

REVIEW ARTICLES

PLANTINGA ON WARRANT*

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Warrant: The Current Debate (hereafter *Debate*) and *Warrant and Proper Function* (hereafter *Function*) develop the ideas underlying Plantinga's Gifford Lectures in Aberdeen in 1987 and his Wilde Lectures in Oxford in 1988. Along with the promised third volume, entitled *Warranted Christian Belief*, they constitute the latest in Plantinga's extensive and extended discussions on the rationality of belief in general and of theistic belief more specifically.

The burden of these two volumes is to discuss, critique, and suggest an answer to the question of just what it is that "epistemizes" true belief, or better, what quality or quantity is it, enough of which turns true belief into knowledge? The (more recent) historic answer to that question has centered on an internalist tradition that has emphasized the deontological character of knowledge. Plantinga wants to show the inadequacy of that tradition. Volume one sets out to delineate the contemporary versions of deontological internalism, while volume two seeks to build a positive alternative which is, not surprisingly, externalist.

In volume one, Plantinga seeks to show why it is that classical foundationalism is all but dead. More specifically, he seeks to refute the contention, consonant with classical foundationalism, that fulfillment of epistemic duty and obligation is of crucial importance for epistemic justification. And thus deontology in epistemology implies internalism.

Chap. 1 of *Debate* connects the notions of justification, internalism and deontology. "The basic internalist idea, of course, is that what determines whether a belief is warranted for a person are factors or states in some sense internal to that person" (p. 5). Justification relates primarily to the "justified true belief" tradition of Anglo-American epistemology, which tradition has been in some disarray since Gettier's 1963 three-page critique.¹ Classical deontologism stems (at least) from "those twin towers of Western epistemology, Descartes and Locke" (p. 11).

* Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. ix, 228. \$39.95; \$19.95, paper); id., *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. x, 243. \$39.95; \$19.95, paper).

¹ E. L. Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis* 23 (1963) 121-23.

Chaps. 2-3 are an attempt to explain and critique the “dean of contemporary epistemology,” Roderick Chisholm. In chap. 2, Plantinga scrutinizes “classical Chisholmian internalism” as he calls it. Consider just one of (classical) Chisholm’s principles of justification, Chisholm’s P5.²

P5a For every x , if (i) x perceptually takes there to be something that is F , and if (ii) his perceiving an F is epistemically in the clear for x , then it is beyond reasonable doubt for x that he perceives something that is F .

P5b If conditions (i) and (ii) are fulfilled and furthermore x ’s perceiving something that is F is a member of a set of propositions which mutually support each other and each of which is beyond reasonable doubt for x , then it is evident for x that he perceives something that is F . [P. 40]

Plantinga sets his counter examples against P5a.

Consider Paul, an avowed Kantian who has determined to edit his cognitive nature, demonstrating his autonomy from natural tendencies. On occasions when Paul is aurally appeared to³ in that church-bell kind of way, he is able to form the belief that he is appeared to orange-ly. As Paul is walking and is thus aurally appeared to, he believes he is appeared to orange-ly.

Now what can Chisholm’s P5a offer to help refute Paul’s Kantian belief? Nothing, according to Plantinga. Paul is epistemically in the clear, in the way that Chisholm defines such. (“Epistemically in the clear for x ” is a proposition such that it is not disconfirmed by the conjunction of all those propositions such that it is more reasonable for S to accept them than their negations.)⁴ Paul forms his beliefs in accordance with his epistemic policy. And they were formed in accord with his determination to live dutifully. But his belief(s) cannot have positive epistemic status (justification) for Paul. Paul has satisfied P5, but is without justification in his belief(s). Classical Chisholmianism’s deontology is insufficient for justification.

But perhaps “post-classical Chisholmian internalism” (considered in chap. 3) will fare better. The primary difference between classical and post-classical Chisholmianism is Chisholm’s switch from epistemic duty fulfillment to reasonableness or value. Consider Chisholm’s reduction of epistemic concepts to the concept of intrinsic value:

(ED8) Believing p is epistemically preferable for S to believing q = def. Those of S ’s purely psychological properties which do not include believing p and believing q are necessarily such that having those properties and believing p is intrinsically preferable to having those properties and believing q . [P. 55; this is Plantinga’s construction of Chisholm.]

² Roderick M. Chisholm, *The Foundations of Knowing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982) 21. Chisholm’s principle is restated, with slight alterations, by Plantinga.

³ The locution “appeared to,” typical in analytic epistemology literature, is designed to highlight the empirical aspect of the knowing situation.

⁴ See Chisholm, *The Foundations of Knowing*, 18ff.

Given this construction, there is no quarrel with the fact that some belief/evidence-base pairs display more intrinsic value than others. The problem is that Chisholm proposes that the only thing that can confer warrant upon a belief is my exemplifying an appropriate evidence-base. But suppose a deceptive demon so scrambles my memory beliefs so that there is mass distribution of those facts which do support those beliefs, and so that only a small part of those things I remember are true. Now suppose I do in fact remember something that is true. I will be (deontologically) justified in that belief (because what I believe will be connected with the proper evidence-base, and because I will have done my epistemic best in my belief), yet the belief will have little or no warrant for me due to the fact that, though what I believe is true, the belief is true only by accident. It could just as well have been a belief that is associated with the wrong phenomenon. So, more must be said for a belief to have warrant, and the “more” cannot simply stop at intrinsic value.

Note also that the key ingredient in post-classical Chisholmianism is evidence. In order to show that such a view is incorrect, all one need do is construe a situation in which one’s belief is true because such a belief matches the evidence and another situation wherein the same belief with the same evidence is false, because, due to some deceptive demon (or Alpha-Centaurian), the evidence one has in the latter situation does not match the actual experience. So neither classical nor post-classical Chisholmianism can confer justification on a proposition.

Plantinga’s attention is turned next toward coherentism as a contender for supplying justification. Plantinga’s approach to an explanation of coherentism *überhaupt* is to compare it to foundationalism (pp. 67–68). Such a comparison provides at least two significant differences. First of all, coherentism, unlike foundationalism, affirms the necessity of circular reasoning. Coherence requires that if one’s belief, B_2 , gets its warrant from or, more generally, is coherent with B_1 , then B_3 must itself be coherent with B_2 (and B_1) and B_4 with B_n , etc. Eventually, however, B_n must itself cohere with B_1 and we are back to the beginning again. Because there is no (at least implicit) properly basic belief in a coherentist structure, there can be no relationship such that warrant or justification is obtained from a foundational belief. Coherence alone is the source of warrant and thus circular reasoning is inevitable.

