

The Proper Basicity Load

Plantinga, Basic Belief, and the Categorical Burden
of Doctrinally Thick Theism

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Central claim

The proper basicity of a thin theistic belief does not automatically supply warrant for a doctrinally thick Christian package. Each indispensable doctrinal proposition needs either its own truth-aimed noninferential source or a warranted inferential or testimonial bridge. Plantinga's extended Aquinas/Calvin model proposes such a direct source; it therefore faces a specifically Christian reliability question rather than a simple inference from thin theism.

Preview: Where the warrant must travel

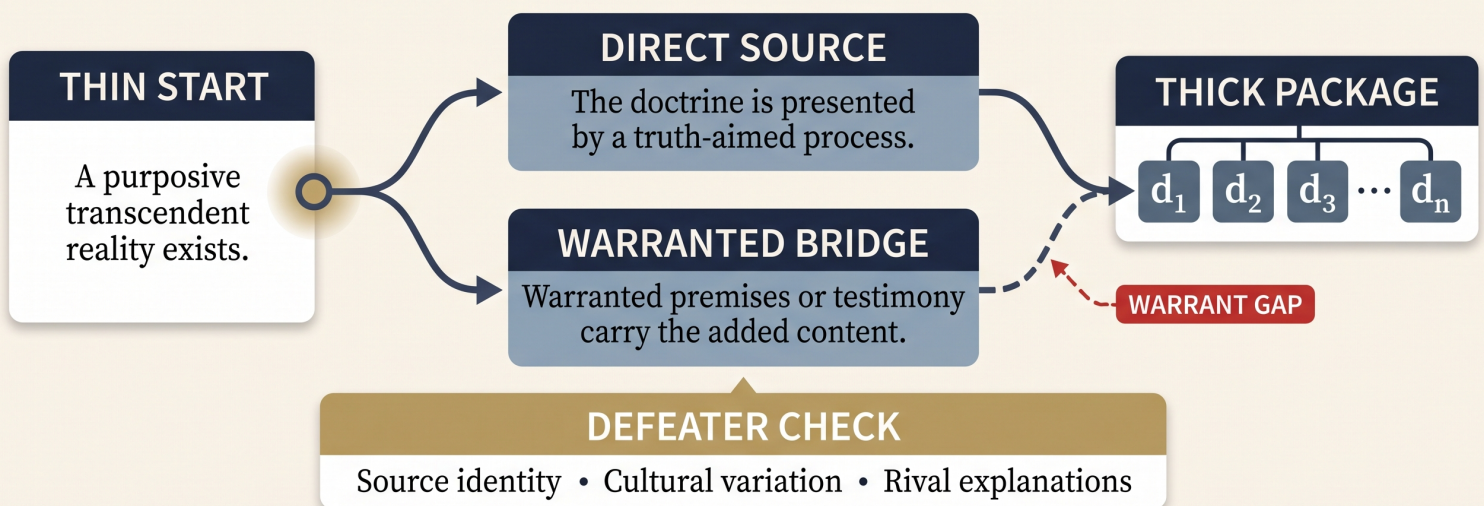
Starting content	Possible route	Audit question	Bounded result
A thin seeming or basic belief presents a purposive transcendent reality.	A doctrine is delivered directly, inferred from warranted premises, or received through warranted testimony.	Does every indispensable doctrinal component have an adequate route, and are live defeaters answered?	A gap blocks package-level warrant through that route; it does not show that the doctrine is false or cannot be basic.

“Load” is categorical, not numerical: it records how many distinct propositions require epistemic routing and what kind of route each receives. Content richness alone neither grants nor defeats proper basicity.

Visual preview:

How Warrant Reaches Thick Doctrine

TWO POSSIBLE ROUTES



No numerical threshold: every essential claim needs a route.

Read the diagram from left to right. A thin starting proposition does not automatically expand into a thick package. Added doctrinal content must arrive through one of two routes: a truth-aimed direct source or a warranted inferential or testimonial bridge. The red break marks a warrant gap when neither route reaches an indispensable claim. The lower bar adds a separate check for source identity, cultural variation, and rival explanations. This is not a numerical test or a ban on content-rich basic beliefs; it is a map of where warrant must reach.

