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Proper Basicality for Belief in God

Alvin Plantinga and the Evidentialist Objection to Theism

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Abstract - Résumé

This study explores how successful Alvin Plantinga is in his contention that belief in God can be obtained and maintained in a basic way that attains and retains rationality for reflective persons. Plantinga indeed calls into question any confident presumption that theistic belief is epistemically irresponsible. He not only seriously challenges the necessity for propositional evidence to be available for such belief to be justified, he also supplies significant support for the conclusion that it remains legitimate even if it faces a preponderance of contrary considerations. However, Plantinga does not convincingly demonstrate that basic theistic belief merits privileged status by virtue of a character sufficiently analogous to paradigmatic perceptual, memory and ascriptive beliefs. Nor does he adequately argue its independence from the bearing of evidentialist concerns, especially regarding its background moorings. He needs to do more work to show the full warrant for theistic belief.

Cette étude examine dans quelle mesure Alvin Plantinga réussit à démontrer qu'on puisse obtenir et maintenir la croyance en Dieu tout en mettant en oeuvre une rationalité authentiquement réflexive. Plantinga met vraiment en doute toute allégation voulant que la croyance théiste soit épistémiquement irresponsable. Non seulement il questionne la nécessité de recourir à l'évidence propositionelle pour justifier une telle croyance, mais il montre aussi que cette croyance peut demeurer légitime même lorsque des considérations contraires à elle sont prépondérantes. Toutefois, Plantinga ne démontre pas de manière convaincante que la croyance théiste de base mérite d'occuper une position privilégiée en vertu de son analogie structurelle par rapport aux croyances paradigmatiques de la perception, de la mémoire, et de l'ascription. Aussi ne plaide-t-il pas assez fortement en faveur de l'indépendance de cette croyance par rapport à l'évidentialisme, particulièrement eu égard au lien avec le passé. Il lui reste à mieux élaborer encore et à mieux fonder la portée de la croyance théiste.

Acknowledgments

I wish firstly to thank my faculty advisor Dr. Maurice Boutin for his considerate assistance in a supervisory capacity. I am grateful as well to Professors Stephen Wykstra, George Mavrodes, and Jay Van Hook for graciously making available to me on request copies of unpublished papers they had produced on subject matter pertinent to this thesis. I am also appreciative of Professor Kelly James Clark for kindly bringing to my attention some recent relevant published pieces.

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Abbreviations
for works by Alvin Plantinga frequently cited in this study

CEO: "Coherentism and the Evidentialist Objection to Belief in God." In Rationality, Religious Belief and Moral Commitment: New Essays in the Philosophy of Religion. Eds. Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986, pp. 109-138.

EP: "Epistemic Probability and Evil." In Our Knowledge of God: Essays on Natural and Philosophical Theology. Ed. Kelly James Clark. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992, pp. 39-63.

FTR: "The Foundations of Theism: A Reply." Faith and Philosophy 3/3 (1986): 298-313.

PNT: "The Prospects For Natural Theology." In Philosophical Perspectives 5: Philosophy of Religion. Ed. James E. Tomberlin. Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Publishing Co., 1991, pp. 287-315.

RBG: "Reason and Belief in God." In Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God. Eds. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983, pp. 16-93.

WCD: Warrant: The Current Debate. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992.

WPF: Warrant and Proper Function. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Introduction

Notre Dame professor Alvin Plantinga has gained repute as a leading American philosopher for his analytical work in a number of areas, including such metaphysical questions as necessity and possibility, essence and accident, and epistemological issues such as warrant. Probably the area in which he has most distinguished himself is philosophy of religion.[1] By his own admission, Plantinga, who is rather firmly rooted in the Dutch -- more precisely, the Frisian -- Calvinist tradition, has been especially motivated in his study to take up intellectual challenges mounted against the Christian theism that he has, as it were, inherited as a personal conviction.[2] One major work in this endeavor, entitled God and Other Minds,[3] concluded after intensive scrutiny that the traditional theistic proofs for God's existence fall rather short of being successful. But his rigorous examination of the opposite side yielded the same verdict for the arguments of natural atheology. Plantinga noted that our belief in other minds is generally regarded as rational, in spite of the fact that formally speaking the strongest support for it is the quite unsatisfactory argument from analogy. He argued accordingly that belief in God should not be rejected as irrational just because the teleological argument faces similar sorts of objections. Since belief in God appears on an epistemological par with belief in

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[1] See Tomberlin and van Inwagen ix.

[2] So Plantinga 1985a, 18, 30, 33-34.

[3] Plantinga 1967.

other minds, if the latter should be accepted as legitimate, which it widely is, then, says Plantinga, so should the former likewise be granted such status.[4]

This suggestion, that theistic belief is rational without support from justifying arguments, marks the beginning of a recent movement which, because of some present adherents and past affinities, has come to be known as "Reformed (or Calvinistic) Epistemology." Its articulate advocates include Nicholas Wolterstorff,[5] with strong support from the prolific William Alston [6] and some backing as well from George Mavrodes.[7] But Plantinga is recognized as the preeminent proponent for the position. It is he who enunciated its main planks in a series of articles [8] which were synthesized in the offering "Reason and Belief in God" for the volume he coedited in 1983 with Wolterstorff on Faith and Rationality.

The present study looks at Plantinga's contention that theistic belief can be obtained and maintained in a basic way that attains and retains rationality for reflective persons. His perspective needs to be considered within the context of his concern with, and construal of,

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[4] See also Plantinga 1985a, 56; 1985c, 400; Cooke 273-275; Clark 118-119.

[5] Wolterstorff 1983a,b, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1992; also 1989, 444-455.

[6] For example, Alston 1983, 1985, and 1991, especially 195-197.

[7] So Mavrodes 1970, 1983, 1986; also 1988, 1989, 1994.

[8] Plantinga 1979a, 1980, 1981, 1982a.

firstly, epistemic justification, and secondly, warrant, since his more recent emphasis is upon the latter. The content of these concepts for Plantinga will be detailed below in the discussion to follow. Something preliminary may be said in broad terms for the sake of outlining their respective contours, before blurred but now distinct for him. He thinks of justification along internalist, subjective lines, having to do with a believer's conscious response to opportunities, and hence with a believer's rights and responsibilities. He views warrant largely in externalist terms of conditions objectively obtaining apart from the awareness of the believer. Plantinga still values justification for the question of rationality. However, he has come to discard the view that justified true belief is virtually tantamount to knowledge, opting rather for this different notion of warrant as that positive epistemic status enough of which, in conjunction with true belief, amounts to knowledge.[9]

While Plantinga's proposals on proper basicality for theistic belief have prompted a spate of protest ranging over a broad spectrum of convictions and considerations, his own published responses to specific criticisms have been somewhat confined thus far. This study, while referring to a wide range of respondents, focuses on significant representatives, especially some whose reactions have elicited replies from him or his supporters. Thus it majors on actual rather than anticipated rejoinders, but still suggests some of the latter.

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[9] Plantinga 1987 marks the movement, with the shift shown complete after by PNT 295-303; EP; especially WCD and WPF.

The first chapter treats the tenability of Plantinga's position that the evidentialist objection to theism does not hold because a classical foundationalism at its root is not entitled to exclude belief in God as nonbasic, evidentially deficient and dependent. It also deals with his responses to various nonfoundationalist views of the rationality of religious belief which see his principal critique as irrelevant.

The second chapter addresses difficulties with Plantinga's inclusion of theistic beliefs as properly basic owing to analogy with perceptual and other paradigmatic beliefs. It focuses on his claim that experiential theistic beliefs are properly formed in the same direct manner. He contends that such beliefs have noninferential grounds rather than being subject to justification through evidential argumentation. Consideration is given to Plantinga's response to significant evidentialist challenges on the legitimacy and import of this distinction. His understanding of the role of background beliefs and their status when acquired through testimony is critiqued. The chapter also introduces a protest that Plantinga's requirement of grounds for theistic beliefs is unnecessary and his claim of justification too weak.

The third chapter examines Plantinga's position on proper basicality for theistic belief in the face of contrary evidence, especially his advocacy of an intrinsic capacity for experientially grounded beliefs to withstand would-be defeaters. It assesses the

solvency of his stance in view of other approaches to the retention of rationality for belief in God. Attention is given to his recent appeal to warrant through proper function of noetic capacities as crucial for the validity of theistic belief. The chapter also relates his insistence that positions here will not be held on neutral epistemological grounds.

A conclusion summarizes findings and issues some continuing questions. It itemizes several areas where Plantinga needs to offer more support for certain claims. Indication is given as to where Plantinga can afford to interact more with views which stress a different role for theistic beliefs within the belief system of those who hold them. Mention is made of some matters involved in the stronger claim of knowledge which he is intending to advance in a forthcoming volume. The conclusion also takes note of another's recent contribution which contends for more complementarity between Reformed epistemology and evidentialist concerns than Plantinga has enunciated.

Chapter One

Plantinga and Various Views on the Evidentialist Objection

Many mature Christian believers in the European and North American context are quite conscious of what has been called the evidentialist objection to theism, even if they are unacquainted with its most renowned exponents or the precise wording of their pronouncements. Plantinga has familiarized himself with statements issued by William K. Clifford, Brand Blanshard, Bertrand Russell, Michael Scriven and Antony Flew, all to the effect that "belief in God is irrational or unreasonable or not rationally acceptable or intellectually irresponsible or somehow noetically below par, because, as they say, there is *insufficient evidence* for it."[1] The objection springs from an application to theism of the evidentialist contention that "if a belief of such and such is to possess a certain epistemic merit, there must be (or be thought by the believer to be) a good argument for the propositional content of that belief" (Wolterstorff 1988, 53). If that challenge, which may assume various particular formulations, is accompanied by the persuasion that in the matter of theism such support is not forthcoming, then it takes on the form of the objection.[2] Plantinga is well aware that many notable Christian intellectuals have agreed that evidence should be on hand, if not in hand, for theistic belief to be rational.

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[1] RBG 17; compare 18, 24-25, 27, 29; 1985a, 56-57; CEO 109-110.

[2] Wolterstorff 1983a, 6, 136; 1986, 38-39, n.2.

These others are content to dispute the claim that evidence is lacking, and Plantinga concurs with their counter conclusion. But he is particularly concerned to contest the very *principle* that evidence is indeed requisite. He contends to the contrary that "it is entirely right, rational, reasonable, and proper to believe in God without any evidence or argument at all."[3]

Plantinga plainly has no quarrel with the implication that there are duties, obligations and norms involved in the matter of believing. These may take on various forms relating to one's initially acquiring a belief or to one's subsequent retaining a persuasion and to what degree confidence and openness ought to be there. Normativity can be construed in different ways, most notably by evidentialists in a deontological sense. Numerous situations highlight human responsibility to use our noetic faculties according to their capacity. At times there may be conflict among the ranks of *prima facie* obligations, a level which also can be overridden. Plantinga is also aware of the limitations of such a singularly focused construal. Beliefs on a matter are often not directly within voluntary control so that one could quickly comply with a command to refrain from believing in the absence of formal evidence. Therefore he suggests that evidentialists might well be better off to speak of defectiveness or deficiency in the structure of a system containing beliefs not

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[3] RBG 17; compare 30, 39, 72, 73; likewise Wolterstorff 1983a, 136.

sustained by adequate evidence.[4] In accordance with the evidentialist outlook he attempts to answer in "Reason and Belief in God" (1983), Plantinga there keeps in the foreground justification in deontological terms: of one believing only what is acceptable, what one is allowed, what is permitted, proper, what one is within one's rights to believe and thus what one is rational in adhering to, only those beliefs which are not the result of any violation of epistemic obligations (RBG 85). At the same time he does not drop the question of defectiveness in some other respect;[5] it will later become his assured chief challenge.[6]

As Plantinga recognizes, evidentialism allows that some beliefs do not need what might be called ulterior evidence or discursive justification, but it also does not thus admit theistic belief.[7] Indeed, he asserts that the evidentialist objection tends to be rooted in a foundationalist normative structuring of how a belief system ought to be ordered.[8] This foundationalist paradigm is best understood if we think of an individual's noetic structure as "the set of propositions that he believes, together with certain epistemic

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[4] RBG 30-39; 1985a, 57-59; CEO 110-112. See also Konyndyk 1986, 98-99.

[5] RBG 17, 30ff., especially 39, also 48, 52, 72, 79.

[6] See PNT; EP 55-56; WCD 72-73.

[7] See McLeod 1993, 108-111.

[8] RBG 17, 47-48, 90; compare 1985b, 389-390; CEO 112; Wolterstorff 1983a, 142.

relations that hold among him and these propositions."[9] Within a rational noetic structure some beliefs are to be regarded as properly basic in themselves, and others as only acceptable in that they are traceable back to, satisfactorily supported by, those which are basic. A strong foundationalism has historically assigned belief in God to the latter, nonbasic bracket. In Plantinga's reading, that strong version in its ancient and medieval formulation, exemplified by Thomas Aquinas, sets forth as exclusive criteria for proper basicality that a qualifying proposition be either self-evident or evident to the senses. A more modern narrower categorization since Descartes accepts as properly basic only such beliefs as are either self-evident or incorrigible. Plantinga calls this strong disjunction, and especially the modern statement, classical foundationalism.[10] He contends that he undermines the evidentialist objection by showing how bankrupt is that classical foundationalism underlying it (RBG 59-62). This study does not assess the accuracy of Plantinga's fairly controversial characterization and classification of Aquinas as being quite in contrast to Calvin. The latter is construed as in essence opposing classical foundationalism forwarded by the former.[11] Plantinga

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[9] RBG 48; CEO 112.

[10] RBG 39-59; CEO 113-118; WCD 67-68; also Wolterstorff 1983a, 1-3.

[11] Besides Plantinga 1980, RBG 39-48, 63-73; 1983b, 58-59, see the complaint by a number of Catholic writers that Plantinga has misrepresented Thomas Aquinas: so Boyle et al. 206-210; also, Russman 189-192, 194-200; Sullivan 82; Veatch 15, 19-22, 34, 43-44, 60, n. 13; Zeis 1993, 73, 77-78, n.56; see also McInerny 280-288 and qualifications in Wolterstorff 1986, 56-75, 78-81. See further Konyndyk 1986, Vos, Garcia; also Brown.

would contend that even if Aquinas does not entirely fit its profile, the outlook of classical foundationalism has still strongly influenced evidentialism and so must be addressed (Plantinga 1985b, 389-390).

1. The Basis for Evidentialism

Is Plantinga correct in his allegation that classical foundationalism is the underlying motivation, almost a necessary condition, for evidentialism? Gary Gutting contends that the simple fact that there exists a large group of nontheists with equal epistemic competence to believers in God makes it incumbent on the latter to justify their credence evidentially, as would be expected of one in a dispute over, for instance, some mathematical question. Failing this they ought to withhold belief until it may be supported by something more than the egoistic presumption that their own intuitions or access are superior to those of the dissenters.[12]

Plantinga has not replied specifically to Gutting's contention. Yet aspects of his response are evident in comments elsewhere and will come up in discussion later.[13] He would contest the case for entire epistemic peerage and the equation argument that another's lack of experience engendering belief suffices to cancel out one's own claim of experiential noninferentiated belief.[14] According to Nicholas

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[12] Gutting 1982; also1985, 241.

[13] See below, pp. 47-49, 76-78, 82-83, 102-105.

[14] Compare Clark 151-153.

Wolterstorff, Gutting's social evidentialism suffers from various liabilities including the difficulty of spelling out epistemic peerage, a status complicated by the addition of justificatory arguments such as Gutting requires (Wolterstorff 1988, 59-65). Wolterstorff sets out a laboratory illustration involving a matching pair of instruments used for detection of possible mineral contaminant in food samples, and able to give readings of present, absent, or yet in question. With a history of uniform agreement on other articles, they are also envisioned as delivering discrepant outputs of one combination or another on an item. What, then, constitute appropriate judgments and procedure on the part of one faced with each case of variance? By pursuing this analogy Wolterstorff exposes a fallacy in Gutting's assumption that an agnostic stance is neutral and need not be justified, and that suspension of belief is in principle preferable in instances of dissent (Wolterstorff 1988, 65-68).

Wolterstorff reformulates Gutting's triad in more precise, practical terms as involving one in three simultaneous beliefs: that *p*, for instance, that God exists; that one has an epistemic peer; that this peer does not share one's belief in the proposition. Gutting's principle of refraining from, or relinquishing, belief in the event evidential support is not marshaled ignores various other responsible approaches one may take in attempting to change the situation and bring about an alteration in one of the three beliefs. Wolterstorff is open to *malgovernance* of beliefs rather than just *malfunction* as a possible explanation for dissent. Gutting's demand that one free oneself from the triadic situation is by far too strong, and he himself

would not meet this demand in all instances of frequent philosophical dispute. Its application to Plantinga's position, then, is compromised on several counts; besides one could just as well direct it at Plantinga's opponents. Furthermore, it bears only indirectly on Plantinga's particular proposal since it does not insist that the evidence become the basis of belief for those who are already theists.[15] Gutting's social ground for evidentialism does not suffice.

Among Plantinga's most adamant critics, Norman Kretzmann charges that, besides misrepresenting the evidentialist objection, he has quite misconstrued the connection between it and classical foundationalism. According to Kretzmann, Plantinga offers no actual argument for the tie and directionality he alleges. He simply inverts the root-to-shoot relationship, ignoring the fact that the demand for sufficient evidence is intuitive, "logically, psychologically, and no doubt, historically prior to any such [foundationalist] system; it is a truistic, pre-theoretic, typically implicit canon of rationality itself."[16] Many contemporary advocates of evidentialism recognize that some beliefs stand on their own as rational, adequately evidenced simply in virtue of the nature of their propositional objects or the circumstances under which they are formed. Into this epistemically privileged category only self-evident and incorrigible propositions are generally admitted. Therefore, classical foundationalism is a

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[15] Wolterstorff 1988, 68-72, 73-74, nn.3-4.

[16] Kretzmann 22, 23. See also McLeod 1993, 122; Alston 1985, 295-296, 309, n.20; Levine 449-450; also Wykstra 1984, 5-6; 1986a, 209 with illustration.

dominant application of the evidentialist sentiment. In granting this, Kretzmann allows that from Plantinga's standpoint this target is an appropriate one even if Plantinga overestimates its importance (Kretzmann 19, 25). According to Kretzmann, Plantinga has failed to appreciate and articulate that evidentialists have long been concerned with whether the quality and quantity of evidence in a very inclusive sense is enough to warrant theistic belief, especially with the degree of assurance such belief often is expected to exhibit (Kretzmann 17-19). Furthermore, when Plantinga avows that theistic belief is rational even without any supporting evidence, he just means evidence in a very narrow, doubly circumscribed sense. Evidence then is only what is *ulterior*, that is, "grounds other than the nature of the believed proposition or the circumstances of the formation of the belief," and only what is *propositional* (Kretzmann 23-24). However, evidentialism, as Kretzmann sees it, has always entertained the potential adequacy as support of evidence from "raw experience" rather than just the "fully cooked" kind for which Plantinga reserves the label. Thus Plantinga is only anti-evidentialist in an arbitrary, artificial sense (Kretzmann 18, 24, 30-32). Moreover, he wrongly confirms his unduly narrow construal of evidence by viewing belief in a doubly confined context of its being acquired, generated, and its being occurrent (Kretzmann 25-29).

