Chapter 2

Critique of Traditional Epistemology
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First part of the criticism
Gettier’s criticism

It is stated in the last chapter that religious experience has to be acknowledged as a cognitive experience but the question arises with its validity that can’t be substantiated at the level of sense experience. To show its validity is a task to be accomplished in two steps. First, the habitual acceptance of the validity of sense experience is to be questioned and for that the traditional epistemology, which accepts that some sense experiences alone are valid, is to be examined critically. Second, it is to be shown that apart from sense experience, some other variety of experience also bear the characteristic of self validation and religious experience is one of them.

Since Plato’s time justified true belief has been considered as knowledge until Gettier pointed out in 1963 in his famous paper that a justified true belief might not be knowledge. He gave examples of justified true beliefs that were not knowledge.

The objective of the analysis of knowledge is to state the conditions that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for propositional knowledge. Various attempts have been made to state necessary and sufficient conditions for someone’s knowing a given proposition. The conditions are stated, generally, as follows

\[ \text{df. } S \text{ knows that } P \text{ iff } \]

i. \( P \) is true,
ii. \( S \) believes that \( P \), and
iii. \( S \) is justified in believing that \( P \).

To test whether the proposed analysis is correct, one must ask (a) whether every possible case in which the conditions listed in the analysans (i, ii, iii) are met is a case in which \( S \) knows that \( P \), and (b) whether every possible case in which \( S \) knows that \( P \) is a case in which each of these conditions are met. When one asks (a), one wishes to find out whether the proposed analysans is sufficient for \( S \)’s knowing that \( P \); when we ask (b), one
wishes to determine whether each of the conditions listed in the analysans is necessary.

Gettier pointed out that a justified true belief might not be knowledge. Gettier argues that df. is false as the conditions stated therein do not constitute a sufficient condition for the truth of the proposition that S knows that P. Here two points are noteworthy. Firstly, in that sense of 'justified' in which S's being justified in believing P is a necessary condition of S's knowing that P, it is possible for a person to be justified in believing a proposition that is in fact false. Secondly, for any proposition P, if S is justified in believing P, and P entails Q, and S deduces Q from P and accepts Q as a result of this deduction, then S is justified in believing Q. Keeping these two points in mind, Gettier shows by examples that even if conditions stated in df. are fulfilled for some proposition, it is false that the person in question “S” knows that proposition.

Case I

Suppose that Smith and Jones have applied for a certain job. And suppose that Smith has strong evidence for the following conjunctive proposition:

- c. Jones is the man who will get the job, and Jones has ten coins in his pocket.

Smith's evidence for (c) might be that the president of the company assured him that Jones would, in the end, be selected, and that he, Smith, had counted the coins in Jones's pocket ten minutes ago. Proposition (c) entails:

- d. The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket.

Let us suppose that Smith sees the entailment from (c) to (d), and accepts (d) on the ground of (c), for which he has strong evidence. In this case, Smith is clearly justified in believing that (d) is true.

But imagine, further, that unknown to Smith, he himself, not Jones, will get the job. And, also, unknown to Smith, he himself has ten coins in his pocket. Proposition (d) is then true, though proposition (c), from which Smith inferred (d), is false. In this example, then, all of the following are true: (i) (d) is true, (ii) Smith believes that (d) is true, and (iii) Smith is justified in
believing that (d) is true. But it is equally clear that Smith does not know that (d) is true; for (d) is true by virtue of the number of coins in Smith's pocket, while Smith does not know how many coins are in Smith's pocket, and bases his belief in (d) on a count of the coins in Jones's pocket, whom he falsely believes to be the man who will get the job.

Case II

Let us suppose that Smith has strong evidence for the following proposition:

e. Jones owns a Ford.

Smith's evidence might be that Jones always has in the past, in Smith's memory, owned a car, and always a Ford, and that Jones has just offered Smith a ride while driving a Ford. Let us imagine, now, that Smith has another friend, Brown, of whose whereabouts he is totally ignorant. Smith selects three place names quite at random and constructs the following three propositions:

f. Either Jones owns a Ford, or Brown is in Boston.

g. Either Jones owns a Ford, or Brown is in Barcelona.

h. Either Jones owns a Ford, or Brown is in Brest-Litovsk.

Each of these propositions is entailed by (e). Imagine that Smith realizes the entailment of each of these propositions he has constructed by (e), and proceeds to accept (f), (g), and (h) on the basis of (e). Smith has correctly inferred (f), (g), and (h) from a proposition for which he has strong evidence. Smith is therefore completely justified in believing each of these three propositions, Smith, of course, has no idea where Brown is.

But imagine now that two further conditions hold. First Jones does not own a Ford, but is at present driving a rented car. And secondly, by the sheer coincidence, and entirely unknown to Smith, the place mentioned in proposition (g) happens really to be the place where Brown is. If these two conditions hold, then Smith does not know that (g) is true, even though (i) (g) is true, (ii) Smith does believe that (g) is true, and (iii) Smith is justified in believing that (g) is true.
These two examples show that definition df. does not state the sufficient conditions for someone’s knowing a given proposition. Thus the definition that justified true belief is knowledge, fails to stand in the face of Gettier’s counter examples. Thus a different conceptual analysis is needed to correctly track (conceptualise) what is meant by knowledge. Both counter examples rely on the established claim under justified true belief that justification is preserved by entailment.

What Gettier’s problem shows is not the need for a fourth independent condition in addition to the original three, rather it is the attempt to show that an account of knowledge by conjoining a set of independent conditions was misguided from the outset.

**Alston’s criticism**

Mere true belief is not knowledge. Even justified true belief is not knowledge.

While Gettier rejected the traditional view that knowledge is justified true belief on the grounds that although justification is necessary to convert true belief into knowledge, it is not sufficient, Alston argues that it isn’t even necessary. He argues that there is no unique term called epistemic justification.

While earlier “epistemic immunities” like infallibility, incorrigibility, and indubitability were generally taken to be requirements for knowledge, but later on, in the twentieth century, they were taken to be requirements for the foundations of knowledge only. However, according to Alston, these are not real possibilities for human cognitive subjects and so not a viable requirement for any epistemically important status. Since it is doubtful that human cognitive efforts are ever marked by immunity from mistake, correction, or doubt, thus, we must set aside these conditions, in favour of more obviously satisfiable conditions. The construal of justification in terms of adequate grounds is introduced only to provide a framework for considering a number of putatively necessary conditions for justifications like –
basing relation\(^8\), truth-conducivity\(^9\), cognitive accessibility\(^10\), higher level requirements\(^11\), coherence\(^12\), satisfying intellectual obligations\(^13\).

