to prove it reliable? In the very process we shall have to *assume* that some *are* reliable. Alternatively, suppose we acknowledge this fact and, taking for granted the reliability of some, try to establish the reliability of the others by reference to these? But which shall we pick as the touchstones? Surely any choice here, at this fundamental level, will be completely arbitrary.

Perhaps some of the deep motivation of the classical foundationalist comes to light here. Perhaps he thought that he could get around this unavoidable trust in our noetic dispositions as a whole by starting with propositions that we can "see" to be true, and then by reference to these establish the reliability of those dispositions which produce the acceptance of propositions that we do not just "see" to be true. But a fundamental objection arises immediately. Cannot one have the *experience* of "seeing a proposition to be true" when in fact it is false? And cannot one *think* one has this experience when one has some other?

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

XIII

And now at last we can return to our beginning. Can belief in God be rational if it has no foundations? Could a person be justified in believing that God exists (or some other affirmative theistic proposition) without the justifying circumstance consisting in the fact that he believes it on the basis of other beliefs of his which he judges to be good evidence for it? Could a person whose belief that God exists is one of his immediate beliefs nonetheless be rationally justified in that belief? Or is it the case that if our theistic convictions are to be rational, they must be formed or reinforced in us exclusively by the "mechanism" of inference?

People come to the conviction that God exists in the most astonishing diversity of ways. Some pick up their theistic convictions from their parents; presumably it is the credulity disposition which is at work in such cases. Some find themselves overcome with a sense of guilt so vast and cosmic that no human being is adequate as its object. Some fall into a mystic trance and find themselves overcome with the conviction that they have met God. Some in suicidal desperation find themselves saying, "Yes,

I do believe," whereupon they have a sense of overwhelming peace. The evidentialist proposes slicing through all this diversity. One's belief that God exists is rational only if it is formed or sustained by good inference—by inferring it from others of one's beliefs which in fact provide adequate evidence for it. In the light of the criterion proposed, what is to be said about this claim?

What our criterion instructs us to consider is whether it is possible that there be a person who believes *immediately* that God exists, and at the same time has no adequate reason to surrender that belief. Or more precisely, whether there is a person who at the same time neither has nor ought to believe that he has any adequate reason to surrender that belief. Might a person's being in the situation of believing immediately that God exists represent no failure on his part to govern his beliefs as well as can rightly be demanded of him with respect to the goal of getting more amply in touch with reality?

I see no reason whatsoever to suppose that by the criterion offered the evidentialist challenge is tenable. I see no reason to suppose that people who hold as one of their immediate beliefs that God exists always have adequate reason to surrender that belief—or ought to believe that they do. I see no reason to suppose that holding the belief that God exists as one of one's immediate beliefs always represents some failure on one's part to govern one's assent as well as one ought.

However, those abstract and highly general theses of evidentialism no longer look very interesting, once we regard them in the light of the criterion offered. One of the burdens of this paper has been that issues of rationality are always situation specific. Once the impact of that sinks in, then no longer is it of much interest to spend time pondering whether evidentialism is false. It seems highly likely that it is. But the interesting and important question has become whether some specific person—I, or you, or whoever—who believes immediately that God exists is rational in that belief. Whether a given person is in fact rational in such belief cannot be answered in general and in the abstract, however. It can only be answered by scrutinizing the belief system of the individual believer, and the ways in which that believer has used his noetic capacities.

Perhaps a theistic believer who is not of any great philosophical sophistication has heard a lecture of Anthony Flew attacking religious belief, and perhaps he finds himself unable to uncover any flaws in the argument. Or perhaps he has heard a powerful lecture by some disciple of Freud arguing that religious belief represents nothing more than a surrogate satisfaction of one's need to feel secure, and perhaps, once again, he can find no flaw in the argument. It would appear that if this believer has puzzled over these arguments for a reasonable length of time, has talked

to people who seem to him insightful, and so on, and still sees no flaws in the argument, then he is no longer rationally justified in his belief—provided, of course, he does not have evidence in favor of God's existence which counterbalance these. And it makes no difference now by what "mechanism" his theistic convictions were formed in him! By contrast, the person who has never heard of these arguments, and the person who justifiably believes them not sound, is in a relevantly different situation.