Some of the issues raised here, such as the relation between grounds and evidence and the distinction between basic and nonbasic belief, will be the subject of further discussion in the next

chapter.[17] It should be noted that Kretzmann is now persuaded, from written and spoken communication with Plantinga, that the latter does not subscribe entirely to the position opposed in Kretzmann's paper. Unfortunately, Kretzmann does not bother to spell out precisely where this difference lies (Kretzmann 38, n.49). This may weaken the force of his overall thrust against Plantinga, but the point remains that classical foundationalism is not the root of evidentialism: a refutation of the former does not amount to an invalidation of the evidentialist objection.

Stephen Wykstra also regards Plantinga as giving a less than apt portrayal of the demand of evidentialism. For him, the terms in which Plantinga presents it are "extravagant." Rather than insisting that for the sake of rational propriety individuals must hold their theistic beliefs on the basis of their own inference of it from other beliefs, it can instead be put in a much more sensible, collective and objective formulation. Evidentialists should be taken as requiring in the matter of theism that, as with many other beliefs (e.g., that electrons exist), an evidential case be available somewhere in the community of its adherents if the belief is to be epistemically adequate rather than defective. As Wykstra sees it, this more appropriate construal, rather than the question of whether theistic belief can be properly basic for certain persons, throws into sharper relief the real dividing issue between evidentialists and the Calvinian camp with which Plantinga identifies, since the latter regard theistic

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[17] See below, pp. 53-72.

belief as not "evidence essential."[18] Wykstra himself, like Plantinga, rejects the demand for inferential evidence of a derivational sort to make up for a supposed lack of any basic epistemic access to God. But he does acknowledge the need for and value of what he calls inferential evidence of a discriminational kind to channel our credulity dispositions towards resolution of the "ostensible parity problem" created by rival religious claims.[19]

In reply to Wykstra, George Mavrodes expresses doubts over how often ostensible epistemic parity really causes the sort of blockage to the flow of belief dispositions which would supposedly require this discriminatory inferential evidence. Would rationality really require identification of such a discerning feature to justify assent to one alternative? (Mavrodes 1986, 4-9) More directly relevant to Plantinga, Mavrodes asks how evidence needed in the theistic community will differ from, and epistemically excel, the shared theistic belief. He suggests the Calvinians could propose that in a collective noetic structure certain mega-basic beliefs confer adequacy on others, with belief in God being regarded by the theistic community as properly part of their foundation without need of any evidential case to support it (Mavrodes 1986, 9-11). While such a response suggests further work for Wykstra and possibilities for Plantinga, it does not undermine Wykstra's reformulation of the

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[18] Wykstra 1989, 427-434; compare 1984, 1-5; 1986a, 208-209; 1986b, 1-6; see also Konyndyk 1986, 106.

[19] Wykstra 1989, 434-437; 1986b, 6-9.

evidentialist issue. Given the strength of the counter contentions to Plantinga from Kretzmann and Wykstra concerning a more befitting rendition of evidentialism, along with other challenges still to be treated concerning the sufficiency of foundationalism as an instrument of evidentialism, Plantinga's points against classical foundationalism will not tally so crucially as he suggests, if indeed they do count.

2. Foundationalist Evidentialism

Himself a weak foundationalist, Plantinga is most willing to spell out an account of factors or features involved in a normative noetic structure on such a view: the differentiation of basic beliefs from those inferred from others; indices of firmness of conviction, of depth of ingression in the system, of conditions of formation and preservation; the definition of basis and supports relations; and evaluation of acceptable kinds of support, whether just deductive, also inductive, or abductive as well.[20] He clarifies the classical criteria for proper basicality: the self-evident propositions are those seen to be true as soon as they are grasped; the propositions evident to the senses are those whose content captures contingent conditions directly perceived; the incorrigible propositions are those about one's own subjective state that are thereby immune from error -- for how could declarations concerning what *seems* to one to be the case

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[20] RBG 48-55; CEO 115-118; compare WCD 72-74.

possibly be mistaken?[21] Plantinga formally sets forth the classical foundationalist tenet on criteria for basicality as follows: "A proposition *p* is properly basic for a person *S* if and only if *p* is either self-evident to *S* or incorrigible for *S* or evident to the senses for *S* " (RBG 59). He himself agrees with the "if" but disagrees on the "only if"; in other words, he accepts these as sufficient but not as necessary conditions.[22]

Plantinga advances a twofold refutation of these criteria as requisite. Firstly, the tenet is so restrictive that it consigns to irrationality most of what people actually do believe. Beliefs in a material world with enduring objects and a history reaching back further than the last five minutes, beliefs in other persons and so forth, all fail to qualify as rational on these criteria. Yet people everywhere regard memory beliefs (like that of one's having had breakfast or lunch today) as properly basic and consider themselves to be fully rational in so doing. Plantinga adds to this practical consideration a second point which is more one of principle. This foundationalist tenet is itself, according to its own standard, clearly not basic. Neither has it ever been argued for on foundationalism's own extended terms, as rationally accepted only because it at least meets the conditions that nonbasic beliefs be supported by properly basic ones. Thus one is "self-referentially inconsistent" in being a classical foundationalist clinging to the tenet. Being either false or a

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[21] RBG 55-59; CEO 112; compare Clark 125-133.

[22] Compare Clark, 133-136.

proposition that causes the foundationalist to violate his epistemic responsibilities since he lacks the evidence to confirm its truthfulness, it ought to be given up.

Plantinga extends this analysis to address the overall principle of classical foundationalism that a given proposition is rationally admissible for one only if it is properly basic as stipulated in the tenet above or is supported by propositions which are thus basic for the believer in question. Like the basicality tenet, the overall principle neither qualifies as properly basic nor has it been successfully argued relying finally on propositions which are. What if one adds to the basicality tenet a clause which serves to include propositions received as basic by nearly everyone? It really would not suffice to confer proper basicality on an individual's own memory beliefs, for the public is not in a position to certify every private recollection. Again, it too would suffer from the liability of being neither basic in its own terms nor established on the basis of propositions meeting its conditions. Plantinga concludes that he has left the onus on the objector to come up with a criterion of proper basicality that avoids self-referential incoherence, still excludes theistic belief from its category, and commends itself as true.[23]

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[23] RBG 59-62; FTR 298-299; 1985b, 387; WCD 84-86; WPF 182. For other summaries see Hoitenga 182-183; Clark 136-139; Cooke 277-278; McLeod 1990, 23-25; 1993, 112-113, 235; Robbins 1983, 242-243; 1985, 275-276; Evans 1988, 28-29, 31.

The charge of self-referential incoherence is well known in two connections: it has discredited logical positivism's verifiability criterion of meaningfulness, and it has been readily directed against relativism. A number of commentators find Plantinga's utilization of it against classical foundationalism to be quite telling.[24] But for many his overall case remains less than compelling. For Joseph Boyle, premoderns, though lacking some refinement, were right to operate with broader boundaries on what is self-evident and evident to the senses. Their more inclusive foundationalist outlook, welcoming as properly basic many everyday beliefs, still commends itself as serviceable. Boyle contends that at the heart of both the older and the more recent foundationalist outlook is the criterion that basic propositions need to be immediately evident in order to provide the desired connection with reality and support for a rational noetic system. This strikes Boyle as eminently sensible and defensible if not also self-evident, and as putting the onus back on Plantinga to show it otherwise.[25] Some writers respond to Plantinga by saying that the classical criteria, regardless of the fact that as a formula they do not satisfy their own requirement, may well stand solid simply in virtue of their proven fruitfulness, similar to the appropriateness of a mystic vocally enjoining would-be meditators to

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[24] See, for example, Goetz 477; Grigg 1983, 125; Apczynski 303-304; Zeis 1990, 176; Swinburne 48-49; compare Appleby 130-131; Gutting 1982, 81; 1985, 237, 240.

[25] Boyle 172-181; compare Peterson 119; Cooke 277-278.

silence.[26] Levine thinks that a more robust at large defense of the stringent criteria is available, especially in view of a better construal of the basis relations between beliefs which Plantinga needs to address. However, he suffers from a confused reading of Plantinga's allegation of self-referential incoherence.[27] Since Plantinga has allowed that self-evidence can be person relative, a classical foundationalist could claim that the tenet has that status for him even if Plantinga and others have not yet grasped it.[28]

Anthony Kenny, while concurring with Plantinga that the classical formulation of criteria is too restrictive, offers an admittedly more complicated but not self-incriminating criterion including, as properly basic, beliefs such as are either (1) self-evident or fundamental, (2) evident to the senses or to memory, (3) defensible by argument, inquiry or performance. Theistic belief only qualifies if the supporting arguments with which one is confident it may be supplied are sufficiently strong. Kenny, far from sure whether this can ever prove to be the case, commends a contingent agnosticism.[29]

Kenneth Konyndyk criticizes Kenny's counter proposal to Plantinga as faulty on several counts. Kenny makes an evidentialist inference to this effect: believing in God's existence is rational only if

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[26] Steuer 251; Grigg 1990, 399.

[27] Levine 454-457, 459, n.3, 460, n.*.

[28] Tomberlin 404-405; compare Martin 1990, 270-271; Runzo 35, 38.

[29] Kenny 9-65, 67, 84-89; compare Parsons 43-44.

God's existence is provable, but believing that God's existence is provable is not rational, so believing in God is not rational. For Kenny, the second premise is intentionally put just as it is, denying the rationality of believing provability here rather than denying provability itself, but as such it leaves the inference invalid. Konyndyk can readily furnish other examples where true statements can fit the form of these premises producing a conclusion that also fits but is false. Alteration of the first premise would be problematic even if Kenny were to permit that (Konyndyk 1991, 323-325). Kenny initially indicates that for proper basicality in one's belief in God one need only be aware of where supporting arguments could be located. But his later requirements for the successful carrying out of natural theology call for much more. His demand of a sound argument is too severe: beliefs now known to be false have historically been defensible by argument. His demand that the premises be widely available is not required of other publicly accepted proofs (Konyndyk 1991, 328-330). Kenny's categories for proper basicality illegitimately rule out the possibility of God disclosing himself to us directly or indirectly through sensory experience from which noninferentiated beliefs get formed. They also fail to account for important beliefs concerning a wide range of inner experience including feelings of hunger, weariness, delight, loneliness, and on Plantinga's proposal, of God's active personal presence. Kenny's classification of fundamental beliefs suffers from circular definition: they are those basic in the noetic structure of every "rational" being, when rationality in believing is the very issue in question. The category also lacks clear demarcation. The

inclusiveness of "every" person is best taken as meaning every person who happens to hold those beliefs, since some beliefs Kenny cites as fundamental, like "there is an Australia," have not even been entertained by other contemporaries. Yet Kenny would presumably not accept belief in God as fundamental if all theists became like Plantinga and held it in a basic way. Kenny's criteria, by their quite contestable exclusivity, beg the question of propriety Plantinga's examples of basic belief in God raise (Konyndyk 1991, 330-332).

Others besides Kenny appeal to the fact that Plantinga does not address some of the most recent, qualified construals of strong foundationalism whose more accommodating statements of criteria are not liable to his accusation of self-contradiction, leaving him with some work to do.[30] Perhaps worthy of being singled out for special mention is this claim by Robert Audi: versions of foundationalism are available which may include as basic even theistic beliefs directly formed but yet justificatorily dependent; while more rigorous forms of evidentialism may be excessive, some weaker forms may have force such as to rightly require a justificatory dependence of beliefs held in the basic manner on others (Audi 1986, 165-166). The particulars of Audi's contention merit more detailed presentation later in this discussion.[31]

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[30] Martin 1990, 271-272; Gowen.

[31] See below, pp. 58, 70.

Philip Quinn does not expect any strong foundationalist to take the tack of claiming self-evidence for the classical tenet. Still, all Plantinga has done is draw attention to the fact that the tenet has not yet been substantiated by argument in a manner acceptable to its own terms.[32] Quinn sees a route for vindication of that tenet as opened up by Plantinga's own advice on the proper way to arrive at appropriate criteria for proper basicality. That way is not the "methodist" approach of declaring standards that specimen claims to rational belief must meet, but rather a "particularist" inductive approach which works toward such principles through scrutiny of samples. Plantinga advises the compilation and comparison of belief-conditions pairs. Some of the combinations would exemplify obviously properly basic beliefs, other pairs would present beliefs quite apparently, yet not obviously, properly basic under the circumstances, still other combinations would give beliefs not at all clearly born out as properly basic in their context. Another set of pairs would show an equivalent variety where beliefs are respectively obviously, apparently and possibly *not* justified in their contexts.

Hypotheses would have to be formulated and tested out with reference to these samples. Plantinga admits that along the way the set of examples may need revision. For certain beliefs the inquiry may yield some necessary conditions and some sufficient, but none

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[32] Quinn 1985, 470-472. McKim 54, n.4., however, echoes Plantinga's point that allegiance is inconsistent so long as the classical criteria are not thus established.

that are both. Perhaps the best that can be achieved is the declaration of "some sufficient conditions of *prima-facie* justification" (RBG 76-77). One cannot assume that all will be in agreement with the examples. Plantinga states that the Christian community will have to be responsible to its set, rather than making their criteria conform to examples supplied by atheists. Given that the former set will include belief in God under some circumstances as properly basic and the latter will not, the criteria will differ and the dispute could not be resolved by recourse to them. For Plantinga, such a dispute would mean that one side is mistaken and irrational in taking, or not taking, belief in God as basic, since "particularism does not imply *subjectivism* " (RBG 77-78). Considering this counsel and conclusion, Quinn wonders why an adherent of classical foundationalism, and representatives of other groups, could not follow faithfully from their own examples through the inductive process to confirm their criteria. It is possible for one intuitively to employ data derived from thought experiments about hypothetical situations and arrive at such a justification (Quinn 1985, 472-475).

Plantinga's response, as Quinn realizes, is to protest that the success of such an endeavor for a modern foundationalist implausibly rests on one being able to take *as self-evident* a proposition to this effect: that a certain person on a certain occasion can accept a certain belief as basic with neither epistemic fault nor noetic defect being involved. To Quinn's reply that while in general that might be too much to ask, in particular circumstances it is possible, Plantinga comes back with the rejoinder that it cannot be so

in all the beliefs making up the evidential base Quinn posits (FTR 299-302). For Quinn, Plantinga's allowance for revision of one's starting set of data owing to the force of argument still leaves the door open to the classical foundationalist possibly succeeding. While he himself, like Plantinga, does not expect this, neither can they rule it out, and it remains an open question rather than a closed case whether exclusive criteria can be established and self-referential incoherence will hold.[33] Plantinga has at least left this sort of evidentialist objector in the same predicament the latter thought he had the theist -- namely the inability to accredit a vital tenet and/or principle with critical criteria. Plantinga has the advantage of blunting his opponent's own weapon (Plantinga 1985b, 387).

Does Plantinga, by dispensing with the classical criteria, essentially allow not only belief in God but any basic belief, however bizarre, to qualify as proper? He himself labels this the "Great Pumpkin Objection," drawing from a fictitious character's imaginative belief, unshared by almost all others, in an annually returning hero of Halloween.[34] A responsible use of the procedure by the Christian community would surely not accept weird claims such as that (RBG 74-78). For numerous other critics besides Quinn, Plantinga's reply misses the real ramifications of the dissent his unduly extreme and obscure example introduces. Does not his method allow for the other

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[33] Quinn 1993, 22-28. See Hanink for another treatment of issues in regard to the inductive approach to proper basicality.

[34] Comic strip and cartoon artist Charles Schultz is the creator of the character Linus and his persuasion about the Great Pumpkin.

communities -- whether Pumpkinite or, to cite relevant examples other than the classical foundationalists referred to above, Buddhist or Hindu -- to satisfy themselves that some of their core convictions, seemingly so incompatible in content with those of their counterparts, are properly basic? Are they not rationally justified however much others may disagree, with no grounds left for anyone to refute them or to arbitrate between competing claims?[35] Plantinga is regarded by some as virtually giving up the traditional epistemological task and the particularly foundationalist quest for credentials according to which claims to rational belief and knowledge of the truth could be adjudged.[36] His response to this broad complaint comes out in the context of an allegation against him to be considered next.

3. Pragmatist Evidentialism

Some of his critics decry Plantinga's perceived forfeiture and seek out more credible versions of the foundationalist approach still skeptical of proper basicality for theistic belief. Others see it as indicative of a failure in foundationalism as a whole. Plantinga's

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[35] Besides Quinn 1985, 473, see also Van Hook 1981, 15-16; 1985, 4-5; Audi 1986, 162-164; 1992, 77; Grigg 1990, 399-401; McKim 33-36, 40-43; Martin 1990, 272-273; 1991, 30; Parsons esp. 49-51; McLeod, 1990, 28-29; Christian esp. 566ff.; Griffiths 71-74; compare Matteo 269-270; Swinburne 49; Appleby 133; Johnsen, Tilley; see also Basinger 1988, 1991.

[36] So Steuer 247, 251-255; Hatcher 1989, 27, 29-30; Robbins 1983, 246; 1985, 281-282; Martin 1990, 275-276; 1991, 30; Parsons, 43, 51, 52, 60-61; Levine; Zeis 1990, 178; compare Van Hook 1981.

refutation of the classical kind is irrelevant and his adherence to a broader model is outmoded. For Anthony Robbins, on the one hand Plantinga contends for the epistemological privilege of proper basicality as a function of objective conditions. On the other hand his advocacy of an inductive approach makes it instead a function of community behavior and leaves him not far from Richard Rorty's pragmatism.[37] According to John Apczynski, however, "it is clear that for Plantinga circumstances that provide conditions allowing certain beliefs to be properly basic include the intellectual tradition of historical communities."[38] Plantinga, as he must, stands in a tradition from which he enunciates a rationality rivaling competitors rooted in a different tradition. Plantinga shows sensitivity to the way in which one's historical context bears on the unfolding of knowledge. By comparison many of his detractors see less concerning the situatedness of rational principles. Those who fault Plantinga's position for lack of objectivity, inadequate reason and failure to demarcate falsehood need to see that they themselves may indeed be begging the question concerning their own assumptions (Apczynski 304-311).

What Robbins views as an unresolved and irreconcilable tension in Plantinga, Apczynski sees as a comprehensive package whose interrelations could be better spelt out. The dispute between

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[37] Robbins 1983; 1985, 281. Similarly minded are Van Hook 1981, 14-17; 1985, 5-6; Hatcher 1986, 91; compare Matteo 269.