Plantinga insists that “a noetic structure that displays a circle in its basis relation displays a . . . warrant defect.” Such is the case, he says, because no proposition can obtain all of its warrant from itself. There are no completely self-warranted propositions. Second, if it is the case that every belief and each belief is warranted only to the extent that it coheres with the rest of one’s beliefs, then coherence becomes, almost exclusively, a doxastic relation, which leads us to our second contrast with foundationalism.

In coherentist theories, there is a (at least implicit) neglect of any kind of belief/experience relationship. Plantinga’s “Epistemically Inflexible Climber” will serve as a paradigm example of the problem:

Ric is climbing Guide's Wall, on Storm Point in the Grand Tetons; having just led the difficult next to last pitch, he is seated on a comfortable ledge, bringing his partner up. He believes that Cascade Canyon is down to his left, that the cliffs of Mt. Owen are directly in front of him, that there is a hawk gliding in lazy circles 200 feet below him, that he is wearing his new *Fire* rock shoes, and so on. His beliefs, we may stipulate, are coherent. Now add that Ric is struck by a wayward burst of high energy cosmic radiation. This induces a cognitive malfunction; his beliefs become fixed, no longer responsive to changes in experience. No matter what his experience, his beliefs remain the same. At the cost of considerable effort his partner gets him down and, in a desperate last ditch attempt at therapy, takes him to the opera in nearby Jackson, where the New York Metropolitan Opera on tour is performing *La Traviata*. Ric is appeared to in the same way as everyone else there; he is inundated by wave after wave of golden sound. Sadly enough, the effort at therapy fails; Ric's beliefs remain fixed and wholly unresponsive to his experience; he still believes that he is on the belay ledge at the top of the next to last pitch of Guide's Wall. [P. 82]

The point, of course, is to show how coherentism's insistence on an exclusively doxastic structure can easily lead one to deny knowledge, though one may affirm coherence. It also seems to show that coherence is not sufficient for warrant.

Plantinga also seeks to show that coherence is not necessary for warrant. The examples revolve around one's believing, or attempting to believe, that which one cannot support experientially. For example, an eminent Oxford epistemologist convinces me that no one is ever appeared to redly (to use the Chisholmian locution). I am walking down the street and am startled by the siren of a fire truck. I turn to look and am appeared to redly. Due to the influence of the eminent Oxford epistemologist, being thus appeared to is incoherent with my noetic structure. However, it does have warrant for me. Thus, coherence is neither sufficient nor necessary for warrant (pp. 82-83).

It will not follow that coherence is not a source of warrant, only that it is not the source of warrant. Coherentism, according to Plantinga, is false. Its primary fallacy, it seems, is its tentative relationship with experience. As an exclusively doxastic relation, coherentism will not suffice.

There is another way to construe coherentism, says Plantinga, which is much more charitable. Perhaps the coherentist is really a foundationalist in disguise. Perhaps he is construing coherence as the condition for properly basic beliefs. He is asserting a situation in which warrant is acquired "without being accepted on the evidential basis of other beliefs" (pp. 78-79). The coherentist is not touting circular (or cylindrical) reasoning but is instead proposing a new source for warrant. Rather than warrant transmission from properly basic to nonbasic beliefs, the pure coherentist will see every belief that coheres as basic just because of its coherence. Every coherent belief, then, is properly basic. Of course, as we saw above, a belief acquires no warrant because of its relation to experience and thus the Epistemically Inflexible Climber and the Oxford Epistemologist's Student.

In classical foundationalism, a belief is warranted (or justified) either by its inclusion as a properly basic belief or by the transfer of warrant (or justification) from the properly basic belief to a belief inferred. In other words, proper basicity is a source of warrant (or justification). Though coherentism will have its different nuances, we could say that, generally speaking, coherentism holds that coherence alone is a source of warrant (or justification) and further that nothing else is a source of warrant. So however we determine to conceive of coherentism, either as an alternative epistemological structure in its own right or as an alternative foundationalist position, coherentism fails.

Lest he be accused of defeating a straw man, Plantinga takes on two different types of coherentism, one proposed by Laurence Bonjour,⁵ and the other dealing with the notion of probability and coherence, called commonly "Bayesian" coherentism. Plantinga looks at each of these in chaps. 5 and 6, respectively, of *Debate*. Both accounts are extremely complex and would take us well beyond the scope of this review were we to outline them in detail. It should be helpful, however, to notice the nuances present in each of the two accounts. Not surprisingly, Plantinga contends that neither Bonjourian nor Bayesian coherentism will suffice for warrant.

It is Bonjour's work that provides the grist for Plantinga's warrant mill in chap. 5. Aside from Plantinga's intriguing discussion of reason in this chapter of the book, he concludes that Bonjour has given us no satisfactory account of warrant within a coherentist structure. As a matter of fact, Bonjour's system seems to disqualify itself from the race. One example of this disqualification would be Bonjour's notion of Doxastic Presumption, which notion affirms that my metabeliefs are approximately correct. If the Doxastic Presumption is not true, then my coherence beliefs will not be warranted. But how can we simply accept the Doxastic Presumption as true without being justified in holding my metabeliefs? If I am not justified in holding my metabeliefs (beliefs about what I believe), how can my other beliefs, dependent on the Doxastic Presumption, be true?

Plantinga now turns us to a consideration of Bayesian coherentism, called by some "Personalism," by others "Subjectivism," but by most "Bayesianism" given that its adherents recommend change of belief in accordance with a generalization of "Bayes' Theorem." Plantinga notes that Bayes' Theorem is "named after its discoverer, the famous 17th century clergyman Thomas Bayes, who allegedly found it useful in gambling. (It is not recorded whether he found it useful in fulfilling his pastoral duties.)" (p. 114).

The better part of this chapter's discussion and the next is extremely complex. We mention it here, however, as another representative of coherentism which, again, Plantinga finds wanting in its ability to produce warrant. Not surprisingly, Bayesianism is neither sufficient nor necessary for

⁵ Laurence Bonjour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

warrant. "To satisfy coherence . . . I must believe each necessary truth . . . to the maximal degree. But clearly I can know a great deal without doing that" (p. 126). We can, contra Bayesianism, know much even if we know that our full beliefs are inconsistent on the whole. Bayesianism is not necessary for warrant.

