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Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), xx + 508.

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The much-anticipated appearance of *Warranted Christian Belief* is an event that should occasion celebration. With it, Plantinga completes the third volume of what is now a trilogy on Reformed Epistemology, by one of its foremost defenders. *Warranted Christian Belief* (WCB) affords us a substantial picture of the resources Reformed Epistemology can muster by way of backing up Christian knowledge-claims. An important feature of this book that sets it apart from much work of philosophers in theistic apologetics, is that it undertakes to defend many of the distinctive *details* of Christian belief, details that distinguish Christian belief from other theistic traditions, and from bare theism itself. Here is a full-blooded defense of Christianity.

To be sure, Plantinga confesses that he has no demonstrations, no good *arguments*, for these distinctive doctrines (such as the doctrines of original sin, of the Incarnation and vicarious atonement, the doctrine that through Jesus we have hope of eternal life, and so on). But this does not prevent a Christian—even a modern, intellectually sophisticated Christian—from knowing these things. Christians can know them, and, according to Plantinga, many Christians do, if God exists. That is because these beliefs are, when arrived at in a certain way, properly basic, or sufficiently close to being properly basic.

WCB is a large book, and my comments will have therefore to be selective. Here is the menu. Plantinga begins by considering the challenge that Christian beliefs, whether true or not, are in any case somehow cognitively defective: unjustified, irrational, illegitimately arrived at, or something of that ilk. Dismissing—perhaps too quickly—the worry that Christianity might commit one to a conception of God that is incoherent, he labors to establish that the only perspicuous *de jure* question—the only cogent

challenge to the intellectual propriety of Christian belief—derives from claims that such beliefs have been generated by defective, or badly designed, or environmentally challenged, belief-forming mechanisms. The question therefore becomes: *are* Christian beliefs formed by way of the operation of such inadequate mechanisms-cum-environments? Do they therefore lack warrant, in Plantinga's sense?

Plantinga considers alternative models, or hypotheses, as to the nature of these belief-forming mechanisms. There are naturalistic models, such as those of Marx and Freud, and there is his own (Christian) model, according to which Christian beliefs can be, and usually are, reliably formed by the operation within us of a *sensus divinitatis* (SD) and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit (HS). In an ecumenical spirit, Plantinga calls this the Aquinas/Calvin (or A/C) model. Whether Christian beliefs are warranted depends upon which model is true, and which model is *true* crucially depends, in turn, on whether the god of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob does exist. Thus, Plantinga concludes, there is no intelligible *de jure* challenge that is independent of a direct challenge to the truth of Christian theism. In the remainder of the volume, Plantinga fleshes out the A/C model, showing how the operation of the SD and HS within us delivers properly basic Christian beliefs, and why they do not operate, or operate effectively, in non-Christians.

I want to consider first whether the only proper *de jure* question here is the one Plantinga finds. Many have thought the difficulty lies in the fact that Christian beliefs require support by evidence, and that the required justification is lacking. This challenge Plantinga rejects, on the grounds that it presupposes what he calls Classical Foundationalism (CF), a position he alleges to be incoherent. I have elsewhere defended the claim that a modified CF that admits both infallible and fallible basic beliefs is not incoherent as Plantinga charges.[1] I will not repeat the arguments here. But I will comment upon Plantinga's claim that a deontic conception of justification lies at the root of CF, and in particular, at the root of its commitment to internalism.

One of the merits Plantinga claimed in *Warrant and Proper Function* (WPF) for his externalism is its ability to handle Gettier examples. He is less sure now—and with good reason. I shall argue that the Gettier bulldog still has a firm grip upon his ankle. The alleged ability to outflank Gettier is a primary motivation for externalism in epistemology; if that dog can't be outfoxed, then we ought to have another serious look at what CF has to offer.

Finally, I shall consider the merits of Plantinga's model of the mechanisms that generate Christian beliefs. How plausible is it? How plausible can it be made from within the (or a) Christian perspective itself?

1. Classical Foundationalism

One thesis concerning CF that deserves brief attention is Plantinga's view that Classical Foundationalists like Descartes and Locke had a deontic

conception of justification, a conception according to which being justified is a matter of fulfilling certain epistemic duties. This is a significant concern because Plantinga locates the root of CF's internalism in this deontic character, that is, in the idea that being justified—satisfying your epistemic responsibilities—must be a matter of doing the best you can (or well enough) with what you have access to. It is also significant because, on this view, a theist would be justified in the CF sense if she does do that. Plantinga repeatedly scores points by noting how easy this can be, especially for the epistemically challenged.

