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# TRUTH-WARRANTED MANIFESTATION BELIEFS

John Zeis

In *Perceiving God*, William Alston has argued that manifestation beliefs (M-beliefs) are warranted or justified in a way analogous to the justification of perceptual beliefs. However, there seems to be a sort of M-belief reported by the Carmelite mystics, Saints Teresa and John of the Cross, which are self-authenticating (SAM-beliefs). In this paper, I argue for an alternative view concerning the warrant of SAM-beliefs. I will suggest that SAM-beliefs are justified in a way analogous to the way in which Alston has suggested that privileged-access beliefs are justified: namely, they are truth-warranted.

## *Introduction*

In his work from "Christian Experience and Christian Belief"<sup>1</sup> through "Religious Diversity and Perceptual Knowledge of God"<sup>2</sup> to *Perceiving God*,<sup>3</sup> William Alston has argued relentlessly against the epistemic chauvinism or imperialism and the double standard which critics of the epistemic integrity of experiential knowledge of God employ. In *Perceiving God*, Alston presents strong and detailed argumentation that Christian mystical practice, like perceptual practice, is a functioning, socially established practice with distinctive experiential inputs, distinctive input-output functions, a distinctive conceptual scheme, and a rich, internally justified overrider system. And since we are rationally justified in believing Christian mystical practice to be reliable, its outputs are thereby prima facie justified.

If Alston's attempt to establish the rationality of believing in the reliability of mystical practice in *Perceiving God* is successful, then I think he has gone a long way in rebutting the epistemic imperialists as well as those who appeal to a double standard of justification. However, I do not think that it is necessary to argue for all M-beliefs<sup>4</sup> being grounded in a socially established doxastic system. There is another route, itself derivable from Alston's epistemic theory, which does not rely upon there being such a practice.

In this paper, I do not wish to dispute Alston's thesis concerning the justification of M-beliefs, as much as to propose an alternative position. In fact I think that the position which I will propose is consistent with Alston's position if one grants that not all M-beliefs need have the same ground or are of the same sort. It may very well be the case that some M-beliefs are justified in the way which Alston proposes while some others are justified in the way



I will suggest. Of course if someone holds the position that grounding in a socially established doxastic practice is a necessary condition of epistemic justification, then the two positions are not consistent.

In any case, I will argue that at least some M-beliefs are justified because they are truth-warranted. One of the most significant differences between the doxastic practice defense of Alston and the truth-warrant defense is that if M-beliefs are truth-warranted, the epistemological parallel between perceptual beliefs being grounded in perceptual practice and M-beliefs being grounded in mystical practice which Alston considers crucial no longer necessarily holds. In the truth-warranted position, M-beliefs are grounded in a fashion which is rather unique and peculiar. Those sympathetic to Alston's approach would be most likely to consider this in itself a defect of my position, but as I hope to argue successfully later in the paper, this is not so and there are certain advantages to viewing justification of M-beliefs in the way I will suggest.

In *Perceiving God*, Alston mentions and hastily dismisses a position on the justification of M-beliefs which he calls the "self-authentication" thesis.<sup>5</sup> He cites Robert Oakes as a friend of the self-authentication thesis, which, as Alston sees it, is the claim that:

the experiences carry with them an adequate *sign* or *mark* of their authenticity, so that, as Oakes says, the experience itself provides a *justification* for believing that it is an awareness of God's presence.<sup>6</sup>

Alston rejects the self-authentication thesis on the grounds that:

Delusory experiences can be phenomenologically indistinguishable from veridical ones, in the mystical realm as well as the sensory. Nothing in the experience itself suffices to distinguish one from the other.<sup>7</sup>

As Alston sees it, there is no reason to take so strong a stand on the nature of the justification of M-beliefs, and in chapter 5, he argues that the claim of self-authentication for M-beliefs is atypical of the religious tradition and for the great mystics of the Middle Ages and Counter-Reformation, self-authentication is "the furthest thing from their mind."<sup>8</sup>

### *The Warrant of PA-beliefs*

The thesis that M-beliefs are self-authenticating bears, I think, a strong resemblance to a position on privileged access beliefs ("PA-beliefs") which Alston himself held in one of his earlier writings on the subject. In "Self-Warrant: A Neglected Form of Privileged Access," Alston argues for the position that PA beliefs are justified by their being self-warranted. According to Alston, "a belief, *b*, is self-warranted if and only if *b* is warranted just by virtue of being *b* (being *b* is sufficient for *b*'s being warranted)."<sup>9</sup> Self-warranted beliefs are a limiting case of immediately justified beliefs for, unlike

beliefs in the paradigmatic set,<sup>10</sup> there is nothing distinct from the belief itself which serves as its ground. In “Self-Warrant,” Alston argued that self-warranted beliefs, although immediately justified, are such that they have no independent ground for their justification.