Neither is it sufficient. Here Plantinga reverts back again to his analysis of coherentism, and in this case Bayesian coherentism, as a doxastic theory. Bayesianism "says nothing . . . about how my beliefs should change in response to experience" (p. 129). We need only remember here the Epistemically Inflexible Climber. Coherentisms—*überhaupt*, Bonjourian, or Bayesian—none are able to produce a context suitable for warranted true belief. Though their respective structures attempt to provide a context for knowledge, knowledge is far too elusive to be held by the weak links of coherentist epistemology.

But there is now a "new boy on the block" (p. 183), an epistemology that is making some progress in the literature as seeking to set forth an alternative theory of how we come to know, an alternative epistemological structure. It is a theory called, generally, reliabilism. In another, related, article, Plantinga gives us a summary model from which we may be able to critique reliabilist epistemologies: "[C]ome up with an appropriate pathological process type of the right degree of generality which is in fact reliable, but (due to the pathology involved) does not confer much by way of [warrant] on the beliefs in its output."⁶

Let us take Plantinga's objections to Dretske as a paradigm case of reliabilism. Plantinga concludes his analysis of Dretske's reliabilist account with this formulation:

(D₅) **K** knows that **s** is **F** if and only if **K** believes that **s** is **F** and there is a state of affairs **r**'s being **G** such that (1) **r**'s being **G** causes **K** to believe that **s** is **F** and (2) $P\{(\mathbf{s} \text{ is } \mathbf{F})/(\mathbf{r}'\text{s being } \mathbf{G} \ \& \ \mathbf{k})\} = 1$ and $P\{(\mathbf{s} \text{ is } \mathbf{F})/\mathbf{k}\} < 1$.

Though a fair and thorough analysis of this formulation would take us far afield, it will help to see just what exactly Plantinga is saying in (D₅). Dretske wants to account for the way in which someone knows that something is a fact. **K** knows that **s** is **F** = **K**'s belief that **s** is **F** is caused (or causally sustained) by the information that **s** is **F**.⁷ In order to account for such, Dretske proposes that knowledge must include the fact that one's belief that something is a fact is caused by the information that something is a fact. As Plantinga seeks to analyze what Dretske could mean by the "information that **s** is **F**," he runs into areas of probability and of background knowledge. On the notion of probability, the probability of something like "Susan is jogging" will be difficult to discern, and Plantinga

⁶ Alvin Plantinga, "Positive Epistemic Status and Proper Function," in *Philosophical Perspectives 2: Epistemology* (ed. James Tomberlin; Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview, 1988) 31.

⁷ Fred I. Dretske, *Knowledge and the Flow of Information* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1981) 86.

confesses to no reasonably satisfactory answer to the problem, nor does Dretske address it. What he does address, however, is the notion of just how information is received and is relative to particular persons. It is received, says Dretske, when a signal having a certain property (F') causes one to believe that s is F . Not only so, but the signal carrying such information is determined on the basis of the probability of s 's being F , given the signal, and one's background knowledge (k), is less than 1 (p. 194). If I already know that s is F , the probability of s 's being F relative to my background knowledge is 1 and no signal (r) carries the information that s is F relative to me. But if I do not know that s is F , then the information carried to me by any state of affairs whose signal (r) combined with what I do know (k) equals 1 and results in my knowledge. Thus, (D_5) is now understood to say that I know that something is a fact if I believe it is a fact and there is a state of affairs such that its signal causes me to believe that that thing is a fact and the probability of its being a fact on the state of affairs combined with my background knowledge is 1 and the probability of its being a fact on my background knowledge (alone) is less than 1. This is the probability notion of reliabilism in which one is said to know a true proposition if one believes it and if the right probability relations hold between the proposition and "its significant other" (p. 192).

But, not surprisingly, (D_5) will not account for warrant. Consider a situation, the Case of the Epistemically Serendipitous Lesion: K suffers from a brain lesion that seriously disturbs his noetic structure causing him to believe wildly false propositions. It also causes him to believe that he is suffering from a brain lesion. Now, K knows that s is F . Furthermore, K 's belief that s is F is caused by his brain lesion and the probability of his suffering from such on his background knowledge and his knowledge that he is suffering from such is 1 (because he knows he is). Yet the probability of his suffering from such on his background knowledge alone is less than 1 (because the brain lesion caused the knowledge). All of the conditions of (D_5) are met, but surely K does not know he is suffering from a brain lesion, or at least we can say that his knowledge is unwarranted. He has no evidence that he is; as a matter of fact, (let's say) he has the strongest possible evidence to the contrary! So, again, the objective fact of the matter is known, but the way in which the knowledge was obtained is highly suspect.

There is more that could be outlined in this first and most fascinating volume. We have not looked at all at some of Plantinga's other examples of, e.g., coherentism and reliabilism, nor have we looked at "Pollockian Quasi-Internalism." However, enough has been said to illustrate the main point of this first volume: All epistemological structures claiming to provide justification for knowledge provide neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for that quality or quantity, enough of which epistemizes true belief. Of course, Plantinga will, in volume two, provide a "first approximation" of such an epistemology.

Thus, the simple conclusion to a most complex volume is that epistemology (in the Anglo-American tradition, at least) is unable to account for knowledge. Given such a conclusion, it is tempting to join the chorus of voices proclaiming the death of epistemology itself. But such a chorus is premature. There is an epistemological option, according to Plantinga, which holds promise for warrant. Such is the content of volume two.

Volume two of Plantinga's (projected) three-volume series develops an externalistic account of belief in which justification, now more aptly discussed as warrant, depends on that which is external to the believer. One can readily begin to see how and why such an externalist account has appeal, given the failure of the internalist tradition noted above. Any externalist account will avoid situations such as the Epistemically Serendipitous Lesion, the Epistemically Inflexible Climber, etc. But further details are necessary.

