

Disagreement from the Religious Margins

Katherine Dormandy

[*forthcoming in Res Philosophica, July 2018*]

Abstract

Religious communities often discourage disagreement with religious authorities, on the grounds that allowing it would be epistemically detrimental. I argue that this attitude is mistaken, because any social position in a community – including religious authority – comes with epistemic advantages as well as epistemic limitations. I argue that religious communities stand to benefit epistemically by engaging in disagreement with people occupying other social positions. I focus on those at the community’s margins, and argue that religious marginalization is apt to yield religiously important insights, so their disagreement with religious authorities should be encouraged.

1 Introduction

Religious communities often discourage disagreement with religious authorities. This attitude might seem to make sense. After all, religious communities tend to regard their religious belief systems as largely accurate, and religious authorities have training, expertise, and on-the-ground experience that might be thought to uniquely enable them to safeguard it and apply it in new circumstances.

But I will argue that a better way for religious communities to achieve epistemic aims is to *encourage* disagreement with their authorities. Religious authorities are often rightly regarded as a source of religious insight, but there are certain sorts of insight which they are not in a good position to have, and certain sorts of oversight and error to which they are prone. The reason is that a person’s social position in a community exerts epistemic influence on her belief system, and religious authorities occupy a social position that is in some respects epistemically advantaged but in others – so I’ll argue – epistemically disadvantaged. This is so even if a religious authority is divinely inspired, as many religious communities take their authorities to be.

The antidote is to encourage open discourse and disagreement among occupants of various social positions in religious communities. But I will focus on one type of position in particular: that of people who belong to the religious community but are marginalized within it. I will argue that, even though religious marginalization can have epistemic disadvantages, it can also promote religious insights that religious authorities alone, as well as more “central” community members, stand to miss.

Some of the claims advanced here are also defended by feminist philosophers of religion (notably [Anderson, 1998] and [Jantzen, 1998]), drawing on feminist standpoint theory (e.g.

[Harding, 1993], [Narayan, 1988], [Wylie, 2003], [Medina, 2013]), though my approach differs from some of these. What I take from standpoint theory is a recognition of the complexity of belief formation that renders it necessary to discuss not just beliefs but belief *systems*, and not just evidence but psychological and social influences on our thought. My attention to the epistemic relevance of social location is also inspired by standpoint theory, though I spell this out somewhat differently. Whereas many standpoint theorists emphasize the epistemic advantages that marginalization can confer and the epistemic disadvantages of social privilege ([Anderson, 1998], 78-79, [Harding, 1993], 221), I argue (with [Narayan, 1988], 221-223 and [Medina, 2013], 42-41) that both social positions come with epistemic plusses and minuses – though I spend more time on the epistemic plusses of marginalization. Finally, some feminist approaches advocate a complete overhaul of traditional religious-epistemological frameworks [Anderson, 1998], [Jantzen, 1998]. My argument is compatible with such an overhaul, but does not require one – at least insofar as traditional religious epistemology is compatible with according a high status to the views of the religiously marginalized.

I will start by giving an account of religious belief systems and the sorts of epistemic benefits that are at issue (section 2). I will then discuss the epistemic features of religious authority (section 3). Next I'll clarify the notion of religious marginalization and argue that this social position, though prone to some epistemic limitations, lends itself to certain sorts of religious insight (section 4). I conclude (section 5) with some applications of my view.

2 Religious Belief Systems

Religious epistemology tends to focus on religious *beliefs*, which we may for present purposes understand as beliefs that purport to represent the religious domain.¹ Too narrow a focus on religious beliefs obscures the fact that they do not represent the religious domain on their own, but only in the context of a *religious belief system*: a complex of interrelated representational components that yield what we might loosely think of as a “model” of religious reality.

Let's outline some salient components of religious belief systems.²

Religious beliefs pertain to various religious topics, including theological ones (e.g., where salvation is found) or practical ones (e.g. whether women can be rabbis). They can be highly general (e.g., claiming that a transcendent reality exists), less general (e.g., that that reality is personal), or very specific (e.g., that a particular healing constitutes a miracle).

Second are *auxiliary beliefs*. These do not directly concern religion, but they bear epistemic or logical relations with religious beliefs ([Anderson, 1998], 73; [Wynn, 2017], 126); so changes in them may epistemically mandate changes in religious beliefs, and vice versa. Auxiliary beliefs concern many areas. One is metaphysics. Assumptions about God's relation to time, for instance, may have implications for how easily we can understand him as relating to his creatures. Another area is empirical: religious beliefs were historically taken to entail certain beliefs about the cosmos which, when disproven, forced the reinterpretation of those

¹There are of course other purposes for which this characterization of religious beliefs would be too narrow. And I will not attempt to define the slippery notion of “religious”; for present purposes an intuitive grasp will suffice.

²I draw on [Anderson, 1995].

religious beliefs.

An important sort of auxiliary belief pertains to epistemological methods and standards, especially those needed to form and maintain religious beliefs. Examples include how to weight different forms of evidence about religion, which hermeneutic is appropriate for religious scriptures, which religious beliefs are epistemically foundational and which derived, which people in the religious community count as experts, and so forth. My aim can thus be understood as advancing the epistemological auxiliary belief that the voices of the religiously marginalized should be accorded significant evidential weight concerning religious matters.

Religious and auxiliary beliefs are formulated by means of *concepts* (such as *God*, *galut*, *nirvana*, and *forgiveness*). These are decisive for the meaning of religious and auxiliary beliefs. Whether for example your concept of goodness presupposes an ethic of justice or of care has wide-reaching implications for your beliefs about God and his action in particular situations. And epistemological concepts, such as *knowledge*, *justification*, and *evidence*, are crucial to fixing the meaning of the community's epistemological auxiliary beliefs.

Finally, religious belief systems contain *values*. These are valenced attitudes that reflect what we care about, and they prompt us to ask the questions in response to which we articulate beliefs and concepts. Values can be expressed in various forms: a question that the community strives to answer in its teaching, the prioritizing of some things over others, and so forth. A community's values reflect *whose* concerns most matter within the community [Harding, 1993].

A religious belief system is individuated in the first instance by a central core of its beliefs, concepts, and values. Central to the Islamic belief system, for example, is the belief that Mohammad is God's prophet, and central to the Baptist belief system is the value of baptism as a free choice.³ Specific agents or sub-groups in the religious community flesh out and interpret that core with additional beliefs, concepts, and values; we may therefore speak of a person or a group's *version* of the religious belief system. It is possible, however, that the non-core components of a given version can so change the meaning or significance of the core ones that the version in question no longer counts as a version of *that* religious belief system. Where it is clear in the context, I will refer to a person or group's version of the religious belief system in question simply as that person or group's belief system.

Even if a belief system is generally accurate (see section 2.1), some of its versions may model the religious domain better than others. What I will be arguing is that, when a version of a religious belief system places epistemic value on the disagreement of its marginalized, it stands to represent the religious domain better than one which does not.