According to Principle of credulity – we have an attitude to accept immediate beliefs. We don’t doubt it initially until occasion arises. We are (deontologically) justified in accepting such immediate beliefs because it is not in our control to stop formation of any such belief. Belief formation is involuntary, we have a disposition to form belief in God just like we have a disposition to form perceptual and other basic beliefs.

\(^8\) **Basing relation**: In order that my belief that p be justified it is not enough that I merely have a ground of the appropriate sort. It is also necessary that my belief be based on that ground, that this be my reason (evidence ...) for believing that p.

\(^9\) **Truth-conducivity**: The reason or its content must be so related to the target belief and its content that, given the truth of the former, the latter is thereby likely to be true. The reason must sufficiently “probabilify” the target belief. It is not enough that the reason would commonly be taken to provide adequate support, or that it intuitively seems to do so, or that we would on adequate reflection judge it to do so. The basis of the belief must actually be sufficiently indicative of the truth of the belief.

\(^10\) **Cognitive accessibility**: The subject must enjoy some special, high grade kind of cognitive access to the justifier.

\(^11\) **Higher level requirements**: The notion of levels here is one that is familiar from talk of meta-languages. Whenever something concerns an item of level n, the former is of level n+1. Thus believing that one believes that p is of a higher level than believing that p; and so is knowing, or being justified in believing, that one believes that p. Being justified in believing that one is justified in believing that p is of higher level than being justified in believing that p. Knowing that the ground of one’s belief that p is an adequate one is of higher level than the ground of one’s belief being an adequate one. Such higher level requirements include:

A. S knows (is justified in believing) that the ground of his belief that p is an adequate one.

B. (Where the belief is arrived at by inference.) S knows (is justified in believing) that the inference is a sound one. Or again, S knows (is justified in believing) that S is justified in believing the premises of the inference.

C. S knows (is justified in believing) that his belief that p was arrived at in a reliable manner.

\(^12\) **Coherence**: For S’s belief that p to be justified it must cohere with a total system of beliefs that itself exhibits a high degree of coherence. The notion of coherence, though often left obscure, has something to do with the extent and strength of inferential, explanatory, and other relations between the constituents of the system.

\(^13\) **Satisfying intellectual obligations**: One is justified in believing that p only if one does not violate any intellectual obligation in believing that p, i.e., only if correct intellectual standards permit one to believe that p under the conditions that do obtain. While Alston rejects this as a viable suggestion for a condition on justification, since it presupposes that belief is under effective voluntary control, and it seems clear to Alston that it is not. However, there are intellectual obligations, e.g., to look for more evidence under certain conditions and to train oneself to be less credulous. And it may well be thought that a necessary condition of justifiably believing that p is that this belief did not stem from any violation of such obligations.
These beliefs are generated by belief forming mechanisms which are triggered by a kind of evidence in experiential circumstances. Evidence is, generally, given by third person but in case of religious experience it is given by first person. Belief forming mechanism and the appropriate circumstances, in which we sometimes are disposed to form a particular belief, suggest an account of knowledge while there is an impulsive ground of belief formation also. To refer to circumstance is to explain why that belief is formed in the mind of the person and to explain why that belief is formed is to explain (give) its reason. This is to show that formation of belief was natural. The rejection of demand of evidence (to call a belief rational) doesn’t result in irrationalism. After all giving evidence (on verifiability criterion) can’t be considered to be the only criterion of rationality. Had verifiability criterion been meaningful and only criterion, rejection of a meaningful criterion would have resulted in nonsense and chaos. But that is not true.

However, those, who deny that it is necessary for justification that one’s belief be based on an adequate ground or reason, do not deny that it is, epistemically, a good thing for one's belief to be based on an adequate ground. Indeed, they do typically take a basing condition to be necessary for knowledge. They only maintain that this is not required for one's belief to be justifiably on the ground of evidences in its favour. A belief formed by the proper functioning of the belief-forming mechanism is a well-founded belief and acceptable solely because it is well-founded. It is not necessary for any belief to be supported by evidence to be accepted. What Alston argues for is a foundationalism without evidentialism or rational justification. For him beliefs are either warranted or unwarranted. The former type beliefs are justifiably acceptable and the latter type are not. Warranted beliefs are produced by the proper function of the aforesaid mechanism and justified just by virtue of their being warranted. No further evidence is needed for their justification.  

While those who deny that truth-conducivity or reliability is required for justification do not deny that it is epistemically desirable to form beliefs in such a way that they are thereby likely to be true. Since the basic aim of belief formation is to store correct information, rather than misinformation. They only deny that this is required for justification, usually on the grounds that since reliability or truth-conducivity is not epistemically accessible in a direct way it therefore cannot be required for justification.
While those who deny that what makes for justification must be directly accessible to the subject do not deny that such accessibility is a good thing. If it is good to be able to determine when one is justified in holding a certain belief, as it obviously is, then it is good to enjoy as sure a cognitive access as possible to what is responsible for this.

While those who abjure higher level requirements for justification do not by any means deny that it is a good thing to have reflective, higher level knowledge or justified belief concerning the epistemic status of one's beliefs and concerning the adequacy of the grounds of one's beliefs. Since it is worthwhile to reflect on the epistemic status of one's beliefs, to determine what grounds one has for those beliefs and how solid those grounds are. This is an essential component of the life of reason. Human life is enriched by a reflective awareness of ones epistemic situation.

While those who deny that coherence is closely tied to justification will not downplay the value and importance of constructing coherent systems of belief. It is clearly one of our intellectual aims, part of what makes for satisfaction of the intellectual side of our nature, to systematize and integrate our knowledge.

While if we do have intellectual obligations, it is tautological that we ought to satisfy those obligations, and that it is better to do so than not. To admit that we are obliged, all things considered, to do A, and then to deny that it is good thing for us to do A, would be incoherent at best and inconsistent at worst.

The disputes over these conditions is not as to whether their satisfaction is valuable or important from an epistemic point of view, but simply over whether a given condition is necessary for being minimally justified in holding a certain belief.