In developing the concept of epistemic justification in essays after “Privileged Access,” Alston has insisted that no belief is justified unless it is based on adequate grounds.<sup>11</sup> This has led him to reject the main thesis of self-warrant defended in “Privileged Access” and instead adopt a position of truth-warrant for PA-beliefs. That the grounds of PA-beliefs are “not distinguished from the fact that makes them true,” . . . “support(s) a diagnosis of truth-warrant, rather than of self-warrant.”<sup>12</sup> The principle of truth-warrant I would assume he has in mind would be some such version of what he considers and then rejects in “Privileged Access,” viz., “A B is warranted if and only if it is true.”<sup>13</sup> And since adequate grounds for a belief in Alston’s sense are what the belief is based on,<sup>14</sup> PA-beliefs are adequately grounded if and only if they are based on the truth of the belief.

Regarding the justification of PA-beliefs, Alston’s position has then undergone a development. Whereas he first supported a notion of PA-beliefs being self-warranted, he has since altered his position such that he later construes PA-beliefs to be justified because they are truth-warranted. I am not sure whether by the self-authentication thesis for M-beliefs he has in mind something like self-warrant or truth-warrant or some third alternative. But if the self-authentication thesis is to be construed as a thesis concerning the self-warrant of M-beliefs, then I would agree with Alston that we ought not consider M-beliefs justified because they are self-warranted. However, I think that a case can be made for construing M-beliefs as truth-warranted, following his lead in the development of the position on the justification of PA-beliefs.

### *M-beliefs as Truth-warranted*

Alston’s epistemological treatment of mystical experience is a generic analysis which does not consider that mystical experiences that differ in kind may require distinct justificatory conditions. It is not that Alston is unaware of the fact that mystical experiences may be of different sorts, but that he sees “no reason to suppose that any of the epistemological and ontological issues with which we are concerned will be significantly affected by this difference.”<sup>15</sup> But I think that there is a certain sort or sorts of mystical experience reported by the Carmelite mystics John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila that may indeed require us to consider having a different type of epistemological ground than that which a doxastic practice provides.

St. John of the Cross, in chapter XXVI of Book II of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, speaks of a mystical experience which he calls a “knowledge of pure truths.”

This knowledge consists in a certain contact of the soul with the Divinity, and it is God Himself Who is then felt and tasted, though not manifestly and distinctly, as it will be in glory. But this touch of knowledge and sweetness is so strong and so profound that it penetrates into the inmost substance of the soul, and the devil cannot interfere with it, nor produce anything like it . . . This knowledge savours, in some measure, of the divine essence and of everlasting life, and the devil has no power to simulate anything so great.<sup>16</sup>

St. Teresa of Avila, in *The Interior Castle*, reports of what she calls an intellectual vision, which appears to have similar marks with the knowledge of pure truths described by John.

This vision comes in another unexplainable, more delicate way. But it is so certain and leaves much certitude; even much more than the other visions do because in the visions that come through the senses one can be deceived, but not in the intellectual vision. For this latter brings great interior benefits and effects that couldn't be present if the experience were caused by melancholy; nor would the devil produce so much good.<sup>17</sup>

Although John of the Cross and Teresa categorize these sorts of mystical experiences in different ways, what I think is instructive is the fact that both of them identify these mystical experiences as ones which cannot be counterfeited by the devil. If they are right, and there are such experiences, then Alston's objection to the self-authenticating thesis does not apply. His objection was that mystical experiences, just like sensory experiences, can be delusory.<sup>18</sup> But if St. John and St. Teresa are correct and even the devil, with all his cunning and power, cannot simulate such experiences, how could mere delusion simulate them? Hence, I think we ought to reconsider self-authenticating manifestation beliefs (SAM-beliefs), which is how I will refer to the beliefs which are formed on the basis of the sorts of mystical experiences which the Carmelite mystics attest to in the passages above.

One may object though, that the beliefs of the type that Saints Teresa and John of the Cross attest to should not be construed as properly basic, but as beliefs which are inferred from other more basic beliefs. For example, Teresa's mystical belief presupposes certain beliefs which she has about God's nature and the kinds of actions which God can perform, as well as the nature of the devil and what he can't bring about. So, the objection goes, Teresa's mystical beliefs are not properly basic but inferred from other more basic beliefs, some of which are these background beliefs. But as Alston notes in "What's Wrong with Immediate Knowledge?"<sup>19</sup> the same sort of objection could be raised against other sorts of properly basic beliefs like PA-beliefs and simple arithmetical beliefs, and just confuses levels of questioning.