Religious (and other) belief systems are subject to three salient influences: evidence, psychological factors, and social factors. *Evidence*, which I will understand as a person's representational experiences and beliefs [Conee and Feldman, 2004], influences her religious and auxiliary beliefs both causally (by providing a basis for them) and normatively (by justifying them). By portraying reality a certain way, it also helps build our concepts and values. *Psychological* influences include affective, conative, and cognitive states and attitudes ([Kahneman, 2011], part II; [Chabris and Simons, 2010]). Social influences include the

³I am *not* saying that adherence to a belief system is what *constitutes* being (say) a Muslim or a Baptist. Religious belief systems play different roles in different religions; [Kellner, 1999] argues for instance that there *is* no single belief system to which a Jew must adhere.

stereotypes and associations prevalent in a society – in the media, the going forms of humor, and so forth ([Fricker, 2007], 30-40; [Mills, 2007], 23-35); they also include *groupthink*: the tendency to imitate the thought patterns of other members of your social group ([Janis, 1982], chapter 8). Psychological and social factors can influence a belief system *directly*, by simply causing a belief, concept, or value. But they can also operate *indirectly*, by affecting our evidence. They direct our evidence-evaluating behavior (we most naturally evaluate evidence as confirming our belief system), and they affect the *content* of our evidence: what we attend to, and how we perceive things when we do attend to them (we might call this “thick” perception).⁴

Each type of influence can be epistemically good or bad. Evidence, arguably constitutively, is supposed to promote truth. In many cases it does. However, whether it does in a given case depends largely on whether the psychological and social factors that influence it are themselves sensitive to the truth. Sometimes they are, but sometimes they are sensitive instead to other pressures, as we will see in section 3.

A person’s social position in a religious community – including whether she is an authority or marginalized – is an important source of all three types of influence. For it affects the evidence that she receives and the psychological states to which she is prone, and it exposes her to a certain configuration of social influences [Harding, 1993], 221. Consider an analogy: where you are standing with respect to the Eiffel Tower affects the impression of the tower that you bring home. Similarly, where you are socially located in a community oriented around the religious domain affects your representation of that domain. Your social location can help you see things that others miss, but it can also occlude things (or parts of things) that others see.

I will argue that the social positions of religious authority and religious marginalization, respectively, tend to have complementary epistemic features – but especially that a religious community stands to benefit epistemically from the insights available to those whom it marginalizes. I am *not* claiming that these or any social positions have *essential or inevitable* epistemic features, but merely that there are broad trends which admit of exception and which are manifested in different ways in different scenarios.⁵

2.1 Epistemic Benefits

If I am to argue that a religious community can benefit from the disagreement of its marginalized, we need a word about the kinds of benefits that are at issue, and about the epistemic standards on which they count as beneficial.

Let’s start with the epistemic benefits; consider religious and auxiliary beliefs. We benefit epistemically when a belief is true, justified, probable, and so forth, and when a set of beliefs is coherent, explanatorily powerful, and the like. As for concepts, we benefit epistemically when they are accurate, but also if they are epistemically useful – that is, if they carve out one aspect of a complex phenomenon in a way that makes it tractable or measurable

⁴On the psychology of attention see [Chabris and Simons, 2010], chapter 1; on thick perception see [Zeimbekis and Raftopoulos, 2015].

⁵“We cannot generalize and talk about *the* epistemic perspective of the oppressed or *the* epistemic perspective of the oppressor. Such rigid and homogenous categorizations of social groups lead to nothing but stereotypes, bad sociology, and bad epistemology” [Medina, 2013], 46; see also [Dotson, 2011], 239.

[Anderson, 1995], 45-46. What about values? If there are non-subjective evaluative properties, then we benefit epistemically by valuing things that possess them. But even if a value is merely subjective, it can be epistemically useful. For example, we benefit epistemically when our community's discourse reflects the concerns of a plurality of its members rather than those of a small elite, because the questions provoked by a plurality of values will likely prompt us to discover a more diverse sampling of evidence ([Longino, 2002], chapter 8). And we benefit epistemically if our religious belief system as a whole is accurate – that is, if it models religious reality something like the way that it is, insofar as human cognition can.⁶ As for evidence, we benefit epistemically when our belief evidence is true or our experiential evidence accurate, and it is good when a *set* of evidence is a representative sample of the domain [Anderson, 1995], 37-42. As for psychological and social influences, these can be reliable, i.e., conducive to true beliefs and accurate or useful concepts or values [Antony, 2016]. These are the sorts of epistemic benefits which I will argue that disagreement with the religiously marginalized can yield.

But we need a clarification. Some epistemic benefits are socially constructed – that is, they are products of a community's own epistemology. A community is likely to have its own conception of epistemic justification, its own purposes relative to which a concept is tractable or a value important, its own criteria for what counts as evidence or how much to weight certain types of evidence relative to others, and its own metric for measuring the reliability of psychological and social influences. Other epistemic benefits, by contrast, are what we might loosely call *non-relative*; these depend not on the community's standards but on what is the case. Examples include the truth or (if such there is) the objective probability of a belief. If a phenomenon has natural “joints”, an accurate concept is one that “cuts nature at” them. If a phenomenon lacks such “joints”, then an accurate concept is one that models it adequately for a certain purpose.⁷

What I want to argue is that disagreement with the religiously marginalized is a source of *non-relative* epistemic benefit. It may of course also count as beneficial by the lights of this or that community's epistemology, and if so, so much the better. But I take it that some communities' epistemologies disvalue the views of their marginalized, and I want to argue that, to the extent that they do so, they are deficient epistemologies: they are not the best suited to representing the religious domain.⁸ My argument will succeed, then, if it shows that religious epistemology should make room for marginalized voices, whether or not any given religious epistemology already has provisos that would support this.

But religious community members might raise an objection that calls this project into question. *Any* talk of epistemic aims, especially the improvement of their own epistemology, might seem misguided. For such talk suggests an ideal yet to be achieved, whereas many

⁶This claim need not commit me to epistemological exclusivism about religious belief systems; for all that I have said, different models can be accurate in different ways; see [Longino, 2002]'s discussion of scientific models.

⁷So strictly speaking, some relativity must usually remain, since the accuracy of a model is itself often relative to certain aims of that model – there is no God's eye view for us; see [Longino, 2002], chapter 8, and [Anderson, 1995], 22-49.

⁸[Harding, 1993] argues similarly that heeding the voices of the marginalized can “guide more competent efforts to maximize objectivity” (220), where “objectivity” can be expected to correlate with accurate representations of reality.

religious communities take their belief systems and epistemologies to be on target already. At most, they will say, their aim is to *preserve* their belief system as it stands. Someone in this position might deny that it would be epistemically desirable to take action beyond what the community has been doing all along – especially if what it has been doing is trusting its (purportedly divinely guided) religious authorities whereas the action in question involves licensing disagreement with them.⁹

One response would be to point out that, given the vast array of religious belief systems, it is statistically unlikely that the belief system of the objector’s own community is perfectly accurate; and that, given this unlikelihood, it is advisable to be open to epistemic improvements wherever they may originate [?]. But this response begs the question of the religious believer who does take her community to have hit the epistemic jackpot. I want to convince precisely this believer that *her* belief system stands to gain from the disagreement of her community’s marginalized. I will thus assume in the following that the religious belief systems under consideration do, at least in key respects, amount to divine revelation.