Warrant and Proper Function, as the title indicates, seeks to develop a "proper function" analysis of true belief. And the content of the entire volume can be easily summarized:

According to the central and paradigmatic core of our notion of warrant (so I say) a belief **B** has warrant for you if and only if (1) the cognitive faculties involved in the production of **B** are functioning properly . . . ; (2) your cognitive environment is sufficiently similar to the one for which your cognitive faculties are designed; (3) the triple of the design plan governing the production of the belief in question involves, as purpose or function, the production of true beliefs (and the same goes for elements of the design plan governing the production of input beliefs to the system in question); and (4) the design plan is a good one: that is, there is a high statistical or objective probability that a belief produced in accordance with the relevant segment of the design plan in that sort of environment is true. Under these conditions, furthermore, the degree of warrant is given by some monotonically increasing function of the strength of **S**'s belief that **B**. This account of warrant, therefore, depends essentially upon the notion of proper function. [*Function*, p. 194]

The externalist notion of warrant, after all is said and done and after it has been shown that no other account is either necessary or sufficient, hinges on proper functioning epistemic faculties, aimed at truth in an epistemically appropriate environment. And one cannot overlook the centrality of the design plan in such an account. As a matter of fact, Plantinga sees the design plan and proper function as interdefinable notions. Our epistemic faculties are working properly when they are working in accord with how they were designed to work. Thus, one may take the Epistemically Inflexible Climber, the Epistemically Serendipitous Lesion, the Oxford Epistemologist's Student, the avowed Kantian, or a host of others and discern a black thread of trouble running through each; each one labored under improperly functioning epistemic faculties or faculties aimed at less than the truth.

It is important to attempt to understand something of the relevant history behind Plantinga's new approach to epistemology. His first attempt to come to grips with the relationship of theistic belief to justification or rationality was in *God and Other Minds*.⁸ In that book, Plantinga sought to show, among other things, that one's belief in God was rational just in case belief in other minds was rational. He worked through the analogical argument for other minds, concluding that such an argument was inconclusive, at best. Even though inconclusive, however, hardly anyone could seriously dispute the fact that other persons, other minds, do exist (there was a kind of *pragmatic* rationality that mandated it, the kind of rationality that frustrated Hume when he left his study to play backgammon). If we can affirm the existence of other minds without conclusive argument, then surely we can affirm the existence of God without conclusive argument, or at least we have a right to do so.⁹ And in this, Plantinga set the stage for what some have called a "parity thesis" with respect to theistic belief. The best that the argument in *God and Other Minds* can accomplish, therefore, is to set belief in God as rational relative to belief in other minds.

After the publication of *God and Other Minds*, Plantinga's epistemological bombshell exploded via his article, "The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology."¹⁰ With that, Plantinga set himself firmly against the notion that one's theistic belief needed evidence in order to be rational or justified or warranted. The "Reformed Objection" led to his own description of his approach as the "New Reformed Epistemology." What was "new" about it was that it went squarely against the "received tradition" in epistemology, i.e., classical foundationalism. What was "Reformed" about it was that he was convinced that the Reformers were themselves rejecting foundationalism, however clumsily, in their suspicion of natural theology. He began to argue, therefore, for the proper basicity of theistic belief. His argument would run something like this: The foundationalist argues that properly basic beliefs are those which are either incorrigible, self-evident,

⁸ Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967).

⁹ It is worth mentioning here that Plantinga saw himself, in *God and Other Minds*, as uncritically accepting the premises of epistemic evidentialism in his refutation of the irrationality of theistic belief. His *Warranted Christian Belief* will discuss this matter in some detail.

¹⁰ Alvin Plantinga, "The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 54 (1980) 191. This article, originally an address to the American Catholic Philosophical Association in April, 1980, has been reprinted in *Christian Scholar's Review* 11 (1982) 187-197 and in *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition* (ed. Hendrik Hart, Johann van der Hoeven, and Nicholas Wolterstorff; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983) 363-84. A revised version can also be found in Part III of Plantinga's chapter, "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Rationality* (ed. Nicholas Wolterstorff and Alvin Plantinga; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982) 63-73. The number of reprints and the responses evoked, particularly in the *Christian Scholar's Review*, indicate the significance of this article's impact in establishing what Plantinga called the "New Reformed Epistemology" as a position with which to be reckoned. It seems to me that this is the article that should be seen as central to Plantinga's epistemological development; his *God and Other Minds* looked forward to it and his warrant series looks back to it.

or evident to the senses. He further argues that all other beliefs can only be believed on the basis of properly basic beliefs. But if that is so, then what of my belief that the world did not come into existence ten minutes ago, or that I had breakfast this morning or that my wife is not a robot but is in fact another person? Those beliefs do not fit the category of properly basic beliefs: they are neither self-evident nor evident to the senses, neither are they incorrigible. But neither do I believe them on the basis of other, foundational, beliefs. I do not infer from self-evident premises to any of those beliefs. Yet it would be difficult to convince me that those beliefs are unjustified or otherwise irrational.

Such is the case with belief in God as well. First, it need not fit neatly into the categories of classical foundationalism. Other rational and justified beliefs will not fit either. Second, because we may rationally or justifiably or warrantably hold those beliefs, we may also rationally or justifiably or warrantably hold belief in God. The evidential objector (one who insists on evidence for theistic belief) is misguided. The criteria that he wants to impose on theistic belief cannot be imposed on many of his own beliefs. Thus his demand for evidence is arbitrary and confused and belief in God takes its place alongside belief in other minds and other properly basic beliefs.

Why is it, given a multitude of experiences, that both theist and nontheist can generate paradigm beliefs and only the theist can generate theistic beliefs? That is a question that Plantinga must answer. We will look at this in a bit more detail below, so for now we can simply state that what Plantinga has done is reduce belief in God to secondary epistemic status and thus in so doing has, in fact, destroyed the foundation upon which any "problem cases" such as belief in other minds or "paradigm cases" such as memory beliefs must rest. Theistic belief cannot take its place among other, "universal" beliefs without significant compromise and insurmountable problems.

In his latest volumes on warrant, Plantinga is arguing for a naturalized epistemology: "striking the naturalistic pose is all the rage these days, and it's a great pleasure to be able to join the fun" (*Function*, 46). Naturalized epistemology can be seen, according to Plantinga, in at least two different ways. From one perspective, a naturalized epistemology is one in which the notion of *normativity* is denied, or at least relegated to less than first class status which, as he says in *Debate*, is against the epistemological tradition. A naturalized epistemology would eliminate deontological notions from the forefront of its theory. This, of course, is quite radical from a historical perspective but it is also quite consistent with what Plantinga has been trying to do. The most extreme version of naturalized epistemology would attempt to replace epistemology with psychology (p. 45).¹¹

¹¹ Two examples given by Plantinga are Hilary Kornblith, *Naturalizing Epistemology* (Cambridge: MIT, 1985), and the more extreme approach in W. v. o. Quine, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969).