[38] Apczynski 306; compare Appleby 133-134.

them comes to this: does Plantinga's position at bottom merely propound innatist epistemology in actual old fashioned Platonic ignorance of the historical factor, or does it really recognize the mediation of historical tradition?[39] Robbins' reading, rather than leaving Plantinga really schizoid, regards him as merely paying lip service to historical bearings which Robbins views as boundaries. Apczynski sees Plantinga as being, like himself and unlike Robbins, open to growing awareness of overarching, continuing reality including God, and open to the availability of this through a particular tradition. Since Robbins has himself embraced Rorty's pragmatism, he goes on to argue that, in any event, a stance such as Rorty's excludes belief in God from the rank of epistemically privileged beliefs, and in so doing makes no reference to the foundationalist distinction between evidentially self-sufficient and deficient propositions. Thus it does not fall prey to any of the self-referential inconsistency or arbitrariness Plantinga and William Alston have targeted. Instead of viewing the rational-evidential structure of human thought in such an essentialist manner as they are so minded, one simply needs to recognize that thought and inquiry, even with regard to starting points, is not really subject to anything more than the retail constraint of others finding an alternative contrasting belief and behavior to be more attractive. The modern rejection of theistic belief as fundamental or even just integral to one's outlook is the consequence of objections to it having gradually accumulated in the community at large to the point where

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[39] See Robbins and Apczynski 1993 for a further short statement.

a contrary outlook has gained more appeal as better suited to human interests.[40]

While Plantinga might accept Robbins' explanation for what has transpired, he certainly does reject Robbins' evaluation and with it Rorty's view of truth and knowledge basically amounting to what society lets us get away with affirming. He summarily dismisses that suggestion by asserting that it would, for instance, remain true that the earth is not flat even if a Flat Earth Society were somehow to persuade an emerging illiterate generation otherwise. Plantinga is quite confident that

> neither my peers nor Rorty's will let either him or me get away with saying that truth is what our peers will let us get away with saying. So if Rorty's suggestion were true, it would also be false, and hence both true and false. But even in these days of technological marvels, no proposition can manage that. So Rorty's suggestion is false. (Plantinga 1982b, 15; cf. 1982c, 7-8)

In another context Plantinga declares that Rorty and followers, in abandoning the very idea of *truth* itself, are guilty of

> intemperate reactions to the demise of classical foundationalism [which] betray agreement with it at a deep level: agreement that the only security or warrant for our beliefs must arise by way of evidential relationship to beliefs that are certain: self-evident or about our own mental states. But why think a thing like that ....? Here we have confusion twice confounded: first, confusion of truth with our access to it and, second, confusion of knowledge with Cartesian certainty. But as to the first, truth owes nothing to our access to it; and as

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[40] Robbins 1985; 1983, 247. For a similar sentiment, see Wisdo.

> to the second, Cartesian certainty is indeed a will-o'-the-wisp, but nothing follows for knowledge. (WCD 85; cf. WPF 182-183)

Accordingly, even a present preponderance of opinion against theistic belief would not rule out its truthfulness or rationality. Plantinga suspects that the charge, at least as leveled by Jay Van Hook, that he is close to being a Rortian relativist, allowing peer groups to decide what will be taken as true and known, is prompted by the persuasion that unless one is able to show, to prove, to other reasonable people what one claims to know, then that claim does not stand up. This, with its accompanying assumption of sufficient neutral common ground between disputants to allow resolution of contrary convictions, Plantinga rejects outright, largely on account of the effects of sin in the world (Plantinga 1982b, 15-17). If his inductive procedure toward constructing criteria ends up as having no apologetic utility in providing a basis for settling a controversy, that hardly reflects on the method as defective: any reputable means employed in philosophy is likewise liable to conflicting results among its practitioners who begin from different starting points.[41] Besides, he does not offer it as an apologetic tool, but rather as an attempted delineation of Christian epistemology, worthwhile in its own right apart from any impact on a skeptic.[42] Philip Quinn's complaint is that for any one entering the exercise unconvinced but open to the possible proper basicality of theistic belief, including some Christians

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[41] FTR 302-303. For another defense of Plantinga as non-Rortian, see Appleby 137-138.

[42] Plantinga 1982c, 7. See also Gutting 1985, 241.

whom Plantinga seems to ignore, Plantinga's approach would not assist them since it begins by including that for which they seek substantiation.[43] Plantinga has presented basic belief in God as being typically, though by no means exclusively, characteristic of the mature theistic believer (Plantinga 1983b, 60-61). Presumably he would advise as preferable a rather different route of one's reaching confidence in it than the path of philosophical procedure.

4. A Wittgensteinian View on Evidentialism

From a somewhat different vantage point than that of Rortian epistemology, Plantinga's ambivalent response to foundationalism has been assailed by Dewi Z. Phillips (1988) in support of what others have labeled "Wittgensteinian fideism." As Phillips sees it, foundationalism, including Plantinga's, fails to appreciate that religious beliefs are a language game of their own and constitute a highly distinctive grammar which emerges in its own unique form of life. As such, a set of religious beliefs finds meaning within the context of its own epistemic practice; it is not subject to any external justification in terms of some more ultimate principle underpinning all kinds of belief. For Phillips, basic propositions are not foundational, logically prior starting points, grounded statements reflecting reality and supplying a tie to the world as it actually is, manifesting the necessity of our epistemic procedures, expressing core convictions that could not be otherwise. Rather, they are

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[43] Quinn 1993, 20. Compare Martin 1990, 273; 1991, 30-31; Runzo 38; Gutting 1982, 84; 1985, 240-241; also Swinburne 51.

statements which come to be held solid by, and receive their sense from, all that surrounds them. They are integrally involved, assumed and unquestioned in our thinking. The way these hang together makes up our world picture, justified not in terms of some necessity but simply as what we in fact happen to believe and do in our natural practice. Plantinga thus shares in the confusion of a misdirected effort to authenticate religious belief as a hypothetical description of reality on the basis of some supposedly common criterion actually alien to its intelligibility. Instead, he should simply seek to elucidate what is deeply embedded in our ways of thinking and derives its meaning entirely from within that framework.[44] From this standpoint Plantinga is himself, unfortunately, an evidentialist.

Plantinga himself would probably second the summary response to Phillips penned by his fellow Reformed epistemologist, Nicholas Wolterstorff. To the charges that they have isolated basic religious beliefs rather than showing their connection to a way of life and thought, Wolterstorff replies that such a worthwhile enterprise was not part of the precise polemical project of replying to the evidentialist objection. Their line of reply is appropriate, he insists, since, contra Phillips and other like-minded Wittgensteinians, the Christian religious way of life "incorporates beliefs about transcendent and future reality, and about a variety of other facts as

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[44] Phillips xiii-xiv, 15-113. Similar sentiments seem to characterize Hustwit's (1988) complaint that Plantinga has not shown sufficient sensitivity to the real essential elements of belief in God.

well--while yet not being reducible to such beliefs."[45] Though Phillips purports to provide a presentation of the pristine nature of religious, including theistic, belief, his exposition does strike observers as one-sided in reference to how believers themselves have often expressed their convictions: not autonomously cut off from other areas of life and thought, but instead often involving those as well. Belief in the last judgment, for example, is held by many Christians "as a guiding perspective for one's whole life," as Phillips recognizes. Yet for a lot of those, including Plantinga himself, it is held thus at least partly because it is also viewed as "an eschatological event closing out history," which Phillips disavows (Phillips 70-71).

Plantinga admits that in his writing bearing on the rationality of theistic belief he has said very little about certain vital aspects involved in belief such as personal entrustment. However, while he would see great significance in such features, he would by no means follow Phillips in situating its rationale specifically there: "Believing in God is indeed more than accepting the proposition that God exists. But if it is more than that, it is also at least that" (RBG 18). In his view, Phillips, Ronald Hustwit and others who share their stance all fail to come to grips with the full thrust of this cognitive dimension. Their restricted terms do not do it justice.

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[45] Wolterstorff 1992, 14-15. Compare Gutting 1987, especially 435-437; also Steuer 241-245.

5. Coherentist Evidentialism

After initially allowing that an evidential objector could come forth not fr ,m foundationalist but from coherentist ranks (RBG 63), Plantinga has subsequently responded to the challenge from Alston (1985, 295-296) that his reply would remain incomplete until he discredited that latter provenance.[46] In contrast to a foundationalist outlook, a coherentist view, he says, is best seen as regarding any belief in a rational noetic structure as properly basic, provided that it coheres with the rest of the belief system. An impure form of coherence would still insist on coherence as the sole source of warrant, yet allow for some transfer through the basis relation; in other words, it would permit *a local foundationalism within a global coherentism.*[47]

A consistent coherentist will not be impressed with any such charge to the effect that theistic belief is inconsistent in a broadly logical sense, being intuitively resistant to the entailed idea that truth in noncontingent propositions is a necessary condition of coherence (CEO 127-128). After scrutinizing Keith Lehrer's account of coherence Plantinga is quite confident that no reason is at all apparent to think that an earnest theist could not still believe that a personal God exists and that that proposition has a greater likelihood of being true than any of its rivals (CEO 129-133). Even if a given

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[46] Plantinga 1985b, 391-393; CEO.

[47] CEO 113-126; WCD 67-80.

believer were to have an incoherent noetic structure on account of one's theism, the question would remain as to what changes should be made to clear up the problem. Those beliefs incompatible with theism could be the ones to be altered.[48] Contrary to the tenet that coherence is both necessary and sufficient for warrant, Plantinga shows through various examples that it is neither essential nor efficacious as a guarantee of nondefectiveness, for it is of no such value in the event of noetic malfunction.[49] Laurence Bonjour's even more refined version of coherence likewise fails to satisfy Plantinga any more in this regard once he assesses it (WCD 83, n. 23; 109-113).

Plantinga's dissuasion with coherentism does not prove persuasive to some proponents of that alternative such as John Zeis (1990) who rejects the idea of ultimate warrant. Zeis charges Plantinga with imposing a foundationalist notion of "warrant transfer" in his evaluation of coherentism, forcing it to accord all beliefs basic status in order to avoid resort to circular reasoning. Zeis contends that coherence regards no beliefs as basic.[50] By regarding a noetic structure as dynamically unbound though finite, Zeis views beliefs as drawing warrant not strictly from other beliefs held concurrently but also from some added subsequently, and so escapes vicious regress (Zeis 1990, 179-187). Plantinga would probably dismiss this as inadmissible, and as a desperate, futile ploy. While

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[48] CEO 127, 133; RBG 63.

[49] CEO 134-138. See also WCD 80-83; WPF 176, 178-182.

[50] Compare Langtry 131-132; Alston 1985, 296; Audi 1986, 152.

granting the core of Plantinga's contention that coherence is neither requisite nor adequate for warrant nondefectiveness, Lad Sessions (1987) suggests that, viewed more restrictively, coherence may play some relevant roles in regard to proper basicality. His views of such a pertinent place for coherence might impress an evidentialist in a way they would not convince Plantinga. Yet Sessions actually advances them not to discredit the proper basicality of theistic belief, but rather towards a thesis that moral arguments would then serve to count for the theistic convictions of one whose belief in God is actually basic. Plantinga could support David Schrader's (1987) concern for, and confidence in, a Christian theology perceived to be relevant in addressing human moral inadequacy. But he would do this without accepting Schrader's insistence that the overall systemic adequacy of such a theology would be the key determinant of any epistemic weight for certain basic beliefs, as opposed to those basic beliefs serving to give credibility to the whole. Besides Zeis and Sessions, others likewise such as Mark McLeod [51] and Louis Pojman,[52] who in response to Plantinga are more disposed to espouse a coherentist framework for theistic belief, are in their arguments obviously opposed to anyone who would see that holistic context for justification as more conducive to the evidentialist objection. Plantinga seems to be in a position of advantage where he can defy anyone to actually bring forth an evidentialist objection from a coherentist standpoint that will not just answer his overall criticisms

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[51] McLeod 1987, 19-20; 1990, 34-40; 1993, 230-250.

[52] Pojman 481-482. Compare Mavrodes 1983, 202-203.

but also carry some rigorous weight against the rationality of belief in God in particular. Until someone does so, he remains quite skeptical that the coherentist framework allows such a formidable task to be accomplished.

Plantinga has not addressed every foundationalist formulation forwarded as a basis for the evidentialist objection, let alone answered each alternative offered from a nonfoundationalist framework. He has sought to identify the most formidable denials of epistemic self-sufficiency for belief in God and to find fault with their exclusive stance. Fairly satisfied with the forcefulness of his negative critique, he feels positive considerations can also be advanced to indicate the entitlement of theistic belief to a privileged status of not requiring evidential support. It is to this aspect of his endeavor that we now turn.

Chapter Two

Plantinga and the Relevance of Analogy for Belief in God

It is one thing to argue that reasons are wanting for the exclusion of theistic beliefs from the domain of proper basicality; it is another thing to argue their rightful inclusion. As Plantinga sees it, theistic beliefs bear a very significant similarity to other widespread paradigm beliefs which modern classical foundationalism, without justification and contrary to common sense, has rejected as properly basic, namely, perceptual beliefs, memory beliefs, and beliefs attributing mental states such as pain to other persons.[1] In forming such beliefs an individual typically does not reflect on the experience one is undergoing, does not take what is apparent as constituting evidence expressible in a proposition, and does not make this serve as a basis for a conviction concerning what is seen, recalled or discerned. Rather, therefore, than moving consciously by inference from "I seem to see a tree" to "I see a tree," or from "I seem to remember having had breakfast" to "I had breakfast," or from "That person appears to be hurting" to "That person is in pain," we naturally form such paradigm beliefs directly, immediately, under the circumstances that obtain.[2] Those particular contexts confer

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[1] RBG 59-60, 78-82, 89-90; compare 67-68; 1983b, 57.

[2] RBG 49, 51, 79; compare WPF 61-64, 65-68, 79-82, 87, 93-98 for a more extended discussion.

justification on the beliefs which are called forth by them (RBG 49, 79, 80).

Admittedly, more is involved in these instances than just characteristic experience. Further conditions are not easy to detail (RBG 80), though in his later work Plantinga stresses the factor of proper noetic function in a suitable environment (WPF). In his earlier writing Plantinga agrees with, but does not detail, the position of Scottish common-sense philosopher Thomas Reid on the functioning of belief forming mechanisms.[3] In his more recent work Plantinga has made more explicit reference to the broadly Reidian profile of his position.[4] Plantinga claims that as it is the case with perceptual and other paradigm beliefs, so also with respect to theistic beliefs: they rightly arise under appropriate conditions which actuate a disposition to respond in belief (WCD 86). There is no attempt to enumerate all the situations which evoke belief in God, but he lists some: occasions of guilt, gratitude, peril, of sensing God's presence or speaking or working. Strictly speaking, "it is not the relatively high-level and general proposition *God exists* that is properly basic, but instead propositions detailing some of his attributes and actions" (RBG 81). The looser language is permissible since these more specific beliefs self-evidently entail belief in God's existence in the same way that other particular assertions like "I see a tree" require

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[3] FTR 305; CEO 115, 122; but see 1985a, 62-63. That task is taken up by his Reformed colleague Wolterstorff 1983a, 148-153, 162-165,172; 1983b; compare Alston 1983, 119.

[4] WCD viii; WPF x.

broader beliefs like "there are trees" (RBG 81-82). So long as the believer does not attend consciously to those grounding conditions as evidence for belief, and so does not form beliefs concerning those circumstances and base his belief on those, the belief remains strictly basic.[5]

Granting, for the time being, the legitimacy of Plantinga's account of an equivalent basic manner of formation for theistic, perceptual, memory, and certain ascriptive beliefs, there are some conspicuous disparities in the respective results, which for some critics discredit the claim of comparable status owing to analogous character. Donald Hatcher complains that the qualitative difference between God and the objects of sense experience is so radical that it defies consideration of the respective beliefs as analogous. Belief in God does not lend itself to public confirmation and common participation like scientific claims; differences outweigh similarities.[6] Michael Martin observes that whereas there are plenty of plausible alternatives to theistic belief, that is obviously not the case with respect to belief in other minds and the external world.[7] He too brings up the point that although we can justify the performance of our own perceptual and memory faculties by comparing them to the output of our peers, there is no comparable agreement in the

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[5] Compare Hoitenga 187-190.

[6] Hatcher 1986, 92-93; 1989, 23-24, 25, 30.

[7] See also Matteo 267; Wisdo 367; Gutting 1985, 247; Steuer 249; Garcia 120.

religious context.[8] John Zeis likewise points to a lack of public criteria associated with theistic beliefs, in contrast to the outwardly observable circumstances that enable a community to linguistically distinguish proper grounds for perceptual and other basic beliefs (Zeis 1993, 52-60). Marcus Hester (1990) points out that other properly basic beliefs invite transcendental or dialectical clarifications pertaining to whole categories of epistemological kinds with an embracing reach or unique nature and a presumed place in the perspective of rational reflection. These sorts of clarifications provide special responses to forms of skepticism by appealing ultimately to common sense rather than supplying ordinary noncircular evidential arguments to which the beliefs are not suited. By comparison, Christian belief in a particular personal God does not lend itself to such clarifications; at best it can be shown to be properly basic only to those who already believe in the existence of this God.[9]

Richard Grigg has specifically pointed to (1) the lack of outside sources for confirmation of theistic beliefs as compared with, for instance, memory beliefs; (2) the discrepancy between other experiences leading those undergoing them to nearly universally shared beliefs, whereas evidently identical experiences result in quite contrasting religious beliefs rather than common theism; and

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[8] Martin 1990, 273-274; 1991, 31-32.

[9] Compare Gilman 147-150, who argues that belief in God must serve as an "absolute presupposition" only for those who hold the belief.

(3) the presence of bias in instances of theistic belief formation as a feature not usually involved in the other instances Plantinga appeals to as analogous (Grigg 1983).

In a pair of articles responding to Grigg, Mark McLeod takes issue with these alleged disanalogies. He argues that bias is sometimes a feature in cases of memory, ascriptive, and perceptual belief production, and that sometimes one's theistic belief occurs in the face of one's own bias against it. Some circularity enters into the confirmation of not just theistic, but other belief forming practices as well. Theistic beliefs ought to be regarded as second-level, not guaranteed to be formed automatically and universally because of their reliance on a background of common beliefs for any shared possession. They could still find analogies with other experiential second-level beliefs that are likewise guaranteed, given a common background for the subjects holding them, and yet also be properly basic, not involving inference in their formation (McLeod 1987). Further on the question of authentication, however much one may reiterate the point of no independent, external check being there for either theistic or the paradigm beliefs, it must also be acknowledged that theistic beliefs lack predictive confirmation after the manner in which regularities in nature serve to substantiate beliefs about empirical objects and events. Yet since God does not fit into such a natural order framework, a different form of confirmation is appropriate, one not requiring *regularity* but still seeking *reliability*. Some such confirmation is seemingly available for general theistic

beliefs, in the presence of specific persuasions about God (McLeod 1988).

In his rejoinder Grigg insists that positive bias is the ordinary larger context for theistic belief, in contrast to the other paradigm beliefs where we believe because we have to, rather than because we want to. McLeod's resort to second-level status for theistic beliefs raises the question of the nature and justification of the background beliefs on which they are dependent. Without any first-level basic theistic beliefs being part of that package the disanalogy would still hold here too. As to confirmation, the paradigm beliefs afford more distanciation, and with it less circularity. McLeod's admission of difference in amenability to predictive corroboration leaves Plantinga's claim of analogy, substantial to his overall thrust, weak indeed (Grigg 1990).

1. The Issues of Universality and Objectification

In his further writing on the parity issue in Rationality and Theistic Belief (1993), McLeod ignores the question of bias and becomes much less a would-be defender and much more a convinced critic of Plantinga's appeal to analogy, and, to some extent, of William Alston's as well. After further reflection on Plantinga's presentation of permissive justification and proper basicality as well as his concern with the right circumstances, McLeod formulates Plantinga's parity thesis in the following terms: "Under appropriate conditions, where no overriders are present, *S* 's belief that *p* , where *p* is a

belief about God, has the same non classical normative proper basicality (the strongest level) as *S* 's belief that *p**, where *p** is a paradigm belief" (McLeod 1993, 121). McLeod is content to focus his discussion on a comparison with one subset of the paradigm category, namely, perceptual beliefs. If parity does not hold there, the overall analogy is discredited (McLeod 1993, 121-122). According to McLeod, the major problem for Plantinga, given his own foundationalist aversion to arbitrariness, is that raised by Grigg's universality challenge, now expressed as follows: "given an experience shared by both theist and nontheist alike, nearly everyone will be led to form a shared nontheistic (perceptual paradigm) belief, whereas only the theist will be led to form a theistic belief."[10] While perceptual beliefs have grounds adequate to compel near unanimous consent, theistic beliefs seem to lack such. Underlying the challenge is the egalitarian assumption that each fully rational human person has or can have the practical capacity to form corresponding justified beliefs about objects supplying input to us. This assumption of a common basic ability in objectification is part of our overall conception of rationality and it is crucial to the endeavor of epistemology (McLeod 1993, 123-129).