So let us consider more closely the epistemic aim of preserving a belief system. This aim requires that people adhere to the belief system. This in turn requires keeping up with the times while avoiding being overrun by them [Wynn, 2017], 126-127. For new times and cultures bring new empirical and conceptual discoveries, such as scientific insights or ethics of human rights; but they also bring new errors, such as hateful political ideologies. So religious communities must monitor their religious beliefs by monitoring the other components with which they hang together. They must ensure that their *auxiliary beliefs* cohere with the current state of information without loading on misinformation [*ibid.*]. They must discover generationally and culturally relevant ways of *conceptualizing* religious beliefs without losing ancient core truths; and they must remain open to previously overlooked *values*, or to ways of realizing their tried-and-true values in new contexts. The preservation of even an accurate religious belief system, then, is not only compatible with epistemic development, but requires it.

But why, the confident believer might wonder, would disagreement with religious authorities, not least by the community’s marginalized, be conducive to this aim? After all, it would seem that those authorities have been doing very well, in some cases for millennia.

My response is that even if this is so, it does not follow that they could not do better. We may grant the confident believer the claim that her religious authorities receive divine epistemic guidance. But if she is to deny that disagreement with them can yield epistemic benefit, she needs to understand divine guidance very strictly. First, divine guidance must make religious authorities impervious to oversight or error, *on non-religious matters as well as religious ones*. The reason, as we have seen, is that religious beliefs hang together epistemically and psychologically with non-religious beliefs, concepts, and values. Second, she would need to add that divine guidance makes religious authorities invulnerable to the truth-insensitive influences on belief systems that I will discuss in section 3. Third, she needs to deny that God would use the disagreement of the marginalized to preserve a belief system that he has revealed. In order to maintain these three claims, she must, fourth, deny that her tradition or scriptures are themselves authoritative when they portray the religiously marginalized offering needed correctives in the face of epistemic or moral wrong turns on

⁹For a view along these lines see e.g. [Plantinga, 2000b], 189-190, [Gellman, 1993].

the part of religious authorities; think of the legions of prophets and saints marginalized by religious authorities in their own times but lauded now.

Perhaps the heart of the objector's concerns is the worry that I advocate subverting her religious belief system as she has received it (cf. [Coakley, 2005], 504). People who have advocated similar claims to mine have also argued, for instance, that religious concepts such as "God", or religious stories such as the virgin birth of Jesus, must be discarded or "re-figured" because they belong to a belief system tainted by "masculine" values [Anderson, 1998], 132; [Jantzen, 1998]. Such moves tend to be defended with a view of revelation as heavily filtered by human minds and thus subject to correction. Our objector may regard approaches like this as defiling sacred sources [Coakley, 2005], *ibid*. But my argument will not make any of these moves: although it is compatible with them, it is also compatible with more traditional understandings of religious belief systems and sources. Indeed, my examples in the following will illustrate that certain religious sources, construed traditionally, support my claim.

I will now argue that religious authority and religious marginalization come with epistemic advantages and disadvantages, so both social positions should be taken seriously as sources of religious insight. However, it is more common to emphasize the epistemic importance of religious authorities. My aim is to reverse this imbalance.

3 The Epistemology of Religious Authority

Religious authorities tend to have practical and epistemic roles in the religious community. Practically, they have a crucial say in how the religious community is run and are responsible for its wellbeing. Epistemically, they interpret and teach the religious belief system; they are the safekeepers of the community's epistemology and as such may model, and train others in, its doxastic practices [Alston, 1991], [Zagzebski, 2017]; and they arbitrate on controversial cases, such as whether a particular healing constitutes a miracle – or, at the epistemological level, whether the belief that it does counts as knowledge. I will focus on the way in which the social position of a religious authority impacts his or her ability to achieve and promote religious-epistemic aims.

Religious authorities are often well equipped to do this, for their own belief systems (or rather, their versions of the religious belief system at issue) are subject to many truth-sensitive influences. Evidentially, religious authorities tend to be better educated on religious matters than other community members. Their experiences along their religious journeys may yield great insights, and their pastoral activities can acquaint them with community members' experiences. Religious authorities are also in a position to undergo epistemically positive psychological influence: if they live out religious ideals such as humility, prayer, and service, they may gain the spiritual training and epistemic dispositions that accompany a dedicated religious life ([Cottingham, 2005], chapter 1; [Aquino, 2017], 164-168; [Zagzebski, 2017], 107).

But religious authority can come with epistemic shortcomings, of which I'll discuss two. The first is that religious authorities' belief systems may be narrow, or one-sided: they may represent a limited range of phenomena accurately, but they may completely ignore others, and for this lack of context they may have a distorted view of aspects of the bigger picture. Consider an analogy with Giorgione's painting "The Tempest". If you only focus on the scene at the bottom right, of a mother peacefully nursing her child on a riverbank, you may

think that the world of the painting is tender and optimistic. But if you take in the changing weather in the background, you realize that it is sinister and tragic. I am suggesting that religious authorities' belief systems, analogously, are apt to compute only part of the picture.

One reason is that religious authorities' education, though comparatively extensive, will tend to come from other religious authorities or people licensed by them. As a result, their evidence may exhibit a selection bias: it may strongly reflect the viewpoints and interests of other religious authorities.¹⁰ This effect may be exacerbated, second, by the psychological and social tendencies to groupthink among religious authorities. As a result, religious authorities may not easily appreciate (say) that some of their auxiliary beliefs might be questionable in light of recent developments outside their areas of expertise, that there may be experiences or conceptual distinctions salient to non-authorities which their own concepts are inadequate to capture, or that non-authorities may value things that would not strike authorities as important.

The second epistemic shortcoming to which religious authorities may be prone is *cognitive recalcitrance*: their belief systems may be resistant to change, including improvements. One reason arises simply from the abovementioned limitations on authorities' evidence: the preponderance of their evidence, because one-sided, simply *will* support their version of the religious belief system. They are likely to perceive the world in its terms, to attend to features that confirm it and overlook those that disconfirm it; and in evaluating their evidence to draw on unquestioned auxiliary beliefs germane to it.

Another reason for the tendency to recalcitrance is that religious authorities are comparatively unlikely to face significant challenges to their version of the belief system. For it is likely to be regarded as *authoritative* – that is, as a normative model for the rest of the community – whether or not this status is appropriate. (In the following I'll use “authoritative” to mean “regarded as authoritative”.) [Medina, 2013] notes the epistemic disadvantages that this situation can yield: “the privilege of knowing (or always being presumed to know), of always being heard as a credible speaker, of always commanding cognitive authority” can “sometimes spoil people” (32, cf. 59-74). He continues (33):

When whatever one says, goes – because one's word is the law or the truth others are bound to uphold and abide by – there is a complete lack of resistance from the world and from others that gets in the way of knowledge acquisition, that is, ... of discovering facts without prejudging, of articulating and justifying one's claims properly, of responding to objections responsibly, of being genuinely open to contrary evidence, and so on.

People in this position “have but rare opportunities to find out their own limitations” (31), and hence are unlikely to recognize the need for many cognitive adjustments.

A third reason for the tendency to recalcitrance is given by certain psychological and social pressures that religious authorities face to *maintain* the authoritative version of the religious belief system. For this version is likely to reinforce the social status in the community of religious authority itself [Anderson, 1998], 79,¹¹ giving authorities a strong incentive (explicit or implicit) not to rock the epistemic boat. This incentive may derive from ambition, but it need not. It may instead arise from a fear of the consequences of *not* maintaining the

¹⁰[Harding, 1993] discusses similar truth-insensitive influence on scientific researchers.