Plantinga argues for a naturalistic epistemology in the milder sense. There is a normativity, but it is not deontological. “This is the use in which we say, of a damaged knee, or a diseased pancreas, or a worn brake shoe, that it no longer functions as it ought to.” So Plantinga joins the naturalistic band. However, he also thinks that naturalistic epistemology is ill-named and it is just here that we begin to see something of a theistic argument.

In the first place, [naturalistic epistemology] is quite compatible with, for example, supernatural theism; indeed the most plausible way to think of warrant, from a theistic perspective, is in terms of naturalistic epistemology. And second . . . , naturalism in epistemology flourishes in the context of a theistic view of human beings: naturalism in epistemology requires supernaturalism in anthropology. [P. 46]

Plantinga argues his point at the end of *Function*; and his argument tends to go, first, with naturalism in epistemology, and then with supernaturalism in metaphysics.

Can't anyone, theist or not, see that a horse, say, is suffering from a disease . . . ? Can't anyone see that an injured bird has a wing that isn't working properly? That an arthritic hand does not function properly, or that a damaged rotator cuff doesn't work as it ought? Wright seems right: “it seems to me that the notion of an organ having a function—both in everyday conversation and in biology—has no strong theological commitments.” Specifically, it seems to me consistent, appropriate, and even common for an atheist to say that the function of the kidney is elimination of metabolic wastes. [P. 198]

The notion of proper function, then, as an epistemic notion, is something that all and any could understand and put to (epistemic) good use. In this sense, it is a naturalized epistemology. But it is a naturalized epistemology that, as we saw in the last section, has at its root the design plan and all that such entails.

However, Plantinga attempts to show that one who is a metaphysical naturalist will have trouble making sense of epistemological naturalism. And all of the examples of naturalistic explanations of proper function that Plantinga mentions fall prey to his basic counterexample: A madman gains control and orders his scientists to induce significant mutations into selected victims. The mutations spread out of control so that, after a few generations, virtually all people function in this mutated state. Is this mutation now an example of proper function? Can we say that the perpetual mutation is now the example of what it means to function properly in an appropriate environment? Obviously not. And Plantinga concludes, in the course of his analysis of naturalistic accounts of proper function, that none of them is able to give an account adequate to describe such a function.¹²

¹² I have attempted to summarize here the argument from *Function*, 203–4.

So what becomes of metaphysical naturalism? Plantinga allows two options for a naturalist who tries to make sense of the Theory of Proper Function. The first option is to adopt “*Die Philosophie des Als Ob*” (p. 211),¹³ in which one takes the *intentional* stance, assuming, strictly for the purpose of explanation, that certain fictions (like theism) were true. This, of course, goes back (at least) to Kant, in which one is encouraged to make sense of the world and its “functions” by thinking *as if* certain theories were true. “There can be, then, purposiveness without purpose, so far as we do not place the causes of this form in a will, *but yet can only make the explanation of its possibility intelligible to ourselves by deriving it from a will*” (p. 212).¹⁴

There is no purpose, therefore, but we must assume or *act as if* purposiveness comes by way of a will, though we know it cannot. “So perhaps the naturalist can join Kant and Vaihinger here, and explain or understand proper functioning in terms of this fiction (as he sees it); perhaps he could say that our faculties are working properly when they are working the way they *would* work if the theistic story *were* true.” This is the naturalist’s first option. It seems less than honest and epistemically *un-natural*, but it is an option, at least as Plantinga sees the matter.

The second option for the naturalist is more honest. However, if one holds tightly to Plantinga’s “Theory of Proper Function” (and we can assume that *Plantinga* does), it too is fraught with its own set of difficulties. This second option is simply to reject Plantinga’s notion of warrant, of proper function, and of the design plan. “A high price, no doubt—but no more than what a serious naturalism exacts” (p. 214).

But there really is a third option for the naturalist. Perhaps the naturalist sees that knowledge must have warrant. Perhaps he sees that there is such a thing as our cognitive faculties working properly, according to the design plan and all that it entails. And perhaps he sees that there is no naturalist account of these things. Then what? Then what you have “is a powerful theistic argument; indeed what you have is a version of Thomas Aquinas’s Fifth Way.” Aquinas’s Fifth Way, of course, is the so-called teleological argument, or the argument from *design*. So, Plantinga sees his notion of proper function, design plan, etc., as offering an argument for metaphysical theism as over against metaphysical naturalism. The Theory of Proper Function is an apologetic after all, used in the end to display the bankruptcy of naturalistic theories of knowledge.

Numerous challenges and issues surround Plantinga’s discussions of epistemology. Rather than deal with one or two in detail, we shall attempt to show Plantinga’s position with regard to a Reformed epistemology wanting in just *some* of the significant and crucial areas. We shall see that Plantinga’s failure adequately to account for his own presuppositions will result in epistemological relativism and compromise on the one hand, as well as

¹³ Taken from a book by that name by Hans Vaihinger.

¹⁴ Quoted from Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* (emphasis mine).

superficiality and inconclusiveness on the other. As if these charges were not serious enough, we must now show that an even more serious charge plagues Plantinga's approach; as an attempt at a Reformed epistemology, it is anti-Christian at its root.¹⁵ Furthermore, we shall see that this position falls prey to some of the most serious problems of certain forms of natural theology, and thus puts Plantinga himself within the confines of his own critical project.

It will be helpful at this point to put forth Plantinga's approach in his *God and Other Minds*, to which approach he has referred in his latest works on warrant. In that approach, Plantinga seeks to argue for the rationality of theistic belief. His argument for rational theistic belief finds its support in the (near) common acceptance of belief in other minds. And because belief in other minds is commonly accepted, Plantinga declares it to be rational. Yet belief in other minds itself lacks persuasive and cogent argumentation. Why then, asks Plantinga, require such for belief in God? Since God himself is an "Other Mind," it is rational to believe in him as well.

This form of apology for the rationality of theistic belief will in fact prove principally to undermine and defeat the entire proposal for rational theistic belief. Consider again the set of propositions, call it **M'**, which Plantinga uses to elucidate the argument for other minds: **M'** equals

- (1) I believe in the existence of other minds.
- (2) I cannot point to a cogent principle that proves my belief to be rational.
- (3) I cannot develop an argument that is compelling for such a belief.
- (4) Yet I do believe.

Such is the status of our belief in other minds.