Abstract

Reformed epistemology rejects the demand that all rational religious belief be inferred from neutral premises. That rejection does not, by itself, settle how warrant reaches a doctrinally thick Christian package. This paper distinguishes noninferential formation, proper basicity, and warrant, then replaces a misleading quantitative “basicity load” with a categorical routing burden. Let thin theism state only that a purposive transcendent reality exists, while thick Christian theism conjoins claims about the identity, action, revelation, and redemptive purposes of the Christian deity. Warrant for the thin claim does not automatically transmit to the conjunction. Each indispensable component requires either its own truth-aimed noninferential source or a warranted inferential or testimonial bridge. Plantinga’s extended Aquinas/Calvin model recognizes this problem: it invokes scripture, faith, and the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit to produce specifically Christian belief. The model is therefore a direct-source proposal for thick content, not an inference from a generic sense of divinity. If Christian theism is true and the proposed process functions as described, thick belief could be properly basic and warranted. Yet the truth-link and source-identity questions then attach to that specifically Christian process; ordinary analogies with perception or a thin religious seeming cannot answer them. Religious diversity and demographic variation do not deductively refute the model, but they supply defeater candidates that increase the need to distinguish the claimed source from culturally transmitted alternatives. A route ledger makes the burden constructive and proposition-specific. The result is limited: a routing gap defeats a claim of package-level warrant through the stated route, not the truth of Christianity, the possibility of externalist warrant, or the basicity of every content-rich belief. An annotated formal appendix separates the valid transmission argument from its contestable epistemic premises.

Keywords: proper basicity; Reformed epistemology; Alvin Plantinga; warrant transmission; doctrinal belief; *sensus divinitatis*; religious diversity

1 Basicity Is Not Inheritance

Reformed epistemology changed the debate about religious rationality by challenging a demanding evidentialist picture. On that picture, belief in a deity is rational only if it is inferred from propositions acceptable to every reasonable inquirer. Plantinga argues instead that some theistic beliefs can be grounded in experience and held without inference, much as perceptual, memorial, and other-minds beliefs often are (Plantinga 1983). The central insight is important: not every rational belief must rest at the end of a consciously rehearsed argument.

That insight is sometimes asked to perform a second task. A person may begin with a sense of dependence, guilt, gratitude, presence, or created order. From there, discussion moves quickly to a doctrinally specific package: one personal creator exists; that creator is triune; a particular incarnation occurred; a particular death has an atoning role; a resurrection occurred; a particular canon is divinely inspired; and a specific account of salvation is true. Because the starting belief is called properly basic, the enlarged package may appear to inherit its status.

The appearance is mistaken. A belief’s being noninferential says how it is held, not whether its content expands other beliefs. Proper basicity concerns whether a belief may occupy a foundational role in a person’s noetic structure, where a *noetic structure* is simply the organized set of that person’s beliefs. Plantinga’s account of warrant concerns the truth-directed quality of the process producing a true belief. These are related but different matters. None supplies a rule under which warrant attached to one proposition automatically spreads to any stronger proposition associated with it.

A comparison makes the point. Seeing smoke may noninferentially ground the belief that smoke is present. It does not, without further information, warrant the beliefs that a specific person lit a cedar fire at 8:10 a.m., intended to send a signal, and used a blue matchbook. Those additional claims could

be warranted. A witness, camera record, or reliable inference might support them. They simply are not contained in the visual presentation of smoke.

The same restraint should govern religious epistemology. A thin theistic deliverance and a thick Christian conjunction differ not merely in emotional intensity but in propositional content. The question is therefore not whether thick belief feels immediate. It is how the truth-directed connection reaches each indispensable proposition in the package.

The route-completeness principle

When warrant is claimed for a doctrinal conjunction, every indispensable component needs an adequate epistemic route: either a truth-aimed noninferential source for that component or a warranted inferential or testimonial bridge to it. Warrant for a weaker proposition does not fill an unmarked gap.

This principle imposes no numerical threshold. It does not say that five claims are acceptable and six are excessive, or that detailed beliefs are less rational simply because they are detailed. It asks a categorical question about each component: what source or bridge connects this content to truth?

2 Plantinga's Position, Stated at Full Strength

A fair evaluation must distinguish Plantinga's early challenge to classical foundationalism, his proper-function account of warrant, and his mature model of Christian belief. Compressing these stages produces a weak target.

2.1 From permissibility to proper function

In "Reason and Belief in God," Plantinga challenges the claim that a basic belief is rational only if it is self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses. He argues that such criteria are neither self-evident nor obviously basic by their own standards. He also suggests that circumstances such as guilt, gratitude, danger, beauty, or the order of nature can occasion theistic beliefs without an intervening argument (Plantinga 1983). This establishes a possibility: inferential evidence of a classical kind need not be the only rational route.

