As the title hints, I will attempt to relate to one another the notions of evidence, faith, trust, and testimony. I will be reflecting on their relation from the standpoint of an internalist, evidentialist, and foundationalist (IEF) position (to be specified below). My main aim is not to argue against non-IEF accounts, for the field is large (for a well-worked-out account of the epistemology of testimony from an apparently non-evidentialist perspective, see Goldberg 2010). Rather, my aim is to describe an alternative to the standard offerings in the epistemology of testimony which seems to be much neglected, and hope that its radiant beauty does most of the arguing. I will, however, defend it against the objections I have most often encountered. One such objection, is that evidentialism precludes the possibility of religious faith, which is very far from the truth. Key “reductionistic” claims along the way are that faith and trust are just the same thing by different names—that doxastic faith/trust in particular turns out to be just one kind of testimonial acceptance with nothing special being added by religious content. So, in short, the thesis is that everything worth saying about faith and trust in a doxastic (i.e., belief) context can be captured by an adequate epistemology of testimony, and that the epistemology of specifically religious testimony is “nothing but” a special case of a more general phenomenon.

The view I describe is both internalist and traditional, but it is not the only way to do a traditional internalist account of testimonial justification. Sections 4.2 and 4.3 will

1 The contribution of the scare quotes is this. There is a structural or theoretical reduction, due to the fact that the formal features of religious epistemology are identical to those of general epistemology, yet it is left open that, and indeed believed by the author that, religious truths are the most important truths a person could know.

2 I will say a bit about its Lockean inspiration, but I think it is largely consonant with what Saint Thomas Aquinas says (see Swinburne 2005, ch. 4 for an account of Aquinas’s view). I think it is also more consonant with early and late modern Catholic and Protestant views than might often be thought (see Wainwright 1995 for an excellent survey).

3 For a different account of testimonial justification that is both internalist and traditional, see Fumerton (2006).
describe the sort of internalist evidentialism that will be the framework for my account of epistemic trust. Section 4.4 will describe the relationship between a closely-related cluster of terms: trust, testimony, faith, and belief. Section 4.5 will focus in on the epistemology of testimony according to the framework described in sections 4.2 and 4.3. Section 4.6 will apply Section 4.5 to the religious case.

4.1 Prolegomena

There are many dimensions to our cognitive life. Epistemologists tend to get fixated on one or another aspect of cognition and try to make that aspect do all the heavy lifting in their theory. I seek to avoid this common error here. Among the various features of our cognition are the following. There is the content of beliefs, the truth of beliefs, there is the conformity of reasoning to special patterns, support relations between propositions, there is our conscious perspective on the world, and there is the unconscious “hard-wiring” below the surface. Our hard-wiring has various modules with various roles in cognition which can function well or poorly. There is even a moral dimension to human cognition. These features give rise to various dimensions of evaluation. Beliefs can be true or false, epistemically justified or unjustified (i.e., have that which takes one from true belief to being in a position4 to know), responsibly or irresponsibly formed, formed by reliable processes or unreliable processes, the result of well or poorly functioning faculties, and they can constitute knowledge or fail to do so. A really difficult problem that can create lots of confusion is the fact that these properties can be combined in almost any combination. A responsibly formed belief could be the result of poor functioning, but still be reliable and epistemically justified, but not an item of knowledge. Or it could have the compliment of nearly all these properties and be irresponsibly formed, the result of well-functioning faculties yet unreliable while at the same time being epistemically justified and constituting an item of knowledge. Philosophers are the kind of people for whom it would be fun to figure out all the possible combinations of these properties. And, of course, there would be disagreement about whether some of the permutations were genuinely possible. Such fun, however, is well beyond the scope of this essay. However, I feel strongly that it is worth mentioning to avoid certain confusions and to get the reader in the mood to hear a theory which tries to do justice to each of the aspects here which I have time to discuss (which will obviously not be all of them).

4 “In a position” to know rather than “knowing” because one’s actual belief might be gettiered.
4.2 An Evidentialism

As can be seen in Dougherty (2011a), there are many ways to formulate a doctrine deserving of the name “Evidentialism.” I advocate a view close to that of Locke. To begin with, nothing can make a proposition *intrinsically beliefworthy* except for evidence. A proposition is intrinsically beliefworthy when there is sufficient non-pragmatic, truth-directed reason to believe it. “Truth-directed” does not mean that the evidence must confer *objective* probability on the target proposition. Rather, the truth connection is intentional and representational. That is, the evidencing states are ones which purport to reveal to us the way the world is. Feeling hot is (approximately) constitutive of a ground for a reason to believe that it is hot, because the feeling “says” that it is hot. We might say, to switch sensory modalities, that the eyes “report” that there is a red-headed bird outside on my deck when I have the right kind of visual and phenomenal experience. This is (or is approximately) what David Hume called the “testimony of the senses.” It is through the immediate sources of justification—the five senses, memory, rational insight, and introspection—that we have our “window on the world” (or “worlds”: external, internal, logical). I will say something about the unity of these sources in the next section.

Having evidence is not only necessary for rational belief, it is sufficient and explanatory as well. That is, whenever evidential considerations are properly aligned, nothing else is required to have epistemically appropriate belief. And when one grasps someone’s evidential profile—what evidence the person possesses—then one is in a position, not only to know exactly what propositions are justified (and to what degree) for that person, but also to understand why the propositions that are justified for that person are so.

Conee and Feldman encapsulate these conditions into the following principle:

\[
(EJ) \text{Doxastic attitude } D \text{ toward proposition } p \text{ is epistemically justified for } S \text{ at } t \text{ if and only if having } D \text{ toward } p \text{ fits the evidence } S\text{ has at } t. \text{ (Conee and Feldman 2004: 83)}
\]

They understand this principle in a way which entails a supervenience thesis.

\[
(ES) \text{The epistemic justification of anyone’s doxastic attitude toward any proposition at any time strongly supervenes on the evidence that the person has at the time. (Conee and Feldman 2004: 101)}
\]

That is, any two possible individuals sharing exactly (qualitatively) the same evidence will also be exactly alike as to what propositions are justified for them to believe. I endorse this supervenience thesis, but both my foregoing comments and other formulations (see Dougherty 2011a) help add content.

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1 See Dougherty (2011b), (2011c), and (2012) for a defense of this thesis.
2 I also endorse the Lockean doctrine of *Proportionalism*, that the strength of one’s belief should be exactly proportionate to the strength of one’s evidence. To describe how this thesis fits in with the cluster of concepts I discuss here, though, would require more space than I have.
What about epistemic responsibility? Couldn't one have a belief that fit one's evidence at a time and still be epistemically irresponsible? Yes, one certainly could, in principle. I have spilled considerable ink over the issue of epistemic responsibility, but I will only summarize my position here. My position is that so-called “epistemic irresponsibility” is reducible to standard moral irresponsibility. Whether one has investigated a matter sufficiently is wholly a matter of what is at stake and what purely moral duties one has. What evidence a person morally should have or would have were they to investigate as much as they morally should have is separable from the questions of what evidence they do have and whether their beliefs do now fit the evidence they do have. Both are interesting questions worth investigating and both dimensions represent ways in which one can go right or wrong with respect to one's beliefs, but so is one's diet, and one can only address so many questions at once. The term “epistemic justification,” the name for the property evidentialism is a theory of, arose in the context of exploring Plato's accounts of knowledge (episteme) in the *Meno* and *Theaetetus*, in which having some “account” is what distinguishes knowledge from mere true belief. Early modern philosophers interpreted this as requiring that one be able to give a reason for every belief they held. This has damaging consequences for our picture of what we know, for there are many things we take ourselves to know, according to the common-sense picture, for which we would give at best faltering answers when asked for the reason why we believe them. This is a natural segue to my account of evidence.