Alston contends that justification is not a matter of relation of the belief to adequate grounds. As the term 'justified' has been imported into epistemology from talk about voluntary action. For example I was justified in charging you for damage to my sidewalk, provided my doing so is in accordance with relevant rules, regulations, norms, or standards. More specifically, my doing so is permitted by the relevant norms; it is not necessary that they require me to do so. I could be justified in charging you for the repair of my sidewalk even if I wouldn't be violating any obligation in failing to charge you. Justification varies with the background system of norms that is presupposed. These can be legal, moral, institutional, and so on. Thus I might be legally, morally, and/or prudentially justified in charging you for the repair to my sidewalk.

The fact that 'justified' comes into epistemology from this quarter explains the strong tendency to think of the justification of belief in deontological terms, in terms of being permitted to believe than p. Or perhaps a prior tendency to think of belief as subject to voluntary control, and hence as subject to requirements, prohibitions, and permissions, is responsible for the use of terms from the justification-family. Or perhaps the two tendencies have developed together and have reinforced each other. In any event, the most natural understanding of ‘justified’ in application to belief is tied to the supposition that terms in the ‘required’-‘permitted’ family are applicable to doxastic attitudes like believing and hence that doxastic attitudes are under effective voluntary control. Alston takes this last assumption to be untenable, and hence considers the deontological conception of justification that presupposes it to be correspondingly untenable. But if we abandon that conception, terms in the justification family are left without any natural interpretation, or at least without their most natural interpretation. Perhaps the most honest course would be to abandon the term altogether in epistemology. But it seems to be too firmly rooted, even in non-deontological circles, for this to be feasible. Moreover, there are other roots of the epistemological use of the term, roots that are not entangled with assumptions of voluntary control. Whether or not these roots can nourish the use of ‘justified’ with linguistic propriety, they unquestionably do influence current epistemological thinking about what is called ‘justification’. Perhaps the most obvious of these is the notion of having adequate grounds (reasons, evidence...) for a belief. or, alternatively, the belief’s being based on this. It seems not implausible linguistically to parse “He isn’t justified in believing that” as “He lacks sufficient grounds (reasons, evidence...) for believing that”. A closely analogous root is the notion of a proposition’s being true “so far as I can tell”, or the proposition’s appearing to be true, given the evidence available to me.
Though Alston argues that justification isn’t even necessary for knowledge or to convert true belief into knowledge. Alston suggests that we should abandon the idea that there is a unique something or other properly called ‘epistemic justification’. As having done so we will be free to recognize and investigate a number of different ways in which beliefs can be better or worse from an epistemic point of view. Still, justification is important in its own right. Alston distinguishes two concepts of justification. According to the deontological conception, a person’s belief is justified just in case one holds it without violating any duties or obligations vis-à-vis getting at the truth. According to another conception the truth-conducive conception, a person’s belief is justified just in case one holds it on the basis of adequate grounds (and one is unaware of defeaters). Alston opts for the latter, arguing that the former presupposes that we have voluntary control over our believing, which we don’t have. Furthermore, the adequacy of the grounds consists in its making the belief based on it very likely to be true; and, while the adequacy of the ground need not be internally accessible to the believer in order for one’s belief to be justified, the ground itself must be accessible.

Alston distinguishes direct justification from indirect justification. A belief is indirectly justified just in case it owes its justification to some other beliefs or their interrelations. A belief is directly justified just in case it is not indirectly justified. According to Alston, indirectly justified beliefs ultimately owe their justification to directly justified beliefs, and many of our mundane beliefs about the immediate environment are directly justified by way of experience. Above stated view is a version of foundationalism.15

Some epistemologists hold that epistemic justification is tied to “believing p in such a way as to be thereby be in a strong position to get the truth”, or “believing that p in such a way that p is thereby highly likely to be true”. 15 Anti-foundationists often assume that a person’s belief cannot be justified unless she is justified in believing that it is justified, in which case directly justified beliefs are impossible. In response, Alston distinguishes between lower-level beliefs, beliefs that are not about the justificatory status of another belief, and higher-level beliefs, those which are about the justificatory status of another belief. Alston shows how a viable foundationalism can hold that lower-level beliefs can be justified even if their higher-level correlates are not. More frequently, anti-foundationists assume that directly justified beliefs must be immune from doubt, error, and the like, in which case skepticism looms large. In response, Alston shows
The present state of epistemology has, in Alston’s view, a variety of different factions arguing about what exactly constitutes justified belief. Alston holds that there is no fact of the matter about what constitutes epistemic justification.

William Alston’s radical multi-dimensional proposal attempts to offer a fully developed theory grounded in the defense and development of a package of epistemic desiderata framed around the central cognitive aim of acquiring, retaining and using true beliefs.

Alston’s radical new approach to epistemology that rejected the centrality of epistemic justification and suggests that epistemology should move ‘Beyond “Justification”’ (that is to say, beyond the search for ‘the unique, epistemically crucial property of beliefs picked out by “justified”’). Once the ‘justificationist’ approach to understanding the epistemic evaluation of belief is rejected, one would be, according to Alston, better equipped to articulate and understand the interrelations between a variety of different epistemic desiderata (whose proponents have, until now, struggled in vain in an all-or-nothing competition for the best account of epistemic justification) and to focus upon the various ways in which beliefs might be good or bad from a variety of epistemic points of view, or relative to certain kinds of desiderata.

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16 Some argue that justification requires that the believer have cognitive access to or even knowledge of the fact that the belief is based on good reasons; while others argue that the belief’s being formed by a reliable process is enough. Some argue that the believer must be able to defend the probable truth of the belief; while others argue that the belief must be part of a coherent set of beliefs or the result of an exercise of intellectual virtue. The list could go on.

17 Alston’s pluralist approach to epistemological evaluation called for the development of many alternative frameworks or ‘packages’ of desiderata against which our beliefs might be evaluated. Further, these frameworks could themselves be graded relative to the various points and purposes of our epistemic theorizing.

Fortunately, the labors of the justificationist project were not completely in vain. This is because each separate account of justification can now be viewed as suggesting a possible epistemic desideratum. Not faced with the task of proving that this or that good-making feature of a belief is what solely constitutes justification, it is open to us to recognize all good-making features as epistemically valuable.