The later proper-function account is stronger and more externalist. *Externalist* here means that a belief's warrant can depend on facts about how it was produced even when the believer cannot fully inspect or prove those facts. Roughly, a belief has warrant when the relevant cognitive faculties function properly in a suitable environment according to a truth-aimed design plan, with a sufficiently high objective likelihood of truth (Plantinga 1993). Merely feeling immediate is therefore insufficient. A malfunction, hostile environment, or non-truth-aimed process can produce an effortless belief without warrant.

Proper basicity with respect to warrant is consequently not a blank permission slip. It is a claim about a successful causal and normative relation among the believer, the cognitive process, the environment, the process's purpose, and truth. This relation is proposition-sensitive. A reliable mechanism for recognizing faces need not be reliable for identifying diseases. A trustworthy report that a meeting occurred need not warrant every account of what was decided there.

2.2 The Aquinas/Calvin and extended models

Plantinga's Aquinas/Calvin model proposes a *sensus divinitatis*, a cognitive disposition or mechanism that produces theistic belief in a range of ordinary circumstances. On the model, if theism is true and the faculty functions as designed, such belief can possess warrant without being inferred from an

argument (Plantinga 2000). This is best understood as a model of thin or comparatively general theistic warrant.

Plantinga does not assume that the same faculty alone yields the entire Christian creed. Chapters 8 and 9 of *Warranted Christian Belief* extend the model. Scripture presents Christian teaching; the Holy Spirit internally instigates faith; and the resulting beliefs may include trinity, incarnation, atonement, resurrection, forgiveness, and salvation. Plantinga explicitly describes this as an account of full-blooded Christian belief (Plantinga 2000). The distinction is crucial. Thick belief receives a proposed source suited to thick content.

The model is conditional in a deliberate way. Plantinga argues that if Christian belief is true, it is likely to possess warrant through the extended model or something similar. This strategy links the de jure question—whether Christian belief is rational or warranted—to the de facto question of truth. A complaint that the belief is unwarranted cannot simply assume the belief is false and then redescribe its production as defective.

The present argument accepts the force of that reply. It does not infer from doctrinal richness that Christian belief cannot be basic. Nor does it demand that a believer first prove the reliability of the alleged spiritual process. It asks a different question: what follows from the warrant of a thin theistic belief, and what additional model is required for the thick beliefs? Plantinga’s own architecture supports the distinction. The extended model is needed because the content has changed.

3 Recasting the Basicity Load

The metaphor of a *load* can be useful if it is stripped of false precision. Beliefs do not carry epistemic kilograms, and there is no defensible universal threshold beyond which content becomes irrational. A numerical-looking formula can obscure the real issue by adding unlike quantities: specificity, tradition-dependence, cultural variability, defeaters, and doctrinal complexity do not share a common unit.

The better interpretation is a *route ledger*. A ledger lists the propositions for which warrant is claimed, the kind of source assigned to each, the connection between that source and the proposition, and the defeaters that bear on the connection. The load is categorical because adding an indispensable proposition adds a routing obligation. It is not automatically negative. A package of ten claims can be well routed; a single claim can be poorly routed.

Table 1: From a numerical load to a categorical route ledger.

Ledger field	Question to record	Why it matters
Proposition	What exact claim is included in the package?	A general experience cannot support content that has not been identified.
Source	Is the claim produced by perception, memory, testimony, inference, scripture, or a proposed spiritual process?	Different sources have different truth connections and failure modes.
Bridge	If the claim is not directly delivered, which warranted premises support it and how?	Association, tradition, and repeated assertion are not logical transmission rules.
Identity	Why think the experience or testimony comes from the source the doctrine names?	An experience can be genuine while its interpretation remains underdetermined.
Defeaters	Which contrary evidence or rival explanations are relevant, and how are they answered?	Basic status does not make a belief immune to defeat.
Result	Is the route adequate, unresolved, or absent?	The verdict applies to a stated route, not automatically to the proposition’s truth.

The ledger also prevents three common substitutions. First, *sincerity* cannot replace source reliability. A sincere experience may be accurately reported while its cause is misidentified. Second, *coherence* cannot replace input. A detailed story can be internally consistent without its details being supplied by the event that prompted it. Third, *community continuity* cannot replace transmission. A proposition's long residence in a tradition may explain its stability without showing how it acquired warrant.

This framework is compatible with inferential, testimonial, and externalist routes. A believer need not personally articulate every bridge. Testimonial knowledge often depends on divisions of cognitive labor, and ordinary perceivers need not possess a theory of vision. The claim is instead that a warranted package must in fact have an adequate route, whether or not the subject can state it. When the package is defended publicly, however, identifying the proposed route is necessary for comparing the model with alternatives and locating its possible failures.