Immediate knowledge is knowledge in which the belief involved is not *epistemized* by a relation to another knowledge or epistemized belief of the same subject. But in the above cases what is alleged is that the very *existence* of the belief depends on other knowledge. Unless I know what it is to be P,

I can't so much as form the belief that  $x$  is  $P$ , for I lack the concept of  $P$ . Unless I know something about outward criteria of conscious states, I cannot so much as form the belief that I feel tired, for I lack the concept of feeling tired. Unless I know something about the rest of the number system, I cannot so much as form the belief that  $2+3=5$ , for I lack the requisite concepts. But all this says nothing as to what *epistemizes* the belief, once formed, and it is on this that the classification into immediate or mediate depends.<sup>20</sup>

So yes, of course Teresa's and John of the Cross's mystical beliefs depend for their existence upon other beliefs about God and the rest of the world in relation to God, just as my belief that  $2+3=5$  depends for its existence upon other beliefs I have about the number system, or my belief that I am tired depends upon other beliefs like what it is to be tired. But this does not imply that they cannot be properly basic.

There may be another level confusion involved in the objection as well. Teresa, in the passage from the *The Interior Castle* quoted above, does cite that the mystical experience "brings great interior benefits and effects." So she is, in some sense, appealing to the effects of the experience for justification of her belief that these experiences are valid. But that she cites these effects in this passage does not entail that these effects are necessarily involved in her state of being justified. If I am challenged to provide a justification of my belief that there really is a tree in front of me, I may walk over to the tree and pound my fist against it as further evidence that there is indeed a tree there. But, be this as it may, it does not entail that my original belief that there is a tree in front of me was justified or warranted on the basis of the projected effects. This is just to confuse the conditions for the state or condition of justified belief with the conditions for a successful process of justifying belief.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, Teresa, in *The Interior Castle*, is articulating her experience for us, many who may very well question how she could be so sure that her experiences were authentic. As such, she is engaging in the process of justifying and the evidence of the effects which she cites is indeed helpful to us and further confirms her belief, but that does not entail that those effects were necessarily part of the ground of her original belief that she was having an authentic mystical experience.

However, one may grant that the SAM-beliefs referred to by Saints Teresa and John of the Cross in the above quotations are properly basic, but question whether their belief that SAM-experiences cannot be counterfeited by the devil is properly basic. It seems that the veridicality of SAM-experiences is not read off from the experience itself, but is rather inferred from the nature of the effects of the experience and other theological beliefs. After all, in the quotes from both Teresa and John of the Cross above, it seems that they are in fact inferring that such experiences cannot be counterfeited. John of the Cross seems to be inferring that since the experience "penetrates into the inmost substance of the soul" and "savours, in some measure, of the divine

essence and everlasting life" that the devil could not counterfeit it. Teresa seems to be inferring from the certitude and great interior benefits the same conclusion. The objection is that if Teresa and John of the Cross are inferring that SAM-experiences cannot be counterfeited, the belief that such experiences cannot be counterfeited cannot be properly basic and consequently that such experiences cannot be self-authenticating.

Now I am quite willing to grant that the Carmelite mystics, in the quotations above, are inferring that such experiences cannot be counterfeited by the devil, but do not think that this threatens the self-authenticating nature of SAM-experiences. Whether it is inferred from the experience or it is properly basic, what Teresa and John of the Cross both attest to is that such experiences *cannot* be counterfeited, and this is what Alston, in the quote above attacking the self-authentication thesis, denies. If Teresa and John of the Cross are right, either by inference or in a properly basic way, this distinguishes SAM experiences from sensory beliefs, memory beliefs, beliefs about other minds and material objects, etc. Such beliefs are not self-authenticating and the belief that such beliefs *cannot* be counterfeited is not properly basic nor can it be reached by a sound inference.

The position which I am defending is that SAM-beliefs are analogous to privileged access beliefs. I assume that Descartes' *cogito sum* is a paradigm case of a privileged-access belief; and his recognition of the self-authenticating nature of the *cogito sum*, like the belief of the Carmelite mystics regarding the veridicality of SAM-beliefs, can be similarly construed as being reached by inference.

But there is a deceiver (I know not who he is) powerful and sly in the highest degree, who is always purposely deceiving me. Then there is no doubt that I exist, if he deceives me. . . Thus it must be granted that, after weighing everything carefully and sufficiently, one must come to the considered judgment that the statement "I am, I exist" is necessarily true every time it is uttered by me or conceived in my mind.<sup>22</sup>

I am not suggesting here that Descartes' inference is correct, but what I am suggesting is that the fact that Descartes infers that the *cogito sum* cannot be counterfeited by the evil genius in no way impugns the self-authentication of the *cogito sum*. As for the Carmelite mystics in the case of SAM-experiences, Descartes is reading off from the experience of the thought certain properties (as he sees it, its clarity and distinctness) which together with his beliefs about what such a being as the evil genius might be able to produce, entail that such a thought cannot be counterfeited. Now he may be wrong about what he takes to be read off from the experience or what the evil genius may or may not be able to produce or whether all this entails the truth of the *cogito sum*. But if he were right, then the fact that he infers the veridicality of the *cogito sum* does not falsify the self-authenticating nature of the *cogito sum*,

it confirms it. Likewise, the Carmelite mystics seem to me to be reading off from their experience certain properties, including the effects of such experiences upon their soul, such that together with certain beliefs that they hold about what God and the devil are and can do, imply that only God can cause such experiences. If so, then SAM-beliefs, like privileged-access beliefs, are uniquely authenticated.