There are a wide variety of candidates for what we generally refer to as epistemic justification and each candidate is argued to be defensible and desirable relative to a particular range of epistemic situations, but problematic in other cases. Alston asserts that the
disagreement over the nature of justification is intractable and in fact this disagreement may be because of our confusing the many for the one, highlighting, emphasizing, “pushing” different concepts, all called ‘justification’, selecting different epistemic desiderata, or packages thereof, as deserving the honorific title ‘justification’. He argues that we should, reject the very idea of a single conception of epistemic justification in favor of accepting a wide range of possible ways in which beliefs might be desirable, e.g., that a belief was formed on the basis of a reliable process, or arose from the exemplification of some epistemic virtue, or resulted from the satisfaction of some epistemic obligation, etc. Alston claims that the best explanation of the disagreement is that there is no single thing that is justification. That it is a mistake to suppose that there is a unique something-or-other called ‘epistemic justification’ concerning which the disputants are disputing. Parties to disputes about justification are working with different concepts, different selections of epistemic desiderata, and not just different opinions as to what is required for the application of a common concept. There are at least two different epistemic desiderata that are being conflated under the term ‘justification’. Thus, what was originally conceived of as competing accounts of justification, are now considered as different ‘epistemic desiderata’ i.e. ways in which a belief might be desirable to hold from an epistemic point of view.

The real problem is not to decide what is the correct account of justified belief, but one of understanding and interrelating the various epistemic desiderata, determining which of them are feasible goals and what it takes to achieve each of those feasibilia, and identifying the contexts (interests, aims, problems) for which one or another is most important.

The parameters of the problem are that none of the points at issue can be used to identify that of which the varying accounts of justification are accounts. We cannot zero in on the subject matter, “justified belief”, by saying that it is what it is permitted, epistemically, to believe, or that it is being sufficiently supported by the ground on which the belief is based, or that it is one’s believing in a reliable or a truth conducive way, or that it is fitting into a coherent doxastic system. Since each of these is something that some parties to the disputes deny of epistemic justification, and so none of them can be non-question beggingly deployed to specify what it is the disputes are about.

All that can be said is - If I am justified in believing that p, my doxastic state is one that is desirable from an epistemic point of view, where that is defined in terms of the aim at maximizing true belief and minimizing false belief: This may be taken as relatively uncontroversial. But this hardly serves to uniquely pick out epistemic justification. There are many epistemically desirable features of a belief that cannot be identified with being justified, e.g., truth. Nothing can be more desirable from the standpoint of an aim at the truth than truth; and yet, justification is distinct from truth. True beliefs can be unjustified, and false beliefs can be justified. All the controversial conditions represent epistemically desirable properties, and yet none of them, just because they are controversial, can be used to identify what it is concerning which the controversialists are disputing.

Some epistemologists try to locate epistemic justification by saying that it is what makes true belief into knowledge. We need only to solve for X in ‘true belief + X + what it takes to deal with Gettier problems = knowledge’. Alston claims that this formula does identify a common target concerning which different theorists hold different views. But the formula does not provide a theoretically neutral way of identifying epistemic justification. Because justification theorists recognize other constraints on what can count as epistemic justification, and if it should turn out that what turns true belief into knowledge does not satisfy those constraints they would not recognize it as justification.

The paradigm case method too does not help us in locating what justification is. As the opposition between different accounts of justification deeply infect the picking out of paradigm cases and the patterns of extrapolating from a class of paradigms. Though there is a substantial body of cases on the justificatory status of which (almost) all parties agree, but there are quite different ways of extrapolating from those cases to other cases.

Since all the different approaches to what is justification can’t be used for justification and if we quit trying to decide what is required for “justification”, what we are left to do is:
• the elucidation of desiderata (i.e. understanding the nature of each epistemic
desiderata);
• seeing their viability (one issue of this sort concerns the idea that beliefs can be
evaluated in terms of whether doxastic standards or norms permit their adoption. This
is not a viable desideratum, for it presupposes an effective voluntary control over our
propositional attitudes that we lack. While another issue is ‘higher-level
conditions’);
• their importance (i.e. discussing the conditions, assumptions, or contexts relative to
which one or another desideratum is more or less important. Focusing on a contrast
between externalism and an extreme form of internalism. While being on our guard
against falling into thinking that we must choose between, e.g., truth-conducivity,
having adequate evidence, and satisfaction of intellectual obligations as the central,
basic, or key epistemic desideratum for belief. We must not fall into an opposite
extreme of latitudinarianism, in which we give equal weight to every condition that
has been espoused as valuable from the epistemic point of view. Since some may be
eliminated as unattainable (or not sufficiently attainable), while others may be plainly
more important than others.);
• and their interrelations.

Alvin Goldman maintains that even if Alston is right that there is no single thing
“justification” that epistemologists are interested in, we should not reject the notion entirely,
for if we did, then we should also by the same form of argument need to deny that in other
cases of protracted disagreement the point under discussion has a single nature (e.g. truth, or
consciousness). Though Alston has replied that the argument ultimately turns upon our
inability to specify a theory neutral way to resolve the disagreement, but someone may fail to
see how this does more than restate the deep intractability of the problem.

Rejecting the idea that there is a single characteristic picked out by the term ‘justification’ one should turn instead to a desiderata based model, but the problem is that
every theory about the nature of justification was apt to be reconceived as describing a
possible epistemic desideratum. And each desideratum was liable to be combined with others
to form hypothetical packages of desiderata.

The possible packages of desiderata are –
A. The belief is based on adequate grounds (reasons, evidence).
B. S has adequate grounds (reason, evidence) for the belief.
A.1. S’s belief that p is based on grounds (reasons, evidence) that render it objectively
probable.
B.1. S has (at least potential) grounds (reasons, evidence) for believing that p that render p
objectively probable.
A.2. The grounds on which S’s belief that p is based are such that on adequate reflection S
would believe that they render the belief objectively probable.
B.2. S has evidence e such that on adequate reflection S would believe that e renders it
objectively probable that p.
C. S’s belief that p was formed in a reliable way.
D. A subject can determine, just on reflection, what grounds she has for her belief that p [and
whether these grounds are adequate].
E. S knows that the ground of her belief that p is an adequate one.