But consider also that Plantinga then pronounces **M'** to be rational;¹⁶ and having pronounced it to be both unprovable and rational, he then inserts belief in God into the same context. We contend, however, that there is a *significant difference* between the two beliefs nevertheless. Though Plantinga asserts that because **M'** is rational so is belief in God, what he in fact shows rather is that *to the extent and in such cases* that **M'** is rational, so also *may* belief in God be rational. It is one thing to say that because **M'** is rational so is **G**, but Plantinga is not saying that in this case. It is quite another matter to say that the rationality of **G** is dependent upon and only as strong as **M'**, which is closer to his position on the matter. We will contend that, because of this construction of dependent rationality, this form of rational theistic belief, in fact, self-destructs.

¹⁵ We need to be as clear as possible when making such a charge. Given the radical antithesis that the Christian position demands, Plantinga's epistemology can only be either Christian or anti-Christian. We would contend that the latter is the case. Furthermore, this has to do, not with Plantinga himself, but with the presuppositions behind his epistemology.

¹⁶ Plantinga, *God and Other Minds*, 271.

Now in order to see the nature of such self-destruction, it will be necessary, first, to look briefly at the discussion of rational belief within the earlier context of *God and Other Minds*, and then further to notice the progression of the same basic principles up to and including Plantinga's latest work on warrant.

First of all, consider the point made above that the rationality of belief in God carries no intrinsic rational weight of its own. It is only as secure and as rational as its "host" belief, i.e., belief in other minds. And the latter rationality is only contingently rational. That is, **M'** is rational only to the extent and in such cases that compelling arguments are not introduced against it. Now Plantinga would not contend that compelling arguments *could not be* introduced against the rationality of **M'**. He only contends that, thus far, no arguments have been introduced against it. And he spends a good deal of time showing that the arguments and evidence that we now have for **M'** is thoroughly unconvincing and flawed. Plantinga then goes on to assert at least three reasons why **M'** should be seen as rational:

- (1) There are no viable alternatives to the inconclusive analogical argument.
- (2) We may hold a contingent, corrigible belief if there are no viable arguments against it.
- (3) The fact that there is no answer to the epistemological question on this matter should not hinder one's holding such a belief.

Now having placed **M'** in such a tentative context, he then simply adds belief in God as an appendix to that main, tentative, contingent, and corrigible argument. Thus, the rationality of belief in God is not only itself contingent, but is dependently contingent on a prior contingently rational belief; it is, we could say, doubly contingent. That is, theistic belief could lose its status as rational with little or no effect on the rationality of **M'**. The converse is not the case, however. Whatever status **M'** holds, belief in God holds as well. Now this way of arguing places belief in God in the most tentative position imaginable. One would suspect that the evidentialist objectors would themselves have no objection to this way of arguing.

Belief in God, in this case, is no more or less rational than, for example, belief in UFOs. Granted that I have never seen a UFO, and granted that the existence of a UFO presupposes an intelligence, an "other mind" (at least) as its designer, my belief in UFOs is itself rational, or is dependently rational to the extent that my belief in other minds is rational.

Thus, it is not the case in this instance that Plantinga is placing the rationality of belief in God on a par with the rationality of belief in other minds. Rather, the rationality of belief in other minds carries with it an "independence" which belief in God does not have. The rationality of belief in God is *dependent upon* the rationality of belief in other minds in an asymmetrical and irreflexive way. The parity, therefore, of rational theistic belief is not **M'**, but rather something in the category of "rational" UFO

belief, both of which need the rationality of belief in other minds in order to be deemed by some as (secondarily?) rational.

If this is the case, then the rationality of belief in God is reduced to each and every individual's doxastic preference, without need of recourse to any other direct argument or evidence. And if that is true, then this kind of rationality itself is reduced to the preferences one might have given other, more primary, rationalities. And if that is the case, then the real problem with the initial evidential objection and its "presumption of atheism" is not the atheism *per se*, but rather the fact that there is no allowance made for the rationality of a contradictory notion, such as belief in God, for which Plantinga is quite willing to allow. The objector's preference may be not to believe in the existence of God or to believe in the non-existence of God; so far so good, given Plantinga's formulation. But if we take Plantinga seriously here, then all that the objector must acknowledge is a rational belief that is in direct opposition to his. The problem is not atheism, but simply the unfair demands placed on theism or theistic belief.

We could contend that within this debate the evidential objector is closer to the truth of the matter in his atheism than is Plantinga in his theism. For if rationality is reduced to a preference-based-on-other-beliefs model, then surely Plantinga has placed the rationality of belief in God on (irrational) shifting sand. Plantinga thinks his belief in God to be rational precisely because no one has yet shown **M'** to be irrational. The very rationality that was supposed to provide the criterion for justified belief has itself, in this scheme, been reduced to (irrational) opinion.

What meaning can rationality have if it must be contended that both one belief and its polar opposite are rational? Plantinga's argument reduces rationality to a person-relative status, thereby eliminating any intelligent means of predication on the matter. The evidential objector believes in other minds without conclusive argument. His belief is rational, but he does not believe in God, and Plantinga will allow for the rationality of such unbelief. Plantinga believes in other minds without conclusive argument, his belief is rational, and he posits the rationality of belief in God as a codicil to his other minds belief. Plantinga's formulation in this case must conclude that both are right.

Furthermore, the best that Plantinga can hope to conclude is that his belief in God is given the status of the objector's unbelief. This is clearly unacceptable for a Christian-theistic position. Because Plantinga has failed to challenge the roots of disbelief in God, because he has not dealt with the presuppositions behind such unbelief, he has argued for belief in God to be placed on the same ground as unbelief.

This is the case because Plantinga's notion of rationality itself is one of brute fact. He has not challenged the evidentialist objector's notion of rationality but rather has adopted it as a standard by which theistic belief must also be measured. In so doing, he has implicitly denied the created nature of human rationality as well as the standard of rationality in the

character of God himself. Without such an objective and absolute standard of rationality, the only option available is a notion of rationality that is contrary to the Christian position. And if such a notion is thought to be the measure of theistic belief, then belief in God is itself subjected to the scrutiny of non-Christian presuppositions. Thus, the non-Christian principle holds sway over the Christian principle, and the rational is subjected to irrationality. The only conclusion possible in such circumstances is the irrationality of theistic belief.

Following his appeal for rational theistic belief in *God and Other Minds*, Plantinga further argues for the proper basicity of belief in God. His complaint with classical foundationalism is not with what it does say, but with what it does not say. It does say that certain beliefs are properly basic. It does not say that belief in God can be among those beliefs. Plantinga, therefore, wants to contend for such.