### 4.3 An Internalism

Evidentialism is sometimes associated with demanding, “hard nosed” views of epistemic justification. And, indeed, it does set an exceptionalness standard. However, how demanding this is depends upon what theory of evidence one mates to evidentialism. Evidentialism is a *formal* thesis. It tells you that a belief must fit a formal condition in order to be justified (and that meeting this condition is also sufficient for justification). But this formal thesis is empty and uninformative until it is paired with a *material* theory of evidence, a theory about what evidence consists in. As mentioned just above, some classical foundationalists held the very demanding theory that to have evidence is to be able to articulate a reason. This, however, confuses *knowing* that something is the case with *showing* that it is the case. It over-intellectualizes epistemic justification. Externalisms, however, which place the locus of epistemic justification wholly at the sub-personal level—such as process reliabilism which holds that a belief is epistemically justified just when it is formed by a reliable belief-forming mechanism—under-intellectualize the process, leaving out entirely the agent's perspective. Neither the skepticism-inducing high demands of certain forms of classical foundationalism, nor the low demands of perspective-ignoring externalism do justice to the
common-sense picture of intellectual life. I seek a golden mean, which does justice both to the sub-personal (roughly, unconscious) and personal (conscious) aspects of intellectual life. We have various faculties which process information unconsciously which have impact on our conscious perspectives.

What each of the immediate sources of justification—sense perception, memory, introspection, rational insight—have in common is that they provide us (alone or in combination) with an appearance of reality. How reality appears to us to be is our only guide to how it is. Obviously, appearances can be misleading. But according to common-sense epistemology, we assume that things are as they appear until we have good reason to think otherwise. This is the opposite of skeptical “conspiracy theory” epistemology. The fundamental unit of evidence, then, is the appearance state. This is a special kind of mental state. It must be distinguished from other kinds of mental states with which it is closely connected or else some epistemologists will write the view off as having already been refuted. Consider these two kinds of states:

Its appearing as though there is a red-headed house finch on one’s deck. It appears as though there is a red-headed house finch on one’s deck when one hosts moderately complex and intertwined instances of phenomenal red, phenomenal brown, in certain shapes and patterns, etc. appearing on a certain geometrical grid, perhaps one is auditorily chirped to in a certain frequency, etc.

Its appearing that there is a red-headed house finch on one’s deck. It appears that there is a red-headed house finch on one’s deck when the following is the case. One is acquainted with a phenomenal property associated with the contemplation of the proposition that there is a red-headed house finch on one’s deck which manifests itself (but is not identical to) a felt attraction or inclination to believe the proposition.

In a favorable situation (for humans) with properly functioning faculties, its appearing as though there is a red-headed house finch on one’s deck will be the dominant explanation of its appearing that there is a red-headed house finch on one’s deck. At the sub-personal level, there are two modules which are meant to work together. One translates data about patterns of light and such into a conscious, sensuous experience with certain shapes and colors, and the other translates these conscious, sensuous experiences into propositional appearance states. But the two can come apart. One can be aware that one is looking at an optical illusion and then proper function will prevent appearing as though from bringing about an appearing that. For example, when looking at a pencil in a glass of water, there is the perceptual appearance of a bent pencil. But one does not in any way take this as indicative of the truth about the shape of the pencil. It does not seem to one that the pencil is bent. I think it is the latter state that is the truly evidential one. This latter state has, unlike the former, “thick” conceptual or propositional content, but the evidence is identified with the state itself, not the proposition which is the content. Normally, the connection between the two states is so intimate and so essential for rational belief that we will easily and naturally confuse the two and

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* For a defense of a similar distinction, see Tucker (2011: sec. 2.2).
include the former in our catalogue of evidence when it is strictly speaking the latter which constitutes our evidence.\footnote{This non-propositional account of evidence goes against my arguments in Dougherty (2011b), which was an attempt to see if I could defend the kind of view required for Williamson’s E=K. For further arguments for experiential theories of evidence see Dougherty and Rysiew (2013).}

There is another way the two kinds of mental states can come apart. Consider the following two scenarios.

\textbf{Martian} On Mars, beings exist who evolved in a way different from, but similar to, the way humans evolved on Earth. They have a similar sensory apparatus which allows them to host some of the same kind of sensory qualia as we do, but in different circumstances. In particular, they have no ability to feel hot and cold, though they are damaged by extreme temperatures just like we are. So hot things appear as though red to them and cold things appear as though blue. That is, when they perceive a hot thing (and are functioning properly) they host an appearance state with a character which is qualitatively identical to the one we would describe as being as though there is a red thing. But for the properly functioning human it will appear that there is a red thing while for the properly functioning Martian it will appear that there is a hot thing. In short, proper function takes us from the same appearance as though to different appearances that.

\textbf{Inverted Spectrum} You suffer from a color spectrum inversion disorder which causes purple things to appear red to you. You have no idea this is the case because purple things are fairly rare anyway and it simply hasn’t come up in a situation where someone corrected you. You have no evidence at all that you suffer from this condition. You look at a violet and it appears as though it is red.

In Martian, though the human and Martian have the exact same sensory experience they have different evidence. The reason is that the sensory experiences are devoid of thick concepts and/or are not associated with the right concepts. It is only the more conceptually enriched experience of its appearing that something is the case which counts as evidence.\footnote{Thus this kind of internalism avoids Bergmann’s dilemma (See Bergmann 2006).}

In Inverted Spectrum, though you are functioning improperly in the turning-light-into-sensory-images module, if you are functioning properly in the response-to-seemings module and basing your belief on the evidence, it will appear to you that there is a red flower. Thus you will have evidence that there is a red flower. All else being equal, you ought to believe that there is a red flower. You have knowledge-level justification for the proposition that the flower is red. The only thing preventing you from knowing it is red is that it is not red. In the exact same experiential situation in which it is red, you know that it is red.

Since one’s total evidence consists in all the reasons one may have to believe or not believe any proposition, we may express an internalist evidentialism which I call Reasons Commonsensism:\footnote{That is, a reason of some non-zero weight. An item which counts in favor of believing, though it may well be outweighed.}

\begin{align*}
\text{(RC) } S \text{ has a pro tanto purely epistemic reason to believe that } p \text{ if (and because) it appears to } S \text{ that } p. \end{align*}
A few comments on RC are in order. First, things can appear to one to be a certain way even if one doesn't have the thought that it appears to one in such a way. One is appropriately guided by one's evidence even if one is so guided without awareness that one is so guided. Second, part of the intuitive motivation behind RC is that one ought to be guided in rational belief by features of one's experience intelligibly connected to their perspective on the world. Yet it is too much to ask of an individual that they be able to give or explain their reasons in order to attribute epistemic justification. The main differences between my principle RC and other, similar principles like Huemer's Phenomenal Conservatism are that my principle is about reasons, not justification, and the appearance states are propositional attitudes of a sort. I think, however, that what I say below will work about the same with weaker principles as well. Finally, RC establishes a principle of foundational justification (speaking with the vulgar, “a reason” is synonymous with “some justification”). So the view I describe is a form of foundationalism, in that there are beliefs which do not receive all their justification from other beliefs (beliefs receiving sufficient justification from experience might well receive justification from coherence with other beliefs as well). But not all foundationalisms are created equal. Some forms of classical foundationalism are very demanding indeed. The foundationalism in the internalist evidentialism I describe is much more moderate. Yet, unlike externalism, it requires that there be something in the agent's conscious perspective which indicates to them that a proposition is true in order to count them as having any reason to believe.

The most common objection to commonsensism is that it makes justification too easy. But why think justification is hard? And as I have presented it, it is not a theory

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12 Jonathan Kvanvig and I were discussing this when Warranted Christian Belief was still in manuscript form. Tucker (2011) uses this as the basis of an argument for the superiority of phenomenal conservatism over proper functionalism. This motivation also addresses another aspect of Bergmann's dilemma (see Bergman 2006). Finally, I want to draw attention to the ways in which my RC differs from that of others (for example, Huemer 2001, Swinburne 2001, and Tucker 2011).