Nonetheless, it is not a libertarian approach. For Alston clearly thinks that some
epistemic desiderata are more important than others; and there is one class of proposed
desiderata that he thinks fails to provide genuine desiderata at all and we should reject it i.e.
group (v) as genuine desiderata. Alston identifies five general classes of possible epistemic
desiderata which are listed below in order of theoretical importance:

(i) truth,
(ii) truth-conducive features of beliefs,
(iii) features of belief favorable to the discrimination and formation of true beliefs,
(iv) features of systems of beliefs that are among the goals of cognition (such as
explanatory power, understanding, coherence and systematicity).
Alston treats truth as the most basic epistemic desideratum; he focusses upon true beliefs, the core cognitive project of human beings. As Alston writes that,

I don’t know how to prove that the acquisition, retention, and use of true beliefs about matters that are of interest and/or importance is the most basic and most central goal of cognition. I don’t know anything that is more obvious from which it could be derived. But I suggest that anyone can see its obviousness by reflecting on what would happen to human life if we were either without beliefs at all or if our beliefs were all or mostly false.¹⁸

Alston argues that we do not have effective voluntary control over our beliefs. There are several things we say that makes it seem as if we have effective voluntary control. For instance, we talk of ‘making up our minds’ and ‘weighing evidence in pursuit of a decision about what to believe’. Alston grants that we may have indirect voluntary control over our beliefs, much like we have indirect voluntary control over our blood pressure, but this is not enough for ‘effective voluntary control’. His argument against effective voluntary control over our beliefs consists simply in asking us to try to exercise it: ‘Can you, at this moment, start to believe that the Roman Empire is still in control of Western Europe, just by deciding to do so?’ The answer is negative.

Since one has not full control over one’s beliefs, by the time-honored principle “Ought implies can”, it follows that the deontological epistemology is not acceptable.

In view of the above stated criticisms of traditional epistemology it is clear that the doubt cast on the epistemic justification of religious belief is based on the notion which itself is vague and not related to any matter of fact. Doubt extended to the cognitivity of religious experience on this ground, therefore, is based on confusions only. Religious beliefs are inextricably

¹⁵ deontological features of beliefs (which are: (a) the belief is held permissibly, (b) the belief is formed and held responsibly, and (c) the causal ancestry of the belief does not contain violations of intellectual obligations).
connected to religious experience (since they are directly formed in the mind 
of religious persons due to the religious experience that he passes through) and 
this direct connection itself is an indubitable justification for religious beliefs. 
The criticism of traditional epistemology, in its second part, consists in the 
detailed presentation of the argument which support the view that apart from sense experience there are other varieties of experience which serve as the strongest justification for the beliefs formed as their direct consequences. Religious beliefs also draw their very strong justification from the religious experience as a direct consequence of which they are formed.

The second part of the criticism

Alston contends that religious experience can provide justification for religious beliefs. He derives this from an argument designed to show that Christian epistemic practice (CP) possesses the same epistemic status as the epistemic norms commonly used in everyday perceptual practice (PP).

Alston says – There is something which can be called, “experimental/experiential awareness of God” which has some similarities to sense perception. As some beliefs formed due to sense perception, directly by perception e.g. I saw a tree, are basic. Similarly belief in God formed due to experiential awareness of God is also direct and basic. It is rational even and should be considered as rational until proved guilty and should not be accepted as guilty until conclusively proved irrational. We are rationally justified in holding a belief unless we have adequate reasons to think that they are false. Theistic beliefs are rational because there are no adequate reasons to accept it as false, criticism does not establish its falsity beyond doubt. Rationality of belief in God is prime facie, it can’t be over ridden by contrary reasoning. By believing believer does not isolate his epistemic duty (deontological sense) nor is there any deformity in his noetic structure (axiological sense).

What Alston argues in favour of Christianity, could be applied for most theistic religions without much modifications.

All perceptual beliefs involve experiential justification. Theistic belief is also produced in an experiential situation that itself confers its justification.
The person whose belief is formed in such a situation can’t refuse to form the belief (as it is involuntary) and lacks any reason for not believing or considering the belief false or un-reliable. Logically any belief can be doubted but experientially produced beliefs are not doubted or considered false until there is a reason for it. Such a belief is not a result of any induction or deduction, it is spontaneous. It does not require any argument or reason in its support. This is a basic or foundational belief. A basic belief is not subject to doubt because it is basic. Doubt comes up only after the formation and acceptance of basic beliefs. Some skeptics doubt that theistic belief is a basic belief. But Alston argues that if the basic status of such beliefs is denied then the basic status of many other well-accepted beliefs (e.g. belief in immediate memory, belief in other minds etc.) also would lose their basic status.

Belief in God is formed as naturally as the belief that, one is seeing a tree

Belief in God is a basic, immediate belief and this is formed in a person’s mind in appropriate circumstances.

Alston develops a model according to which a person’s beliefs about the activities, intentions, and character of God can owe their justification directly to his own religious experience, in much the same way our perceptual beliefs about our immediate environment can owe their justification directly to perceptual experience and not to arguments.19

19 What’s distinctive about his model is the notion of a doxastic practice, a socially learned, monitored, and reinforced constellation of dispositions, habits, or mechanisms each of which yields a belief with a certain content from an input of a certain sort. Two aspects of doxastic practices are fundamental. First, some of them, the most “basic” ones, are the irreducible sole access to a certain stretch of reality, e.g. the practice of forming beliefs directly on the basis of sense perception provides our sole access to the physical environment. Second, basic doxastic practices contain an overrider system of beliefs and procedures that its adherents can use to check for reliability when the need arises in particular cases. Alston applies his doxastic practice epistemology to the practice of forming beliefs about a religiously conceived Ultimate Reality directly on the basis of (what its adherents take to be) experience of that Reality. While this characterization of his project emphasizes the first aspect mentioned above, it does so at the expense of the second. That’s because different religious traditions have, to varying degrees, divergent doctrinal beliefs about Ultimate Reality, and consequently checking procedures likewise vary; thus the overrider systems vary. Alston opts for more narrowly individuated doxastic practices, e.g. the Christian experiential doxastic practice. According to Alston, there is no good reason to think that the Christian practice is unreliable; most significantly, the plethora of religious doxastic practices provide no such reason. Moreover, although, like any other basic doxastic practice, the Christian practice cannot be shown to be
Alston rejects the trend in academic theology to treat the entirety of what appears to be literal religious assertions as something else. Against theological anti-realists of various stripes, he argues that what look like determinate assertions in fact are what they seem, and that their truth or falsity is independent of our conceptual-theoretical choices. Against those who think that thought and talk about God is irreducibly symbolic or metaphorical, he argues that even though such thought and talk is derived from our thought and talk about creatures, and even though there is a vast gulf between the nature of God and that of creatures, it is nevertheless possible to speak of God literally: indeed, if we can metaphorically express a truth about God, then it is in principle possible to literally express the same truth about God. Alston is particularly concerned to defend the view that personal predicates — predicates that distinctively apply to persons, including predicates ascribing actions — can literally apply to an incorporeal being. Two possibilities emerge. First, even if a personal predicate can apply literally only to embodied persons (and we must not just assume that this is the case), that condition of application, if peripheral, can be lopped off, leaving intact a distinctive conceptual core that we can literally apply to an incorporeal being. Alston argues that this is indeed the case with respect to most personal predicates ordinary believers apply to God, e.g. “making,” “commanding,” “guiding,” “forgiving,” and the like. Second, Alston uses a functionalist account of personal predicates to argue that divine perfection and atemporality pose no bar to their literal application.