It is important to keep in mind here our main earlier conclusion, however. From the fact that it is not rational for some person to believe that God exists it does not follow that he ought to give up that belief. Rationality is only *prima facie* justification; lack of rationality, only *prima facie* impermissibility. Perhaps, in spite of its irrationality for him, the person ought to continue believing that God exists. Perhaps it is our duty to believe more firmly that God exists than any proposition which conflicts with this, and/or more firmly than we believe that a certain proposition *does* conflict with it. Of course, for a believer who is a member of the modern Western intelligentsia to have his theistic convictions prove nonrational is to be put into a deeply troubling situation. There is a biblical category which applies to such a situation. It is a *trial,* which the believer is called to endure. Sometimes suffering is a trial. May it not also be that sometimes the nonrationality of one's conviction that God exists is a trial, to be endured?

XIV

And what, lastly, about the enthusiasts who so vexed Locke? Locke was persuaded that the enthusiasts claiming private revelations were irrational and, accordingly, irresponsible. They were acting in disobedience to their Creator. But if we do not demand of everyone in the field of religion good evidence for their convictions, said Locke, then we will simply have to acknowledge that anything goes. The concept of rational belief will simply have to be discarded. So Locke undertook to provide good evidence for his Christian convictions, and he challenged the enthusiasts to act likewise.

The evidentialist challenge which Locke laid down to the enthusiasts is untenable. But that does not mean that one is speechless in the face of crackpots. It does not mean that anything goes. Rather than demanding evidence from the enthusiast, one offers him adequate reasons for the falsehood of his beliefs. Sometimes he may concede the point and give up his convictions. In other cases, no doubt, he will continue merrily believing. But in this respect the approach implied by our criterion is surely

no worse than Locke's. Locke's issuance of the evidentialist challenge was not noticeably effective in snuffing out British "enthusiasm"!

APPENDIX

A reply to my contention in section IX, that an adequate criterion for rational justification in beliefs will itself have to incorporate, tacitly or explicitly, some normative concept, might go along the following lines. This contention may well be true for the *subjective* concept of rational obligation and justification. Surely it is not true for the *objective* concept. But the standard criteria for rational justification which have been proposed —classic foundationalism, reliabilism, and so on – should be seen as criteria for the *objective* concept. Accordingly, what was said in section IX does not touch these criteria. When these are understood as criteria for objective rational justification, there is no need for them to incorporate some normative concept. The objector might go on to charge that I have served the cause of confusion by failing to distinguish, more sharply than I did, my *no-adequate-reason-for-surrendering* proposal concerning objective rational justification from the normative-noetic qualifications attached so as to make it a criterion for subjective rational justification.

I think it will help to unravel the issues here if we turn, for a moment, from the noetic to the moral domain and consider the arguments of those who call for a distinction between objective and subjective obligation within the field of morality. Consider, for example, what Richard B. Brandt says on the matter in his book *Ethical Theory:*

> The definition of "moral obligation" we have outlined makes it possible for a person to make mistakes about his obligation. He may *think* his feeling of obligation is "objectively justified" when in fact it is not. This seems acceptable; we do think that people are sometimes mistaken about their duty or obligation. . . . Yet there is something wrong, as [an example] will make clear.
>
> [S]uppose a physician examined a patient suffering from allergies in 1920, when nothing was known of allergies. The physician advised and performed a series of operations (on the patient's nose and sinuses, for example) at considerable cost to the patient in suffering and money. Was the physician's behavior consistent with his moral obligations? We certainly incline to say it was. According to our total theory, as described above, however, it seems he did *not* do his duty, since, if he had been fully informed (including information about allergies), he would have felt obligated to treat for allergies.[20]

Brandt goes on to try to unravel this case by distinguishing between an *objective* and a *subjective* sense of "duty" and "obligation." The physician did his duty, says Brandt, if "duty" is used in the subjective sense. He did not do his duty if "duty" is used in the objective sense.

But is this correct? Is it true that, in some (standard) sense of the word "ought," the physician did not do what he ought to have done? I suggest that it is not. There is no (standard) sense of the word "ought" according to which Brandt's physician did not do what he ought to have done. I am assuming that the issue at stake here is not to be unraveled by the distinction between *prima facie* obligation and all-things-considered obligation.