It seems to me that this objection confuses the self-warrant view of SAM-beliefs, which I rejected, with the truth-warrant view. If a belief is self-warranted, all of its warrant comes from the belief itself. So if a self-warranted belief were not properly basic, granted, I can't see how it could be self-authenticating. But in the truth-warrant view, the ground is not merely the belief, but the truth of the belief. I take it that this is one of the reasons why Alston rejects the self-warrant view in later writings in favor of the truth-warrant view. And if Alston is right about grounds being accessible, the grounds of beliefs which are truth-warranted must be via the experience itself. It is not the belief alone which is self-authenticating. It is the ground of such a belief which makes such a belief self-authenticating. The properties read off from the experience (not the belief itself) provide the ground.

Extending then Alston's diagnosis of truth-warrant for PA-beliefs, I propose that we take SAM-beliefs as an extraordinary species of PA-beliefs. Like beliefs about one's own mental states, SAM-beliefs are such that the agent has privileged access. The agent is in a cognitive state which gives her a privileged position in relation to its justifying conditions, and whatever justifies the agent's believing M, no one else can have the same justification. SAM-beliefs are justified because they are truth-warranted: a SAM-belief is warranted if and only if it is based on its truth. What would justify *my* believing that God is manifesting Himself to me now is its being grounded in the truth that God is manifesting Himself to me now; but its being true that God is manifesting Himself to me now *cannot* function as a warrant for anyone else's believing that God is manifesting Himself to me now. Construed in this way, SAM-experiences, like other PA-experiences, are self-presenting<sup>23</sup> and SAM-beliefs are a limiting case of properly basic beliefs.

That SAM-beliefs are truth-warranted by being PA-beliefs of an extraordinary character I think coincides with the way we view the nature of what Alston seems to refer to as "mountaintop" M-beliefs. Abraham, Moses, St. Paul, St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa and the many anonymous believers who have had M-beliefs have a degree of warrant for God's presence which is unsurpassed by the degree of warrant possessed by beliefs formed by any doxastic practice in the paradigmatic set.<sup>24</sup> As Plantinga has argued, we ought not to conceive of properly basic M-beliefs as in need of strengthening or support via mediate justification. As I suggest, SAM-beliefs have a degree of certitude which is as strong as the degree of certitude of any other sort of



properly basic beliefs. This is reflected in the resolve of the believer under even *very* difficult circumstances. Abraham had no doubts that God wanted him to sacrifice Isaac and Mary no doubt that she would conceive, even though the “defeaters” of such beliefs seem to be overwhelming. So, SAM-beliefs are not just *prima facie* justified, they are unqualifiedly justified.<sup>25</sup>

SAM-beliefs are an *extraordinary* type of PA-beliefs. It is not typical that humans would form such beliefs in a reliable way, and there is no natural mechanism or doxastic practice which converts the input to output.<sup>26</sup> SAM-beliefs are formed through a *supernatural* doxastic practice. God’s grace elevates the intellect of the person to whom He presents Himself, and God’s manifestation to us is possible only through a supernatural alteration of the cognitive powers of the human intellect. As a result, most of us, most of the time, do not have the capacity to form SAM-beliefs; and it is quite possible that *some* of us never are granted the capacity to form SAM-beliefs. As the congenitally blind person has no reliable perceptual mechanism for the formation of properly basic color beliefs, the person (believer or non-believer), to whom God does not graciously manifest himself in this self-presenting way, has no reliable cognitive mechanism, and cannot form SAM-beliefs. And lacking such a cognitive mechanism, it would be unimaginable to such a person how such basic beliefs are formed. I cannot imagine what kind of experience would justify my belief that God has commanded me to sacrifice my son; whatever I conceive of, seems subject to conclusive doubt or deception.

Although SAM-beliefs are warranted to such a high degree, one must keep in mind that under my proposal, such beliefs are warranted if and only if they are *true*. This is another distinguishing mark from properly basic beliefs which are not of the PA sort or (I would guess) of the general class of M-beliefs which Alston considers. *There is a tree*, or *Tom is in pain* may be warranted in a properly basic way, even in circumstances where the beliefs are false, and *not* warranted in circumstances where the beliefs are true. But if I am right, truth is both a necessary and sufficient condition for the grounding of SAM-beliefs. It does not follow however that SAM-beliefs are infallibly justified.<sup>27</sup> If someone has an SAM-belief and it is not true, such a belief is then unjustified. Mary’s belief that she will conceive, Abraham’s that he sacrifice his son, are properly basic beliefs and warranted if and *only if* those beliefs are true.<sup>28</sup>

As a species of PA-beliefs, SAM-beliefs are essentially subjectively justified. This is the most obvious difference between the justification conditions for beliefs in the paradigmatic set and SAM-beliefs. But barring some reason for epistemic imperialism, SAM-beliefs can be properly basic, even though the conditions which would make them properly basic are dramatically different from the conditions which make beliefs in the paradigmatic set properly basic.