Alston’s argument in favour of the basic status of religious beliefs (because of their direct formation from religious experience of the person) is an indirect but decisive criticism of traditional epistemology. In his arguments some fundamental assumptions of traditional epistemology are challenged which had been habitually accepted for ages.
Plantinga’s development of Religious Epistemology

Alvin Plantinga, on a line of argument similar to that of Alston, criticizes the Traditional Epistemology against the notion of ‘evidence’ and develops a Religious Epistemology to show that the experiences of religious believers directly and indubitably justify the beliefs produced from them (those experiences).

Plantinga invokes the notion of ‘warrant’ of beliefs in place of the notion of ‘evidential justification’. A belief is justified, according to Plantinga, if it is produced by the proper function of the belief forming mechanism. Beliefs formed as a direct result of sense perception are acknowledged to be true because they are the direct results of the proper functioning of belief forming mechanism operating in human mind. If a tree is before a person, then he should see it and form the belief that he sees a tree if his cognitive apparatus is functioning properly, then

20 Religious belief does not require justification or evidence because they are produced by the proper functioning of belief forming mechanism of human mind in the state(s) of religious experience.

If we know the objective conditions or the appropriate environment of formation of a belief then we know how it is formed. If we know that a particular belief is formed in a particular condition then if those conditions obtain we can conclude that the particular belief would be formed and it is rational as well as natural to form such a belief in such a condition. If a person claims that he formed a particular belief in a particular condition we accept his claims as correct because we understand that in those conditions formation of such a belief is rational.

If all objective conditions demand formation of a specific belief then we can say that the belief is warranted in that situation. For example the condition for seeing a tree are that a person is standing in front of a tree and seeing it and there is sufficient light to see it and the person's eyesight, brain etc. are normal. If these conditions exist then the belief that one is seeing a tree is warranted. These purely objective conditions are the reason for the belief but not the cause as conditions are physical and belief is psychic. In the presence of these conditions or appropriate environment we have reason to expect formation of belief that, one is seeing a tree.

These conditions or the environment are not in control of the person. If appropriate environment is present and there is no obstruction we expect the formation of a specific belief or the formation of a specific belief is warranted. If the expected specific belief is not formed or some other belief is formed then something is wrong, then we are inclined to think that there is some malfunctioning of cognitive apparatus. The cognitive apparatus must function properly for a belief to be formed. By proper function we mean proper function of the mechanism of any phenomenon, e.g. A bird can’t fly if its wings are broken; A person can’t see properly if he is blind or colour blind. A belief formed due to improper function of cognitive apparatus is not warranted. Proper functioning means functioning properly in an appropriate environment. Our body, our organs function properly only in an appropriate environment. We know, what is proper hearing even without knowing how the ear functions, and if one is unable to hear one would say that he/she is not hearing properly. If a person’s cognitive apparatus is functioning properly then in a specific situation it is supposed to produce a specific belief or a specific belief is warranted. Warrant is not a generalization of the functioning of cognitive apparatus rather proper functioning of cognitive apparatus is presupposed in the very notion of warrant. If there is a tree before a person then he should see it and form the belief that he sees a tree if his cognitive apparatus is functioning properly, then
such a belief is warranted. If he does not see a tree (or does not believe that he sees a tree) then his cognitive apparatus is not functioning properly. Proper functioning of cognitive apparatus produces warrant of a belief. A belief has warrant for you only if your cognitive apparatus is functioning properly and proper functioning of cognitive apparatus is working the way it ought to work not only to produce but also to sustain the belief.

Reason for production of warrant for a belief is given not only to explain how the cognitive apparatus ordinarily functions to produce the warrant but it is also given to explain the phenomenon of production of warrant by necessarily referring to the implicitly presupposed idea of how the apparatus ought to function. Proper functioning of cognitive apparatus is not normal function, normal function is a statistical notion. Normal functioning is minimum requirement, functioning below normal is an abnormality or defect while functioning beyond normal is possible and is regarded as a speciality. Proper functioning can be more than, but is never less than, normal functioning. If one is functioning more than what is considered as normal, one can’t be considered as abnormal. For example it would be considered as proper functioning and not abnormal functioning if one jumps eight feet high that is three feet more than what is considered to be a normal jump.

The cognitive apparatus of human beings can function properly only in an appropriate environment. Any environmental change may (and does) affect proper functioning of cognitive apparatus. Even climatic changes can result in change or abnormal functioning of our body organs. We may feel more tiered in a heated atmosphere or even at high altitude. For proper functioning of our cognitive apparatus an appropriate environment is needed and the warrant for a belief that is a very delicate result of its proper function can be badly disturbed due to environmental change. Human beings’ cognitive apparatus or epistemic equipment is designed to function properly only in an appropriate environment. Environment must be such for which our faculties are designed by God or evolution or both. Appropriate environment is emphasized to show rationality of objective conditions.

Appropriate environment also indicates a preset design plan for the working of the cognitive apparatus. We must admit that only if cognitive apparatus is designed to achieve truth only then we are warranted to have a particular belief, otherwise notion of warrant is unexplained. Truth is known to us only because our cognitive apparatus is designed to achieve truth and because of this we can distinguish between truth and falsity although at times we may even fail to achieve truth and ultimately we do succeed, it shows that our cognitive equipment is designed to achieve truth.