¹¹[Harding, 1993] makes a similar point about experts in the social sciences (226).

epistemic status quo. After all, religious authorities' status in the community, and in many cases their livelihoods, depend on their adhering to the authoritative version of the religious belief system, ideally with sincerity. If they are seen to stray too far from it, they may face censure, both by other religious authorities and by the community itself.¹² They may thus be subject to direct psychological pressure to maintain an authority's perspective, rather than to venture to understand its weaknesses or to risk accommodating new types of evidence or value.

One might think that this recalcitrance is not so bad, if the authoritative version of the belief system (in addition to the definitive central core) is divinely inspired. However, a major cause of recalcitrance in this case are psychological and social pressures that seem to have little to do with the truth and hence appear at best to be unusual ways for divine inspiration to manifest itself. Moreover, to the extent that this recalcitrance *is* a response to evidence, that evidence itself, as we saw, exhibits a selection bias. So religious authorities' recalcitrance is apt to be recalcitrance in a one-sided picture.

These sorts of influence are subtle and often implicit. Because of this, even well-intentioned and epistemically disciplined religious authorities are apt to be subject to it. They will likely have a strong grasp of the ways in which their version of the belief system coheres into a sense-making whole, but they may lack the mechanisms to perceive, let alone account for, features of reality that do not fit into that coherent picture. The risk is that their version of the belief system – and thus the versions of many other community members – remain parochial, accommodating the experiences only of central insiders and falling short of the sweeping account of reality to which many religious belief systems aspire.

In summary, religious authority has epistemic advantages, but also epistemic limitations: it is apt to yield recalcitrance in a one-sided version of the religious belief system. This is one reason why it is an epistemically bad idea to discourage disagreement with religious authorities: disagreement is an important means of compensating for the natural epistemic limitations of religious authority. There is a second reason: disagreeing viewpoints themselves – among which I focus on those of the religiously marginalized – can offer insights unavailable elsewhere.

4 The Epistemology of Religious Marginalization

A marginalized person is someone who belongs to a community but whose social relations with other community members, or with the community as a whole, are weak or asymmetric, or (for certain attitudinal relations) negatively valenced. We may contrast a person who is marginalized with one who is central in the community: for her these relations are strong, various, or (for some kinds of marginalization) positively valenced. Religious authorities tend – at least in many respects – to be central. Marginalization and centrality admit of degree.

There are many types of marginalization. A person can be what I'll call *personally* marginalized, in the sense of having few relationships, especially deep ones, with other community members, especially central ones. When a person is what I'll call *structurally* marginalized, he is excluded from influential sub-groups or cliques. *Causal* marginalization

¹²[Collins, 1991], 203, observes this of experts.

arises when a person has little or no power to influence events or priorities in the community (yet, in virtue of belonging to it, is affected by the decisions of more central members). *Affective* marginalization arises when a person is disliked by many individuals in the community or counts as disliked by the community as a whole. Another form of marginalization is *epistemic*; this arises when the community does not take one's experiences or beliefs seriously [Fricker, 2007], [Medina, 2013], [Dotson, 2011]. Epistemic marginalization can involve lack of access to community-approved formal education [Collins, 1991], 204; but education is no guaranteed antidote, since it may indoctrinate people to express themselves in the concepts of the mainstream, and these may be inadequate to capture their experiences at the margins [*ibid.*, *xiii*]. There are doubtless other forms of marginalization, but these are among the most important because they closely track the aspects of community that help social beings like us flourish. Each form of marginalization can overlap with and exacerbate others. A religiously marginalized person is marginalized in at least one of these ways within his religious community.

There are also many *reasons* for marginalization, religious or otherwise. These run the gamut from a person's race, sexual orientation, gender, or income level to her opinions. Marginalization is typically inflicted by the community, but self-marginalization is possible too. The arguments to follow hold regardless of why or how the marginalization arises.

Sometimes entire groups can be religiously marginalized. One example is that of the "true" Jewish prophets, such as the biblical Jeremiah, who were persecuted by their communities. Similarly, the ranks of Catholic saints and blessed are replete with people who were marginalized in religious communities of their time. The Blessed Mary Ward, 17th-century foundress of the first non-cloistered women's order, was declared a heretic and imprisoned by the Vatican for her belief, strengthened by a series of mystical experiences, that God wanted women to serve the church in non-contemplative ways. A final example is given by people who were sexually abused by religious authority figures. It is fair to say that in many cases religious communities have responded by marginalizing rather than succoring such people.

One might object that, with these examples, I am stacking the rhetorical cards in favor of my claim that religious communities can gain insight from the disagreement of their marginalized. For these examples are all of underdogs whose marginalization turned out to be morally, religiously, and epistemically unjustified. The objector may remark that marginalization can sometimes be appropriate: think of a religious community that epistemically sidelines flat-Earthers or that structurally, affectively, and epistemically sidelines white supremacists.¹³ One might suspect that the observation that marginalization can be justified will limit my argument significantly – that is, that the benefits arising from religious marginalization only come when that marginalization is inappropriate, for only then might the community stand to learn something important.

I have two responses, one linguistic and the other substantial. The linguistic response: I agree that there are cases of appropriate marginalization – in the literal sense of "marginalization". But I do not think that this word is best suited to describe such cases, for in contemporary discourse it refers mainly to those who are *wrongly* sidelined. I will use the expression *rightly sidelined* for people who are sidelined for good reasons. My substantial response is that my

¹³More controversial cases include the sidelining of those who reject moral codes local to the community itself.

argument is *not* limited to cases of (inappropriate) marginalization. On the contrary, I will argue that there is much to gain, epistemically, even by engaging with – though not tolerating – the views of the rightly sidelined. Some of these benefits differ from those available from dialogue with the (inappropriately) marginalized, but others may be surprisingly similar.

What this observation shows is that there can be any number of narratives attaching to a given case of marginalization or sidelining. On the one hand, the person might be a righteous underdog, pushed to the periphery for speaking truth to power. On the other, she might be a troublemaker, a spreader of immorality in need of discipline. Any case will likely be surrounded by competing narratives. Sometimes a narrative will be spot on, as with the righteous-underdog narrative of Jeremiah and the dangerous-pariah narrative of the neo-Nazi. At other times the truth may lie somewhere in the middle.

That said, in cases of uncertainty the narrative benefit of the doubt should arguably be accorded, at least *prima facie*, not to the community but rather to the person who has been cast to its margins. It is more probable that any given sidelining of a person is *in*appropriate than that it is appropriate [Freedman, 2015]. For it is much easier and more psychologically natural for a big group to exclude an individual person than for an individual person to make trouble for a big group. But nothing that I say will hang on this claim, since (as I'll argue) the disagreement of the rightly sidelined can yield epistemic benefits too. But I will develop my account first with (inappropriate) marginalization in mind (sections 4.1 and 4.2), and will discuss the rightly sidelined separately (section 4.3).