4 Why Thin Theism Underdetermines Thick Doctrine

Let thin theism assert only that a purposive transcendent reality exists or is present. Even that content may be richer than a raw feeling, but it remains compatible with many possibilities. The reality could be one or many, personal in different senses, morally perfect or limited, identical with no historical tradition, or connected to several traditions only indirectly. A thin deliverance does not logically entail a Christian account of trinity, incarnation, atonement, resurrection, canon, and salvation.

Logical non-entailment matters because warrant does not normally strengthen itself. If evidence supports a disjunction—either Alice or Ben entered the room—it does not thereby support the more specific proposition that Alice entered wearing a red coat. A further observation or testimony must do that work. Likewise, a general sense of transcendence does not decide among doctrinally incompatible specifications.

Religious experience can still provide some support. Alston argues that experiential awareness of a deity may be epistemically analogous in important respects to sense perception and embedded in a socially established doxastic practice, meaning a practice of forming and evaluating beliefs (Alston 1991). Yet even a favorable assessment of such experience leaves a question about reach. McKim emphasizes both religious diversity and the gap between religious experience and the larger bodies of doctrine associated with traditions (McKim 2001). An experience may warrant a subset of beliefs without warranting every theological interpretation placed upon it.

Three transitions therefore need separation:

1. **Experience to minimal content.** What proposition, if any, is presented by the experience itself?
2. **Minimal content to source identity.** Why identify the apparent presence as the Christian deity rather than another supernatural being, a general transcendent reality, or a non-supernatural cause?
3. **Source identity to doctrinal package.** How do particular historical, metaphysical, and soteriological claims follow?

The first transition might be noninferential. The second and third might use testimony, scripture, memory, historical argument, background theology, or a further direct source. No rule requires all three to be inferential. The error is to collapse them into one undifferentiated moment and then treat the basicity of the first as the warrant of the last.

This is the categorical burden named in the title. Each transition changes the content under evaluation. If a new content-bearing source enters, it should be named. If an inference is used, its premises and relevance should be identified. If testimony carries the content, its authority and transmission conditions

matter. Where none of these is supplied, the package has a warrant gap even if its starting point is properly basic.

5 The Extended Model Changes the Route

The strongest Plantingan response is not to deny the gap but to fill it directly. According to the extended Aquinas/Calvin model, scripture and the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit present and seal specifically Christian propositions. The believer does not begin with generic theism and deduce the creed. The propositions are produced in a basic way by a process whose content is already Christian (Plantinga 2000).

This response avoids a simple underdetermination objection. If a reliable source directly presents that a particular incarnation and resurrection occurred, the content is not being illicitly inferred from a vague sense of presence. Rich content can be basic. Ordinary perception already supports detailed propositions: one may immediately see that a familiar friend is approaching, not first see colored shapes and then consciously infer a person. Testimony can likewise transmit complex content without the hearer deriving each clause independently.

But the success changes the critical question. The model now depends on the existence and activity of the specifically Christian source, on the truth-aimed function of the process, on an environment suitable for that function, and on the process's reliable connection to the doctrinal propositions. These are not embarrassments added from outside; they are Plantinga's own proper-function conditions applied to the extended model.

The resulting burden has two layers. The *personal-warrant* layer asks whether the believer could possess warrant if the model is true and functioning. Externalism allows an affirmative answer without requiring the believer to prove the model. The *model-assessment* layer asks why an evaluator should identify the process as the extended model describes rather than as cultural learning, memory, expectation, affective salience, social testimony, or another religious process. A believer's inability to answer the second question does not automatically remove personal warrant. But an apologist cannot answer it merely by pointing back to the possibility of the first.

This distinction blocks two symmetrical mistakes. The critic should not say, "The believer lacks an argument, so the belief lacks warrant." That ignores externalist and properly basic routes. The defender should not say, "The belief could be warranted without an argument, so the proposed source has been adequately identified." Possibility is not identification. A model can show how warrant is possible while leaving competing causal descriptions to be assessed.

The direct-source fork

Either thick doctrine is inferred or transmitted from other warranted contents, in which case the bridges must carry the specificity, or it is produced by a specifically thick noninferential source, in which case that source's identity, truth aim, environment, reliability, and defeaters become decisive. Thin basicity cannot do both jobs.

6 Diversity and Defeaters

Religious diversity is relevant because similarly situated people report incompatible basic or experience-grounded beliefs. The fact of disagreement does not by itself prove that all parties lack warrant. Perceptual disagreement can occur even when perception is generally reliable, and externalists need not make warrant depend on a subject's ability to eliminate every skeptical alternative. The question is more focused: does the pattern provide a defeater for confidence in the claimed source or its interpretation?