If there were such an objective concept of obligation as Brandt proposes, one could believe and assert that *S* ought to do *y*, while yet with full sincerity advising *S* not to do *y*, praising him if he does not do *y* and blaming him if he does, and treating him as culpable if he does do *y*. This would be so if one used "ought" in the objective sense. For culpability is thought to attach to the subjective concept of obligation but not to the objective. I suggest, however, that there is no such concept of obligation. Our concept of obligation is inextricably connected with how we treat people: with the advice we give them, with our dispensing of praise and blame, with our treating of them as culpable. If one does believe that *S* ought to do *y*, then one cannot with sincerity advise him not to do *y*, or praise him for not doing *y*, or treat him as culpable if he does do *y*. The so-called *subjective* concept of obligation is the only concept of obligation there is.

But can we not simply judge whether the physician's action is or is not enjoined by objective moral law? Certainly we can. But to judge it to be enjoined by objective moral law is to assert, or imply, that he ought to do it. And, once again, one cannot believe that he ought to do it and with sincerity enjoin him not to do it. There is no difference between acting in accord with one's obligation and doing as well as can rightly be expected of one.

There is, indeed, a certain truth which those who make the objective/subjective distinction are trying to get at. In the case of Brandt's example that truth is this: A physician dealing with the same medical case that Brandt's physician was dealing with, but who differed from Brandt's physician *in that he was fully knowledgeable* on all relevant moral and medical facts, would be obliged to act differently from the way Brandt's physician was obliged to act. But quite obviously that does not imply that there is some concept of obligation according to which Brandt's physician is obliged to act as that fully knowledgeable physician would be obliged to act.

Of course, when confronted by Brandt's medical case, we can ask what a fully knowledgeable physician dealing with this medical case would be obliged to do. We can also, if we wish, *stipulate* that sometimes we will use the word "obliged" in such a way that Brandt's physician is "obliged" to do whatever a fully knowledgeable physician dealing with this case would be obliged to do. And we may, if we wish, call this the *objective* sense of "obligation." But that does not tell us what Brandt's physician—who after all is not fully knowledgeable—is obliged to do, using the word "obliged" in its normal English sense. The English word "obliged" is not as a matter of fact used to express that concept.

This analysis of the situation has implications for how we understand standard theories of moral obligation (which are not intentionalistic in character). Such theories should not be viewed as telling us what we—who are far from being fully knowledgeable persons—ought in fact to do. If viewed that way, they are radically deficient. Rather, they are best understood as theories which tell us what a person who is fully knowledgeable on the relevant facts ought to do. To get from that information to what we, in our concrete situations, ought to do, we must in the appropriate way take account of our justified error and ignorance.

Consider, for example, a hedonistic utilitarian who holds that the criterion for right action is the greatest pleasure of the greatest number. Such a theorist does not really have in mind that, of the options that confront a person at a given time, the one which would in fact produce the greatest happiness of the greatest number is the one he ought to perform. Rather, he means something like this: An agent who is fully knowledgeable as to the pleasurable consequences of his various options for action, and as to how the moral law applies to actions having such consequences, ought always to choose that option which yields the greatest happiness of the greatest number. For on the utilitarian's view a fully moral agent will always have it as his goal to bring it about that of those options for action which face him on any occasion, he will perform that one which yields the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

You and I, however, are not fully knowledgeable agents. Furthermore, some of our error and ignorance is justified. Accordingly, even if we have adopted the goal that the utilitarian recommends, it may well turn out that sometimes an alternative which would not yield the most pleasure is nonetheless such that we ought to try to perform it (if we did not try to perform it, given our state of error and ignorance, that would indicate a lack of commitment to the goal); and sometimes an alternative which *would* yield the most pleasure is such that we ought not to try to perform it. Our performing it, given our state of error and ignorance, would indicate that we were not fully committed to the goal of doing what will give the greatest happiness.

In short, it may well be that of some less pleasurable actions it is true that we ought to perform them, and of some more pleasurable actions, that we ought *not* to perform them. But if so, it will not be true that we ought always to do what is (in fact) most pleasure-yielding, and to avoid what is (in fact) less pleasure-yielding. Nonetheless we ought to have it as our goal to make this proposition true: Always we perform (what is in fact) the most pleasure-yielding of the options that confront us.