McLeod suggests three possible responses to the universality challenge which, if initially of interest, would certainly not suit Plantinga. This is so because they involve theistic belief either in (1) inference in the form of some extra interpretation, or in (2) unshared

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[10] McLeod 1993, 122. See McLeod 1993, 122-130, for the extended presentation of this challenge.

experience with the consequent burden of establishing justification for the background beliefs which facilitate the uniqueness of the theistic experience, or in (3) taking its object as supervenient on physical phenomena or aesthetic effects, and so dependent (McLeod 1993, 130-137). As McLeod sees it, Plantinga's only recourse is to regard theistic beliefs as formed directly out of a certain kind of experience lacking theistic content and so without the "lingo-conceptual link" whereby a belief generating experience in its core conditions is typically described in terms of the object of the belief.[11] The experience generating the belief "I see a tree" is typically described along the lines of "I am being appeared to treely," thus borrowing on object language, making reference to the "tree." However, the belief "God created this flower" need not be said to stem from an experience only expressible along the lines of "I was appeared to divinely-beautiful flowerly."

Plantinga, then, will have to answer the universality challenge by explaining that some do not objectify their experience in a theistic manner because they do not share the same theistic background beliefs which enable the theist to objectify all sorts of experiences into the language of theistic beliefs. Here McLeod alludes to an analogous illustration he had introduced earlier about a wife being able to immediately form beliefs concerning her husband's whereabouts from an indicator in front of her (his bush boots are

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[11] McLeod 1993, 138. See McLeod 1993, 27-28, 139-140, n.7, 151, for the author's coinage and explanation of this terminology. His own examples have been incorporated into the discussion here.

missing) which early in their marriage would have sufficed only as evidence for inference, and still would be at most only that for someone else not sharing her previous experience and background beliefs.[12] This sort of account, says McLeod, would leave Plantinga liable to at least a threefold charge of arbitrariness. Firstly, he may be accused of allowing in effect almost any experience to translate into theistic terms rather than just those having the control of a needed description in terms of the content or belief formed, that is, the lingo-conceptual link. Secondly, such a personalized context for background beliefs so inhibits, if not prohibits, any outside critique of the justification for the just formed belief that it leaves the door open to radical, even intracommunal, relativity. Thirdly, the background beliefs are left subject to explanation, transcribable into discursive form, and so eligible for evaluation concerning their legitimacy as reasons for the present belief (McLeod 1993, 143-146).

McLeod explores the matter of justification of the background theistic beliefs which appear to be required. For Plantinga, those would have to be properly basic and justified nondiscursively by reference to some externalist principle. McLeod asks about the nature of the conditions generating such background theistic beliefs. If the experience is theistic in nature, then even more antecedent beliefs would have to be involved and need to be researched, leaving one in continuing regress. If the experience is nontheistic and so lacking that lingo-conceptual link between input and belief, then the

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[12] McLeod 1993, 139-142; 1987, 16-18.

universality challenge comes into play once more and makes it difficult to see how one can get from an empty information experience to a conviction full of theistic content by some externalist principle (McLeod 1993, 146-152). McLeod entertains the notion that some less than lawlike model of externalism could be operative, such as God selectively causing such beliefs to be formed only by some.[13] This has little appeal, for even if God might be justified in such discrimination, this explanation is well removed from the typical value of an externalist principle as an account of "why so many beliefs we typically take to be justified are held by most people" (McLeod 1993, 153). McLeod moves on to consider whether an evident reliability could suffice to offset the absence of a lawlike externalist mechanism. Before doing so, he pauses to sum up that Plantinga appears to be left with no means of avoiding arbitrary outcomes in externalist justification of theistic background beliefs, except through resort to a discursive approach regarding such beliefs as basic, nontheistic beliefs serving as a foundation for natural theology. This, of course, leaves Plantinga within the reach of evidentialism from which he has claimed independence (McLeod 1993, 154).

In reply to the alleged disparity regarding bias, Plantinga himself would presumably point to the presence, in human depravity, of bias against theistic belief as more of an operative factor than any motivation toward it. In the absence of any

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[13] Compare Zeis 1993, 63-65.

published reply to McLeod's specific suggestions, it is somewhat speculative to speak of Plantinga's particular responses here. What he has to say so far about the bearing of background beliefs and about the theistic element in experience generating belief in God comes out in commentary to be treated further on in this study.[14] For Plantinga, sin also explains why all do not believe in God as spontaneously and confidently as each believes in the existence of others and of the rest of the outside world and in the past.[15] Plantinga admittedly has not produced any satisfactory enunciation of sin's effects in regard to positive epistemic status for different, especially theistic, beliefs.[16] Yet he is unabashed in affirming it as what accounts for the discrepancy alluded to in the universality challenge, and so would not see the egalitarian assumption as telling the whole story.

Donald Hatcher is perhaps the most strongly offended by Plantinga's appeal to sin as that which accounts for the relative rareness of theistic religious belief in comparison to other beliefs which arise in the course of shared human experience. Besides having intolerant overtones, the appeal is objectionable also as circular reasoning: the idea of sin is dependent on the Christian

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[14] See below, pp. 64-68, 70.

[15] Plantinga1982b, 16-17; RBG 66, 90.

[16] Plantinga 1987, 425. Compare Wolterstorff 1992, 14. See Westphal 1992, 13; 1990, 211-226, and Hoitenga 199-201 for criticism on this. See Evans 1988, 33-34, 36-37, and Feenstra 10 for suggestions.

concept of God, belief in which it is being invoked to support. It smacks of the repulsive tactic of conveniently deflecting criticism by subsuming it under one's own ideology and thereby escaping rational debate.[17] Over against such question begging as he has Plantinga engaged in, Hatcher calls for an "unbiased" attempt to set out an epistemology which will fulfill the time-honored expectations of helping us to distinguish false claims from truths to be rationally believed (Hatcher 1989, 27, 29-30). Plantinga would point presumably to the bias Hatcher himself brings to the discussion and expresses openly, namely, that matters of dispute over claims can in principle be resolved in view of human rational capacity. Bias in some form or other attends every view of what epistemology can achieve, and Plantinga's position on the effects of sin makes him pessimistic about consensus in a way Hatcher is not.

2. The Question of Confirmation

On the question of confirmation, McLeod remains convinced by Alston (1983, 1991) that a challenge like Grigg's here is irrelevant. A belief may often be properly basic although under the circumstances it lacks confirmation. McLeod emphasizes the validation of practices which generate beliefs (McLeod 1993, 183-186). He repeats his persuasion that predictive confirmation is most inappropriate with respect to belief in God, but that an appropriate nonpredictive confirmation may be regarded as available in the

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[17] Hatcher 1989, 24, 26-27, 30. Compare Phillips 100-104, 108; Gutting 1982, 84.

content of other theistic beliefs.[18] Is confirmation of conviction that God has created the world comparable to corroborating that a particular person produced a certain sculpture? As to the potential parallel of discerning the maker's signature style, there are no distinct features in the world which are apparently attributable specifically to the Christian God (McLeod 1993, 193-200). Any epistemic access we have to persons as unique individuals is crucially dependent on their self-disclosure or important information supplied by others. In either case responsive belief will not come apart from the very practice which generates beliefs about such persons, including God.

Theistic beliefs must come through the functioning of our natural credulity disposition. That tendency to trust gets modified in the direction of discrimination over the course of experience, leading us also to check out our sources in view of alternative claims. Christian practice is not a "conceptual reading" type of epistemic practice in which a lingo-conceptual scheme itself gets applied noninferentially to experience. Its practitioners, especially those relying on the authority of others from whom they have learned the concepts and substantive beliefs which they apply noninferentially to experience in a mediated production of belief, cannot evaluate how well their credulity disposition is operating by reference to some exterior apparatus. So they are left with recognizing "the

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[18] McLeod, 1993, 188-190. Compare McLeod 1988, 318-323.

rather radical circularity of the Christian worldview."[19] For McLeod, a holistic kind of justification, which works with just such circularity, can approve the information needed apart from the belief in question. This separate information links the producer and the product, whether God and world, or artist and sculpture. Such confirmation will not rely on direct inference from the belief requiring confirmation. It will, though, have to draw on the same epistemic practices and related experiences and beliefs which were involved in the formation of the belief for which confirmation is being sought. As in the case with perceptual practice, Christian practice must make an internal appeal in its process of confirmation. The fact that, unlike the former, the latter practice does not seek predictive confirmation is an idiosyncrasy within an analogous context of common circularity in confirmation (McLeod 1993, 196-201). On the confirmation challenge McLeod hardly moves beyond the position he took in his second (1987) article, making no response here to Grigg's second (1990) statement except by silence to imply its lack of impression on him.

Concerning circularity in confirmation, Plantinga seems little concerned about Grigg's contentions for a significantly greater degree of distanciation in paradigm cases. He indicates his satisfaction, similar to McLeod's, with the force of Alston's arguments of substantial comparability here (WPF 97, n.8). McLeod himself admits that Alston's agreement with him on this point has not

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[19] McLeod 1993, 196. See also McLeod 1993, 35-36, 49-51.

constrained Alston to follow the same holistic model of justification to which he is attracted.[20] Plantinga certainly does not sense any compulsion to do so either; he rejects McLeod's separation of justification of beliefs from the experiences which generate them.

McLeod takes Plantinga to task for failure to pursue a more appropriate plausible parallel than the paradigms he presents: "Theistic belief is much closer to trusting one's spouse or best friend than it is to merely believing that there is a tree in the front yard."[21] Relational beliefs often mature into an acceptance that goes beyond explicit propositional attitude to become in its own sphere a "fundamental assumption of reality" functioning as do others in their role of ordering larger world contexts.[22] While he includes in that bracket some persuasions related to Plantinga's paradigms, he has put a finger on a shortcoming in the latter's failure to elucidate more analogy among beliefs of apparently the greatest proximity. Plantinga's confined concentration on belief *that* God exists, quite separated out from consideration of belief *in* God, prevents him from bringing to bear the full weight of the dynamic of personal relationship to the question of rationality.

It remains an open question of just how close to the paradigms theistic beliefs need to stand in order for the appeal to

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[20] McLeod 1993, 200-201, n.9

[21] McLeod 1990, 38; 1993, 249.

[22] McLeod 1990, 38-40; 1993, 249-250.

analogy to carry force. Plantinga's later discussions delineate distinctions among the paradigm beliefs themselves without those differences diminishing for him the significance of formation features common to the paradigm beliefs and to theistic belief.[23] He would suggest that Grigg is far too rigorous in his requirement of how parallel theistic belief must be to the others in order for the analogy to suffice.[24] The discussion thus far suggests the need to pay further attention to Plantinga's treatment of basic belief formation and to the significance he attaches to both attendant circumstances and background beliefs. These will be addressed in the next two sections of this chapter.

3. The Matter of Grounds Versus Evidence

Plantinga's contention that theistic belief is analogous to perceptual, memory, and certain ascriptive beliefs, has much to do with his perspective that they are all formed in very much the same direct manner, unmediated by conscious inference from other beliefs, and therefore not founded on them. He draws a distinction between grounds and evidence. Grounds are the experiential conditions which give rise to such basic beliefs and confer initial justification on them. Evidence consists strictly of propositional persuasions which

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[23] WPF 57-64, 91-94, 98.

[24] An extended discussion of this dispute would need to go beyond the parameters of this study and examine at length the contentions of Alston (especially 1983, 1991) who has pursued this parity issue far more extensively than has Plantinga.

consciously serve as the basis for some other belief. In response to a query one may reflect on grounds and offer an appeal to them as a rationale for belief, but this only really amounts to evidence when one makes it a formal verbal plank for one's belief.[25] In regard to justification of the above cited sorts of beliefs, such a step would be in the wrong direction as far as Plantinga is concerned (RBG 59-60, 67-68).

Many critics find Plantinga's account of belief formation in such instances suspect, and the distinction he draws between grounds and evidence dubious in various respects. According to Stewart Goetz, Plantinga, in citing sample basic theistic beliefs, ignores one's prior possession of certain individuating concepts concerning God's person and other properties as a basis for such beliefs.[26] The very notion of a necessary divine being can only be an inference from one's self-conscious awareness of one's contingent existence (Goetz 481-484). The first point deserves discussion that, however, may best be deferred.[27] As to the second, one may wonder whether such inference enters into the mind of many theists at all. One may also contend that Goetz reverses the order of things since a proposition concerning the existence of a necessary being has logical as well as ontological priority over another to the effect of one's own

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[25] RBG 49, 51, 78-82; WPF 137-138. See also Wykstra 1986a, 206, 207; Hoitenga 187-189, 190; Evans 1988, 32-33 for commentary here.

[26] Goetz 477-481. Compare Haicher 1986, 93-94.

[27] See below, pp. 56, 58, 64-70.

contingency (Gilman 146-147). Axel Steuer questions whether beliefs ascribing pain are really as noninferential as Plantinga makes them out to be; he cites some controversy over this and claims that he himself reads behavior in such situations as evidence. The belief that someone is in pain scarcely serves as an apt analogy for appreciating the nature of belief in God. It would have been much more apropos for Plantinga, Steuer adds, to compare how we come to characterize people from their conduct.

> Although the circumstances in which I discern divine actions may play an important role in my ability to see in certain events the character and ability revealing actions of God, those actions (rather than the background conditions within which I discern them as God's self-manifestations) are the grounds of my beliefs regarding God's nature. (Steuer 250)

However much he would dissent from Steuer who takes actions as evidence, Plantinga could hardly contest the criticism that he neglects to devote nearly as much discussion to the analogy of theistic belief with belief in other persons as compared with its likeness to perceptual beliefs, memory beliefs and some ascriptive beliefs.[28]

According to Robert Audi as well, beliefs ascribing to others mental states such as fear, pain or anger involve some reading of indicators that spells seeing evidence, even if this is only spelled out to oneself and others in response to a query. What if one assumes

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[28] Compare the criticism by McLeod 1990, 38; 1993, 249.

there is no taking of appearances (e.g., that Sam cut himself) as evidence, no process of inference (e.g., from Sam's crying out), and no conscious acceptance of a mediating belief in instances where pain ascribing beliefs (e.g., Sam is hurting) are just formed? None of that means that the ascriptive belief cannot be based on another belief (e.g., that Sam suffered such an injury). Audi is nondisposed toward Plantinga's position that a basis relation indeed involves such conscious features. Still, if it is so construed, such notions will tend to be used in a broad enough sense as to make Plantinga's task of demonstrating basicality for theistic belief more difficult. Narrower notions, along with a view that the basis relation involves conscious conceptualization, may facilitate a case for basicality. It still will not be easy to show nondependence for justification (Audi 1986, 143-147). For Audi, a sense of God's disapproval, for instance, must be mediated by some background beliefs. How is believing that God is speaking like and unlike the apprehension that one is being addressed by one's familiar friend? A close friend's voice is automatically recognized. An analyst could easily judge that in the other case some unconscious inference moves from a prior persuasion of distinctive qualities, like authority, to the conviction that the "voice" is divine.[29]

Audi suggests half a dozen features that may plausibly be thought to characterize common proper basicality in the paradigm beliefs: the belief is experientially grounded, veridically caused,

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[29] Audi 1986, 145-146; 1992, 71-72.

normally irresistibly formed, virtually universally formed, explanatory only by itself, and has a readily realizable possibility of being perceptible in another sensory mode. He is not prepared to declare these clear cut and necessary conditions, but is impressed that they do point to a likelihood of truth and an indication of rationality. The first two of these six features may be associated with theistic beliefs, the third may be present in the experience of some believers. The last three are apparently not realized here, though undue deference to skepticism should not take that last judgment as decisive. Some basic beliefs in God could result from a mode functioning comparably to a sixth sense some people happen to possess, for which sources of stimulation are not traceable. Yet nothing necessitates a strictly sensory, or sensory-like, model for divine communication, and this leaves full-fledged assimilation of its rationality with that of perceptual beliefs far from mandatory (Audi 1986, 148-152).

Theistic belief may not be corroborated in quite the same way as are sensory beliefs. This disparity can be overstated in view of such factors as how our perception of light is confirmed only by vision. Moreover, among normal people sharing the standard equipment, keenness in perception reaches different levels due to a varying amount of training. This can mitigate the force of a universality constraint. If experiential confirmation is not of the same predictive kind as experimental confirmation, this does not necessarily make the former inferior to the latter (Audi 1992, 70,

72-74). Audi concludes that it still has not been shown that any possibly basic theistic beliefs cannot be properly so.[30]

For his part, Audi proposes a moderate version of evidentialism according to which an acknowledgment of proper basicality may still leave a present belief "historically evidentially dependent" for its justification, its rationality resting on past support, so that "one's belief that God exists is justified only if one has or has had adequate evidence for it."[31] Significantly more recognition from prior experience will be involved in any present identification of an acquaintance, and especially of God, than, say, in seeing red. The justification of one's noninferential belief in God will rest indirectly on how adequately one's community came to believe in God in the first place.[32] One might argue that background evidence is essential only to any present claim of knowledge, but unnecessary for properly basic belief even of some truth. It is supposed, however, that Plantinga would not welcome such a separation. Audi allows that he still has not secured sufficient rationale to rule out directly justified theistic beliefs, though they remain for him a big question.[33]

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[30] Audi 1986, 152, 164-165; 1992, 73.

[31] Audi 1986, 153-154. See also Audi 1992, 75-76; compare Konyndyk 1986, 106, n.33.

[32] Audi 1992, 76, 95, n.27.

[33] Audi 1986, 152-156, 165; 1992, 75-76, 78. Audi himself contends that nondoxastic, attitudinal religious faith, distinct from belief, is more significant for the question of religious rationality in meeting the demands of reason (Audi 1992, 50-67, 79-90).

John Zeis is one who rejects Plantinga's distinction between grounds and evidence. The experience purported as justifying a basic belief must be either ineffable or expressible. Were it the former, it would be conceptually empty; how could it then serve as the ground for a judgment? If it is the latter, then it would have content; the claim is then liable to be possibly false or too meager to confer justification. Even allowing Plantinga's point that one's concentration will, in such instances as he cites, be on the object of attention rather than on the experiencing of this attention, one can still insist that any subsequent reflection will yield the inference essentially involved.[34]

This lines up with Norman Kretzmann's complaint, introduced earlier,[35] that Plantinga artificially and arbitrarily narrows the definition of evidence to exclude grounds.[36] For Kretzmann grounds or elements of experience are really readily translatable into propositional form, in reply to simple questions. As such they are subject to assessment for adequacy as accessible bases for belief. On such a quick and easy convertibility of beliefs from being basic to being based, Kretzmann concludes that "if the status of proper basicality Plantinga has won for 'I see a tree' and 'God exists' is evanescent to that amazing degree, it isn't worth working for or

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[34] Zeis 1990, 182-183, 177-178. Compare Sullivan 83-84; Garcia 118-119.