The epistemology of religious marginalization is a mixed bag. My main aim is to focus on the epistemic advantages that it can yield, but there are disadvantages too. Being personally marginalized tends to result in underparticipation in community discourse, which may impede a person from developing his own thoughts. He might also be made to feel as if his concerns and views are unimportant, which may lower his confidence in certain beliefs that might otherwise have amounted to knowledge [Fricker, 2007]; [Dotson, 2011], 243. In general, his epistemic self-trust might erode, affecting his ability to reason effectively and even to see himself as a full-fledged epistemic agent [Medina, 2013] 41-42. Being affectively marginalized has these disadvantages too, and adds to them the possibility that community members – if they hear the person at all – will do so uncharitably and hence exacerbate these effects. If a person is structurally or causally marginalized, he will lack influence in setting the agenda for community discourse, leaving issues that he cares about underexplored in the community ([Collins, 1991], 201). And of course all of these disadvantages accrue to epistemic marginalization, which *just is* about invalidating one as an epistemic agent ([Dotson, 2011], 242).

In spite of these disadvantages, religious marginalization can yield certain sorts of religious insight that are hard to come by in other social positions in the religious community. One arises from the type of perspective that marginalization offers, the other from the suffering that tends to accompany it.

4.1 The Perspective of Religious Marginalization

We saw that authorities' version of the religious belief system is apt to be regarded as normative for the community, making it the default version for many community members. Marginalized community members, however, are apt to be exceptions: their belief systems will

resemble the authoritative one to a much lesser extent than more central members' will.

There are various reasons why this is so. One is that (as we saw) the topics addressed by the authoritative version of the belief system may not include the ones that the marginalized person cares or thinks deeply about. Another is that a lack of discourse with others in the community will force him to find his own way, epistemically. Yet another is that the phenomenology of marginalization may shape his belief system in ways inaccessible to more socially central community members (as I argue in section 4.2).

But the comparatively large differences with the authoritative version of the belief system is not the only epistemically distinctive feature of religious marginalization. Another is that religiously marginalized people tend also to have a high degree of *familiarity* with that version. After all, belonging to a community involves navigating its discourses and practices ([Anderson, 1998], 78-79; [Wylie, 2003], 34-39). Indeed, a religiously marginalized person may even face a *stronger* impetus than more central members to be well versed in the authoritative belief system: he may be granted less interpretive charity should he make a false social or discursive move.¹⁴ This large degree both of difference from, and familiarity with, the authoritative belief system yields what has been called an “insider-outsider” perspective.¹⁵ the perspective of someone who does not entirely or wholeheartedly share the mainstream belief system, yet who understands it well.

It will be useful to distinguish four types of insider-outsider perspective. These arise from the combinations of two different variables. The first is the *level of confidence* with which a person rejects the authoritative version of the religious belief system or endorses any alternative version: she may range from highly confident to painfully timid. The second is *the extent to which she has a positive alternative to the authoritative one*. Some people may have well developed alternative beliefs, concepts, and values, whereas others, especially those whose cognitive tools are limited to the authorities' belief system itself, may lack the resources for this – even if they do not fully endorse the community's belief system [Meyers, 2016]; [Fricker, 2007], chapter 7; [Wylie, 2003], 37. In the latter case they may know or suspect that something is amiss but lack the cognitive framework to understand what; they might have what [Fricker, 2007] aptly calls a “hermeneutical gap” (section 7.2). Each variable admits of degree.

These two variables yield four types of insider-outsider perspective. We may call the first a *confident-alternative* perspective; here, the person has an alternative version of the religious belief system that she endorses confidently. The second is a *timid-alternative* perspective, in which the person has an alternative but may waver uncertainly between it and the authoritative one. Third, a person might be *confident yet without alternative*: she may strongly believe that the authoritative version is problematic, yet her understanding may not suffice to reveal what to think or value instead. Finally, she might be *timid yet without alternative*, sensing that the authoritative version is problematic yet not trusting her senses and not knowing what to think instead.¹⁶

¹⁴[Collins, 1991], 208, makes this point about Black women in white male society.

¹⁵The idea of the “insider-outsider” comes from feminist standpoint theory [Harding, 1993], [Wylie, 2003], [?], [Narayan, 1988], [Medina, 2013]. I am using it more broadly than many in this literature; see footnote 16.

¹⁶Standpoint theory tends to construe an insider-outsider perspective more narrowly than I do, limiting it to the confident-alternative variety; see e.g. [Wylie, 2003]. Moreover, standpoint theorists may sometimes

An insider-outsider perspective can bring epistemic disadvantages.¹⁷ These are the most evident for people whose perspectives are timid yet without alternative. It is somewhat better, epistemically, to lack an alternative version of the religious belief system if you are at least confident that there must be one – but you still face the confusion of not knowing what to think instead. If a person has an alternative but holds it timidly, some of her alternative beliefs, even if true, might fail to be confident enough to count as knowledge. Even the confident-alternative perspective has disadvantages: working with two alternative versions of the religious belief system, he might have “a sense of clumsiness or lack of fluency in both” [Narayan, 1988], 222.

In spite of these possible epistemic disadvantages, an insider-outsider perspective can bring epistemic benefits. First, a person with such a perspective may be motivated to seek more evidence. Why? Because an insider-outsider perspective may generate a cognitive dissonance. If the person has a confident-alternative perspective, the dissonance will be merely emotional, consisting in the dissatisfaction of belonging to a community with which she expressly disagrees. In the three other cases, the dissonance may be not merely emotional but also epistemic, ranging from a precarious wavering between differing accounts of religious reality, to knowing that something is amiss yet being unable to articulate what. Cognitive dissonances – especially about important worldview matters like religion – are unpleasant [Solomon, *et al.*, 1991]: they nag for resolution. Sometimes we suppress or deny them, but we might also be moved to seek clarity through additional evidence – something that a more epistemically contented member of the religious community is less likely to do.¹⁸

Second, the person with an insider-outsider perspective can be better placed than a more central community member both to notice and to evaluate new kinds of evidence. This benefit accrues most obviously to those with confident-alternative perspectives. For such a person can switch “lenses” at will.¹⁹ Her experiential evidence will be sensitive to psychological and social influences from two versions of the religious belief system. And she will be in a position to undertake a side-by-side comparison of both versions, using the resources of each to evaluate the other. This ability puts her in a good position to achieve a more reflective picture of religious reality than someone – like a religious authority or a more central community member – whose belief system simply defaults to the authoritative version ([Harding, 1993], 221; [Wylie, 2003], 32-39, [Medina, 2013], 45-46; [Narayan, 1988], 220). The prophet Jeremiah and the Blessed Mary Ward are examples. Both were religiously marginalized people whose alternative viewpoints sharpened into confident alternatives with an articulate critical awareness of the flaws in the authoritative belief systems of their time. They also happen to be examples of what [Medina, 2013] calls “epistemic heroes” (226): a subset of those with confident-alternative perspectives whose actions force their communities

think in terms of the marginalized person’s having a different *belief system* to the authoritative one, rather than a different version of the same belief system.

¹⁷It can also cause psychological and emotional difficulties [Narayan, 1988], including “ambivalence, uncertainty, despair, and even madness”, 222.

¹⁸[Zagzebski, 2017], 105, regards cognitive dissonance as epistemically problematic. I am suggesting, on the contrary, that *lacking it* can also be epistemically problematic: too much coherence can yield epistemic complacency and mask underlying error.