Similar things are to be said about the obligations of rationality. The person who does in fact have adequate reasons for refraining from his beliefs whenever he ought to have them, and who is fully knowledgeable about the presence and absence of such adequate reasons, ought to surrender a given belief as soon as he has adequate reason to do so. For he, along with everyone else, should have it as his goal to cease believing something as soon as he has adequate reason for doing so—other things being equal. For each proposition p which he believes, he should seek to make it true that he ceases to believe p as soon as he has adequate reason to do so.

But you and I are not such fully knowledgeable epistemic agents. We are often in justifiable error and ignorance on relevant matters. Because of that, there will be propositions we believe for which we have adequate reason to cease believing but which we are nonetheless permitted, even perhaps obliged, to believe; and there will be propositions we believe for which we do *not* have adequate reason to refrain but which we are nonetheless obliged to cease from believing. Almost certainly for each of us there is some proposition p which we believe of which it is not true that we are rational in believing it if and only if we lack adequate reason to refrain. Nonetheless each person should strive to bring it about that there is no proposition which he believes for which he has adequate reason to refrain.

What we learn from the analogy to the moral case is not that the criterion for rational belief which I have proposed is merely a criterion for the subjective sense of obligation. We learn something in the opposite direction: namely, that standard moral theories apply, as formulated, only to a person who is in a certain kind of ideal noetic situation. To apply to us in our factual fallen situations, they would have to take into account what we are and are not rationally justified in believing and in ceasing from believing.

NOTES

1. Sometimes he also includes under reason our faculty for apprehending what is *evident* to us.

2. Cf. *Essay*, IV,19,4: "*Reason* is natural *revelation*, whereby the eternal Father of light, and Fountain of all knowledge communicates to mankind that portion of truth which he has laid within the reach of their natural faculties. *Revelation* is natural *reason* enlarged by a new set of discoveries communicated by God immediately, which reason vouches the truth of, by the testimony and proofs it gives that they come from God. So that he that takes away reason to make way for revelation, puts out the light of both."

3. Compare this passage: "God, when he makes the prophet, does not unmake the man. He leaves all his faculties in their natural state, to enable him to judge of his inspirations, whether they be of divine origin or no. When he illuminates the mind with supernatural light, he does not extinguish that which is natural. 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. Reason must be our last judge and guide in everything. I do not mean that we must consult reason, and examine whether a proposition revealed from God can be made out by natural principles, and if it cannot, that then we may reject it. But consult it we must, and by it examine whether it be a revelation from God or no: and if reason finds it to be revealed from God, reason then declares for it as much as for any other truth, and makes it one of her dictates." (*Essay*, IV,19,14)

4. Cf. *Essay*, IV,18,11: "If the boundaries be not set between faith and reason, no enthusiasm or extravagancy in religion can be contradicted.—If the provinces of faith and reason are not kept distinct by these boundaries, there will, in matter of religion, be no room for reason at all; and those extravagant opinions and ceremonies that are to be found in the several religions of the world will not deserve to be blamed; for to this crying up of faith in opposition to reason, we may, I think, in good measure, ascribe those absurdities that divide mankind. For men, having been principled with an opinion that they must not consult reason in the things of religion, however apparently contradictory to common sense and the very principles of all their knowledge, have let loose their fancies and natural superstition; and have been by them led into so strange opinions and extravagant practices in religion, that a considerate man cannot but stand amazed at their follies, and judge them so far from being acceptable to the great and wise God, that he cannot avoid thinking them ridiculous and offensive to a sober, good man. So that, in effect, religion, which should most distinguish us from beasts, and ought most peculiarly to elevate us as rational creatures above brutes, is that wherein men most often appear most irrational, and more senseless than beasts themselves."

5. I have argued for the rejection of classical foundationalism in Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976).

6. Though in principle there may be other obligations that we have with respect to our believings, it is only these governance obligations of which Locke takes note. They are the only ones relevant to his purpose--as indeed to mine.