Being designed to achieve truth is not sufficient; the probability of achieving truth should be very high. Therefore, design plan aims at truth but that is not sufficient as one may aim but may not achieve the truth. If the probability of failure to achieve truth is more, then there is no warrant for holding a belief. If theistic belief is true then it does have warrant, (belief of God immediately entails its existence) and if a belief is true, it constitutes knowledge.

Our beliefs undergo changes because our cognitive apparatus demands for such changes because it is designed to aim and reach truth. The claim that a belief is true is implicit in a belief and it is considered as true until no reason or defeater is found against it. When a reason against a belief is found it is defeated.

Justification for the rationality of theistic belief need not be necessary or sufficient to constitute knowledge. Warrant and not justification transforms a belief into knowledge. A belief is rational if its warrant is produced as a consequence of the proper functioning of a person’s cognitive faculties (or cognitive apparatus) in an appropriate environment for which it is designed and is not defeated by any defeater. Theistic belief is rational without any evidential support. There is no plausible objection against theistic belief. All possible objections against theistic belief, assume in advance that it is false. Rationality is because of warrant, and proper functioning of the divine sense in an appropriate environment is the warrant for theistic belief. Truth of theistic belief is because all human beings are endowed with a divine sense. While we must accept that very little of what we believe (or even of belief forming mechanisms if there are any) can be demonstrated. Critics of theistic belief may claim that, “Sensus Divinitatis”, may in fact be a construct based on a considered generalization that all human beings have knowledge of a supreme divine person or being and that it is
available to them as a natural gift. However, even critics can’t give any reason, justification, evidence or warrant for what they claim.

Plantinga contends that belief in God is properly basic, i.e. that Christians are justified in believing in the existence of God without formulating arguments to prove its existence.

Plantinga rejects classical foundationalism in favor of a revised version of foundationalism in which theistic belief is “properly basic” for the believer. Plantinga is interested in defending the notion that it is intellectually acceptable for the believer to assert belief in God without basing it on any other beliefs, propositions or arguments.

Plantinga claims that there is nothing unjustified about religious belief for the believer, since his/her belief in God is as basic a part of his or her epistemic beliefs as asserting the statement “I see a tree”.

Plantinga not only asserts that the theist’s belief in God is properly basic but also demonstrates that theistic belief is a member of properly basic beliefs.

Plantinga contends that although properly basic belief may not be grounded on any other belief or inference, this does not mean that the belief is groundless. For e.g. when he sees a tree, he believes that he sees the tree without any other propositions entering into the equation of belief. This belief, along with some other circumstances, form the basis, or “ground”, of Plantinga’s belief that he sees a tree.

Plantinga makes proper basicity a function of community belief in his claims to be independent of the epistemic norms of the atheistic community, responsible only to the epistemic norms of the Christian community. Proper basicity can only be defended through the enumeration of various circumstances through which proper basicity can be claimed for theistic belief.

Proper basicity may not lead the theist down the path of fideism, but it certainly appears that proper basicity is a part of every “lived option” embraced by humans, including the very denial of theistic belief expressed by atheism and agnosticism! But Plantinga has no difficulty with this, since his Reformed epistemology denies the possibility of proofs for God’s existence drawn from premises mutually acceptable to both the believer and the nonbeliever.

Where by “lived options” we mean - We are often placed in a situation in which we must act upon faith in other individuals without being able to empirically examine the nature of their commitment. We are sometimes forced by circumstances to make choices that are not fully grounded in empirical testing. In the absence of fully compelling evidence to the contrary, we are justified in making a choice provided that we have good reasons for doing so, i.e. that such a decision is a prima facie valid one, that it is a living option for the decision-making individual.

Plantinga claims that the only adequate way of defining proper basicity, in the absence of any “clearly acceptable arguments” is through inductive generalizations based on “examples of beliefs and conditions such that the former are obviously properly basic to the latter; and examples of beliefs and conditions such that the former are obviously not proper in the latter.” Such examples would be tested by hypotheses that endeavor to delineate the “necessary and sufficient conditions of proper basicity”. Plantinga here seems to argue for a view of proper basicity that is conditioned by environmental as well as social circumstances, since he subsequently claims that the claims for proper basicity may not, and indeed in the case of theistic claims will not, be accepted. He claims that Christians are only responsible to its own epistemic norms, not the norms of atheists. Thus the reformed epistemologist is not obligated to consider every set of possible basic beliefs, but only those basic beliefs which are a “living option” for Christians.
and on seeing that if the belief is formed in his mind that there is a tree before him then this belief is the result of the proper functioning of his sense organs and belief forming mechanism. If some other belief is formed when a person is seeing a tree, then definitely either there is some defect either in his sense organs or in the mechanism that forms belief in human mind. If both are functioning properly then in the presence of a tree only the belief that there is tree over there is formed.

Plantinga argues that religious believers, in their lives, pass through such experience in which the belief in a benevolent, all mighty creator is formed naturally. Such a theistic belief is, Plantinga argues, a direct result of the proper functioning of the belief formation mechanism with which human beings are endowed.  

Belief in God is formed in the believer’s mind not due

Theistic beliefs are true because they are basic and don’t require any reason, theistic beliefs are rational as other basic beliefs are also accepted without any reason as rational. Such other basic beliefs are belief in other minds, belief in the truth of ones memory of past experience, which we accept without any reasons. Theistic beliefs and religious truths are rational, as for believer they are foundational.

Belief in God is also a rational belief just like belief in other mind. Such a belief is warranted by proper functioning of divine sense.

Moreover we have no reason to trust more on reason than on sources of beliefs or belief itself.

If sources of belief or belief can be doubted then reason can be doubted too. There is no good ground to believe that reason will lead to correct conclusions still we believe in it, trust it and don’t doubt it. Similarly sources of belief and belief need not be and cannot be doubted.

Theistic beliefs result from direct awareness of reality which comes immediately with direct experience of reality, just like direct awareness with direct experience of a perceived reality. The belief thus formed in religious persons minds, is as much a warranted belief as the perceptual beliefs are, or as any other properly basic beliefs are. As the warrant of perceptual belief – for the person who perceives – is its rationality, so is the warrant of theistic belief – felt by the persons whose divine sense is functioning – is its rationality.

Though the person who feels the warrant for theistic belief may not necessarily know how to defend it argumentatively and to show that he is justified in having this theistic belief.

You know something when that belief is true and when it’s produced in you by your faculties working properly. God has created us with a lot of faculties.