There are at least two complications with this entire discussion that have yet to be addressed by Plantinga. First, there is the obvious interplay between a theological formulation and a philosophical problem. Plantinga wants to argue for the non-necessity of natural theology for theistic belief and then further for the possibility of theistic belief to be included in his own modified epistemological structure. In support for the non-necessity of natural theology he appeals to Calvin, Bavinck, and others, and in support of theistic belief as foundational he appeals (among other things) to Reid. One of the problems with this, however, is that there is no clear delineation of just how it is that that which is Reformed influences or is influenced by that which is Reidian. One suspects, because of this unclarity, that the New Reformed Epistemology might be better classified as the New (or Old) Reidian Epistemology.

If what Plantinga wanted to develop was a *Reformed* epistemology, then some radical changes would have to be incorporated into his line of argument. Plantinga would have to see the ontological fact of God's necessity as an epistemological fact as well. He would have to see, in other words, that just as God is himself the one and only necessary being, so also, given creation, is his existence necessary for the knowledge situation. Had God not created, there would be no epistemological question. Given his creative and sustaining work, however, it is both unbiblical and illogical, not to mention non-Reformed, that God would be removed or otherwise tangential to the problem of knowledge generally. All Plantinga had to read in this regard was the first sentence of Calvin's *Institutes*.¹⁷ Had he begun where

¹⁷ A matter worthy of another volume would be the extent to which Plantinga himself fits within traditional Reformed theology. His free will defense, as well as his arguments for the counterfactuals of freedom, give fairly strong indications that, on the level of theology proper, Plantinga is no Reformed thinker. If that analysis is correct, his argument for a Reformed epistemology might simply be a natural, though erroneous, extension of his less-than-Reformed metaphysical position. Those matters, however, must be left for another time. For our present purposes, we will take Plantinga's taxonomy of "Reformed" at face value.

Calvin does, he would have surmised that there can be no knowledge, no belief, except upon the sure foundation of our knowledge of God. Not placing knowledge and belief on such a foundation, however, places Plantinga's epistemology on shaky ground.

Plantinga's argument is that belief in God should be raised to the status of a possible common-sense belief, rather than reduced to the status in which unbelief can impose its own demands, as in the evidential objection. Those who object to theistic belief do so on the grounds that such has not been "proven," that it cannot be supported by propositional evidence. They neglect, however, to be as critical toward other beliefs they hold. Plantinga argues for the possible inclusion of theistic belief among those others.

Again, serious problems creep into this line of reasoning, problems on a presuppositional level that, if carried through, will undermine Plantinga's entire project. The question as to the possibility of common-sense beliefs themselves is never raised by Plantinga. The criteria for determining common-sense beliefs seem absent from the entire discussion. Thus, the reason given for the possible inclusion of theistic belief among common-sense beliefs is that the latter are held and believed without demanding much by way of proof or argument.

Given Plantinga's line of argument, common-sense beliefs are made to function on the presuppositional level. That is, they are propositions, principles, states of affairs, etc., that are assumed to be necessary for the rationale of other beliefs, and which are seen to function on a foundational and religious level.¹⁸

What is the case, therefore, when common-sense beliefs are posited in this way? First of all, common-sense beliefs must either derive their status from something or someone else, or must have it intrinsically. That is, any given common-sense belief must abide by some criteria in order to maintain its status as properly basic, or its proper basicity must be inherent within the belief itself. Plantinga contends that an inductive approach will suffice for the establishing of common-sense beliefs. However, such an approach depends on the disposition of the one investigating in that certain conditions will be acceptable to one and not to another. Common-sense beliefs, in this case, are only as "common" as the given bias of the investigator. And if the commonness of the belief depends on the one holding such a belief, then any notion of "common" sense is subverted. Or, to put it another way, when

¹⁸ Plantinga would not argue with the bulk of this description. He would, however, argue with the religious character of common-sense beliefs. Plantinga argues in "Methodological Naturalism?" (unpublished paper, presented at the symposium "Knowing God, Christ, and Nature in a Post-Positivistic Era," April 14-17, 1993, Notre Dame University) that common-sense beliefs are among the deliverances of reason and therefore religiously neutral. And it is at this point that his Reformed epistemology proposal fails; it is neither Reformed, nor can it bear the presuppositional weight that Plantinga wants to give it.

one can only account for commonality by way of individual preference, then the criteria needed for such an account is absent. Common sense, in this case, makes no sense.

Had Plantinga grounded his notion of commonality in the universal truth of man's knowledge of God, then the ground for commonality would reside both in universal conditions and in conditions that are self-attesting and self-authenticating. But such conditions can only be posited if one's presupposition is the self-attesting God of Scripture who reveals himself both in the world he has made and in the Word he has given. Since Plantinga failed to take account of such truths, his common-sense beliefs fall into the abyss of irrationality, and thus belief in God falls with them.¹⁹

The further problem of "rationality" rears its head again here. Plantinga accepts and works with a notion of rationality that has been delimited by a system in which God is excluded at the outset. There are certain beliefs thought to be rational, whether or not God exists. The challenge to theistic belief comes in the context of beliefs already thought to be rational. Plantinga's answer to that challenge is to argue for theistic belief to be included in the same rationality as those other, accepted, beliefs. In arguing this way, Plantinga has simply given a new twist to an old problem. In arguing this way, Plantinga has placed himself within the camp of the very natural theology that he has attempted to discourage.

Though natural theology can take many different forms, its method remains fairly uniform. Natural theology argues within the context of notions and propositions that are assumed to be accepted and acceptable to both Christian and non-Christian. For example, in some forms of the cosmological argument, the notion of cause and effect is thought to be explained and explicable to both sides, regardless of the existence of God. Plantinga's Reformed epistemology argues in much the same way. He takes for granted that the non-Christian system of thought has much for which it is to be commended, whether or not God exists. He assumes that much of what is held by unbelieving thought is necessary, good, and rational *as it stands*. In other words, for all of its talk against propositional evidence for theistic belief, and this is all-important, *Plantinga's Reformed epistemology proposal depends, for its cogency, on the propositional fact that some beliefs are accepted in a properly basic way*. Lying behind Plantinga's attempt for properly basic theistic belief is the necessary proposition that some beliefs are basic, and properly so. And lying behind that proposition is an acceptance of (at least significant aspects of) the non-Christian position.