14 One concern for making seemings that necessary for justification is that one might think that some inferential beliefs don't seem to be true, but we believe them reasonably because we see that they follow from what does seem true. I think I can handle this with an account of two different kinds of seemings—direct and indirect—but if not, then I am happy to let RC be a principle of immediate justification. Robert Audi suggests another possible counterexample to necessity. He suggests that when we are receiving larger chunks of testimony, much of the content just "flows in" and it is not the case that each item of information has a seeming true. I think I can also handle this with a distinction between two kinds of seemings, but if not, then, once again, I'm happy to drop back to defending RC as a principle of reasons generation. Perhaps the stronger version could be defended for the doxastic attitude Lehrer calls "acceptance" (1997: 3; 2000: 32). Lehrer's notion of acceptance is quite different than that of Audi's. See Audi (2011: 21). Alternatively, the connection to appearance states could be more remote. It could be that bearing some correct relation to appearances is both necessary and sufficient for generating epistemic reasons.

15 Any epistemic reason, that is. One may well have practical or moral reasons to believe. For example, someone might promise to give you a million dollars to believe that the moon is made of green cheese. That would give you a practical reason to believe something for which there is no epistemic reason. Or someone might threaten to blow up a school unless you believed it. That would give you a moral reason to believe something for which there is no epistemic reason.
about justification (except insofar as “justification” is used to refer to evidence which consists in all one’s reasons), it is a theory of epistemic reasons. And reasons come in all strengths, so merely to have a reason is not something that should require much. RC could be wedded to theories which require lots of reasons for justified belief or it could be wedded to theories that require only a single reason to justify belief. So I really take no stand on how hard it is to be justified in believing. But let us briefly consider the objection that RC makes justification too easy (since justification consists in having reasons of a certain strength).

First, the fact is that for many of our most intuitively justified beliefs—such as simple mathematical beliefs and perceptual beliefs—all we have by way of reason to believe is the appearance that they are true. So if such seemings are not sufficient for justification, then we have none. Second, RC is compatible with a recursive notion of justification whereby foundational beliefs are justified in the way RC says, so we have to do the hard work of building on this foundation and working out how all the foundational beliefs fit together. Forming a coherent synthesis of all our foundational beliefs is no trivial matter. Third, recall the desideratum to have a view of evidence which is a common-sense golden mean between under- and over-intellectualization. Principles like RC go back through Swinburne and Chisholm to the Scottish common-sense tradition embodied by Reid and his principle of credulity. And before that, similar principles were suggested by Augustine and some stoics, especially Carneades, who was attempting to strike a balance between academic skepticism and dogmatism. This is clearly a fallibilist position. That is, it acknowledges that evidence can mislead, even in the best of cases (compare Descartes’s demon).

According to RC, what goes on in the space of reasons matters to justification. That is, there must be features of an individual’s conscious experience which are essential parts of the explanation of why S believes as she does. Yet the processing of information which gives rise to these evidential states can go on quite unconsciously. (And, of course, what is unconscious can change across time as the thinker reflects upon what reasons she might have. Thus, items that are foundational in her conscious experience can become grounded when S reflects and brings unconscious reasoning to the surface.) The importance of all this will become more clear when it is illustrated in the next section.

Views similar to the one I’ve described are emerging as major players on the epistemological field, yet no one has yet attempted to give a theory of the justification of testimonial beliefs in these terms. That is what I attempt to do in the next section.

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16 Witness Tucker (forthcoming). Bergmann (2012) testifies “Phenomenal Conservatism has become quite a significant player among internalist positions in epistemology in recent years…” (165).
4.4 Trust, Testimony, and Faith (and Belief)

In this section, I will consider some of the key relations between the members of the triad in the section heading (and belief). Because the terms in question are sometimes used synonymously and sometimes used non-synonymously but quite similarly, and vary in only imperfect parallel (all but “testimony” have “_____ in” and “_____ that” versions but they do not always take “in” and “that” in the same contexts equally well), it is important to say how I am thinking of their relation to one another. My treatment here is necessarily brief and there are nuances I will neglect. However, I think the framework I present embodies one important set of structural relations that hold for the most part.17

“Faith” and “trust” are virtually synonymous outside a religious context. They both express both doxastic and non-doxastic states and in their non-doxastic state they each express a concept with two aspects: active and affective. In the doxastic mode, to “have faith that” and to “trust that” are (except in very special cases) just to believe that. The active aspect is actual reliance on something. The affective aspect is a feeling of confidence (not necessarily the “degrees of confidence” decision theorists talk about) that the thing relied upon will not fail. For either term, sometimes only one of these aspects is implicated by context in a deployment, and sometimes both are. Another thing that may not be part of the semantic content (not entailed) but is almost always implicated by context is that there is a non-trivial chance that the thing trusted in could fail.

We must distinguish from this possibility of failure another shortcoming usually implicated by uses of “faith” and “trust” in their doxastic form: indirectness of verification. Outside of the philosophy room, we rarely talk about trusting our senses. Rather, if we see it, we don’t need to trust someone or something for the fact. But “we walk by faith, not by sight” says Saint Paul (2 Corinthians 5:7). Interestingly, his context of use is brimming with expressions of confidence. This fits Aquinas’s model of faith, which has the same degree of assent as if we had seen, even though we have not (ST II-II.1.2, II-II.2.1). Still, faith is in this way imperfect and to this extent is defective. Thus it is not surprising to find that, for Aquinas, Jesus has no faith (ST III.7.3). We can refer to these two shortcomings of trust/faith as risk and remoteness. Risk relates to both the doxastic and non-doxastic aspects of faith (I take it that believing that the chair will hold one and sitting in the chair constitute different acts of trust/faith). The doxastic risk is of the proposition one believes being false. The non-doxastic risk is of the thing trusted failing to have the property one is trusting it to have (such as being able to hold my weight) and thus causing some harm to the one exercising the trust (such as falling to the ground when it collapses). Doxastic risk is surely at least in part a consequence of remoteness: the indirectness of one’s method of verification.

17 For a somewhat similar but perhaps “thicker” account of trust and its many dimensions, see Linda Zagzebski (2012). Also, a somewhat expanded version of chapter 4 focused on the complex nature of trust. See her ”Trust” in Timpe (2014).
Objection: If fallibilism is true,\(^8\) that is, if none of our beliefs is literally certain, then everything involves some risk, so everything is a matter of trust/faith;\(^9\) doesn’t this trivialize the notion? 

Reply: Not at all, for risk varies greatly. Doxastic risk ranges from the small amount in nearly certain propositions to very great risk in the nearly impossible. And active risk ranges from almost inconsequential to world-changing. This fact helps us measure the degree of trust/faith required for an act. It is clear that trusting/acting in faith comes in degrees. It takes very little faith to trust a bridge on the highway. It takes a lot of faith to trust half-inch thick ice, and the deeper the water, the more the risk, and so the greater the faith exercised. The riskier the action, the greater the degree of faith exercised.

We should distinguish here the idea of having “a lot of faith” in a proposition that we take to be very well confirmed by our total evidence or, by extension, in people who have proven to be reliable sources of information. This trades on an ambiguity in “faith.” One usage is essentially synonymous with “confidence” (this comes from a common root in the Latin “credo”). This is the usage at work in “having a lot of faith/confidence” in a proposition or person. The other usage is essentially synonymous with “trust” (this comes form the Greek root “pisteuo”). To see the contrast, we only need to be able to hear the opposite directions “faith” is pulled in in the following two utterances.