### *Conclusion*

What are the significant conclusions that can be drawn from the account of the justification of SAM-beliefs that I have given? In particular, in what way does this account differ from the alternative model provided by Alston in *Perceiving God* and earlier essays?

First, it is clear that Alston's account of the justification of M-beliefs does not in any way rely upon the postulation of a phenomenal quality which distinguishes veridical from non-veridical M-beliefs. The position that SAM-beliefs are truth-warranted may appear to presume that there is such a quality. But in what way such a phenomenal quality is presumed by a truth-warrant account is not clear-cut.

What I think might very well be the case is that it is quite possible that there is such a quality, but that it is only identifiable by those who have had veridical manifestation experiences, and that such experiences are not the sort that can be well-articulated to those who have not had the experience.<sup>29</sup> And so for those of us who haven't had such experiences, the testimony of the enlightened gives us very little insight into what the experience might be like. As St. Teresa recounted, "I did not know how I knew it . . . There are no words to explain."<sup>30</sup> George Mavrodes suggests that these experiences are basic, and that like other basic actions or experiences, we just do them or have them, and there is nothing of note to articulate about them.<sup>31</sup> So even if there is a phenomenological mark of SAM-beliefs which accompanies a valid cognition, if this experience cannot be communicated by authentic mystics, spurious manifestation experiences would still be problematic. For all I know, there *may be* a phenomenological characteristic of genuine SAM-beliefs which spurious SAM-beliefs lack. But don't ask me what that property might be, for I am here like the congenitally blind man being asked to describe the phenomenology of color perception. And, in any case, if there is such a phenomenal quality, it is not something that can be infallibly identified.<sup>32</sup>

But there now seem to be strong disanalogies between SAM-beliefs and PA-beliefs. After all, if SAM-beliefs are not infallible, one can have false SAM-beliefs, and this does not seem to be the case with PA-beliefs. Another point of disanalogy is that warranted PA-beliefs are universal whereas warranted SAM-beliefs (as far as I can tell) are held by only a special few. Another difference is that whereas PA-beliefs are beliefs about a state which is internal to the subject, SAM-beliefs are about a reality (viz., God) which is external to the subject. How then can I hold that SAM-beliefs and PA-beliefs are similarly grounded?

It seems to me that the possibility of having false SAM-beliefs and the fact that warranted SAM-beliefs are not universal are connected. One of the reasons why we do not have false PA-beliefs is because paradigmatic PA-beliefs are about experiences which are common to all humans. Take, for example,

beliefs about being in pain. We have all experienced pain as long as we can remember and well before we had a language in which we could articulate beliefs about pain. Hence, if in learning language about pain, one forms what appears to be false first person pain beliefs, we would say that the person has not correctly mastered the concept of pain, that she doesn't understand the language properly. Since we take it for granted that the person has pain experiences, we insist that a proper understanding of the concept of pain must entail true ascriptions of first person pain beliefs and since the ability to make such true ascriptions is a necessary condition of having a mastery of the concept of pain, seemingly false first person pain beliefs are rejected as conceptual or linguistic confusions. And then when a person does master the concept of pain such that she forms true first person pain beliefs with recognition, false PA-beliefs are ruled-out by the self-authenticating phenomenon of pain.

But imagine if pain were not such a universal phenomenon. Imagine an alien who migrates to earth and is such that although he shares much in common with human life, he has never experienced pain. However, amongst the things which this alien does share with humans is something akin to certain forms of pain behavior (say, grimacing or the like in certain appropriate circumstances). If this alien then learns our language, it would seem to me quite plausible that he would form false first person pain beliefs. And for such an alien, since he has never experienced pain but shares pain behavior with us and forms first person pain beliefs in the appropriate behavioral circumstances, he might have no clue that such beliefs are false. Imagine further that this alien life form's biological constitution is affected by long exposure to the earth's environment such that he suddenly begins to experience pain. After an initial shock, the alien would be able to recognize his earlier first person pain beliefs as false, and would hardly be tempted to form such false beliefs in the future.

The alien hypothesis is not as far-fetched as it may appear. I remember as a young boy witnessing my father experiencing leg cramps. I was very curious about what sort of experience he was having; and being an active and accident-prone boy, who was never without bumps, bruises, aches and pains of all sorts, (and wanting to be as much like my father as I could be), I thought at times that I too had leg cramps. As I got a bit older and wiser, less active and hence less susceptible to the ever accompanying aches and pains of childhood, I stopped forming beliefs about having leg cramps. Then, in early middle age, I was awakened in the middle of the night by an excruciating leg cramp. I knew then that I had never had such an experience before, namely, any sort of cramping experience, and since then believe that I have never formed any false first person beliefs about having such an experience. That certain cramping sort of experience is self-authenticating.