[35] See above, p. 13.

[36] Compare Matteo 268.

having" (Kretzmann 31).[37] There is another aspect to his attack on Plantinga's differentiation between basic belief elicited by grounds and belief based on evidence. The distinctiveness of the former hinges also on such belief being superficially limited to the occasion of acquisition. It hinges as well on that event being marked by the nonoccurrence of what would otherwise be a contributing conviction (Kretzmann 25-29). Plantinga's focus on a belief's genesis, says Kretzmann, actually allows for plenty of evidence to be available and appealed to as support at some suitable time other than that of the actual entrance into belief. One such time would be in the event of some subsequent challenge to the legitimacy of one's belief. Kretzmann refers to Plantinga's statement of some conditions for nonbasic belief: the subject must hold two beliefs, and if the believer holds one to be good evidence for the other and believes that indeed he holds the latter on the basis of the former, that is a sufficient condition.[38] Such an occurrentist conception of "believing on the basis of" ignores covert dispositional beliefs that naturally obtain, and implicitly figure in situations of belief.[39]

Such disagreement over what is involved in seemingly spontaneous beliefs finds a larger context of debate in the ongoing dispute between those who are convinced that inference underlies observation affirmations and so call for evidence, and those who

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[37] See Kretzmann 30-31.

[38] RBG 52. See also Sessions 1987, 122.

[39] Note also Kretzmann 37, nn. 38-39.

assert that people make judgments in such situations without inference or any need for justification. Plantinga belongs to the latter camp and affirms its stance also with reference to encountering God (Cooke 283-285). For the sake of argument Philip Quinn allows that Plantinga is right on beliefs in God being properly basic. Quinn is attracted by George E. Moore's position that commonsense beliefs are directly justified by virtue of being grounded in the circumstances of their formation rather than through the mediation of a belief concerning one's experience of these conditions. However, like Kretzmann, Quinn argues that in such situations, whether theistic or perceptual beliefs are involved, there is no loss in justification when the beliefs in question (like "I see a hand in front of me") are based on propositions articulating such experience (like "it seems to me that I see a hand before me"). These propositions simply express the relevant content of the encounter which constitutes the grounding for the belief. Indeed, some beliefs might sometimes retain justification longer through being consciously maintained on the basis of the intermediary belief (Quinn 1985, 476-479).

Plantinga rejects the claim of equal epistemic status inasmuch as modern philosophers have repeatedly concluded that intermediary experiential propositions do not provide much by way of noncircular evidence necessary for any cogent argument culminating in a conclusion which entails the existence of the object of the belief. Plantinga is persuaded with Reid that much more warrant is acquired by beliefs formed in the basic way, provided it

happens under the proper circumstances.[40] Quinn is confident Plantinga is not just stubbornly denying the commonplace that "sensory experience is good evidence for perceptual beliefs." He agrees with Plantinga over the difficulty of putting together an adequate argument ending with the entailment of objects, having started from propositions concerning experience. But this fails to suffice as a reason for disqualifying such propositions as evidence. Counterexamples are conceivable where such propositions (as "that student is moving restlessly about") could serve as solid evidence for another belief (like "that student feels uncomfortable") even though a cogent argument from the former to the latter would not be forthcoming. Statements of experience could likewise stand as good evidence for theistic beliefs. The latter thus based would be no less justified than if they were basic. A movement from properly basic to properly nonbasic belief could in the case of certain theistic believers be the means of accruing additional warrant so as to amount to knowledge (Quinn 1993, 28-34).

It is hard not to anticipate Plantinga insisting again that we naturally come directly to a belief like "the student is uncomfortable" rather than via "the student is moving restlessly" and that we are often better off epistemically in such immediately formed beliefs. Although, admittedly, his preferred view has been a minority opinion in recent centuries, he stands by the position that having the right kind of experience in the right sort of conditions confers a

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[40] FTR 303-306; WPF 95-98, 183-184. Compare Gutting 1985, 242-243.

greater degree of warrant than an evidential basis that is transferred to a belief from propositions relating the experience. As he sees it, something is lost in the translation process which Kretzmann and Quinn find so straightforward and worthwhile: the full value of one's cognitive faculties having functioned properly as they ought to work in being aimed at truth. The transfer is not simply into some supposedly more manageable form, but rather onto a different track in which different demands are imposed. What is quite suitable and sufficient in an experiential context becomes unsatisfactory only when it is unnecessarily transferred and transformed into the evidential context where inference is assumed to operate in ways which fail to recognize the functioning of the mechanism in formation of basic belief (WPF 93-99, 183-184). Sometimes nonbasic beliefs can be held with more warrant, including firmness, than basic beliefs.[41] However, they certainly do not include the sort of perceptual beliefs Kretzmann and Quinn consider as attaining equality, let alone superiority, when viewed as nonbasic. An advantageous movement from properly basic to properly nonbasic belief as envisaged by Quinn (1993, 28-34) could take place in such connections as a belief concerning some mathematical matter. It could also be at least partly applicable in the experience of weak, immature believers. And yet, Plantinga would surely reaffirm his agreement with Calvin that properly basic belief in God can

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[41] RBG 50; WPF 94, n.6; WCD 70.

constitute knowledge already, apart from whatever warrant may be acquired by argument.[42]

4. The Role of Credulity Disposition and Testimony

Plantinga's position in this debate over the distinctiveness and desirability of proper basicality in perceptual and theistic belief can be further amplified. For many basic beliefs, belief in some other proposition(s) will be part of the conditions that confer justification on the belief without serving as a basis for it. For example, Plantinga's acceptance of someone's summary report concerning the state of diplomatic relations between two nations on some contemporary issue requires prior belief that those countries do in fact exist. Yet that awareness, he insists, does not factor as the basis for his belief in the latest information supplied by some media (RBG 86). Some of the very concepts (for instance, of a quantity 14) involved in a *basic* belief (like 12+2=14) can not even be formed without the benefit of other beliefs (14>1), since such other beliefs need not figure in as an evidential basis for the one in question (WCD 71, n.11). If Plantinga forms the basic belief that Sam is in pain, the appropriate conditions conferring justification and warrant include the belief that he sees Sam, without that amounting to even partial evidence for him in the situation of forming the belief that Sam is

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[42] See RBG 73; Plantinga 1983b, 60-61; 1985a, 63-64; PNT especially 294-295, 303, 310-312; compare EP 59-60.

hurt.[43] Most recently Plantinga admits that formulating a precise statement on nonbasic belief remains somewhat elusive for him: the basis relation, he says, involves "a causal element of *some* sort" but does not entail explicit inference though such will often enter in. Beyond the necessity of holding two beliefs it will also require "that, at any rate, I have in the past believed both A and B *occurrently*, not just dispositionally."[44] In occasions of perception one may have a dispositional belief that one is being appeared to "like *that*," so that one will form such a belief in response to a question concerning how one is being appeared to. But for Plantinga, such a dispositional belief is not already there before such a question is posed, let alone functioning as a basis. Against Kretzmann, he stresses the different disposition to believe we do have in such cases: "we don't ordinarily form beliefs describing our experience when we form perceptual beliefs; *a fortiori*, therefore, we don't form the perceptual belief on the basis of a belief about experience. Instead, the belief in question is held in the *basic* way."[45]

Plantinga speaks lately of a compromise position as being perhaps available. According to it, one could hold that a perceptual belief is to be believed on the basis of an experiential proposition which supports the other in some relation other than that of deductive, inductive, or abductive evidence for it. The relation

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[43] CEO 123; WPF 185.

[44] WCD 69-70. Compare RBG 52; FTR 306.

[45] WPF 94. Compare WPF 184.

would have to capture the "right kind of intrinsic value" in the connection between the two propositions (WPF 184, n.10). This might suit Quinn, but Plantinga does not indicate that he himself is inclined to take it. He does recognize the role of learning for perception, that before one can form such beliefs as "I see a dolphin" one must first learn that "something that looks like *that* is a dolphin." Such modifications of one's belief-forming capacities over the course of experience naturally tend to follow in accordance with how such faculties ought to be shaped and are conducive to warrant. Plantinga is still minded to regard perceptual judgments, such as that of seeing a dolphin, as made in the basic way. At worst, they are formed only partly on the evidential basis of propositions of what things like dolphins look like (WPF 99-101).

With respect to theistic beliefs, Plantinga appreciates that such faith is engendered and enhanced under a rich diversity of circumstances. While some come to believe in God in a rather radical and rapid conversion, many are reared by their familial and ecclesiastical elders to believe. These especially acquire their belief through testimony. Plantinga regards an imagined fourteen year old boy, raised in a theistic community, as typically and properly basic in his belief if he has simply grown into such faith under the influence of what he has been taught, without being exposed to and impressed by any arguments, without making any inference to the credibility of such belief from reflection on the reliability of his witnesses or their

testimony.[46] He would welcome Stephen Wykstra's comparison of this with the rationality of a young student readily accepting the word of science instructors about the existence of electrons (Wykstra 1989, 429-430). Indeed, an enormous number of our basic beliefs about the world around us are formed in response to testimony, as a function of our credulity disposition.[47] Through experience, discrimination becomes a normal feature of our exercise of that disposition, and yet we still typically receive testimony in the basic way, without reflective reasoning, in accordance with credulity's natural operation and our earliest usage of it. This is also in keeping with the fact that, notwithstanding the common and frequent temptation to lie and cases of habitual prevaricators, the bent to tell the truth remains a feature characteristic of human conduct in general (WPF 79-82).

Still, the epistemic worth of any belief acquired through testimony is second-rate and secondary, parasitic on the warrant this belief held for that testifier who obtained it by some other superior means.[48] This holds true of theistic beliefs also. While the youth is justified in coming to basic belief in God simply by receiving testimony, such a one will subsequently strengthen the epistemic status of one's faith by having one's own experiences.[49] Basic beliefs

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[46] RBG 33; PNT 304.

[47] RBG 85; WPF 77-79.

[48] WPF 37, 82-88, 138, n.1, 180; compare RBG 85.

[49] RBG 86-87; PNT 304-305. Compare Gutting 1985, 243-244.

concerning God gained in response to testimony serve as a background for such directly personal experiential beliefs. Yet the latter will commend themselves to the believer and carry their own warrant by virtue of the circumstances in which they are formed, without drawing on the earlier source as an evidential basis. The content of the original belief will be borne out by the deliverance of a superior source. As for a case where previous belief had been supported by argument alone, properly experiential basic theistic belief does not just rely upon, or stand beside such. Instead, it improves upon the quality of the original by undergirding it. So, contrary to Sweet (78-79), belief would not be left in a paradoxical, even contradictory situation of being held as both basic and nonbasic.

Frank Schubert criticizes Plantinga for failing to acknowledge how heavily reliant belief in God's existence is on the evidence of ancestral testimony. This reliance makes it illegitimate to call theistic belief basic, however much it assumes the status of an umbrella belief obstinately resistant to being undermined by any empirical evidence. In identifying the God of whom he speaks as the Judeo-Christian God of the Bible, Plantinga neglects to point out how indebted he himself is to testimony as the vehicle for his own coming to that belief. There are, indeed, various strands of witness involved in Plantinga's arriving at and growing in such faith. Both Plantinga in real life and his hypothetical fourteen year old theist do have and, if queried, would appeal to the evidence of ancestral testimony mediated through their community as integral to, and justifying their specific theistic belief (Schubert 499-503). Plantinga has not

provided answers on how to establish the reliability of such significant testimony. While not claiming to provide any full set of factors, Schubert refers to elements such as integrity and trustworthiness of transmitters as needing to be counterbalanced by other evidential concerns (Schubert 505-510).

Schubert would be more positive about the tenor of Plantinga's recent stress on the epistemic limitations of what is believed from testimony alone, including the awareness that a testimonial chain is no stronger than its weakest link (WPF 82-88). He would not be persuaded by Plantinga's persistence in regarding such belief as potentially properly basic and often actually so for theistic belief, especially when Plantinga's assurance, at least as of now, assumes rather than argues for the authenticity of the testimony it has accepted. One might presume here that Plantinga would lay the onus on a skeptic to show that the transmission has been suspect at some point or in some respect, and that he himself is not expecting that this can be done so as to persuade him or other committed theists. Plantinga might well criticize Schubert for failure to recognize that subsequent experience can be of such a nature in its own right as to prompt further faith that, thus fostered, legitimately excels, even if it does not entirely supersede, the former specimen of belief. Schubert refers only to the individual as subconsciously severing one's faith from its historical roots in a move to appropriate it for oneself as one's own (Schubert 506-507).

To Robert Audi's mind, Plantinga's youthful theist corroborates his contention of historically evidential justificatory dependence. Even if the youngster's initial beliefs are imitative of, rather than inferential from, his elders, and so causally grounded but not overtly epistemically based, he still has evidence without which his resulting beliefs would not be justified. Such testimonial evidence is crucial for the rationality of subsequent personal recognition of God's voice in the youth's formation of basic beliefs that God is speaking to him.[50] While Plantinga is willing to call testimony a source of evidence, he insists on calling it basic evidence, evidence taken in the basic way.[51] Again, he traces its merits back to nontestimonial underpinnings of the very sort which in subsequent occurrences in the personal experience of the youth do not simply supplement the testimonial evidence but rather surpass it in value. More than drawing conceptually on the testimony, the beliefs formed in these experiences will confirm and transcend it. Their primary nature far exceeds any extent to which they take their cue from testimony, itself initially dependent on, secondary to them.

Norman Kretzmann calls Plantinga's youthful theist Ted. According to Kretzmann, all of the developments contributing to Ted's belief constitute evidence regardless of whether or not Ted himself remembers all that many or regards any of them as such.

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[50] Audi 1986, 153; 1992, 76.

[51] WPF 79, 80, 88, 138, n.1, 187; PNT 304. Kenny 40-41, 76, is minded otherwise.

Ted's evidence is adequate for the situation and stage of life he has been at. Kretzmann too expects that on being asked why he does believe in God, Ted would quickly adduce various supporting beliefs as reasons -- for example, that his prayers for his mother's restoration to health were answered. Even if such did not prompt his belief in the first place and are not always in his consciousness, they have become relevant to the continuation of his belief and tell rather strongly against Plantinga's portrayal of Ted as believing without evidence.[52] Plantinga might reply that perhaps Ted's basic belief in God prompted his prayers for his mother's recovery, that under the circumstances Ted's persuasion about her return to health through God's gracious care was properly basic, and that such instances may well serve to renew, reinforce, enhance, strengthen Ted's general belief in God without serving as a separate substructure to it. Plantinga might well add that Ted himself would likely be willing to share such incidents as confirmation and, if that would please Kretzmann, call them evidence for his faith. But he would see Ted as unwilling to look on the beliefs like "my prayers were answered" as foundational to his faith. Ted would rather regard the statement "God answered my prayers" as integral in his fundamental belief in God. Nor would Plantinga welcome Ted seeing such beliefs as actually based on others and subject to others for their justification. Again, Plantinga would submit that the experience under which they were formed does not lend itself to being reproduced intact in propositional terms. So they need not be subjected to the evidential

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[52] Kretzmann 26-29. Compare Kretzmann, 37, n.37.

canons of discursive justification, for such cannot retain the value of the beliefs' formation. Plantinga's stand here will not satisfy Kretzmann or Quinn. They will regard themselves as entitled at least to a further commentary on why the chain of Christian testimony may be regarded as retaining warrant from beginning to end, and on how experiential belief can presume on and elevate background belief from testimony without being based on it.[53]

5. The Concern for Certitude

Plantinga's stance is again objectionable on the opposite side to critics like Dewi Z. Phillips, for whom the requirement of grounds is hardly an improvement over the misplaced demand for evidence. Phillips criticizes Plantinga for being too impressed, in his delineation of basicality, with a standard of not being mistaken. Plantinga defines his properly basic propositions in deference to incorrigibility statements, caught up in the quest of avoiding any possible falsehood. However, rarely unfavorable circumstances ought not to take away from the fact that the regular context of our practice and discourse recognizes various propositions as taken for granted and fundamental (Phillips 34-35). By insisting that basic propositions be grounded, Plantinga ensures their isolation. Phillips stresses the logical gap that remains unspanned, and seemingly unbridgeable,

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[53] Quinn 1985, 484-485, insists that conceptual elements do affect experiential grounds, so that a cognitive state does underlie the formation of beliefs in those circumstances. Background beliefs are implicitly involved.

between the sensory input and what is claimed to be the objects of these experiences. He targets in particular the example of "I see a tree" and "I am appeared to treely." He affirms with Stephen Austin that under the constraint of approaching an actually impoverished incorrigibility, the more cautiously one states the conditions necessary for solid grounding, the further away one actually moves from the assurance we normally, naturally have: from "I see a tree" to "I seem to see a tree" to "It seems to me that I see a tree" to "It seems to me as if I was seeing a tree" (Phillips 43-47).

While Phillips could and would still advance the thrust of this critique against Plantinga, it should be in a much more qualified form. Plantinga has made it plain that he does not share the classical foundationalist objective of Cartesian certainty that puts so much stock in incorrigibility.[54] He himself has alluded often enough to the logical gap between experience and its purported objects that experiential propositions are not able to span by way of evidential argumentation.[55] Perhaps the dispute between Plantinga and Phillips over whether basic beliefs need be regarded as grounded or groundless would focus further on their debate over whether our normal practice could not naturally be otherwise than it is.

What further troubles Phillips, besides Plantinga's insistence on grounds, is the latter's allowance that even the right

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[54] WCD 85; WPF 76-77, 126, 182-183.

[55] RBG 59-60, FTR 304-305.

circumstances conducive to the formation of a basic belief confer not an *ultima facie*, but only a *prima facie* justification, thus one which is defeasible, one that can be overridden (RBG 82-84). Phillips declares himself decidedly turned off, unimpressed by philosophical tentativeness which deprives people of the certainty with which they practically operate on a daily basis where the circumstances are for the most part quite adequate. Plantinga allows for the confidence of faith to be unnecessarily and inappropriately undermined by opening the door to potential defeaters, even the threat of which constitutes an intrusion on the practice of religious belief.

For Phillips, religious belief is marked by a certitude which is justified by its own context of conduct within which commitment comes and ought not to be subjected to external considerations which cast a question mark over its correctness and continuance. Accordingly, Plantinga has compromised the character of religious belief by leaving it liable to the ongoing possibility of being rendered irrational, and ruled out of place in its foundational role, by would-be defeaters in the form of evidential propositions (Phillips 47-51). Phillips is criticizing Plantinga's response to the protest he anticipated from the other side, that his construal of properly basic belief precludes any argument from bearing whatsoever on its virtue. The very immunity which Phillips insists on is for the others an isolation which would constitute forfeiture of any continuing reasonableness. Plantinga is concerned to contend not just for the initial, but also for the sustained rationality and justification of belief in God. The next chapter will address this question further.

Chapter Three

Plantinga and the Viability of Properly Basic Belief in God

After stressing that proper basicality, for theistic belief as well, is situation specific, resting on the right circumstances or conditions conferring justification on the beliefs formed in them, Plantinga qualifies this (RBG 82-84). This grounding provides only an initial, working legitimation rather than an all-things-considered justification. It by no means excludes arguments from subsequently having any bearing on the legitimate retention of belief in God. That which ordinarily adequately grounds one's natural perceptual response can be overridden by the observer's consciousness of some additional factor militating against it. An extraordinary example would be "the dreaded dendrological disorder, whose victims are appeared to treely only when there are no trees present."[1] One can perhaps identify more with an incident whose conditions would prompt the persuasion that a natural tree stands there, until other indications point to an artificial specimen.[2] For one like his fourteen year old theist, "conditions can arise in which perhaps I am no longer justified in this belief" because I have now been exposed to a convincing argument, moving from seemingly self-evident premises through seemingly self-evidently valid steps to a conclusion, that God's existence is impossible (RBG 84).