Descartes—to take just his case—clearly does think that there are certain rules you ought to follow in pursuing epistemic justification. But it in no way follows that in thinking this, he is committed to the view that being justified *consists in* following those rules. Of course he thinks we ought to follow the rules; he thinks that following them will maximize the chances of acquiring true beliefs rather than false ones. And he takes it for granted that we want to (and ought to) believe what's true and disbelieve what's false. But being justified does not consist in following or doing ones duty by any rules; on the contrary, it is a matter of seeing clearly and distinctly, because seeing something in this way provides access to truth.[2]

By Plantinga's lights, being CF-justified is to meet a low standard indeed, so long as you are stupid or crazy enough, but cognitively conscientious. By his lights, the benighted soul who believed that a woman could procreate asexually by being suspended from the ceiling and rotated, might meet this standard (see WCB, p. 101). Would Descartes and Locke agree? Or is this a *reductio* of Plantinga's exposition of CF?

How, then, from the perspective of CF, might a *de jure* challenge to theism go? A first approximation is this. The propositions to which theism commits us are not properly basic: they are not self-evident or clear and distinct; they can intelligibly be doubted. So, they require substantiation, support from evidence. Matters are not so simple, of course: from the standpoint of CF, *all* beliefs about the extramental world might be claimed to require such support. The interesting question, in *this* context, is whether theism is on roughly the same epistemic footing as belief that there are trees and chairs, or, perhaps more pointedly, that there are atoms and electric fields. I think not; but that is a journey for a different occasion.

2. Gettier Woes

In WCB, in part because of difficulties raised by critics, Plantinga has had second thoughts about whether the proper-function account of warrant can evade Gettier problems. In revisiting the issue, he adds some conditions to his account of knowledge to address difficulties with the earlier account.

First, Plantinga distinguishes the maxi-environment for which a given cognitive function is designed from the mini-environments which may crop up within such a maxi-environment, relative to which a well-designed cognitive process can misfire and yield true beliefs only by luck. (Thus, I may at a distance misidentify Peter as his twin Paul, because I can't discriminate distinguishing features.) To handle this, Plantinga adds a *Resolution Condition*:

> (RC) A belief B produced by an exercise E of cognitive powers has warrant sufficient for knowledge only if MBE (a mini-environment with respect to B and E) is favorable for E.

where

> (F) MBE is *favorable* for agent A iff, if A were to form a belief by way of E in MBE, A would form a true belief.

The strategy is to outflank Gettier problems by requiring cognitive faculties to be good enough under the circumstances to guarantee truth. But is it *infallibility* that condition (F) demands? It would seem so; but perhaps this depends upon just how the counterfactual in (F) is to be understood (what conditions are held fixed?). Indeed, consistently with his view that knowledge-certifying warrant can fall short of infallibility, Plantinga concedes that there are counterexamples to (RC) and (F), cases in which a cognitive process *would* produce a true belief in a MBE, even though that MBE is *not* favorable, and truth is the result of luck. (A real barn is believed to be real, because serendipitously fog obscures nearby fake barns.) So, even if a cognitive process can't lead to error, *given a certain minienvironment*, it is not an infallible process/faculty in general, since the relevant facts about the MBE may be unknown, and the fact that application of the cognitive faculty leads to truth, a lucky accident.

So Plantinga modifies (F) in a way designed to exclude, as unfavorable, MBEs that contain circumstances not observable by the subject, that might lead her astray. Where $DMBE$ denotes the subset of states of affairs in MBE that are detectable by the subject, Plantinga now replaces (F) with:

> (F*) MBE is favorable for A just if there is no state of affairs S included in A's MBE but not in A's $DMBE$ such that the objective probability of B with respect to $DMBE \cup S < r$ (for some suitably high value of r).[3]

Plantinga is rather tentative about offering (RC) and (F*) as repairs to the proper-function account; as he says, the track record of previous failures

leads him to be "less than wholly confident" that this gets it right. Should we rest content with this guess? I think not.