Maitzen argues that the uneven geographic and cultural distribution of theistic belief challenges the claim that a universal *sensus divinitatis* operates normally across humanity (Maitzen 2006). The demographic fact is not a formal contradiction of Plantinga's model. The model can invoke damage, suppression, environmental differences, or the varied occasions of belief. Yet such explanations must not become cost-free. A source described as widely implanted and truth-directed should generate some expectations about distribution, stability, and cross-cultural recognition. When observed patterns fit ordinary cultural transmission at least as well, the identification of the process requires further defense.

The extended model faces a sharper version because its content is tradition-specific. A Christian believer may experience a proposition as internally taught or sealed, while adherents of other traditions report experiences supporting incompatible accounts. Those reports need not be identical in phenomenology or evidential strength. Still, their existence prevents immediacy alone from identifying the Christian source. The route ledger asks what discriminates veridical instigation from sincere but differently formed conviction.

Plantinga devotes substantial attention to defeaters, including pluralism, historical biblical criticism, suffering, and projection explanations (Plantinga 2000). This is evidence against the caricature that properly basic belief is unrevisable. Moon's survey similarly stresses that a successful objection must engage either the underlying epistemological theory or its application to religious belief; the familiar Great Pumpkin objection cannot succeed merely by listing an eccentric belief and calling it basic (Moon 2016). The route analysis follows that advice. It targets an application: the movement between contents and the source assigned to each.

A defeater can operate in at least three ways. A *rebutting defeater* supplies reason to think a proposition false. An *undercutting defeater* attacks the connection between a source and the proposition without directly proving the proposition false. A *selection defeater* raises doubt about why this interpretation of an ambiguous experience was chosen over relevant rivals. Cultural clustering often functions in the second or third way. It suggests that the same felt certainty may arise through processes that track social location rather than doctrinal truth.

The appropriate response is proportional rather than automatic. A modest demographic discrepancy may reduce confidence only slightly. A well-supported alternative causal account may demand more. A successful reply may show that the rival cases differ, that the source predicts diversity, or that independent considerations identify the Christian process. The route ledger does not predetermine the result. It ensures that the result is attached to an explicit proposition, source, and challenge.

7 Five Objections and Replies

7.1 Content-rich perceptual beliefs can be basic

Agreed. A person may immediately recognize a spouse, hear a familiar melody, or see that a child is frightened. The route-completeness principle does not impose a simplicity limit. It asks whether the source is capable of carrying the content. Expertise and learned perceptual skills can make rich recognition reliable. By the same standard, a spiritual process could in principle carry doctrinally rich content. The extended model must then be evaluated as that kind of content-bearing process, not as a free expansion of thin theism.

7.2 Externalism makes route articulation unnecessary

Externalism makes reflective access unnecessary for personal warrant. It does not make the route nonexistent. Plantinga's theory is filled with route conditions: proper function, suitable environment, truth aim, and objective likelihood (Plantinga 1993). The ledger translates those conditions into proposition-specific questions. A young child may know by testimony without evaluating a speaker's

reliability; a philosopher explaining the knowledge still needs a true account of why the testimony transmits warrant.

The distinction also clarifies the paper's jurisdiction. Failure to provide a public route map does not prove that a believer lacks warrant. It shows that a defense appealing to proper basicity has not yet established where warrant for additional doctrinal content comes from.

7.3 Warrant for a conjunction follows from warrant for its parts

Often it can, subject to familiar complications about closure and competent combination. But that point supports the present argument. Before the conjunction receives warrant through its parts, the indispensable parts must themselves be warranted. A warrant gap at one component cannot be repaired by conjoining it with well-supported components.

The reverse direction is also important. To warrant a whole package is to take responsibility for its essential conjuncts. If one cannot rationally affirm that a resurrection occurred, adding warranted belief in a creator does not produce warrant for the conjunction that a creator exists and that the resurrection occurred. Logical packaging does not generate epistemic support.

7.4 If Christian theism is true, Plantinga's model is likely successful

That conditional may be granted for argument's sake. It shows that a *de jure* objection cannot be cleanly detached from truth. It does not show that thin theistic warrant establishes the antecedent or identifies the extended process. The route analysis is compatible with the conditional: if the Christian deity intentionally produces the relevant true beliefs through reliable faculties, those beliefs may be warranted. The analysis then asks which route is being claimed and what bears on its application.

This is not vicious circularity by definition. Many epistemic practices rely on their own outputs. Perception helps confirm perception; memory helps assess memory. The question is comparative and defeater-sensitive. When incompatible source models explain similar confidence, what additional features favor one identification? Calling the process properly basic restates its proposed status; it does not answer every undercutting challenge.