What I am suggesting in my alien example and my example about cramps is that PA-beliefs are not necessarily infallible. What is common to both examples is that the sort of experience which grounds the PA-beliefs is an experience which is not universally shared and the subject experiences only some time after he already has the linguistic resources necessary to articulate such beliefs. In such cases, it seems quite plausible that false first person PA-beliefs be formed, or that a shift in meaning or understanding has occurred.<sup>33</sup>

Now SAM experiences, if I am right, are much more like my alien's experience of pain or my illuminating leg cramp experience in the middle of the night than they are like our more common PA experiences. If, as I am arguing, SAM experiences require a supernatural alteration of our cognitive processes, and yet many of us can read the mystics and have experiences with similar behavioral manifestations, it would seem quite natural that some of us who have never been blessed with legitimate SAM experiences could easily form false SAM beliefs. And as in my own case of forming false leg cramping beliefs, there may well be a component of wishful thinking involved: many might wish to be a mystic, as I wished to be like my father. But for those who have been blessed with the authentic experience, they will only form true SAM beliefs, as I now only form true leg cramping pain beliefs.

But still, one may question how even God, through a supernatural alteration of our cognitive processes, could bring about such self-authenticating experiences of Himself. It would seem that even God could not bring it about for me, for example, that *there is an eagle sitting on that limb* is a self-authenticating experience, entailing as it does a fact about the world external to me. It does seem to me problematic, given that eagles and limbs of trees are objects which are necessarily external to me. But then there doesn't seem to be the same problem with experiences like *God is comforting me now*. If God is the source and the ground of being, He is the source and the ground of my being. God is not an object external to me like an eagle or a tree. The supernatural alteration of the cognitive process could involve God's making His presence self-evident to me. As John of the Cross says, "this knowledge consists in a certain contact of the soul with the Divinity, and it is God Himself Who is then felt and tasted."<sup>34</sup>

And God's presence within me does not necessarily entail His *being* me. Common PA experiences are distinguished such that some are intentional and some are not, e.g. *I am experiencing the color blue* versus *I am blue*. When I am feeling blue, there is an identity of the subject (myself) and the object (the feeling). But if I am experiencing the color blue, it is a self-authenticating experience, but within the experience there is nonetheless a clear intentional distinction between myself (the subject) and the color experienced (the object). If the Holy Spirit really does dwell within us, why can't He make Himself self-evidently manifest within us via certain extraordinary interior intentional experiences?

The second notable difference between Alston's position and the truth-warrant position is that Alston's position relies upon M-beliefs being grounded in a socially established doxastic practice which we are rational to believe is reliable, whereas the truth-warrant account that I have given in no way relies upon grounding SAM-beliefs in such a practice. I would hold that such a ground is not necessary for certain M-beliefs, namely, those which are of the SAM sort. What, for example, would be the socially established doxastic practice which grounded Abraham's M-beliefs? I would suggest that there was none, and that the truth-warrant model gives us a better picture than the doxastic practice model of the sort of M-beliefs Abraham had. On the other hand, my position is quite open to the possibility that there may be other sorts of M-experiences which are not self-presenting and thereby need to be grounded (if they are at all grounded) in a different way. After all, it does seem as if the documented M-experiences of Abraham, Moses, Mary, Saul, St. Teresa, and of the other saints and prophets, are of a rather exotic sort. Maybe there is a less exotic sort, more common amongst believers, which are warranted in an entirely different way. Here the doxastic practice approach seems to me to be quite valuable.

Teresa's and John of the Cross's taxonomies of manifestation experiences seem to confirm the distinct nature of the justificatory conditions of distinct sorts of M-experiences. For example, John of the Cross distinguishes many different types of mystical experiences. Regarding what he considers as spiritual visitations of the interior sense, he warns us that these experiences can be produced by the devil as well as being the work of God. And unless they are in clear conformity with the Gospels, we ought to take no notice of them. If St. John is right and there are M-experiences of interior sense, I think that Alston's doxastic practice approach provides a plausible rendering of the justificatory conditions of M-beliefs formed on the basis of such experiences. But, as noted on p. 438 above, John of the Cross also speaks of a different sort of mystical experience: a supernatural union with God which produces a "knowledge of pure truths" and cannot be counterfeited by the devil. According to St. John, these sorts of mystical experiences are on a higher plane and are of the sort Moses and David experienced.<sup>35</sup> If there are mystical experiences of this sort, I think that the truth-warrant position provides a much more plausible epistemological rendering of them than does Alston's doxastic practice approach.