It is not difficult to come by a general diagnosis of what generates Gettier cases, and hence of why a large class of accounts of knowledge fail. Gettier examples capitalize upon external (i.e., unrecognized) circumstances in which our justification (or warrant) for a target belief *B* is anything less than ironclad; hence, cases in which it is possible for error to creep in, undetected, in some fluky way, in spite of all precautions—in which, therefore, if error does *not* creep in, or is somehow neutralized, the truth of *B* is a matter of luck (since the agent ignores, or lacks access to, potential defeaters).

But errors of this kind can creep in whenever a belief-producing process is not infallible. Since Plantinga's new conditions admit beliefs fallibly produced, let's explore the Gettier terrain. Consider a candidate case. Ten people seated in a circle are playing the "telegraph" game. The first whispers into the ear of the person to his right, the message "Plato was a philosopher." That person whispers what she hears to the person to her right, and so on; the last person announces what he believes the message to be. Let us assume that this mode of message transmission is highly reliable: reliable enough that, by Plantinga's lights, each person knows—provided she gets it right—what the person to her left said. Suppose, indeed, that the individual probabilities are high enough that the composite probability for correct transmission to the tenth player meets Plantinga's standard for warrant sufficient unto knowledge, and that each player's auditory and memory processes are functioning well in a suitable mini-environment, etc. The tenth player, P10, declares the original message to have been "Plato was a philosopher." Player 3, however, has misheard P2; she thinks the message is "Pluto was a philosopher." By good fortune, this error gets cancelled: P4 mishears P3's whisper, construing it as "Plato was a philosopher."

Does P10's belief that P1 said Plato was a philosopher meet Plantinga's conditions for knowledge? That depends upon whether we apply (F*) so as to include in P10's *MBE* the state of affairs, P3's having misheard P2. If we exclude it, then (F*) wrongly rules P10's belief to be knowledge. So of course Plantinga will include it. What then? Well, suppose that, as it happens, there is still an objective probability greater than *r* that the original message was 'Plato was a philosopher'. Indeed, P10 would conclude this because he knows of P1's great love of philosophy and admiration for Plato, and of P1's ignorance of Greek mythology. Then, since P10's faculties are in good order, his belief passes the Plantinga knowledge test. But does P10 know what P1 said? Surely not, even if P10's guess is a rational one for which he has adequate evidence.

On (F), Gettier problems are evaded by means of a condition that bears a significant relationship to internalist infallibilist accounts of knowledge—viz., that the disqualifying condition *S* of the *MBE* is just such that, if P10

had access to it, he could no longer regard *B* as a piece of knowledge, since the transmission was not failsafe. (F*), on the other hand, returns Plantinga squarely to the externalist/fallibilist fold. But either way, why isn't it a matter of luck when P10 gets the correct message via a transmission process in which, as it happens, the message is never scrambled?[4,5]

3. Christian Knowledge: Plantinga's Model

By way of answering what he takes to be the proper *de jure* question, Plantinga constructs a model depicting how Christians, by and large, come by their distinctively Christian beliefs—specifically, those beliefs concerning the human condition and the means provided for salvation, which he deems to be the great truths of the Gospels. Moreover, the model, if more or less correct, shows that Christians know these things; their beliefs are formed in a way that meets Plantinga's conditions for knowledge.

I can't do justice to Plantinga's nuanced account of the model, but very crudely, the model posits that we are created in God's image, that this entails our having been endowed with a *sensus divinitatis* (SD) whose function is to provide us with knowledge of God, an appreciation of God's world and of the evilness of sin, and with certain affective states such as love of God. The functioning of the SD, and to some extent of our cognitive and moral capacities generally, was damaged by original sin. In response to that, God has sent his Holy Spirit (HS). If we will receive the HS, it will commence to work within us so as to bring about a restitution of proper functioning in our cognitive makeup and, in particular, of the SD. Sin, of course, corrupts: it blinds us to God and to our moral failings, it hobbles the work of the SD, and it shuns the HS. Working in tandem, the SD and HS are able to provide us with reliable, properly basic beliefs concerning the Great Things of the Gospels. Our recognition of these truths may be triggered by hearing or reading Scripture, or by religious "experience" produced by the SD/HS; but they are not inferences of some kind from these. Thus the model.

I belabored Plantinga's discussion of CF and of Gettier problems for two reasons. One, of course, is that I am interested in defending a version of CF. The other is that the viability of CF has profound implications for Plantinga's project. Perhaps God has implanted within me a SD by the light of which I could come to know Him. Perhaps, even, the HS is at work, laboring to break through that deep, tough encrustation of sin that overshadows and cripples my cognitive faculties. But how can I know whether this is so? How can Plantinga know it? Is Plantinga's "model" of our cognitive constitution correct, or merely a just-so story?