7.5 The route burden revives evidentialism

It would revive evidentialism if it required every believer to infer every belief from propositions available to all reasonable people. It requires no such thing. A direct, noninferential route satisfies the principle if it is genuinely truth-aimed and reliable in the relevant environment. Testimony can satisfy it without reduction to private evidence. The burden concerns the existence of a route, not universal reflective access to it.

The principle is therefore ecumenical across internalist and externalist theories. An internalist may demand accessible reasons. An externalist may emphasize reliable production. Both can agree that warrant for proposition *p* does not automatically warrant a stronger proposition *q* unless a source or bridge connects the subject to *q*.

8 A Constructive Route Audit

The argument becomes useful when it tells defenders and critics what to do next. A route audit should begin with the smallest public claim under discussion and expand only when the source warrants expansion. It can be conducted in six steps.

Table 2: A six-step audit for doctrinal warrant.

Step	Task	Completion question
1	State the package	Which propositions are indispensable, and which are optional elaborations?
2	Mark direct sources	Which propositions are allegedly presented noninferentially, and by what process?
3	Mark bridges	Which propositions come through inference or testimony, and what warranted content does each bridge begin from?
4	Test specificity	Does the source or bridge distinguish this proposition from live alternatives?
5	Enter defeaters	Which rebutting, undercutting, or selection challenges bear on the route, and what answers them?
6	Report locally	Which routes are adequate, unresolved, or absent, and how does each status affect the package?

Suppose the package includes five claims: a personal creator exists; that creator is triune; an incarnation occurred in Jesus; Jesus was resurrected; and a particular canon reliably reveals the preceding claims. An audit might assign the first to the *sensus divinitatis*, the next three to the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit through scripture, and the fifth to a combined testimonial and spiritual route. This allocation does not settle whether the routes succeed. It does make the argument inspectable.

Specificity is the central check. If the experience presents only dependence on a transcendent cause, it does not identify trinity. If scripture carries the specific content, then canon identification, textual transmission, interpretation, and the alleged spiritual confirmation enter the route. If historical inference is invoked for resurrection, historical premises and alternative explanations matter. If the entire package is directly instigated, then the extended model rather than the thin model carries the load.

Local reporting prevents exaggerated verdicts. An unresolved bridge to one doctrine need not erase every warranted component. A thin theistic belief could remain warranted even if the route to a canon fails. Conversely, success at the thin level should not hide the unresolved thick component. The audit permits mixed verdicts because real belief systems rarely stand or fall as single blocks.

The approach also improves dialogue. Defenders can identify the actual source they claim instead of being forced into an argument they reject. Critics can target the source-content connection instead of assuming that absence of inference is irrational. Both sides can separate three questions: whether the proposition is true, whether a particular believer has warrant, and whether a stated route has been adequately defended.

9 Conclusion

Reformed epistemology is right to resist the idea that every rational belief must be inferred from neutral premises. Perception, memory, testimony, and perhaps religious experience can place a person in direct epistemic contact with truths. But direct contact has content. A source that warrants one proposition does not automatically warrant every stronger proposition a community associates with it.

The proper basicity load is therefore not a weight limit. It is a categorical routing burden created by doctrinal expansion. Thin theism underdetermines a thick Christian package. Each indispensable addition requires its own truth-aimed noninferential source or a warranted inferential or testimonial bridge. Where a route is missing, warrant does not transmit through that route.

Plantinga's extended Aquinas/Calvin model is the strongest answer because it proposes a direct process for full-blooded Christian content. That answer deserves to be assessed in its own form. If Christian theism is true and the process functions as described, thick belief could be properly basic and warranted. The price of specificity is not automatic irrationality; it is specificity in the reliability claim. Questions about source identity, environment, cultural formation, disagreement, and defeaters attach to the Christian process itself and cannot be discharged merely by analogies with thin theistic experience.

The result remains bounded. A failed route does not entail a false doctrine. A missing public defense does not prove the absence of personal externalist warrant. A content-rich belief is not disqualified simply for being rich. What fails is warrant by inheritance: the quiet movement from "this belief may be basic" to "this entire package is therefore warranted." Once the propositions and routes are placed on the ledger, the real work of religious epistemology can begin.