¹⁹This ability has been called “split vision” [Anderson, 1998] or “double vision” [Narayan, 1988]; see the contributions to [Harding, 2004]; [Medina, 2013] uses the term “meta-lucidity” (chapter 5) to capture a similar phenomenon.

to soul-search.²⁰

But one need not be an epistemic hero, or even have a confident-alternative perspective, in order for one’s marginalization to yield religious insight, both for oneself and for the religious community; we may call marginalized people who are timid or who lack robust alternative versions of the belief system “epistemically meek”. Such a person may need help or encouragement in expressing and diagnosing his disquiet with the authoritative version of the belief system, or in articulating any fledgling alternative he may have. Religious authorities and central community members should want to offer such help if they can – on epistemic grounds, but also on moral ones, since taking their marginalized seriously as epistemic agents can be an important step toward healing and re-integration (see section 5).²¹

4.2 The Suffering of Religious Marginalization

I have argued that religious marginalization can provide a viewpoint from which to critically evaluate the authoritative version of the religious belief system. Religious marginalization can confer a second epistemic benefit, arising from the suffering that it is apt to involve.

To see this, consider that religious marginalization can evoke, for instance, feelings of shame, inferiority, resentment, worthlessness, loneliness, rejection, or self-hatred. Structural, causal, and epistemic marginalization can leave one feeling powerless on top of this. Epistemic marginalization can be disorienting, possibly even bringing a person to feel that her experiences do not accurately reflect reality (imagine what it was like for Mary Ward to be told by none other than the pope that her vivid experiences of God must have been hallucinations).

These experiences can bring certain epistemic disadvantages. A sense of confusion may damage a person’s epistemic self-trust, impeding his ability to seek understanding or gain knowledge [Fricker, 2007], chapter 7, [Medina, 2013], 42. Suffering may vitiate his trust in others, even those who might have served as helpful sounding-boards for making sense of his experiences. His suffering may exert psychological influence that negatively valences his experiences to an extent that is inaccurate. Finally, he might respond to suffering by becoming embittered and less sensitive to certain realities, such as others’ suffering [Narayan, 1988] 220.

Yet suffering can also yield religious insight. It can do so in two ways, which we may characterize as “positive” and “negative”. Positively, suffering can sometimes force us out of complacency and motivate us to develop new psychic resources; and it can prompt dissatisfaction with surface-level answers and kindle a search for deeper ones [Stump, 2010], 457-460; [Dormandy, 2018]. This amounts to an indirect psychological influence that motivates one to seek additional evidence.

But suffering does not always have this outcome. Even – and perhaps especially – when it does not, it can yield insight in “negative” ways. To see what I mean, consider the widely held view that religious experiences provide evidence about religious reality [Alston, 1991],

²⁰In [Dormandy, 2016], I describe the way in which marginalized people can use their own narratives to force conceptual re-evaluation.

²¹[Harding, 1993] calls this “starting from the lives” of the marginalized to see what can be learned from them and how they can be helped to flourish; 222.

9-67; [Swinburne, 2004], 293-327. Discussions traditionally emphasize experiences of beauty, love, or God’s presence [Aquino, 2017], 163-164; [Plantinga, 2000a], 171-172; [Alston, 1991], 12-13. Yet insight can also be gained from experiences of ugliness, injustice, discord, hatred, or God’s absence or abandonment. Religious experiences, in other words, need not be positively valenced; they can reflect important spiritual realities precisely by being negatively valenced. Think of Job, whose sufferings, including of marginalization from the community in which he was once respected, plumb new depths of religious anguish yet yield unprecedented acquaintance of God [Stump, 2010], 177-226; [Dormandy, 2018]; or think of the dark night of the soul, which some mystics regard as an initiation into a deeper understanding of divine reality.²²

This “negative” epistemic influence is evidential and psychological. The relevant experiences are representational and so constitute evidence. And the psychological states that accompany them exert indirect psychological influence by developing certain perceptual sensitivities. For example, they can dispose the sufferer to recognize similar suffering in others, and they can attune his modal intuitions to foresee the trajectory that certain sufferings may take, uniquely empowering him to know how to help. The person’s belief system, shaped by this evidence and this indirect psychological influence, in turn shapes his future experiences and the ways in which he conceptualizes and evidentially weights them.

The epistemic influences I have highlighted thus far result from suffering in general and are not unique to religious marginalization. But the suffering of religious marginalization can provide unique insights beyond these. First, a religiously marginalized person gains a special perspective on the religious community itself, providing evidence of a sort that religious authorities in particular are likely to lack: she will see the community’s underbelly – its less likeable, crueller, exclusionary side, exemplified in the behavior of its more central members and perhaps of authorities themselves – which is obscured from its more contented members and may point toward errors in its thinking.

Second, all communities endorse certain norms, but religious norms tend to be more encompassing and prescriptive than many. They embrace how to live, what to hope for, what to believe and prioritize, indeed the very meaning of life. Because of this, marginalization within a religious community can impose an unusually heavy psychological weight. It can signify (or be strongly felt to signify) an ascription of cosmic wrongness or worthlessness to one’s very self. Indeed, since religious community is supposed to channel or represent divine reality, marginalization in such a community can be experienced as exclusion from the divine presence. Here are two examples of the sorts of insight that this sort of suffering might yield. First: a sufferer of clergy abuse might, in the light of the evidence of her experiences, be forced to re-think much of what she ever believed about God. On the one hand, she may develop a distorted conception of God. This is of course an epistemic loss for her, but if her community heeds her, it may alert them to important information about its own spiritual state – and perhaps lead them to repent and thus lay the groundwork for her psychological and epistemic healing. But she might also develop a much deeper understanding (for example) of the presence of Christ in the most hurt and broken – from which her community could surely also stand to learn. As a second example consider Job, who regarded his standing in society as a bellwether for his favor in God’s sight. What he learned about God when the

²²See also [Gellman, 1992], who argues that one can experience God’s absence.

latter appeared to him *in* his miserable state was the hard-won result of that marginalization and Job's intellectual and emotional wrestling with it [Stump, 2010], 195-196.

In summary, religious marginalization can be painful, but its epistemic influences can yield religious insight to the marginalized person and (through engaging with her) to her community.

One might object that I am guilty of instrumentalizing suffering for epistemological gain: if I am right that religious marginalization yields epistemic benefits, I might seem committed to advocating that communities routinely marginalize people for this reason alone – a *reductio* of my argument. But I am not committed to this, any more than the person who says that one can learn from one's mistakes advocates making them. Epistemic goals compete with other goals, and the goal of preventing religious marginalization is more important than the goal of extracting additional insights.

A related worry is that I am advocating the objectifying of marginalized people *themselves* for the greater epistemic good. But I am not. It is important to remember how vulnerable testifiers are even in the friendliest of contexts; the risk undertaken by a marginalized person in testifying to the community that marginalized her is exponentially greater ([Dotson, 2011], 238). The humanity and autonomy of marginalized people must be respected, even if this means foregoing some of the epistemic benefits that conversing with them might offer (see section 5).

4.3 The Rightly Sidelined

Let's return to the rightly sidelined – think of white supremacists whom the community sidelines structurally, causally, epistemically, and affectively. I advertised that cases like this are not exceptions to my argument, and now is the time to show why.

We must be clear that engaging with the disagreement of rightly sidelined people does *not* mean tolerating their belief system (which might be so aberrant as to fail to even be a version of the operative religious belief system). It simply means trying to understand their belief system: to clarify the beliefs, concepts, and values comprising it, and identify the evidential, psychological, and social factors influencing it.