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[1] RBG 83. See also RBG 80.

[2] For a more ordinary, nontree example from Plantinga, see WPF 41.

Plantinga's response to such a scenario is to acknowledge that such would-be defeaters are around but are themselves vulnerable to potential defeat. When one becomes aware of such a defeater-defeater one may legitimately return to, or persist in, a properly basic belief in God. The belief in the failure of the defeater becomes a part of the proper conditions under which that belief in God is held, without necessarily being a basis for it. Indeed, the assurance of the defeater's failure does not constitute evidence for theistic belief and cannot be a rational basis for belief in God, even though it may be requisite in the circumstances (RBG 84-85). Returning to the perceptual sphere, Plantinga sees a parallel in a case where one initially believes one is seeing tulips on a table, is then told one is actually looking at an impressionable laser image, only after to be informed that this hi-tech explanation was in fact only a joke and that real tulips are indeed there, as they are (WPF 185).

It is not only Phillips who protests that, notwithstanding this preservation of basicality, Plantinga has left the rationality of belief hinging on the plausibility of the latest atheological line to be issued (Phillips 21-22, 50-52). Fellow Reformed epistemologist Dewey Hoitenga takes him to task for making an uncalled-for concession to evidentialism: "If the proper basicality of theistic belief makes the arguments of natural theology unnecessary and inappropriate to its justification, why does that proper basicality not make apologetic defenses of that belief equally unnecessary and inappropriate to its justification?" (Hoitenga 209). According to Hoitenga, Plantinga

would be more consistent in assigning negative apologetics not the role of restoring one's own temporarily suspended faith, but rather the objective of removing mistaken objections on the part of a challenger. The one who has a basic belief in God will become aware that this belief faces arguments which the believer will not always be able to answer to one's own satisfaction and often less so to another's. But the believer will recognize that this belief still stands as valid, however unprovable to a skeptic. Confident in the persuasion of direct acquaintance with God, the believer will be unmoved by contrary arguments, viewing one's own faith as an adequate defense against potential defeaters, but willing to engage those as inappropriate, unnecessary obstacles for others (Hoitenga 206-212).

This exposition by Hoitenga does come across as a more consistent extension of Plantinga's position than he himself expressed in "Reason and Belief in God" (1983). It is more in line with his agreement with Calvin that a firsthand faith in God leaves one in a more favorable vantage point than any inference from argument. In these passages Plantinga likens the difference between basic and inferred belief in God to one's familiarity with one's spouse over against persuasion of that spouse's existence in virtue of an analogical argument for other minds. Another analogy he offers early on is that of an unimpaired observer at Devil's Tower in Wyoming, watching all the pigeons flying around. Upon having this experience it would be perverse for such a one still to believe in their presence there only on the basis of information one had earlier

obtained from a guidebook or subsequently garnered from another and better report.[3] Why, Hoitenga asks, should Plantinga retreat?[4]

1. The Call for Sustaining Argument

Is basic theistic belief alone adequate in the face of contrary considerations? Robert Audi again advocates justificatory dependence instead.[5] Audi's argumentalism requires for the retention of rationality that one's belief in God now be accompanied by the possession of, or the power or at least permissibility to produce, propositions which would suffice to protect one's theism from being undermined by purported reasons that God does not exist.

Is not such potential already implicit in a justified belief in God which carries with it the conviction that no sound atheological argument avails? The nontheist could work the opposite way by contending that if one is not justified in believing there is no such good argument against God, then neither is one justified in believing in God. This indicates a standoff perhaps satisfactory for the basic theistic believer. But cases can be conceived which run counter to such an epistemic principle that approves "the transmission of justification across subjectively justified implications" (Audi 1986,

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[3] RBG 67-68, 71, 73; compare 1985a, 61-64.

[4] Compare Sullivan 85: Gutting 1985, 246.

[5] Audi 1986, 156-161. Compare above, pp. 22, 58, 70.

159). Accordingly, one (person m) could be within one's rights both to believe one proposition -- for instance, that the next scheduled flight will not get person n from city y to city z on time to teach class c -- and because of it, another -- that n will not be at class c. And yet person m could at the same time have good reason to believe the denial of the latter -- thus, that n will be there -- on other grounds: n is credible and has affirmed to m that he will be there.

A rational theist might well countenance the implication that the seeming soundness of the inductive argument from evil reflects negatively on the rationality of his belief in God, with the result that such a one is constrained to neutralize that challenge with counter reasoning rather than rely simply on the force of his well grounded directly justified conviction. Even granting the contention that a tendency to form theistic beliefs is God-given, this does not safeguard their justification from being called into question any more than it would ensure the indefeasibility of all perceptual beliefs formed through divinely bestowed mechanisms. While Audi is not prepared to stipulate under which circumstances a basic theistic belief is weakened, he calls for more defense of the position that a gain in awareness of reality in the world need not at all spell any loss in rational belief in God's existence.[6] It is Audi's belief that even if theistic belief can be directly justified experientially, this will not be the case for all that many, even within the tradition with which Plantinga concerns himself (Audi 1992, 78).

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[6] Audi 1986, 161-162, 165; 1992, 76-77.

Plantinga will presumably be unpersuaded by this argumentalist thesis. He might well be quite prepared to agree that in the example given there is coincidental justification for contrary beliefs. But would he share Audi's apparent qualms over the suggestion that person n's pledge that he will be in class could have enough more warrant as to override m's justification that the airline schedule will not alter so as to allow n to arrive after all in time, based as that belief is on m's extended experience? (Audi 1986, 160) Might Plantinga instead be quite content to suggest that m's strong confidence in n's credibility could be subsequently vindicated by n using some other means of transport, not specifically anticipated by m, such as a private plane, to get back on time? Plantinga may concur with Audi that more argument is appropriate than he has advanced for the claim of sufficient rationality in basic theistic belief owing to its formation by means of a divinely imparted disposition actuated under widely realized conditions. He might well point to his expanded exposition on the factor of faculties that are aimed at truth functioning properly in the right environment. This aspect, vital for warrant in general, would have some specific application here. A more precise pointer to how he would answer comes in Plantinga's response to the intuitions of another Audi-like advocate.

According to Philip Quinn, only epistemic negligence could account for "intellectually sophisticated adults" in the modern milieu not being exposed to a variety of "very substantial reasons" for thinking that God does not exist. Those reasons include the problem of evil in particular and alternative plausible naturalistic

explanations for the emergence of belief in God. In order to preserve any possible proper basicality, any dutiful theistic believers thus confronted with such potent potential defeaters need to have even stronger reasons for regarding those defeaters as false. Quinn considers himself neither to have remained naive nor to have regained such innocence and wonders whether there can be many others who have. Such a possession of defeater resistant reasons would preserve basicality only if the basing relation is construed in Plantinga's very narrow terms. By those terms one proposition is accepted on the basis of another only if it is received when inferred from another that is accepted. Quinn feels that this construal is inadequate considering the likelihood that many responsible informed theists do regard their beliefs as very broadly based on a range of reasons and sense themselves constrained to do so for the sake of rationality (Quinn 1985, 480-484).

Plantinga defends his narrow conception of the basing relation as being appropriate for his aim of answering the evidentialist objection, an objection which demands positive evidence for theism rather than being concerned with what are one's resources for refutation of denials. But what about those Freudian and Marxist theories that religious belief is the product of psychological illusion or projection? Though not denying that these theories are of interest in other regards, Plantinga is not nearly so impressed with their currency value as is Quinn. They not only carry no cogency as reasons for believing in God's nonexistence, but regarded as an argument for such, they represent examples of the

genetic fallacy. Plantinga has already elsewhere engaged the argument from evil in both its initially stronger claim of evil's logical incompatibility with God's existence [7] and its more recent, modest claim of improbability for God in view of evil.[8] He affirms that the earlier claim has been abandoned and the latter falls far short of strong confirmation. Even if substantial reasons for denying theistic belief are around, Quinn's requirement of even weightier rebutters, counter arguments for theism and thus for the denial of such defeaters, ignores the fact that undercutters, refutations of the success of the defeaters themselves, would suffice to defeat them.

As Plantinga sees things, consideration ought to be given to the possibility that a proposition one accepts may itself be weighty enough as a reason to believe that a potential defeater is false. A basic deliverance of one's own memory can be sufficient to withstand a great deal of cumulative contrary evidence. For example, an apparent theft has taken place. One individual faces the manifold liability of an obvious motive, the means, an incriminating past, and of being allegedly sighted at the spot around the time the offense had to have occurred, by a reliable witness. Such a case is convincing of guilt to others in the situation and would be otherwise compelling for the individual involved. But the suspect, actually innocent, recalls being alone, away from the scene of the alleged crime, and that he has not done it. Even lacking any independent reason for

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[7] Plantinga 1974a,b; 1985a, 36-52.

[8] Plantinga 1979b; RBG 20-24; 1985a, 52-55.

thinking a defeater of one's memory belief here is false, one is rational in still holding to that deliverance in the basic way, owing to the greater warrant it carries as an intrinsic defeater-defeater. Such an episode demonstrates the distinctiveness of warrant for appropriately grounded, properly basic beliefs. It also indicates at least occasional superiority for such warrant over epistemic status conferred instead evidentially through a belief being held on the basis of other propositions.

Plantinga follows with the opinion that in the matter of experientially grounded basic theistic belief, it too may well enjoy the benefit of an intrinsic amount of nonpropositional warrant adequate for the rejection of would-be defeaters. Any awareness of at least the disputability of a proposed defeater, that is, that competent people contest it, may also serve as enough rationale for one to continue to hold theism in a basic way.[9] Impressive extrinsic undercutting defeater-defeaters are available against the forceful atheological argument from evil, but many honestly find their intrinsic warrant satisfactory in the face of such challenges. All told, in Plantinga's estimation even a majority of intellectually sophisticated adult theists have a properly basic belief in God (FTR 306-312).

What, then, of Quinn's stated conditions for the maintenance of proper basicality, requiring one without negligence to have better

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[9] Compare Gutting 1985, 250-251.

reasons for thinking potential defeaters of theistic belief false than any substantial reasons one might have for regarding those defeaters as true? This, Quinn insists, could be met by means of a negative apologetic alone since such could militate enough against an atheological argument in favor of a defeater as to discredit that argument as a reason for thinking the defeater true. Also, an intrinsic defeater-defeater could in principle qualify as a means of satisfying its requirement. Quinn is impressed by the example of a memory belief qualifying as an intrinsic defeater of a defeater, and grants Plantinga's point that Moses' theistic belief formed in the burning bush experience would constitute another against the likes of a Freudian counter issued to Moses by a bypasser. But will a common theistic conviction of God speaking to one, arising from one's reading of the Bible, suffice as such in our contemporary cultural climate? This and other unexceptional experiential theistic beliefs like it, Quinn suspects, carry very modest warrant.

Conversely for Quinn, the argument from evil and especially projection theories explaining theistic belief carry much more clout as rationale for repudiating theism than Plantinga appreciates. Observation statements (in this case about the extent of nonmoral evil in the universe) rather than unestablished probability theory satisfy as data for confirmation of claims scientific and philosophical, including one concerning God's nonexistence. Taken as research programs, projection theories have achieved measured success in explanatory power, which result supports their status as significant reasons for thinking God does not exist. Natural theology could

possibly serve to increase a theist's warrant in view of such results, even subsuming them in its own case. Extrinsic defeater-defeaters will be needed by most in the absence of Mosaic-like experiences. What would a scientifically conducted survey disclose about adults in America holding Plantinga's typical basic theistic beliefs and well exposed to the kind of defeaters Quinn has been concerned with? Quinn suspects the decided majority would be not in categories comprised of those with either intrinsic or extrinsic defeater-defeaters, but in a third bracket of those without any confidence that the theistic community's intellectual specialists were agreed on how to adequately answer those challenges.[10]

2. A Claim of Properly Unargued Belief

Bruce Langtry is unsympathetic to the evidentialist demand that an argument for God's existence is necessary for justified theistic belief. He shares Plantinga's dissatisfaction with the undue narrowness of the classical foundationalist criteria that would exclude not only belief in God but a lot of other, commonly accepted beliefs from being rational. But he finds Plantinga's construal of the "on the basis of" relation unduly narrow. A belief could quite plausibly be seen as the basis of another even when not occurrent with it, nor previously consciously entertained at the same time as

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[10] Quinn 1993, 35-45. Quinn closes with the assessment that Plantinga may well be able to further elaborate his religious epistemology into one deserving respect, though as of yet it does not commend itself to him as excelling other emerging candidates.

the other. For instance, one's belief that another's name is not Helen, in answer to a question whether it is, may be based on one's belief that her name is Marilyn, even if that belief happens to be momentarily unavailable. Because of his unwillingness to oppose coherence theories of justification, Langtry puts forward the thesis that belief in God is properly *unargued* ; in longer form, that even professional philosophers in our milieu who have never had a good argument for God's existence are entitled to their belief in God's existence. Such belief has not been shown any less proper than other unargued beliefs which are held within that group, and the thesis itself has resisted discreditation (Langtry 129-134).

Some of Langtry's demonstration of this resilience deals with Gary Gutting's (1982) objection that the mere fact of dissent by epistemic peers tells against the legitimacy of holding theistic belief basically, without argument.[11] He rejects Gutting's allegation that epistemic egoism is what accounts for a stubborn adherence to my belief in the face of disagreement. It is simply an insinuation that one is favoring one's own intuitions just because they are one's own and supposed by one's self to be more probably accurate. Rather, one's basic belief might be strong enough constraint itself to convince of the truth of the belief. Why should a claim to proper basicality be called into question whenever it can be shown that no solid reason supports the believer's epistemic situation affording a privileged access to the truth of the proposition believed? Gutting has not

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[11] Compare Wolterstorff 1988, summarized above, pp. 10-12, for one Reformed epistemologist's extended refutation of Gutting 1982.

shown that this reason must be independent of one's basic belief. Langtry offers several scenarios as suggestive of epistemic difference where Gutting supposes sameness. Does my friend's basic belief that the chemical formula for sulfuric acid is H_3SO_4 oblige me to discard mine that it is rather H_2SO_4? Why should we assume exact equality in the matter of dissent over basic theistic belief? In other controversial areas of unargued beliefs philosophers can be cognizant of fallibility and critical without having to let go owing to opposition, so why not here? (Langtry 135-139)

Langtry is open to the potential for appropriate abandonment of some previously unargued beliefs. Like Plantinga, he realizes that an argument can serve a defensive, refutational role without becoming an argument for the truth of the belief in question. The argument from evil does not impress him as a threat to properly unargued theism. Even if theism is conceded to have somewhat less theoretical attraction (in terms of ontological economy, explanatory power, and so forth) than its alternative, that is not an argument against theism's truth. One could still rest content with one's unargued belief, since it is not held on such grounds. Even if one were to allow that evil in the world does amount to strong evidence against God's being, this would not require resolution by each and every believer seeking to assume the stance of a neutral analyst assessing the argumentary soundness of how one has obtained one's own belief.

Langtry connects properly unargued status with one's other beliefs and with what are reasonable expectations for one's capacities for reflection and investigation. Are the intellectual elite not obligated to supply arguments for theism under the pressure of challenge or else suspend adherence? How strong ought such supporting arguments to be? Should each be strong enough to justify the conclusion on the basis of it? Such a requirement is so severe as to leave improperly unargued too many other beliefs besides theistic ones. But if not that stiff, arguments may well be available to the theist, and yet still leave his theism properly unargued according to the standard of Langtry's thesis. Examples can easily be envisioned where a professional philosopher would not be able to produce good enough formal evidence to justify an unargued belief that nonetheless commends itself, even against a slew of contrary evidence. In such situations, one believes on other grounds and is not compelled to adopt the detached vantage point of Gutting's neutral observer, and so it may also be for theistic believers (Langtry 139-143).

When ought one to relinquish an up till then properly unargued belief? Langtry takes issue with Plantinga's assertion that retention of proper basicality for a memory belief is secure provided the positive epistemic status thereby conferred exceeds whatever contrary weight the evidence affords. Rather, a minimal disparity calls for a lesser degree of adherence, like suspecting instead of believing. Moreover, the positive epistemic status conferred by memory -- like the high level that obtained when I saw Clair enter

the room a few moments ago -- can decline drastically in the very event of contrary evidence emerging, such as information reaching me that she has a twin sister who is around. A new context with its different equation would not be conducive to any calculation isolating an after amount in degree of justification for the memory contribution within the quota conferred by the overall circumstances. Langtry lacks an alternative account of sensitivity to opposing evidence attracting him more than that of Plantinga, which he finds inadequate on invulnerability of properly unargued belief. Yet his thesis still stands against the objection he has been dealing with (Langtry 143-145). Langtry's example of decline in the weight of warrant for a memory belief and his argument on the elusiveness of any measurement of its residual warrant in a complicated context point to limits for Plantinga's proposal. This does not, however, diminish the force of Plantinga's example where the intrinsic deliverance of memory remained a dominant justifier versus the accumulation of contrary considerations to which the believer was subsequently exposed. So it does not preclude intrinsic defeater-defeaters in the matter of properly unargued theistic belief.

Langtry defends his thesis against other objections that might similarly be raised against Plantinga's proximate position on properly basic belief in God. Would not a properly unargued belief under other conditions be deprived of this status if the believer were to acquire, or ought to have obtained, adequately forceful and unanswered reasons for thinking that this belief would be owned even if it were not true? Certainly instances can be imagined in the

case of nontheistic beliefs: a person could be so convinced when informed that one's own previous perceptual belief of a chair in front of oneself was actually the result of others' preplanned precise positioning of mirrors. Could not one contend that theists need recognize that, and examine whether, the retention of their beliefs might well be owing to the influential role on them of their religious community and its consensus?[12] But there are pressures in the other direction for those theists belonging to the professional philosophical community. These believers might just contend that any fostering role of the community is itself owing to God's actually existing. There is also Langtry's analogy where one's own unargued memory belief in H_2SO_4 as sulfuric acid's correct chemical code is contrary to a friend's likewise held conviction of H_3SO_4. Admittedly one would presumably hold one's own belief here even if it were not true. Though lacking independent evidence, and in spite of the comparable conditions connected with the competitor, could one not claim the truth has vitally contributed to the causal history of one's belief, leaving it still properly unargued? (Langtry 145-147)

The main premise of the objection being treated is this: "An otherwise properly unargued belief would be rendered improperly unargued if the person possesses, or would possess were it not for epistemic negligence, sufficiently strong and undefeated reasons for supposing that the belief would be held even if it were in fact false"

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[12] Like Plantinga, Langtry puts little stock in Freudian and Marxist theories supplying credible alternative candidates for influences here.