A Formal Reconstruction of the Central Thesis

A.1 Ordinary-language argument

- P1.** A doctrinally thick package is a conjunction of indispensable propositions: affirming the entire package commits the believer to every component.
- P2.** A claim that the entire package is warranted bears a route-completeness burden: every indispensable component must have either its own adequate noninferential source or a warranted inferential or testimonial bridge.
- P3.** Proper basicity for a thin theistic proposition does not, by itself, supply any such route to doctrinal propositions not contained in or entailed by the thin proposition.
- P4.** If at least one indispensable component lacks both kinds of route, the package has a warrant gap.
- P5.** Therefore, when a warrant gap exists, the thin belief does not supply warrant for the doctrinal package.
- P6.** Plantinga's extended Aquinas/Calvin model can answer P3 by proposing direct, specifically Christian sources for the thick components; its success then depends on the truth and reliability conditions of that extended model.
- P7.** Failure of the stated route does not entail that the package is false or that no other route could warrant it.

P2 is the main epistemic premise. It does not require arguments for every belief; a suitable direct source counts as a complete route. P3 is a content relation: a weaker proposition does not logically include the extra claims. P4 and P5 then follow from the definition of a warrant gap and the route-completeness premise. P6 prevents the argument from attacking a simplified version of Plantinga. P7 states the conclusion's limit.

A.2 Symbols and their ordinary meanings

Fix one believer, S , and let the symbols mean the following:

- T : a *thin theistic proposition*, such as the claim that a purposive transcendent reality exists.
- D : the doctrinal package under review.
- $d_1, \dots, d_n$: the indispensable propositions whose conjunction forms D . For example, separate d_i propositions might concern trinity, incarnation, resurrection, or revelation.
- $W_S(p)$: proposition p is warranted for believer S .
- $B_S(p)$: S holds p in a properly basic way. This symbol does not itself say that p is true or warranted; it identifies the proposed noninferential status.
- $N_S(p)$: S has an adequate truth-aimed noninferential route to p .
- $J_S(q, p)$: warranted proposition q is connected to p by an adequate inferential or testimonial bridge for S .
- $R_S(p)$: S has some adequate route to p , either directly through $N_S(p)$ or through a warranted proposition q and bridge $J_S(q, p)$.
- $G_S(D)$: package D contains a *warrant gap* for S : at least one indispensable component lacks an adequate route.

- $H_S(p)$: in Plantinga's extended model, p is produced for S through the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit operating as a proper, truth-aimed source.
- $p \models q$: q logically follows from p ; every possible situation in which p is true is also one in which q is true.
- $p \not\models q$: q does not logically follow from p .

The subscript S matters because warrant is assessed for a person in an epistemic situation. The formulas do not claim that everyone has the same experiences, testimony, background information, or defeaters.

A.3 The package and its routes

First define the thick package as a conjunction:

$$D := \bigwedge_{i=1}^n d_i. \quad (1)$$

Plain-English annotation. The large wedge in Equation (1) means “and.” The formula says that package D contains d_1 and d_2 and every further indispensable claim through d_n . If one component is false, the whole conjunction is false. The formula does not assume that every minor denominational detail belongs in D ; only claims treated as essential to the package are listed.

Now define what counts as an adequate route to one proposition:

$$R_S(p) \leftrightarrow N_S(p) \vee \exists q [W_S(q) \wedge J_S(q, p)]. \quad (2)$$

Plain-English annotation. The double arrow means “if and only if,” and the symbol $\vee$ means “or.” Believer S has a route to proposition p in either of two ways. The first is direct: a suitable noninferential source produces p . The second uses a bridge: there is at least one proposition q that is already warranted for S , and q is adequately connected to p by inference or testimony. This definition deliberately allows externalist routes; S need not be able to explain the entire process.

The route-completeness principle can then be stated as a necessary condition for package-level warrant:

$$W_S(D) \rightarrow \forall i (1 \leq i \leq n \rightarrow R_S(d_i)). \quad (3)$$

Plain-English annotation. Equation (3) says: if the whole package D is warranted for S , then every indispensable component d_i must have an adequate route. The symbol $\forall i$ means “for every component number i .” This is a burden of completeness, not a demand for conscious arguments. A direct perceptual, testimonial, or spiritual source can satisfy the requirement if it is genuinely adequate.

Define a warrant gap as the failure of that component-by-component condition:

$$G_S(D) \leftrightarrow \exists k (1 \leq k \leq n \wedge \neg R_S(d_k)). \quad (4)$$

Plain-English annotation. The symbol $\exists k$ means “there is at least one component number k .” The negation sign $\neg$ means “not.” Thus D has a warrant gap when at least one essential component d_k lacks both a suitable direct source and a warranted bridge. The equation does not say which component fails; an actual audit must identify it.

