

## Run-About Theological Inference Tickets

Prior (1960) popularized the notion of an “inference ticket.” Logical connectives, Prior observed, have characteristic inferential inputs and characteristic outputs. For example, CONJUNCTION is tied to these three inferential forms — the first is an *input* condition, describing when one can infer *to* an “and” claim; the latter two describe *output* conditions, which are about what one may infer *from* an “and” claim:

$$\frac{P, Q}{P \text{ and } Q} \quad \frac{P \text{ and } Q}{P} \quad \frac{P \text{ and } Q}{Q}$$

Foster and Ichikawa (2023) observe that the notion of an inference ticket can be extended from merely logical concepts to concepts more generally. They do so by recognizing that concepts are associated with a series of stereotypical connections, and those stereotypical connections give rise to inference tickets much like the one above. Only, in contrast to logical inference tickets, these inference tickets are usually *not deductively valid*. Rather, they capture what are typically taken to be *generally reasonable/reliable transitions* in thought. They do this by exploiting conceptual connections close to the stereotypical core of the concept. Take, Pigden (2023)’s, discussion of CONSPIRACY-THEORY as an illustration. Given the dominant stereotypes associated with the concept, we can articulate the input and output rules as follows:<sup>1</sup>

$$\frac{x \text{ is a theory which posits a conspiracy}}{x \text{ is a conspiracy theory}} \quad \frac{x \text{ is a conspiracy theory}}{x \text{ is false, crazy, or unbelievable}}$$

Three observations:

- (1) the input condition is nearly analytic, especially if the situation is near the stereotypical core (e.g., 9-11 was an inside job).
- (2) The output condition is ampliative and (in some cases) normatively problematic.
- (3) It often takes special pleading to resist the inferential route made available.

We argue that three concepts that loom large in Christianity— SIN, DOUBT, and MYSTERY — have, in virtue of the stereotypical connections deeply attached to each concept, associated inference tickets that exhibit these three features; in particular we argue that the way these concepts function in Christian religious contexts underwrite the following inference tickets:

$$\frac{x \text{ fell short}}{x \text{ sinned}} \quad \frac{x \text{ sinned}}{x \text{ is deserving of punishment}}$$

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<sup>1</sup> Pigden (2023) p. 430

$x$ doubts whether $p$	$x$ doubts
$x$ doubts	$x$ is not a faithful member of the religious community

Dogma $p$ cannot be coherently explicated	$p$ is a mystery
$p$ is a mystery	$p$ must be accepted on faith

We then argue that the widespread use of these inference tickets leads to harmful forms of *epistemic injustice*. The inference tickets associated with SIN and DOUBT which are rooted in what is stereotypically central to each concept, we argue, distort the collective hermeneutic in ways that lead to significant difficulties for members of the community to appropriately understand the nature or normative significance of their (social) experience. In so doing, they satisfy Ficker (2007) and Mason (2021)'s characterizations of *hermeneutical injustice*. The inference ticket associated with MYSTERY, we argue, can lead to skepticism about the prospects for improving one's evidential position and lead the agent to no longer be able to see their evidential position or capacities as offering epistemic goods to them on that matter. While it may be fine to stifle attempts to inquire into certain dogmas (e.g., the trinity), it will be far more harmful to stifle inquiry into dogmas that play key roles in marginalizing the epistemic standing of certain members of/outside to the religious community.

After some pessimistic reflections on the problem of run-about theological inference tickets, we conclude that in virtue of deep features of the Christian conceptual scheme, Christians are apt to suffer significant kinds of epistemic wrongs.