(Langtry 147, 145). This fails by being far too strong. It would leave unjustified too many unargued memory beliefs about the world around us. Take, for example, one's present belief that all copper conducts electricity, a belief assumed to date back to one's reading a pre-1960 physics text. Would that belief be rendered irrational as admittedly believed even if it were false, the falsity owing to very rare exceptions of which the text, and so its reader, was ignorant? Given "the inductive assumption" that it was highly probable on the evidence at hand when the text was authored that all copper is conductive, it was also quite likely that no exceptions to this would be discovered in the next thirty years. Anyone aware of this is nonnegligent even now in forming the belief, on reading that text, that copper's conductivity is universal. A denial of one's right to rely on the text, owing to doubt about the inductive assumption, but a doubt unaccompanied by any particular allegations of fault back then, has implications. It leaves the denier in principle bound to decline now taking up a belief in copper as an unexceptionable conductor of electricity on reading a contemporary text. Langtry sees little promise for a more modified version of the premise (Langtry 147-148).

Is unargued knowledge of God's existence possible? An evidentialist could contend that "it is unreasonable to rely on the premise that God exists, itself unsupported by argument, in order to defend the existence of human cognitive capacities which might issue in unargued knowledge that God exists" (Langtry 149). But Langtry is satisfied that he is rather relating to a claim quite unlike the

following, one of those which manifest a desperate convenient specificity in their contention that a causal connection obtains between the premise and their cognition and so qualifies that state as knowledge of the premise. A claim to properly unargued knowledge that "the first woman to climb Mt. Wellington (many millennia ago) was left-handed" is not able to appeal to any available chain of testimony going back to an acceptable source. Yet the believer also insists, on the basis of his belief, that there is some irrefutable unknown suitable route by which his knowledge came to him. Langtry affirms that,

> by contrast, the premise that God exists is a reason for supposing that unargued knowledge that God exists is possible. The belief that there is some appropriate causal connection between God and the theistic unargued believer's present cognitive state is not ad hoc: there are good arguments for saying that God, if he exists, could induce unargued knowledge of his existence in many ways. (Langtry 150)

Langtry judges that his group in question, professional philosophers with properly unargued beliefs in God, while not under obligation to show how one can obtain unargued knowledge of God, at least ought to defend the possibility of it versus objections, which still seems achievable. His defense of his thesis may be incomplete in its consideration of relevant epistemic duties, but thus far the thesis holds up (Langtry 148-151). This defense would not entirely satisfy Plantinga, being a more modest claim; but even with its guarded, tentative tone it does tend to support rather than to undermine Plantinga's thrust.

3. A Case for Supporting Beliefs

Robert McKim is another who reflects on the persistence of proper basicality for theistic belief. He opts for a more permissive reading of proper basicality than Plantinga prefers, one which opens the door to a wide variety of belief claims, including atheistic claims and those for the existence of ghosts, as qualifying at least initially. In the face of contrary considerations, McKim sees the assessment of evidence and engagement in argument as serving to sift out those unworthy of more than provisional acceptance (McKim 29-45). How does theistic belief fare in this regard? McKim feels his discussion is pertinent to either a more restrictive or loose account of proper basicality. Can theistic belief remain properly basic for privileged people such as himself and his well educated philosophical periodical readers, those having both the opportunity and capacity to scrutinize their beliefs? The obligation to engage in such scrutiny is tied especially to the degree to which such beliefs are significant to our lives and controversial among us. Belief or disbelief in God certainly rates high enough on these indexes to call for careful examination (McKim 45-47).

Like Quinn, McKim expects responsible people in the group he has singled out to encounter, not evade, defeaters. Otherwise, the proper basicality of their belief is forfeited through negligence. Should the defeater remain undefeated, there are some situations in which theistic belief could rightly continue as basic: when alternatives face the same liability, or one has reason to believe the

state of affairs is about to change. Concerning occasions when the defeater is defeated, McKim seconds Plantinga on how the original belief may remain properly basic. He offers his own example of how evidence overthrowing a defeater can contribute nothing by way of support for that which it disencumbers. I have the basic belief that I was in contact with Joe this very morning. But the propriety of that belief is called into question by a report that he has been some distance away already for a few days. Later, fulier, better placed information on Joe having remained in town right through this morning defeats that earlier report. However effectively it overrides the earlier report, the later data itself does nothing to substantiate my contact with Joe (McKim 48-49). Plantinga presumably would say, however, that in this instance the belief that I was in contact with Joe should be seen as an intrinsic defeater-defeater, since, as McKim sets up the story, I have a clear belief Joe spoke with me directly, in person, face to face.

McKim's next example involves the basic belief that Joe, looking somewhat sad, spoke with me five mornings ago, in front of the court house. The defeater is information that he had out of town obligations on the day in question and was dropped off at the airport the evening before, with the source certain that he then was away for that following day. The defeater-defeater is an official written report of his arrest at the airport before his flight could depart, followed by his court appearance the next morning, just after the time I recall encountering him. Here, McKim says, the defeater-defeater, significantly supporting and resolidifying my shaken belief,

does soundly serve to stop my wondering whether I had not been confused and mistaken. If, in this instance, I had not begun to wonder, it seems it could only reasonably have been because my nontrivial belief was supported by, based on, other beliefs about the date and hour having been confirmed at the time (McKim 49-51). But here one can object that McKim's situation and suggestions are not sharply enough defined to discount my overall memory belief of the situation being unified in its inclusion of temporal bearings, or to preclude beliefs about the time standing as basic beliefs beside that of the court house encounter, rather than as bases for it.

According to McKim, a defeater-defeater ought to become a part of the basis for a belief if it has that supporting capacity, and according to the degree in which the help it can give is needed, which will be, for instance, more in cases of memory beliefs about more distant events. With respect to theistic beliefs, some useful overriders of defeaters will be incapable of serving as supports. Others appear in principle to be potentially suitable servants, such as Hick's theodicy viewing evil as "*just what you would expect* if a deity wished to elicit certain responses from human beings" and so possibly prompting one to discern God in experience in ways unconsidered previously (McKim 51-52). Among McKim's privileged class, some might on the grounds of their compelling, self-convincing experience have basic beliefs with the capability to resist defeaters: these are virtually and consciously the equivalent of Plantinga's intrinsic defeater-defeaters. When McKim says that such believers are in a situation where their accounting of their experience as

theistic encounters "do not involve their imposing a particular interpretation on something which may equally well be interpreted in other ways," one presumes he means "... by them in other ways" and that here he is presupposing such certitude.[13] Plantinga would not find him necessarily question-begging here, but detractors would likely find McKim much too easily accrediting such a reading by such theists of their experience. McKim's suspicion, pace Plantinga and pro Quinn, is that there will be more privileged theists, confident in their convictions but not compelled in their construals of experience, who ought to base their belief on defeater-defeaters with the capability to support it, leaving their belief improperly basic should they decline to do so (McKim 52-53).

4. The Criterion of Holistic Justification

Robert Pargetter affirms there can be beliefs grounded in experience, but irrational, overridden by defeaters already present (Pargetter 142-143). That is a situation recognized in Plantinga's example of "I see a tree" in conditions of "being appeared treely to" being unjustified in the knowledge one suffers from the "dreaded dendrological disorder." In the absence of defeaters, Pargetter suggests at least two things both merit consideration as additional necessary conditions for proper basicality for beliefs beside their grounding in experience: (a) communitarian corroboration and (b) holistic adequacy, wherein a belief's inclusion contributes to one's

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[13] McKim does add afterwards that this need not preclude freedom and choice in believing.

belief structure being overall, systemically, satisfactory compared to what would obtain in its exclusion.

With regard to the first, Pargetter concedes that the corroboration in general agreement is not at all always required as confirmation of reliability of belief forming mechanisms, one's own or another's. Is it instructive to attend to cases where ostensibly similar external stimuli only sometimes do not occasion like beliefs? Of interest is the reasonableness, for participants and observers, of three possible explanations: actually dissimilar stimuli; similar stimuli but different experiential input in the event of that sort of stimuli; similar stimuli, similar experiential elements, but belief-forming mechanisms differing in this particular range. The most Pargetter can do, upon careful analysis of imagined examples, is allow that lack of agreement on the part of others with one's basic belief might or might not sometimes give one justification for accepting a defeater of it, and may or may not give another person justification for accepting a defeater preventing the acceptance of one's testimony to that grounded belief. This is because instances are conceivable where one's perceptual precision could excel those of others around and so entitle her beliefs, even before she comes to be convinced of her superior skills and the others come to concur with her thus formed beliefs communicated to them by testimony (Pargetter 145-150).

Concerning holistic requirements for justification, Pargetter proposes that these will include pragmatic features, like aptness for

survival, as well as strictly epistemic factors to which they will in any event be connected. Components of holistic rationality, enumerated rather than delineated, include coherence, consistency, and simplicity, also meaningfulness, usefulness, explanatory potential, and contribution to general well-being. These "cannot be identified with any particular internal requirements on the beliefs that make up the system."[14] Equivalent holistic quality -- with, if it does not include, the absence of a defeater -- is a sufficient condition for proper basicality for experientially grounded belief. Holistic superiority would signal the nonrequirement of agreement in belief among those situated in a similar context of experience. Holistic equality for one's belief system would justify acceptance of another's testimony to what one has not believed through one's own experience. There is an admitted ambiguity in that such rationality is to be measured in a community context rather than only on an individual level (Pargetter 153-154). Pargetter declines to fill out the application of this ambiguity.

Pargetter approaches theistic beliefs by according in principle rationality, in their respective beliefs about the reality of the Force, to various fictitious figures in the Star Wars saga: Luke Skywalker first through testimony and then from firsthand experience, Han Solo from testimony alone. Pargetter is receptive to Plantinga's claim that many theists hold their belief in the same sort of basic way Skywalker came to hold his in the Force. The issue is whether they

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[14] Pargetter 152. See further Pargetter 150-154, 160.

are proper in so doing. The first question addressed is that of defeaters which would stand in the way. Mystical experiences are called into question, because they involve preparatory conditions comparable to what cause hallucinations, whereas most theistic claims stem from normal circumstances. With Plantinga, one need not be overly impressed by the phenomenon of common unbelief among the intelligentsia. For a theist, to opt rationally for that other way of looking at things involves not simply gravitating to a perceived majority persuasion but seeing it as contributing to a more rational belief system overall, or as founded on reasons which stand strong in the face of the experiential theistic beliefs one has had. The latter judgment, though, leads to that same sort of large scale review as is also required, from Pargetter's point of view, for one to confirm the superiority of the basic theistic belief instead. The argument from evil again does not impress. Many well aware of evil find it uninhibiting of their experience of God. This is just as, in the analogy from the Star Wars trilogy, encounters with the Dark Side in its disruptive effects did not deprive Obi-Won Kenobi or Luke Skywalker of their ongoing experience of the Force. Granting any force to the argument from evil, the right winner should be decided on holistic terms (Pargetter 154-157).

What about the concern that experiential theistic belief is not universal under similar circumstances? Pargetter affirms that since there are so many who do claim to believe, it seems unlikely that their beliefs are the result of mechanisms malfunctioning in this respect in particular. In the absence of any specific indicators, he is

not drawn to account for the disparity as owing to special abilities or different stimuli, though there is the possibility that God is selective or the stimuli are internal. Believing and unbelieving subjects by all appearances share similar sensory mechanisms. There is no reason to require that theistic beliefs come through some separate special channel. If the differential medium is not one acquired through training comparable to musical skills being taught and sensory capacities being enhanced, then it may have to remain undefined for now. Pargetter is satisfied that a believer need not feel obliged to choose a defeater for one's theism because that experiential belief is not shared by one's evident peers. Could another person lacking that experiential belief rightly receive a testimony to it? On the face of things, lacking independent reasons for considering the theist's belief defeated, or the testimony inadequate, or the theist's mechanisms faulty in a relevant respect, another person without the benefit of the experiential belief would be more than entitled to accept that testimony. Only holistic advantage or gain the other way justifies refusal to do so (Pargetter 158-160). Pargetter emphasizes how different the belief systems will be in the event of acceptance or rejection of theistic beliefs, whether direct experience or testimony is involved as the vehicle. Also, an overall assessment of comparable holistic rationality such as seems necessary to determine the final validity of a claim for proper basicality should be achievable, though admittedly such has not yet been laid out in any fashion commanding consensus (Pargetter 160-161).

Plantinga would, of course, agree with Pargetter that theistic belief lends itself to a more, not less, overall rational set of beliefs. Plantinga shows sensitivity to the importance of consistency in one's epistemic system. But, for Plantinga, faced with an apparently defeating argument acceptable to me from start through to finish, my theistic belief might properly prompt me to abandon some of the premises or inferential connections, or dispute the contention that the conclusion contradicts my confession (RBG 83). More broadly, as a foundationalist Plantinga contests the claim that proper basicality ultimately depends on a holistic rationality which is detached from internal requirements relating to the beliefs within a noetic structure.

Plantinga would judge Pargetter obviously to take rationality and justification in deontological terms. But he would insist that fulfilling rather than failing in one's epistemic duties need not be a matter of satisfying such a standard as Pargetter sets forth. Rather, Plantinga insists on the need for the belief formed in a basic manner to be so formed by competent faculties correctly responding to stimuli in accordance with how such faculties ought to operate in their capacity to achieve their goal of truth. In his own further discussion of rationality as having various facets, he emphasizes how a holistic value such as coherence often fails to capture, and even occasionally conflicts with, a given form of it.[15] Plantinga would submit that his own emphasis on proper functioning cognitive

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[15] WCD 132-146; WPF 173-175.

faculties recognizes that in some situations beliefs are so formed in aim of some legitimate goal other than truth (WPF 26, 42). But, as Pargetter allows a most rational belief system may be marked by the coincidence of belief and truth (Pargetter 159), Plantinga would stress that the same external factors that bestow proper basicality for a theistic belief are also those which confer on that belief a warrant making it knowledge if, as Plantinga holds, the belief is true. He realizes a skeptic will not share our common presupposition of reliability in the proper functioning of our belief forming mechanisms. This does not deter Plantinga from commending that assumption as a legitimate one, that our thus functioning faculties do for the most part deliver the goods, and that the degree of firmness in our beliefs indicates the extent of this reliability in specific instances. Reliability is an integral element, a necessary condition in the warrant package (WPF 17-19, 27-28). In particular Plantinga would say that a belief such as the apostle Paul's, formed suddenly with the Damascus Road experience, was properly basic for him right away, well before Paul was able to make the radical revision in his overall belief structure which its acceptance demanded, away from a rather rational system as he had held. While the situation was somewhat exceptional, for Plantinga other more regular circumstances yield the same sort of right.

5. The Crux of Intrinsic Warrant

Plantinga propounds such a position more pointedly in more recent papers. He picks up on the very challenges Philip Quinn

referred to as powerful potential defeaters, namely, the atheological argument from evil and popular projection accounts for theistic belief. Also addressed is the suggestion that natural theology could prove a crucial factor in attaining rationality for theistic belief in the face of formidable defeaters. Plantinga clearly distinguishes now, as he did not in 1983 with "Reason and Belief in God," two levels of positive epistemic status, justification and warrant, respectively corresponding to what has been called acceptable and successful by Audi (1986, 155). These answer respectively to the liabilities of irresponsible fault, deontological transgression, on the one (internalist) hand, and cognitive flaw, noetic defect, on the (externalist) other. "Clearly this deontological territory of duty and permission is where the whole notion of justification has its natural home. To be justified is to be without blame, to be within your rights, to have done no more than what is permitted, to have violated no duty or obligation, to warrant no blame or censure."[16] Given a basic theistic belief which one finds compelling even upon considerable reflection, neither the lack of noncircular evidence in some available argument for that belief nor the honest awareness of objections on the part of others need make the maintaining of that belief an epistemic offense. This parallels the simple fact that some others' adamant but unconstraining dissent from some of the rest of one's considered beliefs need not make one's own retention of those an epistemic iniquity.[17]

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[16] PNT 292. Compare WCD 3-29 for a more extended discussion.

[17] EP 56-57; PNT 293-294, 298; RBG 33-34.

Returning to a topic which he had earlier treated in some significant measure (Plantinga 1979b), Plantinga reflects further in "Epistemic Probability and Evil" (1992) on the matter of the continuing contention concerning evil, that God's existence is improbable in view of evil's extensive and intensive presence. From the standpoint of intuition the future of such an argument is not promising, and current accounts of probability indicate the same even more since they do not supply the means to pursue the question (EP 39-50). A more workable notion of epistemic probability still does not lend itself to application in the calculus of probabilities (EP 50-53). People have responded variously to the likelihood of God being there given the experience of evil. One not inclined to believe in God otherwise could well be minded because of evil to disbelieve, this even if unconvinced of the stronger incompatibility claim. Such inclination points to some improbability. Even if God was improbable on evil, it would not make him improbable on a larger body of evidence. But Plantinga bypasses any debate about whether God is or is not probable on a total case (EP 53-55). Instead, he hastens to challenge what he calls "the nearly universal" yet "surely unwarranted" assumption attending such discussions on evil, namely, that acceptance of belief in God is warranted solely by propositional evidence (EP 55). Picking up on the thrust of his reply to Quinn (FTR 310-312), Plantinga contends for the weight of that epistemic status conferred by the right sort of experience. Again he invokes his example of the individual whose memory belief (of innocence away from an offence) rightly withstands an imposing pile of propositional evidence which flies in

its face, and appeals anew to the burning bush episode in Moses's life as an instance of this sort of superiority in relation to theistic belief (EP 55-56). Further appeals in his discussion are to the same sorts of illustrations. One is of a person who remembers that he did send in his tax return, and so is not dissuaded in this belief despite being privy to all the propositional evidence to the contrary which his accusers have assembled. The other is a further adaptation of an earlier release (1985a, 61-62): the one who sees pigeons flying around Devil's Tower in front of him believes in their presence there on that experiential basis. This time such belief comes in spite of the fact that whatever propositional evidence is accessible is both substantial and strongly negative.[18]

But what about such an individual as Moses or those in the other examples suffering from a severe malfunction causing honestly but totally mistaken beliefs? Such would leave them not guilty, in any way, of contravening what one is accountable for epistemically, but they would be saddled with some sort of distorting defect. The key question becomes whether, in forming experientially arising basic theistic beliefs, the processing mechanisms involved are working correctly or not.[19] Here Plantinga brings to bear his view of what warrant is. His theory is prompted by the shortcomings of other, especially internalist, accounts on what makes the difference

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[18] EP 59. Hoitenga 212-215 is satisfied with Plantinga's position here; compare above, pp. 76-78.

[19] EP 59; PNT 303-305.

between a merely true belief and knowledge (WCD). Four factors are identified as together crucial for the attaining of this vital value. The first is the proper, as distinct from normal, functioning of the cognitive faculties. This must be conjoined, secondly, with an appropriate environment, congenial for, suited to, their proper operation. The third is that the particular belief forming mechanisms in effect must be functioning in accordance with their "design plan." In other words, they must be operating as they should, being specifically aimed at the purpose of obtaining truth in one's beliefs. The fourth, alluded to earlier, is a high statistical likelihood, objective probability, that beliefs thus engendered will be true, the degree of warrant varying with the degree of firmness in belief. This definition of warrant is subject to various qualifications and the concept also cannot be clearly applied to all conceivable cases. Still, in view of the apparent complexity rather than conciseness of what knowing involves, Plantinga is not dissuaded; he takes pains as well to show how his general epistemology of warrant does not presuppose a theistic metaphysics but fits best with it.[20]

Is warrant present for the basic theist, not just those in the position of a Moses or a Paul, but those many whose experience is quite ordinary? Or is there present rather the sort of epistemic disorder to which the likes of Marx and Freud among others have pointed? This time around, Plantinga does not summarily dismiss such famous projection theorists, and in disparaging language as well.