A. “I know you’ll do great: I’ve got a lot of confidence in you.”
B. “I’m so disappointed: I put so much trust in you.”

As long as we keep these two usages in mind, the ambiguity of “faith” needn’t lead to confusion. The more confidence one has in something, the less trust required to depend on it.

This allows us to understand “perfect faith” (and perhaps Aquinas’s notion of faith as involving a degree of assent as if one had perfect knowledge) in terms of not hedging one’s bets but instead wagering all (and so we get a little Pascal as well).\(^{20}\) Since one does not have the highest degree of epistemic strength for the propositional contents of one’s faith, this can involve substantial risk. Put more positively, one “invests in eternity” in the religious case. Acts of faith are acts that only “make sense,” practically speaking, if the faith (propositional) is true. That is, they are acts with a “payoff” (to put it crudely, but the reality needn’t be crude) only if the faith is true. If it is false, acts of faith are a waste of time.\(^{21}\) All those Sundays spent in church, rather than on a bike

\(^{8}\) See Dougherty (2011e) for an account of fallibilism that fits with what I develop here.

\(^{9}\) Once you feed into decision theory only propositions that aren’t certain, every act involves some risk. If I had time, I would expand on the way risk defines faith.

\(^{20}\) For a great exposition of a sort of Pascalian account of faith, see the appendix to Swinburne (2005).

\(^{21}\) A full treatment would also cover weak forms of belief such as Swinburne’s contrastive notion (2001: 36–8) and Poston and Dougherty’s de re belief (2007). Also, Pojman (1986) suggests hope may stand in for faith. Augustine’s account of faith in the Enchiridion seems to make it a species of faith (1955).
or a hike, then, would be a waste of time in this sense, if one's faith turned out to be misplaced.

There is a particular kind of indirect verification that is central to Christian belief: testimonial evidence. This kind of epistemic trust is central to all our intellectual commerce as social beings with a very limited sphere of direct verification in a wide world. Almost all we believe gets its justification from testimonial evidence. In the next section I will briefly describe a theory of testimonial justification in line with my first two sections and then, in the final section, I will apply that theory to an important kind of testimonial belief (belief formed from testimony): religious belief.

The account is intended to be in general agreement with Locke’s “Of Faith and Reason and their Distinct Provinces.” But I also think it has more in common with Aquinas’s view than meets the eye.  

4.5 Justified Testimonial Belief/Rational Trust/Rational Faith

4.5.1 The Value of Belief in a Trusting Relationship

With the above framework in place, I can now present the evidentialist view of testimonial justification I wish to describe fairly simply and in a context which will illuminate its core content. For some reason, some synonymous or near-synonymous terms tend to gravitate toward certain other terms. Old soft drinks go “flat” but grapes go “flaccid.” And almost nothing else is described as flaccid. And even though, on the relevant precisifications, “justified,” “rational,” and “reasonable” all name the same property, they gravitate quite strongly to different nouns. They tend to pair up as I have them in this section’s heading. I believe we have seen that “belief,” “trust,” and “faith,” though they are deeply intertwined and have significant overlap in usage, are not wholly synonymous. In this section, I will focus on the doxastic/epistemic usage of “trust” and “faith” which has belief that at its core. I do not think this is somehow more important than what I have called “active faith” or “Pascalian faith” . And even though I have some sympathy for the position that Pascalian faith does not require strong belief that, there is clearly at least some good-making feature in acting on strong beliefs rather than weak ones.  

Objection: But isn't there also something good-making about acting on weak beliefs, namely, that it clearly displays what one values?  

Reply: Yes, that’s true and not inconsistent with my claim. However, the objection—which is really no objection—is

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22 See Locke 1975, book IV, chap. XVIII.  
23 For a nice presentation of Aquinas's view, see Penelhum (1989) and Swinburne (2005: ch. 4).  
24 See the appendix to Swinburne (2005) and Poston and Dougherty (2007).  
25 I am unhappy with the locution “acting on belief B” for I do not think that, strictly speaking, beliefs are what one acts on, though there is a natural re-translation. I think that one acts on reasons and that reasons (for action) are not beliefs but rather chances of success. This is not the place to argue that, however. See Dougherty (forthcoming-b) for explication of the notion of a reason to act.
less and less plausible as the probability of what one is acting on progresses toward zero, for then it just looks like desperation. *Objection:* But mightn't even acts of desperation have the previously-mentioned good-making feature of more clearly revealing what one truly values most? *Reply:* I suppose so.

Perhaps one way to state one good-making feature of acting on what one actually believes is that there is a kind of coherence involved in doing so. Furthermore, many people find it much easier to act on what they believe than merely act out of expected utility. And even if one is able to act upon epistemic hunches comfortably, it is harder to celebrate (not exactly the right word, but I hope context will clarify) the truth of a proposition one doesn't believe. There are comforts and joys and other positive psychological factors that come with really believing that, say, your spouse is not cheating on you rather than merely acting as though that is the case when your evidence is ambiguous at best because, after all, confronting them about it without solid evidence will have negative expected utility. And, since religious commitment is, at its best, so much like a marriage, it follows that there are the same kinds of benefits in actually believing the creed of the religion one wagers on.

### 4.5.2 How Testimonial Beliefs are Justified

Contrast the following two situations.

**Nefarious** You are in a city you have never been in before. Many buildings are boarded up and many windows are broken out in those that are not. There are very few people out on the street. You would like to get out of this part of the city, but you have no idea which way to go. Reluctantly, you pull over and ask one of the few people you see standing on the sidewalk. When you ask how to get back onto the highway, he grins eerily, looks quickly from side to side and tells you that if you keep going forward and take the first right, there is a gas station where they will give you a free map inside.

**Normal** You are in a city you visit fairly often, but you can't seem to locate your favorite restaurant, The Red Rooster. You stop and ask the first person you can flag down. They tell you you just went two blocks too far, so you should turn around and go back two blocks and it will be on the north side of the street.

These stories are caricatures of course, but their extremity illustrates important points that can be applied to the many degrees in between (and there may well be indeterminate borderline cases). In Nefarious, you probably would not come to believe the testimony (you would either come to believe it false or have enough doubt that you would withhold judgment), whereas in Normal you probably would readily believe. I suspect there are perfectly ordinary inductive arguments that support the reasonableness of those doxastic responses. Yet it is not on the *basis* of any discursive reasoning that you would form your beliefs, not even quick tacit ones I think. This is one reason why issues of epistemic responsibility are not of much help in thinking about standard testimony cases. The whole idea in such cases is that we don't need to do any inquiry unless there is some special reason to doubt or in special cases where we have plenty of time and
the inclination. A standard kind of case of testimony is one rightly described as simply trusting the other person for the information rather than investigating matters for ourselves. In aspects of Enlightenment thought—that great, trembling, visceral reaction to authority—this would have been anathema. But it is now—once again—widely recognized that trusting others—believing what they say without reasoning through it on our own and even without explicit discursive thought about whether it is right to trust them—is a perfectly rational thing to do; that justified belief and knowledge are routinely had by such means (more so, surely, than by any other method with the possible exception of perceptual beliefs).

In a properly functioning human, there will be some kind of sub-personal information processing which results in an overall impression. You will be creeped out by the nefarious testifier but feel assured by the normal one. The sense of creepiness and sense of assurance count as reasons to believe/disbelieve the reports. In ordinary circumstances these appearances will be enough to make believing/not believing the most reasonable doxastic attitude. In some cases the reason will be enough to make a true belief based on it knowledge, and in others knowledge will require a bit more by way of independent evidence. Cases would have to be described in detail to discern the level of justification.

As evidence that the justification isn’t the result of discursive reasoning, I will spend exactly two minutes trying to make an argument as to why the normal testimony should be accepted. I’m starting the timer now.