Furthermore, while (to use the cosmological argument again) natural theology pleads for the inclusion of the existence of God within an already

¹⁹ Without going into the knotty problem of defining rationality and irrationality, suffice it to say at this point that what Plantinga has argued for is a "commonality" based on individual preference. If such is the case, then there is no link between the "universal" of commonality and the "particular" of preference. Herein lies the epistemological dilemma.

coherent process of cause and effect, Plantinga is arguing for the *possible* inclusion of belief in God within an already coherent system of beliefs. In other words, as in all natural theology, the assumed coherence of the non-Christian system (of beliefs or facts) is the necessary prerequisite for the plea for theism. Plantinga's apology, then, begins from what we all know and accept as true, and attempts to reason to the possible acceptability of theism. This is natural theology in disguise.

Plantinga has misread his Reformed forebears. In reading them as rejecting classical foundationalism, he has read them as rejecting the inclusion of (all too few) certain beliefs within the rational purview to the exclusion of God. But, to use Calvin again as just one example, Plantinga should have read him as insisting that one's true knowledge of God is the only foundation upon which any other true knowledge or belief must rest. Instead, Plantinga gave ground in order to take it back, but wound up on the very ground which he sought to reject. Such is always the case when theism or theistic belief is thought to be merely an addendum to an already rational or semi-rational system rather than the presupposition behind any and every notion of rationality, coherence, knowledge, belief, etc.

Within Plantinga's Reformed epistemology, finally, is the notion of theism or theistic belief as a hypothesis. We see this when it is argued that one *may* include theistic belief among the foundations of one's noetic structure. The substance of Reidian epistemology, then, can be summarized as always including properly basic (or, rational) beliefs and, depending on one's preferences, perhaps including theistic belief as well. Thus, not only is theistic belief denied the status of other properly basic beliefs; it is, in one sense, a *tertium quid* in that it "fits" neither with truly foundational beliefs nor with those which are based on the latter. It is, so to speak, a foreign immigrant into an already self-sufficient country, and Plantinga is arguing for toleration and hospitality in what has tended to be a hostile environment. If one decides to include this foreign element within one's noetic structure, it should, like other "natural" elements, be tolerated.

This, of course, reduces belief in God to a mere hypothesis, mere conjecture, and it affirms, since so much can be properly believed without theistic belief, that there can be no certainty with such belief, nor is it necessary for such belief to be present in one's noetic structure at all. There is nothing of Reformed influence in such a notion.

Plantinga's new approach to epistemology in his most recent books on warrant is burdened with the problems above, and then some. First of all, Plantinga still wants to insist that there can be warranted belief whether or not God exists. Or, to be fair, his formulation of the warrant situation is agnostic as to the existence of God. When Plantinga postulates that one can have warranted belief if one's epistemic faculties are functioning properly, are aimed at truth, and are functioning in an epistemically appropriate environment, he has not explicitly argued for the necessity of presupposing God for the warrant situation. Furthermore, Plantinga will want to insist

that theistic belief, if it conforms to the above stipulations, can be accepted and acceptable as a rational and proper belief.

Perhaps the greatest challenge that Plantinga will face in this new development will be, again, the place of natural theology. Having argued fairly strongly against the *necessity* of natural theology in his earlier Reformed epistemology, he now argues that one who accepts his view of warrant in epistemology should accept as well his theistic metaphysic. As a matter of fact, he argues that the only explanation for his naturalized epistemology is a supernatural metaphysic. It would appear, then, that natural theology has returned within the context of Plantinga's new epistemology. And if such is the case, then he will either have to affirm natural theology, against his earlier emphasis, or he will have to show how *his* natural theology is different from that which necessitates agreement with the evidentialist objection to theistic belief. It is true that Plantinga has not rejected natural theology *per se*, but he has been sufficiently critical of it and of what it presupposes that he should set forth a good argument as to the viability of (something like) Aquinas' fifth way toward which his naturalized epistemology is supposed to point. Plantinga should make clear how his natural theology differs from that against which he has argued.

Finally, if we can see Plantinga's approach to the rationality of theistic belief as spanning, roughly, from *God and Other Minds* to *Warrant and Proper Function*, one of the primary problems with this entire argument is the necessity of positing the rationality of belief in God as a hypothesis. As in all such cases in which problems discussed above arise, there is something much deeper and more pervasive working here, something which destroys Plantinga's argument at the outset, something which a presuppositional approach is designed to expose and correct. With all of his encouragement elsewhere for Christian philosophers and scientists to "start with" God in their philosophizing and scientific inquiry, Plantinga's rational theistic belief, along with his understanding of what it means "to start with God," is nothing more than (a parasite of?) a mere hypothesis.²⁰ With that, he has eliminated any attempt truly to start with the God of Christian theism.

If we use a standard definition of hypothesis as "a provisional assumption about the ground of certain phenomena, used as a guiding norm in making observations and experiments until verified or disproved by subsequent evidence,"²¹ then we can begin to see serious problems with Plantinga's view of theistic belief in this context.

Now clearly Plantinga sees belief in other minds as a hypothesis. He has shown that such a belief cannot be *proven* rational. Yet he has declared it so.

²⁰ Alvin Plantinga, "Advice to Christian Philosophers," in *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984) 253-71. It is worth noting here that others took his advice and published *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy* (ed. Michael D. Beatty; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990) as an attempt to apply the principles stated in Plantinga's address.

²¹ Thomas Greenwood, "Hypothesis," in *Dictionary of Philosophy* (ed. Dagobert D. Runes; Totowa, NJ: Littlefield, Adams and Co., 1980) 134.

And the strength of the rationality of belief in God is only as strong as the contingent, declaratory rationality of belief in other minds. Until something else comes along to take its place, belief in other minds stays, and it stays as rational. Consequently, if one so prefers, one may add belief in God to such a belief, and it too will share the attributes of its host belief.

This amounts, however, to affirming the irrelevance, though perhaps pragmatically useful notion, of theistic belief. Not only will it fail to make theistic belief necessary, it defines it simply as subject to the whims or preferences of a particular individual or individuals. And if theistic belief carries no more epistemological weight than that, then the evidential objection is back with a vengeance. The question still remains as to the rationality of theistic belief. Not only so, but the further question presents itself as to the relationship of the existence of God to theistic belief.

Thus, Plantinga's project must be radically revised if what is hoped for is a Christian or Reformed epistemology. A Reformed epistemology will not be able to posit belief in God as a working hypothesis, inserted by preference among other, more acceptable beliefs. A Reformed epistemology will need to make clear at the outset that the presupposition of the existence of God and belief in him are the only avenues through which true knowledge can be had.

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