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[20] Plantinga 1987; PNT 298-303; WCD vii-viii, 212-215; WPF especially viii-ix, 3-47, 194-237.

Attention is drawn to some misrepresentation in Freud's assertion that testimony can be checked out in other fields of knowledge but not in regard to religious claims. But rather than pressing to score points, Plantinga primarily seeks to identify just how the two theorists see theism as an illusion brought on by cognitive defectiveness. The theist will be minded, with Calvin, to see things the other way around, that it is unbelief in God which reflects the malfunction of natural human faculties under the effects of sin.[21]

Who is right in this dispute? Plantinga's response is that the epistemological question is far from being ontologically neutral.

> Your view as to what sort of creature a human being is will determine or at any rate heavily influence your views as to which basic beliefs have warrant; for your view as to what sort of creature a human being is will determine or at any rate heavily influence your views as to what sort of beliefs will be produced in the basic way by properly functioning human cognitive faculties. (PNT 309)

It is at bottom, then, not just an anthropological and ontological dispute, but a theological one, with religious roots. Those who regard humans as created in the divine image will tend to see theistic beliefs as the legitimate products of proper functioning faculties; those who regard humans as coming about by accident in a godless universe may well be attracted to accounts of theistic belief which posit malfunction.[22] This is Plantinga's strongest statement of an

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[21] EP 57-59; PNT 305-309; 1982b, 16-17; RBG 66, 90.

[22] PNT 309-311; EP 60-61; compare WPF 183, n.9.

outlook indicated on several occasions earlier.[23] It is also where he leaves the discussion at present. For him, his theistic metaphysics combined with his theory of warrant satisfies him with confirmation of the Reformed view that the strong basic belief of certain mature theists is, beyond being rational and justified, indeed knowledge. It is in such terms [24] that he would reply to the challenge of those who call for defense of that claim.[25] It is in such terms that he would respond to the challenge of those who call for a declaration of rational responsibility not just right, of obligation not just entitlement, to believe in God.[26]

For Plantinga it is, then, not only epistemically permissible for people to believe in God in the basic way; belief like that may be or may readily become such that they cannot rightly resist or relinquish it. Theists with weaker basic belief may benefit from natural theology to increase the epistemic status of their belief, even possibly raising it to the level of knowledge. Plantinga is prepared to propound several lines of natural theology. While they will not meet traditional standards of universal acceptance for the premises and unanimously approved forms of inference to the conclusion, that will leave them no worse off than any other argument advanced in

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[23] See, for instance, RBG 90; 1985a, 13; FTR 303, 313, n.6.

[24] See, already, Plantinga 1982b, 14-17.

[25] See Hatcher 1986, 85-86, 88, 92 and Van Hook 1981, 15-17; 1985, 1, 7-11.

[26] See Gutting 1985, especially 251-256; compare Mavrodes 1983, especially 195-196.

philosophy. But for those already enjoying a high level of properly experiential, nonevidentially based belief, arguments even of an impressive sort will scarcely serve epistemically to enhance their belief. Why should it, anymore so than would a successful, finally noncircular analogical argument for other minds make a decisive difference for the belief of many on that matter?[27]

Various critics remain unconverted by Plantinga's advanced position, both in particulars and overall. Paul Draper finds a shortcoming with Plantinga's recent response to evil. For Draper, theistic believers frequently have alienation experiences inclining them toward belief in God's indifference. This fact prevents their basic belief in his benevolence, arising out of gratitude experiences, from itself being enough properly to more than withstand any impression that propositional evidence was indeed tilted against God being good. This state of affairs may be likened to a scenario where Plantinga's memory man [28] is confronted by conflicting recollections, some of having been away and innocent of the theft, others of having been present and actually committing it. Since it was the latter which all the outside evidence supported, that rather than the former would be the rationally proper belief (Draper 137-142). As for a counter that the gratitude experiences could confer higher warrant than their opposites, Draper argues that neither an

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[27] PNT 311-312; compare earlier 1983b, especially 57-58, 60-61; RBG 67, 71-73, 86-87.

[28] See above, pp. 82-83, 104-105.

internalist nor externalist version of this can carry. Phenomenological equivalence in the respective experiences hurts the one version; the subject's ignorance concerning whether the positive beliefs were from proper functioning would impair the other version (Draper 142-144). A further counter could be that reconciliation experiences, involving both guilt over doubt and positive reassurance of benevolence, bestow *prima facie* justification for a persuasion that the alienation engendered beliefs are delusions. This can be refuted by considering that "the antecedent possibility of theists feeling guilty about their alienation experiences or feeling reassured that God loves them is almost as great on the assumption that alienation experiences are not delusory as it is on the assumption that alienation experiences are delusory."[29] The nonpropositional warrant itself from such reconciliation experiences in view of this is not nearly enough to hold up against the propositional support going the other way from the allowed belief that external evidence weighs in favor of God's indifference. Draper concludes that the class of mature theists for whom such alienation experiences would be foreign might be so limited as to exclude Jesus himself in view of Mark 15:34 (Draper 145).

Would not Plantinga, for the sake of preserving his approach, perhaps have to bolster his earlier decision to reject alienation experiences as an epistemic problem and to treat them instead as

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[29] Draper 145. In the context, Draper exploits another of Plantinga's examples to support this point. See also Draper 147, n.17.

pastoral? That decision, of course, is unacceptable to Draper.[30] One can envision Plantinga responding that Draper exaggerates the bearing and force of alienation experiences. Whereas for theists gratitude experiences always produce inclinations to believe in God's benevolence, alienation experiences only sometimes incline them toward believing that he is indifferent. More often, Plantinga might add, especially with many mature believers, the inclination is to a protest that by all appearances God is not acting in accord with his goodness, a cry that still implicitly assumes he is benevolent, as in the case of Jesus on the cross. Alienation experiences would, then, not qualify for the role Draper accords them in his argument and analogy. Might Plantinga have problems as well with the utility of an analogy which presents the same cognitive faculties both functioning and malfunctioning, producing such conflicting beliefs, under the same conditions?

On a broader level, challenges are starting to appear also from theistic philosophers concerning the adequacy of Plantinga's externalist account of warrant and the appropriateness of its application to a claim for knowledge in one's basic belief in God.[31] These cannot be canvassed here; hopefully they, along with other

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[30] See Draper 141; compare Wisdo 374.

[31] So, for example, from a reliabilist standpoint, Hasker; from an internalist standpoint, Lee especially 142-150, and Greco especially 174-178, 183-184, along with other essayists in Zagzebski. See also McLeod 1993, 169-182.

enduring major questions, will be addressed in Plantinga's forthcoming Warranted Christian Belief.[32]

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[32] For notice of Warranted Christian Belief see WCD viii, 86, n.27; WPF 48, n.2; 161, n.4; 183, 237.

Conclusion

In contending a proper basicality for belief in God, Alvin Plantinga appeals to analogy with certain paradigm beliefs, including relational beliefs in other persons. More detail would be appropriate concerning the respects in which the latter are parallel. The fact that God personally reveals himself looms large in Plantinga's personal convictions and needs to be expressed in terms of comparison and contrast with how we are led to form beliefs concerning others. Should he not address the question of disparities in confirmation at greater length, indicating to what extent he can avail himself of arguments like those of Alston and can adduce others, again especially with regard to the context of beliefs concerning the communication and character of another? Plantinga does see himself as obliged to give a much fuller account of the element of sin which factors so significantly in his understanding of theistic unbelief (Plantinga 1987, 425); does he not here need to say more with regard to its effects on the proper functioning of believers too? (Wykstra 1989, 437) Ought he not to reply more to the concerns of those who feel he has slighted the role of the will in the matter of believing?[1]

Should not more be said concerning the role which theistic beliefs play in the belief system of those who hold them? Certainly some of those undissuaded by Plantinga remain so because they see

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[1] Among whom are Hoitenga 199-201; Garcia 121, 132-133; Zagzebski 202-203, 221-223.

the fundamental function theistic beliefs take on as a feature distinguishing their rationality in a way he disregards.[2] Such beliefs by their nature come to be held as "absolute presuppositions" or "umbrella beliefs." While not simply subject to narrow evidential legitimation, they do lend themselves to some justification on a holistic, systemic, basis of assessment. Plantinga will still be concerned with what virtues entitle one's belief in God to assume such a significant role rather than with focusing simply on the implications of that belief functioning so influentially as it often will. Nonetheless, does not his advocacy of a foundationalist structuring of one's belief system need to interact more directly in the matter of religious beliefs with those who find that model not nearly as fruitful as what is pictured in nonarchitectural metaphors?[3]

Plantinga needs to address the question of degree of confidence or certitude in basic theistic belief more pointedly than he has thus far. Firmness is a factor in warrant as Plantinga sees it. He has moved from the preoccupation with justified basic belief to the externalist case for the stronger value of warrant as the component which is vital for knowledge. How does the internalist feature of conscious access, regarded as important by believers themselves in their assured sense of contact and communication with God, figure in his equation of what constitutes theistic knowledge for them? Plantinga will be unashamedly drawing on some theology for his

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[2] For instance, Gilman 148-149; Schubert 503-505; Sweet 79.

[3] For example, Pojman 481-482; Mavrodes 1983, 202-204.

further account of warranted Christian belief. He will appropriate Calvin's advocacy that a natural sense of the Deity is implanted in humans. He will appeal as well to some tenets on the witness of the Holy Spirit. How ready will he be to avail himself also of other efforts to commend some theological considerations in philosophical argument?[4]

Plantinga's efforts may be regarded as effectively countering and calling into question the presumptuous contentions of many evidentialists that theistic believers are epistemically irresponsible. He has not shown theistic beliefs to be on a full par of proper basicality with several paradigmatic privileged persuasions. He has contended forcefully for the first-level value in its own right of grounds, nonpropositional sources of warrant, over against an insistence on the necessity of second-level evidence in the form of beliefs.[5] Two of his favorite, though extraordinary, examples for circumstantially grounded rather than discursively evidenced theistic beliefs arise in the experiences of Moses and Paul. Propositional content, words heard by the two, contribute to the formation of those beliefs. Plantinga does not address the implications of this in those cases. He also should do more in setting forth the case that background theistic beliefs are acquired in a basic way with warrant through testimony, especially given Plantinga's awareness that liabilities attend other chains of witness and that

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[4] Such as those made, for example, by Evans 1988, 1991; also Talbot.

[5] This language of levels is his terminology in WPF 137.

many suspect similar deficiencies bear on the tradition he accepts. Another question worthy of further treatment: How can firsthand experiential theistic beliefs draw on a background conviction without being quite dependent on it and its credentials?

Plantinga is an anti-evidentialist in a highly qualified sense which can still benefit from further elucidation on his part, especially in regard to the provenance of theistic beliefs. He has tenaciously contended for the legitimacy of claiming that one's basic theistic belief may rightly retain propriety not only without the support of external considerations, but even in the face of contrary evidence. He realizes, as do many of his interlocutors,[6] that many Christian believers will be more concerned with the truthfulness of their theism than with its qualifying as rationally respectable, more concerned with whether their theistic beliefs are truly knowledge, rather than just defensible against a viewpoint quickly inclined to dismiss them. Plantinga's advocacy of this stronger claim for Christian belief can certainly afford to be augmented by a good deal of additional argumentation, as advertised for the yet to be published third Warrant volume, even if that work will reissue the statement that this question is not by any means epistemologically neutral.

Michael L. Czapkay Sudduth has very recently (1994, 1995a) drawn upon William Alston's multi-level foundationalist

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[6] For example, Appleby 139; Mavrodes 208-209; Sweet 80; compare Steuer 247; Langtry 153; Parsons 52-54, 60.

epistemology, most fully enunciated in some essays collected for Epistemic Justification (1989), as a valid framework allowing the main contentions of both Reformed epistemologists and evidentialists to be incorporated in a noncontradictory fashion. Mention here will be confined to a summary of his thrust and of its import for the ongoing discussion Plantinga has prompted.

Following Alston, Czapkay Sudduth [7] advises that a distinction needs to be made between first-level, nonepistemic beliefs, and their higher-level doxastic correlates, epistemic beliefs about the former. Beliefs on both levels need to be adequately grounded for their justification; but whereas conditions alone may sometimes avail for the first-level, the second-level always require reasons, or mediate, discursive justification. Within the former group one putative belief that p would be the belief that God exists. On this level Czapkay Sudduth would side with Plantinga that immediate justification can suffice. Such a belief will be properly basic, legitimately uninferred, or "unreflectively rational" as he would put it, under the appropriate conditions.[8] Evidentialism need not apply to theistic or many other beliefs here: even people able to reflect on the adequacy of their grounds often do not do so while in the process of acquiring beliefs that do in fact have an adequate grounding.

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[7] See especially Czapkay Sudduth 1994, 30-34; 1995a, 388-391.

[8] Although he does not feel compelled here to spell out its components, Czapkay Sudduth (1994, 380-381, 394, n.9; 1995a, 26), like the later Plantinga and Alston, favors a truth-conducive rationality involving some sort of reliabilist constraint over a merely deontological rationality stressing fulfillment of epistemic obligations.

In the second group would be beliefs about the epistemic status of the lower-level belief, for example, beliefs that p (here "God exists") is a rational belief, or that p is immediately justified, or is formed in a reliable manner, or is based on adequate grounds. These latter beliefs call for meta-reasons along the lines that there are valid epistemic principles or properties that render immediate justification and that such pertain to this particular lower-level belief that p, that "God exists." The fact that such meta-reasons may and must be adduced for justification at the second-level means that evidentialism now comes into play. Indeed, this is the stage at which such reflective rationality should apply, since it is constrained by the social premium put on answering objections by showing an internalist awareness of one's being in a positive epistemic position conducive to possessing true beliefs. One does this by appealing to adequate reasons, or at least indicating one's consciousness that such acceptable reasons are accessible. Czapkay Sudduth's claim (1995a, 37-40) is that by respecting evidentialism as a requirement for higher-level, epistemic beliefs, he specifically situates it at a precise point where it answers to the intuitions which have traditionally prompted it.

Rejection of the evidentialist requirement as necessary at the lower-level respects the central tenet of Reformed epistemology that theistic belief too can be rightly evoked directly, apart from any reasons. It also allows the accompanying contention that belief in God is indeed normally better grounded in immediate experience, so that a noetic structure with theistic belief properly in the

foundations is usually epistemically superior to one where it is nonbasic. But Reformed epistemology does not rule out the applicability and consideration of reasons at the second-level, and thus does not preclude indirect evidential support. Rather it permits the logically possible and psychologically common phenomenon of one holding a belief in the basic way on appropriate grounds, thus with immediate justification or unreflective rationality, even as one is reflectively rational, aware that adequate reasons, mediate justification, are at hand in support of such a belief. It also grants that justification may be shared, partly contributed by both sources, and that a combination of the two may give the strongest noetic structure. For Czapkay Sudduth himself, a situation where a subject's basic belief benefits from both appropriate grounds and adequate reasons would be "epistemic icing on the cognitive cake" (Czapkay Sudduth 1995a, 39).

Czapkay Sudduth notes that the Calvinist tradition concerning apologetics has been divided between presuppositionalists and evidentialists, despite their agreement on the preeminent value of immediate justification for theistic belief. The former have stressed belief in God as a necessary epistemological starting point, a tenet not to be subjected to establishment by argumentation. The latter have allowed that showing such support need not constitute compromise and might rather serve a worthwhile function. Czapkay Sudduth sees the contention between the two Calvinist schools as tied up with the question of whether and how Christian convictions regarded as experientially privileged, produced by the Holy Spirit, can be

publicly commended as epistemically solid when such a showing involves discursive justification according to generally accepted canons, standards at least somewhat skeptical of the special mode being claimed. Reformers need not restrict the apologetic enterprise to the negative task of simply showing consistency in Christian beliefs and the opposite in their competitors. Alston's bi-level epistemology allows the indirect assessment of first-level, "privileged epistemic state" beliefs by requisite evaluation of the publicly accessible reasons offered in support of their higher-level epistemic correlates. A Reformed apologist can and ought to positively contend at the higher level for the effectiveness and applicability of the properties regarded as conferring immediate justification on those privileged lower-level beliefs. In so doing the apologist is not only directly arguing for the legitimacy of the correlate beliefs, but also, from a vantage point one step removed, evidentially promoting the basic beliefs themselves. Advancing reasons for justification of the higher-level persuasions in effect commends the lower-level convictions they are about, even as it recognizes the distinctive nature of those bottom-line beliefs. Thus a more comprehensive apologetic may be carried out than has been countenanced by some Reformed stalwarts who have failed to discern clearly that reasons may appropriately be adduced for one's *taking as* immediately justified, beliefs that *are* immediately justified (Czapkay Sudduth 1994).

It will be up to evidentialists to say whether Czapkay Sudduth has done justice to their concerns in situating their

requirement specifically at the second-level. Plantinga, if still persuaded of the pull of classical foundationalism on many of them, will be doubtful of this. But he may need to concede that this alternative account of the evidentialist impulse is better placed than his own. There seems to be no major obstacle in the way for him to endorse this framework as helpfully clarifying the way in which Reformed epistemologists may remain committed to their core convictions and still show sensitivity to evidentialist sentiments in the manner desired by the likes of Mavrodes, Wykstra, and Kretzmann. They will thus more readily engage themselves in positive argumentation for the purposes of confirming and commending their convictions. The new account admittedly leaves work yet to be done on how combinations of first and second-level justification are to be construed and on how higher-level evidentialism can be fitted into Plantinga's position on warrant.[9] Still, it does indicate that a complementary relation of internalist and externalist values can be expounded to an extent that Plantinga has not yet achieved.

In another recent complementary piece (1995b), Czapkay Sudduth makes a case for Calvin's advocacy of a mediate natural theology. His thesis challenges Plantinga's reading of certain passages early in the Institutes as promoting direct experiential belief in God. The Genevan Reformer is better to be understood as

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[9] Czapkay Sudduth 1995a, 43-44, nn. 25, 28. There is some affinity between Czapkay Sudduth's language of levels in beliefs and justification and Plantinga's language of levels in WPF 137.

referring to nonbasic beliefs. These emerge out of a structurally inferential mediation in which the subject's belief is based on other beliefs without being reasoned from those through a conscious process of inference.[10] Nor, judging from his commentary on Paul's preaching to pagans in Acts, does Calvin despise instances when theistic beliefs might derive from an episodic inference of which the believing individual is explicitly aware. While Calvin emphasizes the superiority of the Spirit as a source of strong belief in the credentials of Scripture, he realizes the educational and confirmational relevance reasoned arguments may still have for those whose faith rests finally in the inner testimony of the Spirit. Here Czapkay Sudduth concurs with Plantinga's more recent allowance (PNT 311-312) that mediate natural theology might occasionally provide additional warrant for theistic belief on the part of some who are already, albeit weakly, assenting. Again, it could also enhance reflective rationality by furnishing satisfactory reasons for one's higher-level confidence that one's basic belief in God is well-grounded. The upshot here is that people are still finding Plantinga's position imprecise and unpersuasive on when a belief is really basic and when it is not. He will have to do more to convince them of the legitimacy of calling basic beliefs which, while not involving explicit inference, implicitly build on others. He is now also faced with the challenge of defending his interpretation of Calvin.

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[10] Czapkay Sudduth 1995b, 57-61, with acknowledgment of his dependence again on Alston and of indebtedness for the distinction between structurally and episodically inferential belief to Robert Audi's The Structure of Justification (1993).

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