An argument always presupposes that you trust or that you are relying upon some other faculties or some other belief-producing processes or cognitive processes. You reason from them to the one in question.

Belief in God is produced by divine sense, as Calvin says that every human being is born with a divine sense (Sensus Divinitatis) and belief in God is a spontaneous response of this divine sense. If the above statement is true then people may rightly and rationally come to have a belief in God immediately with religious experience without any evidence (or without any need to give evidence). While those whose belief in God is demolished by any reason their divine sense is not functioning properly, they are involved in epistemic imperialism, or they have been taught about the belief in tradition or family and have not acquired it due to
to any argumentation or calculation about its benefits and losses. The believer just finds that he believes in an all-mighty, benevolent, creator.22 Plantinga

divine sense, such people may also be considering that they require a reason to base or defend their belief, which is not the case.

Plantinga supports the argument of proper basicality by comparing theistic beliefs with perceptual beliefs, memorial beliefs, and a priori beliefs. For instance, he says that there is a way in which

the sensus divinitatis resembles perception, memory, and a priori belief. Consider the first. I look out into the backyard; I see that the coral tiger lilies are in bloom. I don't note that I am being appeared to in a certain complicated way (that my experience is of a certain complicated character) and then make an argument from my being appeared to in that way to the conclusion that in fact there are coral tiger lilies in bloom there... It is rather that upon being appeared to in that way (and given my previous training), the belief that the coral tiger lilies are in bloom spontaneously arises in me. This belief will ordinarily be basic, in the sense that it is not accepted on the evidential basis of other propositions. The same goes for memory. You ask me what I had for breakfast; I think for a moment and then remember: pancakes with blueberries. I don't argue from the fact that it seems to me that I remember having pancakes for breakfast to the conclusion that I did; rather, you ask me what I had for breakfast, and the answer simply comes to mind. Or consider a priori belief. I don't infer from other things that, for example, modus ponens is a valid form of argument: I just see that it is so and, in fact, must be so. All of these, we might say, are starting points for thought. But (on the model) the same goes for the sense of divinity. It isn't a matter of making a quick and dirty inference from the grandeur of the mountains or the beauty of the flower or the sun on the treetops to the existence of God; instead, a belief about God spontaneously arises in those circumstances, the circumstances that trigger the operation of the sensus divinitatis. This belief is another of those starting points for thought; it too is basic in the sense that the beliefs in question are not accepted on the evidential basis of other beliefs.

Plantinga considers belief in God as being a fundamental insight triggered by certain experiences or under certain circumstances, instead of seeing it as the end-product of an inferential process.

In Reason and Belief in God Plantinga mentions a bunch of circumstances that call forth belief in God. The circumstances are gratitude, a sense of contingency, just beholding the beauties of nature like mountains, flowers and the like of that - being in danger.22 In a certain condition the cognitive apparatus produces warrant for a specific belief of a person but such a belief is not formed in the mind of most of the people, then the person who forms a particular belief would not be considered as abnormal or irrational neither would the functioning of his cognitive apparatus be considered as abnormal. Rather it would be considered as proper and warranted to have such a belief in the appropriate environment or in those certain conditions. It is on this basis that belief in God of some persons is defended from the charge that not all people have this belief. Moreover proper functioning of the entire cognitive apparatus of a person is not necessary for a particular warranted belief. For e.g. to form a warranted belief about what one has heard requires only the proper functioning of one's ears and not of one's eyes or nose etc., proper functioning of memory is not required for immediate perceptual beliefs.

Only that part of cognitive apparatus need to function properly that is involved in the production of a warranted belief. Proper functioning of cognitive apparatus is required for the production of a warranted belief but proper functioning alone is not sufficient, an appropriate environment is also required.

However, even if a person's cognitive faculties are properly functioning in appropriate environment still the person does not hold all his beliefs with the same degree of firmness. We may all hold firmly that 2+2=4 but may not hold that much firmly that we had our breakfast yesterday or even today. Some people forget that they had eaten food earlier.
holds that the belief in God is very much a warranted belief in the situations of experiences which the believers pass through. Their warrant is their justification for the believer and it is so clear and strong that he neither needs any further reason for its support nor he finds himself in doubt when his belief is criticized by the skeptic.

Plantinga’s elaboration of Religious Epistemology on an Externalist view is an indirect criticism of the Traditional Epistemology which presupposes that sense-experience-based beliefs alone are justified.

Both the parts of criticism of Traditional Epistemology make it clear that its acceptance is not a matter of any logical compulsion. It had been accepted since alternative possibilities were not thought.\textsuperscript{23}

when they are hungry. Thus different types of belief have different degrees of warrant. A belief which has more warrant is held more firmly, because of change in objective conditions or the environment the degree of warrant also changes and the firmness with which a belief is held also changes. More firmly a person believes in his belief; the more warrant belief has for the person.

Variations of objective conditions affect proper functioning of cognitive faculties of different people differently, and this result’s in varying degrees of warrant for a particular belief. Thus some people hold some beliefs more firmly, while others hold same beliefs less firmly and this is the reason for different people to have varying degrees of belief in God. However, beliefs are subject to total rejection or a partial reform by any new knowledge which acts as a defeater to the earlier belief. A belief is rejected and reformed by a rebutting defeater and an undercutting defeater respectively.

Theistic belief is defended on the ground that those who don’t have theistic belief their divine sense may not be able to function properly as they may not be in an appropriate environment in which divine sense functions properly, while those who believe in God their divine sense may be functioning properly as they may be in an appropriate environment in which it functions properly.

Plantinga has no reply to the atheist who says, “I am experiencing the absence of God.” Though he may reply that sin has clouded the atheist’s perception, but on his own terms he cannot rationally demonstrate this to the atheist, or even consistently deny proper basicity to his atheistic beliefs.

\textsuperscript{23} Plantinga is not arguing that belief in God is properly basic because it so greatly resembles such perceptual experience e.g. seeing a tree. Planting tries to point out various analogies, illustrating points about proper basicity of theistic belief by pointing to similar things in the case of sense-experience. It was an illustration or analogy rather than a matter of arguing from its similarity to a sense-experience to its being properly basic like sense-experience. Since things that are properly basic come in a wide variety of forms like memory, \textit{a priori} reasoning, what one is taught or told by other people, religious beliefs formed by religious experiences and sensory beliefs formed by sensory experiences and so on.