The normal testifier was chosen more or less at random from a number of people on the street. Therefore, since serious mental illness is rare, the testifier is probably not mentally ill. The same goes for moral viciousness. Therefore, probably, the individual was not mentally ill or morally vicious. And unless they were so, they are probably willing and able to tell the truth if they have the correct information. OK, I went over. That was 2 minutes, 36 seconds. And the reasoning is pretty incomplete. I would still need to defend the premise that the individual probably did have the relevant information. I suppose I would fill the argument as follows.

At any given time, most people in a city are residents of that city—I suppose this is true even for NYC. Since this person was chosen essentially at random, probably that person is a resident. Furthermore, residents typically have fairly good knowledge of areas which are not very far from where they live and work, and, finally, they often travel familiar paths associated with their home and work. And, of course, most mentally and morally healthy persons will not assert that p unhedged unless they are pretty sure of what they are saying, and they will not be pretty sure unless they take themselves to have pretty good evidence. I suppose one needs the lemma that the average person is fairly reliable about determining when they have good evidence for the relevant kind of proposition.

I think I could clean this up into a perfectly good formal argument, perhaps with two partly independent strands: one based on sampling and reliability and the other just on speech act theory (the latter, it usually seems to me, would still require evidence
(whether misleading or veridical) that the testifier (or original testifier in a chain) was reliable at identifying when he had good evidence, so the two strands would overlap at least there). And it might go faster as an inference to the best explanation. And probably one can typically think through such things more quickly than one can type it out. Still, even if you cut the time to a fourth of what it took me to write it out as fast as I could type my thoughts, it wouldn’t be nearly fast enough. For our assent in the normal case is nearly instantaneous.

What happens, according to the view I am describing, is at least one of two things. One possibility is that information relevant to reliability is processed sub-personally and a “verdict” is sent to the conscious mind in the form of an appearance state, a seeming that the person is telling the truth or that they are reliable or honest or what have you. In light of how much information content is in a worthy representation of the argument, there is probably a default mode of acceptance unless there is defeating information obtained. “Assumption” is not meant to imply any kind of non-evidential entitlement. On the contrary, information relevant to reliability judgments will have been recorded and used to justify the proposition Probably, testimony is true, unless there is some reason to think it isn’t. And then the only mental processing required would be to combine that premise with the information that there is no defeating information present. Still, though this exhibits an inferential structure, I prefer not to call in an inference since it is not conscious or intentional. Little rides on that classification, however. The important point is that the evidence (in the good case) is an experience non-deviantly caused by the unconscious processing of the information (whether it be particular facts about the testifier, or the application of the general reliability of testimony, or some restriction of the latter, or all of the above).

As with Inverted Spectrum, you may be functioning improperly and your mind will map the wrong outcome “verdict” on to the incoming data—it might do the “unconscious reasoning” right but get wires crossed in the report—or your mind might process improperly and thus send a report that is at odds with the data. So it might be the case that were you to consciously reason about the relevant data you would come to the natural conclusion that you would not accept the nefarious testimony, yet in reality your evaluation module sends the conscious mind a “seems trustworthy” mental state by mistake. Nevertheless, your evidence consists in the appearance state itself, so you ought to believe, all things being equal, that the nefarious testimony is, in this case, true.

Objection: Doesn’t it sound strange to say “You should believe the nefarious testimony?” Reply 1: The testimony doesn’t seem nefarious at the time, just as, above, the purple flower didn’t seem purple at the time. It would be absurd to believe that a flower that appeared to be purple was red, and it would be absurd not to accept seemingly reliable testimony (i.e testimony from a seemingly reliable source). Reply 2: One usage.

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26 This is suggested by Malmgren (2006).
of “ought” is what I call the “Monday morning quarterback” usage. It expresses what would have had the best outcome or what would have had the best expected outcome given what we know now, after the fact (or from some idealized perspective in the present). But since the rationality of a belief is judged from one’s own perspective just like the rationality of an action, this after-the-fact or omniscient-perspective “ought” is inappropriate here. Read as a perspectival ought—one which goes with epistemic probability—on analogy with expected utility, there is nothing strange in saying that one ought to believe what is false.

**Objection:** Is it plausible that small children’s brains can process this information to produce the appearance of credibility or incredibility? **Reply:** I don’t see why not. Their brains are known to make complex calculations with respect to sensory motor activity. Their memory systems are quite complex as well. Indeed, it is an advantage of my theory that it puts the information processing at the sub-personal level, which makes it plausible to attribute testimonial learning to children yet also includes a normative element—the judgment of appropriateness from one’s perspective judged relative to their appearance states. In the end, though, I’m not sure the beliefs of small children are the proper subjects of epistemic evaluation anyway. Also, one might want to hold a view like that of Foley and Audi who both—for similar but different reasons—separate the theory of justification from the theory of knowledge and/or Sosa’s distinction between “animal knowledge” and “reflective knowledge” and so attribute to small children knowledge without justification or animal knowledge, but not reflective knowledge.

I conclude, then, that if RC is true (which I am assuming without argument), then the appearance of credibility is sufficient to justify much testimonial belief. On the low end of testimonial cases are cases where we are not epistemically justified in believing the testimony but are rationally justified in acting on it (in low-stakes cases). These will ordinarily be cases where we have little to go on (i.e., there are few data from which to reconstruct an argument, data which a properly functioning mind turns into a weak appearance of credibility). On the high end of testimonial cases will be cases of testimonial knowledge. These will ordinarily be cases where we have more to go on (i.e., more data from which to reconstruct an argument, data which a properly functioning mind turns into a strong appearance of credibility).

The only thing I have to add by way of conclusion is that the (psychological) expectation that testifiers tell truly is rightly grounded in a mathematical expectation based on observed cases recorded by the mind. And the experience of that expectation—the mental state of hosting it, what it’s like to expect it—is an appropriate ground for the belief that the testimony is trustworthy (likely to be true). In this way, I think the bulk of testimonial belief is epistemically justified, even apart from data about particular instances. The particulars may be what push cases of justified belief into knowledge, when the testimony is true. (Note: And of course many of the data about particular cases will fit the expectation model. That is, will be of the form “S has F” where there has been previous observed and recorded correlation between having F and speaking the truth, resulting in the psychological expectation that S is telling the truth. When
the feature is “says ‘p’” we have the broadest kind of testimonial evidence, since saying that \( p \) is, in normal assertoric contexts (perhaps not quite the same as asserting that \( p \) positively correlated with \( p \)'s being true).

4.5.3 Is My Theory Evil?

There are two kinds of views which have scary names which my theory might be thought to satisfy (correctly, I hope). The first is “egoism,” the view that testimonial beliefs (beliefs formed (solely?) in response to testimony) are justified only if one has testimony-independent reasons to believe that the testifier is reliable (likely to be telling the truth in the present kind of circumstance). Egoism entails that non-testimonial reasons are necessary for justified testimonial belief. Another view, “reductionism,” entails that non-testimonial reasons are sufficient for testimonial justification (and thus “testimonial” can be dispensed with as at best misleading). The following two sections discuss whether the internalist-evidentialist view of the justification of testimonial beliefs I describe counts as egoist and reductionist. I conclude that it does and that this is a good thing.

4.5.3.1 Is This Egoism?

Consider the following two theses.

(Weak Epistemic Egoism) The fact that someone else has a belief\footnote{The normal way of finding out someone else has a belief is via testimony, and the literature on trust tends to have an especial focus on testimony. One can consider the question of the epistemic significance that someone else believes something apart from testimony, at least in theory, through something like ESP.} provides me with a reason to believe the same proposition but only if I have sufficient evidence that that person is sufficiently reliable.\footnote{What constitutes sufficient evidence will be hard to say. For example, problems concerning higher-order evidence may arise. But I am interpreting this thesis in such a way that having a reason for means having a consideration that counts in favor of, which I take to be equivalent to acquiring a unit of incremental confirmation. Problems also arise in fixing the lower bounds of sufficient reliability (for belief).}

(Epistemic Universalism) The fact that someone else has a belief provides me with a reason to believe the same proposition whether or not I have sufficient evidence that that person is sufficiently reliable.