Understanding the belief system of a rightly sidelined community member can yield several epistemic benefits. First, community members can gain insight into an odious belief system, positioning them to improve the coherence and detail of their own belief systems in defense against ideologies of its ilk.

Second, the community may learn how the authoritative belief system, or the epistemic influences prevalent within the community, might have contributed to this person's developing his or her odious belief system. This is not to shift the epistemic or moral blame away from the rightly sidelined person; it is merely to acknowledge that communities must take responsibility for the evidential, psychological, and social influences that they exert. There may be nothing that the community could have done to prevent the poisoning of the rightly sidelined person's belief system, but it might also turn out that this person's concerns are unhealthy reactions to understandable insecurities or fears which, had they been accorded commensurate value in the community's discourse, could have been defused before becoming toxic.

Third, a rightly sidelined person may have critical reflections on the authoritative belief system: on ways in which it could be intellectually better supported or could address any of the more legitimate among his or her concerns.²³

But fourth, the religious community stands to gain even if the rightly sidelined person has misunderstood the authoritative belief system too badly to have identified genuine flaws in it. In this case the community stands to discover that it has failed to communicate the religious belief system effectively. To the extent that this is so, others in the community may have similar misunderstandings, so this discovery – if acted upon – may improve the understanding of many and perhaps even preempt other extremist developments.

Fifth, the community also benefits epistemically by helping rightly sidelined people gain understanding – after all, they are community members too. They may even learn that the authoritative belief system – or perhaps an improved version of it – can address any legitimate concerns that they may have in a way that their own toxic viewpoint cannot.

But we must take care, for although it is sometimes clear whether a given case of sidelining is right or wrong (like the white supremacist, on the one hand, and Jeremiah, on the other), at other times, as we saw, it is unclear. Further research needs a thorough account of the distinction.

5 Conclusion

I'll finish with a few examples of the fruits of disagreement of the religiously marginalized, and then some remarks about how fruitful engagement with them might proceed.

Here is an example concerning religious beliefs. In certain Christian circles, the belief “The Jews killed Jesus” was and is unfortunately widely held. Imagine a community member with Jewish ancestry, who might have been pushed or let herself drift to the margins precisely because of this heritage, who entertains this belief. Because of her Jewish perspective on the Christian belief system, she, unlike other community members, would be quick to spot the problem: not only was Jesus himself a Jew, but even if some Jews were involved in his crucifixion, others were his very first disciples and immediate family; moreover, Roman authorities had as much if not more to do with his death.

Now consider auxiliary beliefs. A religious community might (I have heard of those which do) believe that forgiveness entails reconciliation with the offender. This belief might easily lead to abuse victims being expected to endure repeated exposure to perpetrators, or to believing that there is something wrong with them for continuing to harbor anger; such a person might well drift to the religious margins. In order for this false auxiliary belief to be corrected, the community sorely needs this person's misgivings and experiences (which she may as yet be unable to fully articulate) to be aired. Epistemological auxiliary beliefs can also be improved upon: the very airing of marginalized people's stories might prompt a religious community to form the belief that experiences such as theirs should receive greater evidential weight.

A religiously marginalized person might also have insight about important religious concepts. Unfathomable stories of Holocaust suffering, for instance, told by many who would

²³A sidelined person may or may not have an insider-outsider perspective: whether such people do depends on whether they sufficiently understand the authoritative belief system.

have been at the margins of Christian religious communities (such as those of Jewish ancestry), historically prompted much theological soul-searching on whether traditional assumptions about the concept of God – such as that he is impassible – are rationally sustainable.

Community values too can benefit epistemically. A person might for instance be marginalized because he cannot sympathize with the community’s focus on a certain sort of politics over and above the appropriate way to handle domestic violence, and hearing him out may alert the community to the need to develop the authoritative version of the religious belief system to be less one-sided. Or consider a mostly white religious community whose racial minorities are marginalized because the community places little value on genuine (as opposed to superficial) racial reconciliation. Hearing their dissenting viewpoint may teach the community about something of great religious value.

Similar remarks apply to the epistemic influences prevalent in the community. Marginalized perspectives provide evidence that can complement the sorts of evidence that tends to be possessed by more central community members and religious authorities – think of the experiences that they are apt to have of the community’s crueller side, and some of the implicit auxiliary beliefs that this might reveal. And regularly engaging with the viewpoints of the religiously marginalized may weaken some of the stereotypes that contributed to their marginalization to begin with.

So far I have said little about *how* a religious community might go about engaging with the disagreeing viewpoints of its marginalized. Space does not permit a detailed discussion, but I will finish with four brief remarks.

First, religious authorities, as well as central community members, should look out for the religiously marginalized, be they epistemic heroes, the epistemically meek, or anywhere in between. As for epistemic heroes, religious communities tend to have a mixed relationship with theirs, often persecuting them during their lifetimes but honoring them later. It is time to start recognizing them in their own time. But religious communities must also look out for the epistemically meek. Not only are they likely to take up a relatively large proportion of the marginalized in any given religious community, but large numbers of them are likely to exist *well before* any epistemic heroism even arises – for epistemic heroism is arguably a product of a problem already grown acute. Keeping an eye out for the epistemically meek at an early stage might preempt the need for bigger reckonings later.

Second, engaging with the disagreement of the religiously marginalized must not be an occasional practice, but rather a way of life. Having – perhaps laboriously – come to terms with the disagreement of one person, it is easy to be lazy in referring continually back to her as the “spokesperson” for those like her [Collins, 1991], 204. A community might even domesticate her message while hypocritically reverting to old ways – Jeremiah’s concern for purity of heart and for the poor, for instance, needs to be constantly refreshed. Moreover, the insights and experiences of marginalization come in a variety of forms, so it is epistemically naïve, to say nothing of patronizing, to think that one person *could* speak for all [*ibid*].

Third, it is important, in engaging the disagreement of the marginalized, to do so on their terms and in their vocabulary [Collins, 1991], [Meyers, 2016]. Although there are examples of marginalized people who have successfully appropriated mainstream vocabulary to make their cases [Dormandy, 2016], expecting them to articulate themselves in the framework

of the mainstream may silence their message²⁴ – especially when this message challenges precisely that framework.

Fourth, being ready to hear people in their own terms means, for religious authorities and central community members, recognizing that they themselves may struggle to operate outside the box of the authoritative version of the belief system. Outside “interpretive” help may need to be enlisted to ensure that the marginalized person is heard.

Fifth, it is important to be sensitive to the vulnerability that the marginalized exhibit in articulating their story or concerns [Dotson, 2011], 237-238; [Freedman, 2015]; [Narayan, 1988], 219. After all, there is a good chance that in their very marginalization, to say nothing of the events that provoked it, they have been let down by the religious community and hence are taking a grave risk in expressing themselves. It is important to respect and merit their trust.

It is important, finally, for central community members or religious authorities to approach the exchange with the epistemic humility to realize that they may learn something new and perhaps challenging about their own version of the religious belief system. This does *not*, however, mean that they must slavishly adopt everything that a marginalized person says [Narayan, 1988], 221 – for part of respecting another’s viewpoint involves pushing back in search of genuine understanding.

I hope that it is clear why a religious community and its authorities should want to attend to the disagreement of their marginalized. But – especially given the risks of sharing their stories and views – what do the marginalized themselves stand to gain? The answer will differ from one situation to another. One hope, however, is that re-integration will be a live option for them: on their own terms, into a community that now heeds their messages.