7. It is clear from the above that one can attach the word "rational" to

other facets of our noetic obligations than these. Perhaps here is also the place to remark that the word "rational" need not be directly hooked up to obligations but can be used simply to pick out a merit in beliefs concerning which one may or may not have obligation. This is connected with the comments about the concept of justification in note 12 below.

8. Provided the person has, or ought to have, the necessary conceptual equipment. See note 19 below.

9. Roderick Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge,* 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1977), p. 15.

10. There is another analysis of the resistance cases I have cited that ought to be considered. Perhaps the situation is not that the person resists believing, but that he resists acting in appropriate ways on what he does believe. Though I of course acknowledge that there are cases of this sort, it does seem to me that sometimes the resistance is a resistance to the believing. Probably a thorough adjudication between these two analyses would require a perusal of the relevant psychological literature. Such perusal has entered far too little into philosophical epistemology.

11. Alvin Goldman, "What Is Justified Belief?" in George S. Pappas, ed., *Justification and Knowledge* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1979), pp. 9–10.

12. Might it be that the reliabilist, rather than giving a plainly incorrect criterion for rationally justified belief, is formulating a criterion for a different concept of justification than that with which I am dealing? Well, there is evidence that Goldman, for example, *thinks of* the concept of justification differently from how I think of it. He says this: "There may well be propositions which humans have an innate and irrepressible disposition to believe, e.g., 'Some events have causes'. But it seems unlikely that people's inability to refrain from believing such a proposition makes every belief in it justified." ("What Is Justified Belief?" p. 4) Now if a certain belief of a person really is ineluctible, then his holding that belief is no indication that he has failed to use his belief-governing capacities as well as can rightly be demanded of him; for one cannot rightly demand of a person what he cannot do. Accordingly, on the concept of justification with which I have been dealing, such a person is clearly justified in his belief, contrary to what Goldman says. So may it be that the philosophical literature presents us with two different concepts of rationally *justified belief*—not merely various criteria for *one* concept, but two different concepts for which theorists attempt to offer criteria? The one would be a normative concept. A person is (rationally) justified in believing *p* just in case in doing so he conforms to certain obligations that bear on him. And a reasonable assumption is that if he could not have failed to believe *p,* then he is not obliged not to do so. On this concept a person is, roughly speaking, rationally justified in his beliefs just in case he is doing as well in his believings as can rightly be demanded of him. The other concept of justified belief would be a purely evaluative concept. The word "justified" would pick out a certain merit in beliefs, a desirable feature of beliefs; "unjustified" would pick out a demerit in beliefs, a blemish. And a belief would have these merits and defects whether or not it was in any way within the control of the person to have or not have the belief.

The truth, in my judgment, is that there is no such concept of justification

as this purely evaluative concept. The situation is not, I think, that Goldman and others are offering a criterion for a different concept of justified belief from that for which I propose to offer a criterion. The situation is rather that Goldman misapprehends the nature of the concept of justified belief. No doubt this misapprehension plays a role in his adopting the criterion he does.

In a person's system of belief we can pick out certain merits which lie between, as it were, all the beliefs being true and all the beliefs being in accord with what can rightly be demanded of that person. Perhaps some of those merits are picked out with our word "rational." And no doubt one of those in-between merits is that of all the beliefs being well-formed or sustained. But the word "justified" does not pick out that merit. The test cases will be those in which the belief is not reliably formed but in which we agree that the person could not rightly be expected to believe otherwise than he does. So look once more at our example of the young person in a primitive tribe. Can it really correctly be said of him that he is *not justified* in believing as he does? I suggest that there is no sense of the English word "justified" such that that can correctly be said of him.

Incidentally, there is a passage in Goldman's essay in which he himself is on the verge of recognizing that the one and only concept of justification is a normative concept. After considering a case which in his judgment calls for a revision in his unqualified reliabilist theory, he says, "So what we can say about Jones is that he *fails* to use a certain (conditionally) reliable process that he could and should have used. . . . So, he failed to do something which, epistemically, he should have done. This diagnosis suggests a fundamental change in our theory. The justificational status of a belief is not only a function of the cognitive processes *actually* employed in producing it; it is also a function of the processes that could and should be employed." (Ibid., p. 29)

13. In the sense of "reason" cited in the preceding paragraph the *event* of a person's believing q and believing that it is good evidence for p may be his reason for believing p.