These are weakened versions of theses that Richard Foley (2001: 86) considers. He, and after him Zagzebski (forthcoming)\footnote{See also Huemer (2011) and Kvanvig (2011).} defend Epistemic Universalism. It appears that the view I have described is not only reductionistic but egoistic. I hope that this appearance is not misleading, for it is my desire to describe a view that is both reductionist and egoist. We should straightaway distinguish egoism from egotism which is egotistical. An egotistical view attributes special status to one’s opinions or sources of opinion just because they are one’s own. Rather, like Foley and Lehrer,\footnote{It is interesting that though they both especially value and work from first-person perspective, they are on opposite sides of the reductionism/non-reductionism debate. See Foley (2001) and Lehrer (2006).} my motivating...
principle is that we have no choice but to do epistemology from the first-person perspective. There is no “view from nowhere” from which to establish a “scientific” epistemology. This is not to deny that our perspectives are influenced by others, for they certainly are. But even those influences have their effects via affecting our perspective.

Foley and Zagzebski argue against weak egoism on the basis that, roughly, it is incoherent not to extend trust to others who have similar constitutions and informational backgrounds. These arguments would need to be made much more precise to be evaluated properly, for though humans at all times and places share a common nature, subsequent nature and nurture differ radically among the human population, including within one’s own country, state, county, and city.

4.5.3.2 IS THIS “REDUCTIONISM”?

After discussing my view with a leading theorist about testimony, I am not certain whether my view counts as reductionistic or not. I certainly hope it does, though, because then there would be one less thing in the world to worry about. It is far from clear what counts as reductionism in the literature, but Jennifer Lackey nicely offers this account of reductionism that focuses on a particular thesis (Lackey 2008: 144 (the following is not a quotation)).

(The Reduction Thesis) The justification of testimonial beliefs is provided by non-testimonial grounds positive reasons such as sense perception, memory, and inductive inference.

Clearly, it seems, the view I have described entails the reduction thesis (and if it does not, then I have failed). Lackey wishes “provided by” to be read strongly, so that the reduction thesis entails this precisification (Lackey 2008: 148–9 (the following is not a quotation)).

(PR-S) Appropriate (non-testimonial) positive reasons (for the probable truth of an item of testimony) are sufficient to render belief in the content of the testimony epistemically justified.

Again, I will have failed in my purpose if my view does not entail this. Lackey notes that reductionism is often charged with “devaluing” testimony (Lackey 2008: 3). She does not clearly endorse this charge, but she credits her view with avoiding it. As far as I can tell, she doesn’t challenge the charge as being the non sequitur it is. That justification via testimony is a special kind of justification via foundational sources no more means it isn’t special and important than that your home is built upon a foundation of boring old concrete means your home isn’t special after all (or, perhaps more aptly: than that your home is “nothing but” a bunch of mereological simples arranged home-wise). There is simply no connection between general value and fundamentality. So the fact

32 For example, it is not at all clear that the following all share an account in common. See Adler (2006), Carter and Pritchard (2010), and Greco (2012).
33 Her principle ends “... sufficient for testimonial justification/warrant [sic]” (148). But justification and warrant are such different notions that it is unwise to put much effort into considering principles which run them together.
that I (gleefully) endorse a reductionistic theory of testimonial justification should not be thought to be in tension with the fact that I (enthusiastically—really, you should see me defend it in class) support testimony as a very, very special source of justification. *Objection*: But it’s not really a *source* on your view, now is it? *Reply*: Is my kitchen faucet not a source of water just because water isn’t created ex nihilo from the tap?

Lackey argues against PR-S with the following case.

*Nested Speaker* Fred has known Helen for five years and, during this time, he has acquired excellent epistemic reasons for believing her to be a highly reliable source of information on a wide range of topics. For instance, each time she has made a personal or professional recommendation to Fred, her assessment has proven to be accurate; each time she has reported an incident to Fred, her version of the story has been independently confirmed; each time she has recounted historical information, all of the major historical texts and figures have fully supported her account, and so on. Yesterday, Helen told Fred that Pauline, a close friend of hers, is a highly trustworthy person, especially when it comes to information regarding wild birds. Because of this, Fred unhesitatingly believed Pauline earlier today when she told him that albatrosses, not condors (as is widely believed), have the largest wingspan among wild birds. It turns out that while Helen is an epistemically excellent source of information, she was incorrect on this particular occasion: Pauline is, in fact, a highly incompetent and insincere speaker, especially on the topic of wild birds. Moreover, though Pauline is correct in her report about albatrosses, she came to hold this belief merely on the basis of wishful thinking (in order to make her reading of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* more compelling). (Lackey 2006: 149)

I must say that this strikes me as a case of *obvious* justification. Lackey’s puzzling verdict is premised on a rejection of or misunderstanding of internalism, so what you get is really the conditional: If internalism is false, then PR-S is false. She does not argue for the antecedent. Alternatively, she says, internalists can view her arguments as “arguments against reductionism about testimonial *warrant* or *knowledge*” (Lackey 2006: 151). To be a reductionist about knowledge seems absurd, to the extent I even understand what that would be. We’ve known since at least 1963 that positive reasons don’t suffice for warrant.

4.6 The Model Applied: The Truth of the Catholic Faith

4.6.1 Epistemic Authority

Though I think Catholicism makes a particularly fit model for a real-world application in this context, I expect that much of what I say here can be adapted to Christian belief

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34 For other ways in which testimony might be distinctive, see Greco (2012: 15).
35 On p. 150, Lackey seems to assume that reliabilism is true.
36 In her discussion of the objection that Nested Speaker only refutes reductionism if externalism is assumed (151ff.), she seems to think that internalists’ notion of epistemic probability and the truth connection is limited to some form of objective or logical probability. I recommend Cohen and Lehrer (1983), Fumerton (2004), (2011), and the replies in Conee and Feldman (2011).
more generally as well as certain other kinds of religious belief. It is easier, however, for me to illustrate my theory of testimonial justification in terms of my own belief system, Catholicism. I do think most of the beliefs of most Catholics in Catholic dogma are epistemically justified. I will offer an interpretation of this purported fact in terms of the theory described above. I wish to be explicit that I am not here arguing for the truth of the Catholic faith. A fictional example might just as well have served, but it would have required more creativity to describe. Only the beginnings of a sketch of such an argument are possible here.

I was not born Catholic (or born into any other religious tradition), but as an adult convert I have made a non-scientific but careful study of how ordinary Catholics think of the reasonableness of their faith-commitments (their belief that the creeds and catechisms express truths, that most of what the priest says in his capacity as priest is true, et al.). Some, of course, may not even count as believing. They may just be carrying on a social practice. There are two ways for this to be so, though. One way is somewhat explicit non-belief: they are good Americans and think religion is all about “what works for you.” (This is obviously not disbelief, for the attitude here is that religion doesn’t really propose things for belief at all.) A more common kind of potential non-belief (or at least very inexplicit belief) is illustrated by what I prefer to call “habits of thought.” These are cultural affirmations like “Smiling is a nice thing to do” or “One shouldn’t walk around unclothed all the time.” Even if people have dispositions to believe these things, I doubt many people have the right kind of mental assent to count even as unconsciously believing them: for one thing, they have never even consciously entertained the propositions. But maybe these cases just reveal what an attenuated notion belief is and that we should follow Lehrer in aiming at a more reflective state as the object of epistemic evaluation.