Equations (3) and (4) yield:

$$G_S(D) \rightarrow \neg W_S(D). \quad (5)$$

Plain-English annotation. If an indispensable component has no adequate route, the claim that the entire conjunction is warranted fails under the route-completeness principle. This is a valid consequence of the definitions and Equation (3). Whether the principle itself is correct is a philosophical question discussed below.

A.4 Why thin basicity does not fill the gap

The content relation between thin theism and the Christian package is:

$$T \not\models D. \quad (6)$$

Plain-English annotation. The crossed entailment symbol means “does not logically guarantee.” A purposive transcendent reality could exist even if one or more specifically Christian propositions were false. Therefore the truth of thin proposition T alone cannot logically deliver the entire conjunction D . This statement concerns content, not anyone’s sincerity or intelligence.

It follows that properly basic status for T is not a transmission rule to D :

$$B_S(T) \not\Rightarrow W_S(D). \quad (7)$$

Plain-English annotation. Equation (7) says that “ S holds thin proposition T as properly basic” does not by itself logically imply “the thick package D is warranted for S .” Additional routes may still warrant D . The point is only that the label attached to T cannot silently do the additional work.

Combining the thin starting point with an actual gap makes the bounded result explicit:

$$B_S(T) \wedge G_S(D) \rightarrow \neg W_S(D). \quad (8)$$

Plain-English annotation. The symbol $\wedge$ means “and.” Even if thin theistic belief T is properly basic, the thick package is not warranted through that starting point when an essential component lacks a route. Notice what does the decisive work: the warrant gap, not the mere fact that D is long, detailed, religious, or Christian.

A.5 How the extended model can answer

Plantinga’s extended model proposes direct routes to specifically Christian propositions. Its formal role can be represented as:

$$\forall i (1 \leq i \leq n \rightarrow [H_S(d_i) \rightarrow N_S(d_i)]). \quad (9)$$

Plain-English annotation. For each indispensable doctrine d_i , if the internal instigation described by the extended model reliably produces d_i , then S has a direct noninferential route to that doctrine. This formula shows why the model is a serious answer to the gap. It does not derive thick doctrine from thin theism; it assigns a thick source to thick content.

If the model successfully supplies every route, there is no warrant gap of the defined kind:

$$[\forall i (1 \leq i \leq n \rightarrow H_S(d_i))] \rightarrow \neg G_S(D). \quad (10)$$

Plain-English annotation. If every essential component is reliably produced in the way the extended model claims, each has a direct route and the package has no missing-route gap. The antecedent is substantial: it includes the model’s truth, proper-function, environment, truth-aim, reliability, and defeater conditions. The symbolic step is conditional; it does not prove that those conditions obtain.

Finally, failure of package-level warrant through the stated route does not establish falsity:

$$\neg W_S(D) \not\Rightarrow \neg D. \quad (11)$$

Plain-English annotation. The failure of one warrant claim does not show that the doctrine is false. A true proposition can be poorly supported, and another adequate route may exist. The paper therefore rejects warrant by inheritance while leaving the truth of Christianity and the possibility of other warrant routes open.

A.6 Validity, support, and possible defeat

The derivation from Equations (3) and (4) to Equation (5) is valid: if package-level warrant requires a route for every essential component and at least one component has no route, the requirement is not met. Equation (8) adds the thin basic belief to show that its presence does not repair the gap. The logic is straightforward once the terms are defined.

Validity is not the same as soundness. A valid argument has a conclusion that follows from its premises. A sound argument is valid and has true or well-supported premises. The main contestable premise is Equation (3). A critic might argue that a conjunction can be warranted holistically even though no separate route can be identified for each component. The reply is that holistic support must still connect the subject to the content that makes the conjunction stronger; otherwise adding an unsupported essential claim could never reduce warrant. A holistic theory may redescribe the route, but it cannot make specificity appear from nowhere.

Application is also contestable. To establish $G_S(D)$, one must show that a particular component lacks a suitable direct source and lacks a warranted bridge. The mere existence of disagreement does not prove this. Conversely, merely naming the Holy Spirit does not establish $H_S(d_i)$ in the demanding sense used here, because H_S includes reliable truth-aimed production, not only a believer's attribution. Evidence about experience, testimony, cultural formation, coherence, historical claims, and defeaters bears on the application.

The formal reconstruction therefore locates rather than conceals disagreement. The defender can close a proposed gap by identifying $N_S(d_i)$ or a warranted q with $J_S(q, d_i)$. The critic can challenge the adequacy of that source or bridge. Neither side may treat the formulas as empirical proof. Their value is to stop a warrant claim from moving unnoticed between propositions.

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