14. Suppose that someone who believes p—perhaps because someone told him that p is true—later finds that the evidence for p is exactly balanced with that against p, that is, with that for *not-p*. What then constitute the obligations and permissions of rationality? Well, the "innocent-until-proved-guilty" principle which we are exploring says that he is permitted to continue believing p, for p has not been proved guilty. On the other hand, it would seem that he is also permitted to refrain from believing both p and *not-p*. What he is *not* permitted to do is to proceed to believe *not-p* on the basis of his awareness that the evidence for p and for *not-p* is equally balanced, for he should realize that believing thus is an unreliable "mechanism." (Shortly we shall see more clearly the relevance of this fact.) Of course, if the person had entered this situation believing *not-p* rather than p, then the opposite of all these things is true. Then he is permitted either to continue believing *not-p* or to believe neither p nor *not-p*, but not to believe p on the basis of his awareness that the evidence pro and con *not-p* is equally balanced. This yields what seems initially to be the paradoxical result, that of two people surveying the very same evidence and making the same responsible

judgment as to its weight, one may be permitted to believe *p* but not *not-p*, the other to believe *not-p* but not *p*.

Consider a different but related case. Suppose that a person who believes neither *p* nor *not-p* comes responsibly to the conviction that the evidence for these is equal. What ought he to do? Quite clearly, to refrain from believing either *p* or *not-p*. For to believe either of these on this basis is to believe it on account of what he should realize to be an unreliable "mechanism." Again, suppose that a person who believes *both p* and *not-p* discovers that the evidence for these is equal—and also notices that he believes both, and notices that they cannot both be true. (He may, of course, have been believing both without believing *p and not-p*.) What should, or may, he do? Once again, he is not permitted on the basis of his awareness of his situation to give up one and hang on to the other, for that would be to believe on account of what he should realize to be an unreliable "mechanism." Clearly what he is permitted to do, though, is give up both. But what about the last possibility, that of hanging on to both? Well, the "innocent-until-proved-guilty" principle would in fact seem to say that he is permitted to do this. And though at first this result takes one a bit aback, maybe it is correct. I think, however, that rarely will a person be able to do this—at least for any length of time. And we have already seen that he is not entitled, on the basis of his realization of the situation, to give up either one of them and hang on to the other. He is entitled only to give up both. (Surely such a person would not be rational in believing *p and not-p*. And it is surprising that this would be so, while at the same time it is rational for him to believe both *p* and *not-p*, realizing that they are contradictory.)

15. This last would be most in line with the conclusion drawn in note 14 above.

16. Consider someone who believes that *p* and who earlier held that same belief and held it nonrationally, having adequate reason to cease from holding it. Suppose that in the interim, though he retains the belief B*p*, he forgets those reasons. Suppose also that he is rationally justified in that forgetting; his not believing those reasons later on is rational on his part. And suppose that neither now nor at any time after all those events had transpired was there anything else in his situation relevant to the rationality of this belief than that he once held it in defiance of adequate reasons to give it up and later remembered it but justifiably forgot those reasons. Is he now, at this later point, still nonrational in holding that belief, even though now he neither has nor ought to have adequate reason to cease from that belief? If he *is* still not rational in holding it, then we have to insert a qualification into the above, assuring that the nonrationality of such a belief remains, even though now the person neither has nor ought to have adequate reason to give it up.

17. With this qualification: As mentioned before, the criterion makes no attempt to specify the rationality of the *firmness* with which beliefs are held.

18. Perhaps the rational person tolerates different degrees of unreliability for different sorts of propositions. This is an important issue which I cannot here explore.

19. Of course, the fact that all of some tiny child's beliefs are rationally *justified* does not imply any praiseworthiness on his part. Though lack of justification implies culpability, justification does not imply praiseworthiness. One could, of course, add some qualification to our criterion for rational belief so that it did imply this. Then, on the criterion, though the tiny child would not be unjustified in his beliefs, he would also not be justified.

20. Richard B. Brandt, *Ethical Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1959), pp. 360–61.

Faith and Rationality:

Reason and Belief in God

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