After having tuned out the above kinds of static and tuned in to people who do have a relevant degree of reflective affirmation of a relevant set of Catholic dogmas, we can understand the rationality of their belief in terms of the model above. Because I accept every Catholic dogma I am aware of as dogma, I will speak in language which reflects an assumption that all Catholic dogma is in fact true. That assumption is merely a matter of convenience of exposition here.

Baseball fans frequently know a lot about the history of baseball. But most Catholics are not fanatics, and, unsurprisingly, don’t know much about the history of the Church. However, they are aware that it is of very ancient origin as are the creeds they recite. For example, one needn’t have a degree in Patristics to know the Apostles Creed goes back

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37 This is to be distinguished from believing that the items of the creed are true; compare: I believe that the proposition expressed by $E = mc^2$ is true, but I have very little idea what proposition that is. So it would be misleading to say that I take the attitude of belief to that proposition in any straightforward way. Rather, I believe about some expression that it expresses a truth.

38 Audi (2011) considers it a kind of belief.
in some form to about the time of the Apostles. And of course, if only because of collegiate sports, they are aware that there are many prestigious Catholic universities. They can name a few saints, will recognize the names of many more, and are well aware that there are lots of others they haven't heard of or wouldn't recognize. If they went to a Catholic school, they are aware that the Church has had many great theologians through the ages, and even if they didn't, they are vaguely aware of this. They know there is a Pope in Rome who is the head of a worldwide Church with members and officials in about every place they will have heard of. And they know their local parish priest had to undergo many years of training to be ordained.

Such, in rough outline, is a goodly portion of the relevant background knowledge the average “practicing” Catholic possesses, or so has been my experience. (It’s hard to imagine how someone could miss this stuff.) I think it is perfectly natural that a properly functioning noetic system would produce in such an individual an appearance of credibility in the Catholic Church. There is some vagueness about the extent of this credibility or perhaps in the term “the Catholic Church.” Clearly the creeds are included but various other dogmas will be as well. Principally the other dogmas will concern the seven sacraments—chiefly transubstantiation—and morality—chiefly the Ten Commandments. There are a few dogmas about Mary as well. It is plausible that Catholic dogma includes some form of mind-body dualism, and a host of other philosophical theses. My position is that the appearance of credibility of the Catholic Church gives the believer a solid reason to believe the thing proposed until there is some special reason to call it into question as a teacher of the relevant truths. But reasons come in all shapes and sizes, so I am not committed to all of Catholic dogma having the same degree of justification for all Catholics.

The key thing is clearly the creeds and sacraments. The many dogmas that most Catholics are not even aware of will have a degree of propositional justification, since

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39 It is a slight modification of the Old Roman Creed which is taken to be a summary of apostolic teaching just after the close of the apostolic age. See Kelly (1950: 372–4).

40 Space limitations required cutting out a section dealing with charges of corruption within the Church, which in fact would illuminate well real-world credibility assessment. Short version: someone who moved from “a bunch of priests violated the teachings of the Catholic Church, morality, and the law” to “Probably, Catholic teaching is false” is either dysfunctional or irresponsible: the dysfunctionality is demonstrated by the abysmally bad inference and the irresponsibility is demonstrated by how easy it is to find the relevant information online: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/upload/The-Nature-and-Scope-of-Sexual-Abuse-of-Minors-by-Catholic-Priests-and-Deacons-in-the-United-States-1950-2002.pdf>). However, most people are well aware that (i) a very, very small minority of priests have been in any way implicated in wrongdoing of any kind, and (ii) many reliable organizations struggle with internal corruption.

41 The appearance of reliability of an institution can either be grounded in a reduction to the appearance of reliability of its principal personal constituents (which is rare, since we rarely know much of anything about them), or in perceptions of relevant details, or in recorded information about frequencies of true reports which (details or frequency information) may or may not be noticed by the conscious mind and which simply make the proposition that the organization is likely to issue truths (in a certain reference class) appear true.

42 The whole of the Catholic Catechism—which is a fat book in any edition—is divided into four parts: The Apostles Creed, the Seven Sacraments, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer.
they are attested to by an apparently credible source. Of course, discovery that that is proposed for belief—when that thing seems very counterintuitive or contrary to other very solid evidence—may well work the other way around and either reduce the appearance of credibility or suggest a restriction of the range of credibility.

One might think that the doctrine of transubstantiation itself might be just such a case. It is solemnly proposed for belief that some bread and some wine turn into the body and blood of Christ. It is indeed a striking doctrine, but the problems are “philosophers’ problems” in that they involve questions about substances, properties, and their relations. Assuming theism is true, there is no extra problem beyond the philosophers’ problems and they needn’t—and usually don’t—trouble lay folk.

There is not space to explore these matters adequately, for the vagueness treated raises many deep issues, and the doctrines of the sacraments have nuances which go well beyond their primary function. However, I think the broad outlines of the story are promising. The Catholic lay person perceives themselves as being part of a certain type of community: one with historical and intellectual depth and global breadth. That it could all be a sham seems absurd. Yet there is a structural integrity to the system that makes being a “Cafeteria Catholic” strained. On my model, Catholic faith-that (belief that core Catholic doctrine is true) is epistemically justified when one accepts the testimony of the Church (which comes via and is perhaps constituted by many more proximate receptions of testimony by family members, priests, professors, and popes) because the Church seems reliable to them and the beliefs seem true in virtue of that seeming. I have indicated why I believe this is the result of well-functioning faculties when the subject’s background evidence is as I take it to typically be. I furthermore take it that the average Catholic doesn’t have much by way of contra-indicating appearances which give them a moral obligation to investigate these claims much (a prominent exception will be discussed shortly).

I have described a process by which a properly functioning noetic system produces evidence in the believer with the relevant background information. The process is this. The mind is hard-wired to take certain information inputs and process them in such a way as to send up a “report” to the conscious mind. The “report”—a conscious state with propositional content and phenomenology, a seeming that that content is true—has status in the space of reasons and determines the normative dimension of the belief as epistemically justified or unjustified. If the proposition is true and the mind is functioning well, then, ceteris paribus, a belief with that same content will be an item of knowledge. If it is functioning poorly or the belief is false, then the belief can still be

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43 Most “Cafeteria Catholics”—which may well be most Catholics—doubt only the inconvenient teachings on sexuality. This is a special case which leaves most orthodoxy intact.

44 Justification of faith-that plays a key role in justification of faith-in, in acts of risking well-being on the truths of those doctrines. For example, in admitting to being a Christian in political contests where it is very risky to do so, the rationality of this risk is prefaced upon the rationality of believing certain things to be true, such as that one has a filial and fraternal duty to do so because of the Actions taken on behalf of God in the economy of salvation.
justified so long as the appearance of truth is strong enough and not contra-indicated by other appearances. If it is contra-indicated by other appearances, then, because of the gravity of the situation, what is at stake in religious belief, the agent will have a moral responsibility to investigate whether the proposition is true, to try to resolve the conflict.

This is exactly the process described in section 4.5 above. I also mentioned above the “expectation of truth” argument. We are aware that by far most people tell the truth about most things most of the time, so this creates the expectation (mathematically and psychologically) that any non-nefarious testimony is likely to be veridical. And most Catholics learn of the Catholic faith in the normal ways one learns most things. So I want to emphasize that in applying the theory described there, the subject matter is irrelevant. That is, there is nothing special about religious testimony. “Religious testimony” is therefore a potentially misleading term, much like “dietary testimony” would be. For the latter would just be testimony about a matter concerning what one should eat. The subject matter doesn’t change anything structurally about how the belief would need to be related to the evidence to be justified. Religious testimony is just testimony about religious matters. “Faith” as Locke says, is just trust in the testimony of God (which comes via revelation and implicitly via miracles).