There is a way in which the doxastic practice approach may be incorporated into the position I have suggested. Alston has continually reminded us of the distinction between *being justified* versus the *process of justification*. If some M-beliefs are justified in the way which I have suggested, the justification, as I noted above, is subjective. Hence for such beliefs, their grounds would not be effective evidentially in showing that one is justified. It seems clear

to me that whether or not Christian doxastic practice (CDP) is a necessary component of the justification of M-beliefs, it seems to be quite relevant, and maybe even necessary for the process of justification. St. Teresa may not have needed CDP to be justified in her M-beliefs, but to show to others that she was so justified, appeal to CDP appears to be essential. SAM-beliefs are justified *only if* they are true. And although if true, they are evident to the subject, SAM-beliefs can *seem* evidently true and consequently properly basic, even when they are not true. In short, since we are not infallible in our identification of true M-beliefs, even though someone may be immediately justified in believing certain M-beliefs, their emphatic claims are no reason for someone else's taking them as justified. Only those who have *true* SAM-beliefs are warranted, and since we have no access to that which grounds someone else's SAM-beliefs and since claims about SAM-beliefs may conflict, we need to find some other way to approach the question of the plausible truth of such claims: another way seems to be through grounding in a doxastic practice.

There is one more way in which CDP can be relevant to the justification of SAM-beliefs even if my view is correct. CDP can confirm such beliefs. But as I have described them, SAM-beliefs do not seem to be in need of further confirmation. Well, I think we ought to distinguish between having an M-belief about a present experience, and having an M-belief about an experience which we have had in the past. When I am left with an M-belief (whether of the SAM sort or not), and am no longer having the M-experience, my memory of having had just the right sort of experience can be easily clouded by doubt, particularly given the uncommon nature of such an experience. So the grounds of justification for M-beliefs while I am having an M-experience may be quite different than the grounds of justification when I am no longer having such an experience.

Another significant difference is of a more global sort. Alston's position relies upon a reliabilist conception of justification in general. But maybe that is not the way to go. Alvin Plantinga, most recently in *Warrant and Proper Function*, has argued that a warranted belief is one which is formed by a cognitive capacity which is properly functioning in a congenial epistemic environment according to a design plan which is aimed at the truth. On such a view, grounding in a socially established doxastic practice appears to be irrelevant to warrant. I think my position is quite in line with the proper function approach. SAM-beliefs can be construed as outputs of a cognitive faculty functioning properly. The only stipulation that needs to be made is that these beliefs are not formed in accordance with the design as ordinarily or naturally instantiated, but rather as the result of a supernatural modicum of awareness added by God to our cognitive system under special circumstances.

Alston's position construes M-beliefs as analogous to perceptual beliefs,

hence the title *Perceiving God*. If my view is correct, PA-beliefs are better analogues for some M-beliefs. Why? If SAM-beliefs are justified in the way I have suggested, this better explains why SAM-beliefs, unlike perceptual beliefs, are not universal or intersubjective. God does not build into our natural design the capacity for having SAM-beliefs and so only those for whom God has modified their design experience God's presence in this extraordinary way. It also explains better, or at least as well, the difficulty of articulating the character of SAM-beliefs.

As a final note, I would say that Alston's position on M-beliefs is one which is epistemically weaker than mine concerning justification, but stronger than mine on the potential for showing that one is justified. The truth-warrant position entails that a SAM-belief is justified if and only if it is true, so there are no warranted false SAM-beliefs in this position. This is the sense in which the truth-warrant position is epistemically stronger than the doxastic practice approach. But the rigid requirement that SAM-beliefs be true in order to be justified results in a weaker position in the truth-warrant view for showing such beliefs to be justified. However, since I hold that CDP can be appealed to in the process of justifying M-beliefs, this relative weakness can be to some extent addressed.<sup>36</sup>

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#### NOTES

1. "Christian Experience and Christian Belief," *Faith and Rationality* edited by Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press: 1983) pp. 103-34.

2. "Religious Diversity and Perceptual Knowledge of God," *Faith and Philosophy*, vol. 5, no. 4 (October 1988) pp. 298-313.

3. William Alston, *Perceiving God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). Henceforth *PG*.

4. The term "manifestation belief" is used by Alston to designate "beliefs to the effect that God is doing something currently vis-a-vis the subject . . . or to the effect that God has some (allegedly) perceivable property." *PG*, p. 1.

5. *PG*, p. 80.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 210-11.

9. Alston, "Self-Warrant: A Neglected Form of Privileged Access," in *Epistemic Justification* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989). Henceforth, *EJ*; p. 287.

10. By the "paradigmatic set" of immediately justified or properly basic beliefs, I mean the set which includes perceptual beliefs, memory reports, and beliefs about other minds.

11. See e. g. his “Concepts of Epistemic Justification” and “An Internalist Externalism,” both collected in *EJ*.

12. *EJ*, p. 314.