In conclusion, discouraging disagreement in religious communities is epistemically misguided; on the contrary, it should be actively encouraged. The viewpoints of religiously marginalized people are epistemically important for the ability that they confer to see beyond many of the unquestioned beliefs, concepts, and values originating in mainstream religious thought. Religious authorities make important contributions to the epistemic aims of religious communities, but precisely because of their social position, they are subject to epistemic limitations. In other words, religious insight is not distributed along exactly the same dimensions as religious authority. Because there are religiously important insights to be had by non-authorities, different members of the religious community – including and especially its marginalized – have different pieces of the epistemic puzzle. Heeding them may help make the authoritative belief system authoritative in more than name.

6 Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) for the funding to write this paper. Many thanks for valuable comments to John Cottingham, Dirk-Margin Grube, Christoph Jäger, Peter Jonkers, Sami Philström, Oliver Wiertz, and the anonymous referees for *Res Philosophica*. For valuable discussion I’d like to thank Michael Dormandy, the research platform “Kulturen – Religionen – Identitäten: Spannungsfelder und Wechselwirkungen” at the Catholic Theology Faculty at the University of Salzburg, the research center “Synagoge und

²⁴This is an example of what [Dotson, 2011] calls “testimonial smothering” (244).

Kirche” at the University of Innsbruck, the research group at the University of Innsbruck’s Institute for Christian Philosophy, and the women’s network “Sophia Forscht” at the Theology Faculty of the University of Innsbruck.

References

- [Alston, 1991] William Alston. 1991. *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- [Anderson, 1995] Elizabeth Anderson. 1995. “Knowledge, Human Interests, and Objectivity in Feminist Epistemology.” *Philosophical Topics* 23(2): 27-58.
- [Anderson, 1998] Pamela Sue Anderson. 1998. *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- [Antony, 2016] Louise Antony. 2016. “Reflections on Saulish Skepticism.” In *Implicit Bias and Philosophy: Volume 1: Metaphysics and Epistemology*, edited by Michael Brownstein and Jennifer Saul, 157-190. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [Aquino, 2017] Frederick D. Aquino. 2017. “Spiritual Formation, Authority, and Discernment.” In *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, edited by William J. Abraham and Frederick D. Aquino, 157-173. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [Chabris and Simons, 2010] Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons. 2010. *The Invisible Gorilla and Other Ways Our Intuitions Deceive Us*. New York: Crown.
- [Coakley, 2005] Sarah Coakley. 2005. “Feminism and Analytic Philosophy of Religion.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, edited by William J. Wainwright, 495-527. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [Collins, 1991] Patricia Hill Collins. 1991. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge.
- [Conee and Feldman, 2004] Earl Conee and Richard Feldman. 2004. *Evidentialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [Cottingham, 2005] John Cottingham. 2005. *The Spiritual Dimension: Religion, Philosophy and Human Value*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [Dormandy, 2016] Katherine Dormandy. 2016. “Argument from Personal Narrative: A Case Study of Rachel Moran’s *Paid For: My Journey Through Prostitution*.” *Res Philosophica*, 93(3): 601-620.
- [Dormandy, 2018] Katherine Dormandy. 2018b. “Evidence-Seeking as an Expression of Faith.” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, forthcoming.

- [Dotson, 2011] Kristie Dotson. 2011. "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing." *Hypatia*, 26(2): 236-257.
- [Freedman, 2015] Karyn Freedman. 2015. "Stories Count: Testimony, Gender, and Knowledge." Dublin: Presentation at the Annual Conference for the Society of Women in Philosophy (SWIP) Ireland.
- [Fricker, 2007] Miranda Fricker. 2007. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [Gellman, 1992] Jerome Gellman. 1992. "A New Look at the Problem of Evil." *Faith and Philosophy* 9(2): 210-216.
- [Gellman, 1993] Jerome Gellman. 1993. "Religious Diversity and the Epistemic Justification of Religious Belief." *Faith and Philosophy* 10(3): 345-364.
- [Harding, 2004] Sandra Harding. 2004, ed. *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader*. New York and London: Routledge.
- [Harding, 1993] Sandra Harding. 1993. "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: 'What is Strong Objectivity?'" In *Feminist Epistemologies*, edited by Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter, 218-236. New York: Routledge.
- [Holroyd and Sweetman, 2016] Jules Holroyd and Joseph Sweetman. 2016. "The Heterogeneity of Implicit Bias." In *Implicit Bias and Philosophy, Volume 1: Metaphysics and Epistemology*, edited Michael Brownstein and Jennifer Saul, 81-104. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [Hundleby, 2016] Catherine Hundleby. 2016. "Implicit Bias and Fallacies of Argumentation." In *Implicit Bias and Philosophy, Volume 1: Metaphysics and Epistemology*, edited by Michael Brownstein and Jennifer Saul, 238-264. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [Jantzen, 1998] Grace Jantzen. 1998. *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion*. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press.
- [Janis, 1982] Irving L. Janis. 1982. *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes*, 2nd Ed., New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- [Kahneman, 2011] Daniel Kahneman. 2011. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- [Kellner, 1999] Menachem Kellner (1999). *Must a Jew Believe Anything?* London: Littleman Library of Jewish Civilization.
- [Longino, 2002] Helen Longino. 2002. *The Fate of Knowledge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- [Medina, 2013] Jose Medina. 2013. *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and the Social Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [Meyers, 2016] Diana Tietjens Meyers. 2016. *Victims' Stories and the Advancement of Human Rights*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [Mills, 2007] Charles Mills. 2007. "White Ignorance." In *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, edited by Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana, 13-38. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- [Narayan, 1988] Uma Narayan. 1988. "Working Together Across Difference: Some Considerations on EMotions and Political Practice." *Hypatia* 3(2): 31-48.
- [Plantinga, 2000a] Alvin Plantinga. 2000a. *Warranted Christian Belief*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [Plantinga, 2000b] Alvin Plantinga. 2000b. "Pluralism: A Defense of Exclusivism." In *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*, edited by Kevin Meeker and Philip L. Quinn, Oxford: Oxford University Press. ((Pages))
- [Solomon, *et al.*, 1991] Sheldon Solomon and Jeff Greenberg and Tom Pyszczynski. 1991. "A Terror Management Theory of Social Behavior: The Psychological Functions of Self-Esteem and Cultural Worldviews." *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 24, edited by M. Zanna, 93-159.
- [Stump, 2010] Eleonore Stump. 2010. *Wandering in Darkness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [Swinburne, 2004] Richard Swinburne. 2004. *The Existence of God*, Third Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [Wylie, 2003] Alison Wylie. 2003. "Why Standpoint Matters." In *Science and Other Cultures*, edited by Sandra Harding and Robert Figueroa, 26-48. New York: Routledge.
- [Wynn, 2017] Mark Wynn. 2017. "Tradition." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, edited by William J. Abraham and Frederick D. Aquino, 126-140. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [Zagzebski, 2017] Linda T. Zagzebski. 2017. "Authority in Religious Communities." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, edited by William J. Abraham and Frederick D. Aquino, 97-110. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [Zeimbekis and Raftopoulos, 2015] John Zeimbekis and Athanassios Raftopoulos (2015), eds. *The Cognitive Penetrability of Perception: New Philosophical Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.