There is another respect in which my position on testimony in religion is boring: the answer to the question “Why are the Catholics in question rational to believe that these things are so?” is simply “because someone non-nefariously told them so.” The beliefs they formed via testimony are rational for the same mundane reasons most beliefs formed via testimony are justified. Of course, other people say other, conflicting things, and so it is hard to separate the epistemology of testimony from the epistemology of disagreement. I do not have room to consider this connection in any detail, but I have elsewhere defended the thesis that it is possible in some cases to rationally maintain one’s position in the face of epistemic peer disagreement even with internalist evidentialist assumptions in play. Assuming that mine or someone else’s account of reasonable belief in the face of disagreement is correct, there is no special problem with learning from testimony when the testimony is controverted by someone else (a key fact, in my view, is that one typically knows more about their informants than they do about their detractors, but this is contingent, of course. In spite of what I have just said, I think it is absolutely crucial to the epistemology of testimony that it be developed in tandem with a theory of disagreement, for testimony in anything interesting is rarely unopposed). So consider the common situation in which a Catholic meets

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45 There is perhaps a sort of consensus gentium argument in the neighborhood here. By far most people have been religious and most (independent) religious belief has been Catholic. (I’m well aware this is consistent with the majority of people being non-Catholic.) And keep in mind, I am proposing a model for appropriately basic justified belief, not an inference from a discursive argument. For two very good recent discussions of the consensus gentium argument, see Zagzebski (2011) and Kelly (2011).

46 For an overview, see Dougherty (2013) and Feldman and Warfield (2010). My theory is a generalization of a case about conflicting testimony and generalizes to issues about consensus and expert testimony.
either an evangelical Protestant who tells them that the Catholic Church has corrupted the Gospel or an atheist professor who tells them that the things the Church teaches are simply crazy and absurd. There are two possibilities here. The Protestant/atheist can seem reliable to the individual or they can fail to seem reliable. If the latter, then there is no normative problem. If they do seem reliable, then, according to my model, the individual will acquire a reason to doubt their belief. They will now have a reason to believe arising from one arena of testimony and a reason not to believe arising from another. But notice now we’ve left the realm of the epistemology of testimony as such. We’ve now entered the epistemology of disagreement. There are again two ways this could go on the branch where the Protestant/atheist seems reliable. The seeming reliability could be at an obvious distance from that of the seeming reliability of the Church or not. If it is, then one will trump the other and that will be that. But if the conflict is between two sources that seem approximately equally reliable, then, ceteris paribus, the individual will have a moral responsibility (due to the gravity of the claims) to investigate concerning which testimony to believe. They will also tend to lose their epistemic justification for the doctrines, since their evidence is now evenly split.

One lesson to be gleaned from applying a model of testimonial justification (the justification of a belief formed in response to testimony) to a specific set of religious beliefs is that we shouldn’t expect it to be hard to be justified when one is in the right community setting. This, in turn, suggests that there are deeper issues which relate to disagreement, epistemic responsibility, and social epistemology more generally. For though testimonial justification might be easy to come by, the more one is confronted by alternative views, the greater the concern that that justification might be defeated. And the easier it is to come by justification, perhaps the greater the onus to test one’s beliefs with further investigation. I want to resist, however, taking these lines of thought too far, for there is within communities a division of intellectual labor. Given the existence of a sub-community of scholars and authority figures in one’s community, I doubt an ordinary believer bears too much of a burden to look too deeply into disagreements about what one believes on the testimony of an apparently credible authority figure.

4.6.2 *The Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit*

I have principally been concerned here with acquiring justified beliefs via testimony from other humans, but since I have also considered testimonial justification in a

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47 Ceteris may not be paribus because the individual might be a slave or enslaved to an unjust economy and have to work constantly or in a country with no freedom of information or what have you.

48 For reasons given by Kyburg (1961) and Foley (1992), developed a bit more in his 1993, and see also Kvanvig (2012). I think it is possible to rationally hold a belief set which includes contradictory propositions, so long as the contradiction itself isn’t held. This is non-ideal and a properly functioning individual will seek to alleviate the pressure given constraints on their time. A good illustration is when someone is presented with an apparent paradox. It does not make sense to suspend belief before one has evidence that the appearance is misleading.

49 It is for these reasons that investigations like Zagzebski (2012) are, in my view, central to the discussion of reasonable belief, including religious belief.
religious context it is worth considering how the testimony of the Holy Spirit might fit into an evidentialist account of epistemic justification for religious belief. I said above I would consider a possible exception to my claim that there is nothing (epistemically) “special” about religious testimony. The internal testimony of the Holy Spirit is a plausible counterexample. Yet in the end I do not think it is. Briefly, here is an analogy. Suppose you go to a hypnotist. He puts you under and demonstrates to onlookers that you are in that state in which you are under his control. He puts a red rubber ball under one of ten shells telling you you will remember that it is there when you are triggered but you will not remember how it got there. He then snaps his fingers and you “wake up.” You remember nothing and you blush as onlookers giggle. Then the hypnotist tells you he put a red rubber ball under one of the ten shells and asks you to pick it out. You are hesitant but you are also inexplicably drawn to one shell and, low and behold, it is the right one. You are somewhat surprised yourself, but there it is, nevertheless.

I propose that the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit may well work something like this. It is testimony the conscious mind never hears. The Holy Spirit testifies to the unconscious mind that, say, what this priest is saying is true. In creating this impression, the Holy Spirit provides you with evidence that it is so. That is, the mental state created ex nihilo in you by the Holy Spirit constitutes an appearance state that is a reason to believe.

In the shell case, given that you have evidence that you don’t have ESP, the reason may not be enough to justify belief about the ball, since you have an at least partial undercutting defeater. But if one already rationally believes that there is a Holy Spirit that sometimes reveals things to people, then there will be contexts in which such unexplained impressions do confer justification, for the occurrence of such an event will not be improbable. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit can do this for a number of relevantly concurrent propositions which will add up justification.

There is yet another way the Holy Spirit can give us evidence, which is more indirect. The Holy Spirit can bring it about that you have certain items of evidence by causing you to desire to listen to or read certain things such that the Spirit knows that if you encounter such ideas, they are likely to seem true to you, thus giving you evidence of their truth. Or the Spirit could directly cause you to entertain the thought, knowing that you have a disposition to affirm the idea were it to occur to you. In this way as well in the previous way, the “testimony of the Holy Spirit” can be given its due without any special treatment and without undue mystery. It is just a case of extraordinary means to ordinary evidential justification.

It is important, I think, for the Holy Spirit never to create such impressions contrary to good evidence without some overwhelming reason to do so (just as it is important never to assert or pretend to assert a falsehood unless there is sufficient reason to do so). However, I do think that the Holy Spirit can more readily create appearances contrary to misleading evidence as a corrective. For example, suppose an inquirer—whether believer or not—is reading one of the old “new atheists” and can’t think of a reply to their arguments (such that they are). I think it completely appropriate for the
Holy Spirit to create an impression that the book has somehow gone wrong in a way that one can’t explain. Likewise, the Holy Spirit can give an appearance of credibility to figures that are sources of more accurate information. This is somewhat like adjusting lighting conditions so that certain features of a work of art stand out, which the subject would not have seen on their own.

So the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit is an unusual case of testimony, but one wholly explicable in terms of my account of testimonial justification.

4.7 Conclusion

In the end, I believe, taking my reading of this chapter as primary evidence, that I have described a coherent, empirically adequate, and quite simple explanatory framework for understanding the nature of what might fairly be called “epistemic trust.” The view described is, I hope, evidentialist, reductionist, egoist, and humane. I focused on one special kind of “epistemic trust”: propositional Christian belief (faith-that), acquired via testimony (principally human testimony) to illustrate how this entirely “secular” (religiously neutral and unmotivated) theory can be applied to good effect in a case of religious belief.\(^50\)

References


\(^50\) I would like to thank editors Tim O’Connor and Laura Callahan for helpful comments on an earlier draft.


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