13. *EJ*, p. 301.

14. *EJ*, p. 99.

15. *PG*, p. 33.

16. St. John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, translated by David Lewis, (London: Thomas Baker, 1922), p. 207.

17. St. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, trans. by Kernan Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), p. 152.

18. See p. 437 above.

19. *EJ*, p. 63.

20. *EJ*, p. 63.

21. The level confusion between being justified and justifying is introduced by Alston in “Concepts of Epistemic Justification” in *EJ* pp. 82-83.

22. Descartes, *Meditations* II.

23. *EJ*, p. 315.

24. St. Teresa describes one of her experiences in this way: “how is it that I can understand and maintain that he stands beside me, and be more certain of it than if I saw him? . . . He renders Himself present to the soul by a certain knowledge of Himself which is more clear than the sun.” Quoted from Evelyn Underhill’s *Mysticism*, 1955, pp. 284-85.

25. On *prima facie* versus unqualified justification, see *EJ*, pp. 109-10, 238-39.

26. In this way, my position on SAM beliefs contrasts with Plantinga’s view on M-beliefs. He holds that “God has so created us that we have a tendency or disposition to see his hand in the world about us. More precisely, there is in us a disposition to believe propositions of the sort *this flower was created by God or this vast and intricate universe was created by God* when we contemplate the flower or behold the starry heavens or think about the vast reaches of the universe.” “Reason and Belief in God” in *Faith and Rationality*, p. 80. Both Teresa and John of the Cross consider SAM experiences to be infused and that God effects these experiences without the cooperation of the soul of the subject. See *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* Bk. II, chapter XXVI, #7 and *The Interior Castle* Sixth Dwelling Place, #5.

27. Alston defines “infallibility” with respect to a type of proposition as: “For any proposition, S, of type R, it is logically impossible that P should believe S, without knowing that S.” *EJ*, p. 261. For the definitions of omniscience, indubitability, and incorrigibility *vis-a-vis* belief, see *EJ*, p. 264. Some may wish to argue that SAM-beliefs are indubitable, incorrigible, and omniscient in Alston’s sense; I do not wish to argue that they are or that they are not, for my main thesis concerning truth-warrant for M-beliefs is neutral in respect to both positions.

28. This condition allows theists to dispose of the worries about Great Pumpkinites and others who have a false faith being justified in their holding SAM-beliefs. But of course the Great Pumpkinites who claim revelations from the Great Pumpkin *think* that their claims are justified because they are true, and under my view they can similarly dispose



of the claims of Christians, Jews, and Muslims on the basis that they are false (they think). Although the truth-warranting thesis I am suggesting entails that if SAM-beliefs are justified, then they are true, and if they are true, they are justified, of course anyone who holds SAM-beliefs will think that they have satisfied the truth-warrant condition.

Plantinga is responsible for dignifying consideration of belief in the Great Pumpkin in "Reason and Belief in God," pp. 74ff.

29. Another mark of SAM experiences which John of the Cross notes is their ineffability. See *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* Bk. II, chapter XXVI, #4-5. Although I do not think that SAM experiences are completely ineffable, if I am right and they are like common PA experiences of human knowers but are not universally experienced, this would explain their relative ineffability.

30. Underhill, pp 284-85.

31. See George Mavrodes, *Revelation in Religious Belief* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), pp. 106-7.

32. Some may consider it objectionable that, in the view which I am proposing, there is no infallible way to identify SAM-beliefs from "the inside;" there is no phenomenological characteristic which characterizes spurious SAM-experiences for the unenlightened. George Mavrodes has considered this general issue in his article "Enthusiasm," and concludes that probably the best response is no response; that there is very little in the way of validation that is applicable to M-beliefs. See George Mavrodes, "Enthusiasm" in the *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 25 (1989), pp. 171-86.

33. For example, the alien may not say that "I used to have false pain beliefs" but rather "This isn't what I used to mean when I said 'I was in pain.'" The same may be said for the person who used to falsely report SAM-beliefs. She may not say "I used to have false SAM-beliefs," but rather "This is not what I used to mean when I said that 'God is speaking to me now.'" In any case, we have PA-belief reports or SAM-belief reports which are not true.

34. *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, p. 207.

35. For a concise summary of John of the Cross's views of mystical experience, see Anthony Kenny's "Mystical experience: St. John of the Cross" in *Reason and Religion* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 85-99.

36. Earlier drafts of this paper were read at the Western New York Regional meeting of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, the Pacific Regional and the Canadian meetings of the SCP and the Santa Clara Philosophy Conference on Religious Epistemology. I wish to thank the participants of those meetings, particularly John Heiser, Herb Nelson, and William Alston, for their many perceptive questions and helpful suggestions. I also wish to thank the editor, Philip Quinn, and two anonymous referees of *Faith and Philosophy* for their criticisms of earlier drafts.