Well, it would be helpful to know the answer to this question. If internalism is correct, it would moreover be *essential* to know it, if we are to claim

that Christian beliefs are known or at least justified (at least absent strong independent evidence for those beliefs).[6] But even if the model is correct, even if the SD and HS are laboring mightily within us, it will be false that theistic beliefs are properly basic, given CF. For the model is not itself self-evidently true; nor, in the required sense, are the beliefs so delivered.

Perhaps the A/C model is at least consistent with everything we know. Plantinga insists it is; he says it is "*epistemically* possible: . . . consistent with what we know, where 'what we know' is what all (or most) of the participants in the discussion agree on." (WCB, pp. 168–9) It is not clear what we should make of this. It involves an idiosyncratic understanding of epistemic possibility since, of course, all (most) participants in a given discussion might agree on lots of things which none of them knows (and which are false).[7]

Who are the agreeing "we," in this case? Presumably, they don't include (radical) skeptics. If the "we" were just (Plantingian) Christians, then truth of the A/C model, or some close cousin, would be, not only consistent with, but *entailed* by what we know: Plantinga claims that "if Christian belief is true, then the [A/C] model or one very like it is true." (WCB, p. 169) But if the "we" were metaphysical naturalists, then the *falsity* of the model would be entailed by what we (allegedly) know.

In either case, the epistemic-possibility claim would beg the question. So perhaps Plantinga means by "we" the community of theist and naturalist philosophers; or perhaps he just means that the A/C model is compatible with common sense, or some such thing. It is hard to know; and therefore, hard to know what sort of bite the epistemic-possibility claim can have. From an externalist perspective, after all, we need not, and will often in fact not, know what it is we know, and hence won't be able to judge what is consistent with that.

By the lights of Plantinga's externalism, it will, of course, not be essential that he—or anyone else—knows that the SD and HS exist, or how they operate, in order for these to deliver beliefs with warrant sufficient unto knowledge. But, naturally enough, Plantinga considers the likelihood that they do exist; more precisely, the likelihood on theism that they exist. Since he finds it extremely likely that they (or something in this neighborhood) exist given theism, and unlikely that they do on atheism (and since theism would not be both warranted and false[8]), he concludes that the *de jure* question, the question whether we have warranted theistic beliefs, reduces to the *de facto* question, the question whether theism is true. Ergo, atheists who have thought that there is a *de jure* challenge to theism that can be mounted independently of the *de facto* question are mistaken. The only *de jure* questions an atheist can raise just amount to questioning the *truth* of theism, for if theism *is* true, then Christians surely have well-designed cognitive faculties, successfully aimed in a proper environment at delivering true theistic beliefs.

But is Plantinga right about this? Does the answer to the *de jure* question depend upon the answer to the *de facto* question? As we have seen, that depends crucially upon whether Plantinga is successful in eliminating the justification question as CF might pose it. But let's grant, for the moment, that Plantinga does succeed; let's even grant that theism is true. Does it follow that there is no intelligible independent epistemic challenge that the atheist can offer?[9]

There are, in fact, two *de jure* questions it is perfectly proper to ask under these conditions. First, is Plantinga correct in his estimate of the likelihood, on theism, that God has granted us cognitive faculties that are warrant-producing with respect to Christian beliefs? Second, is there any independent evidence, presumably of an empirical sort, for the existence of such faculties?[10]

As to the former question, Plantinga argues that an all-loving, omnipotent being like God, who created us in his image,[11] would *want* us to know that He exists. But is it so clear that we can know what God wants for us? Maybe we can know that *if* God has given us the right sorts of cognitive faculties. But if He hasn't?

Many theists—Plantinga among them—have expressed skepticism concerning the possibility of an adequate theodicy. What are the chances that we can know what God wants, when he allows Bambi to roast in a forest fire? For God's purposes—indeed his morally significant purposes—may transcend our understanding. It may be hard for us to imagine what reasons God could have for creating rational beings such as we, endowed with what seem to be inclinations to believe an enormous spectrum of religious beliefs and for Him to deny them warrant for whatever true religious beliefs they acquire. But indeed, if we are deficient in the way just suggested, then presumably we *don't* have any knowledge of God's purposes.[12]

What right has the theist, recognizing the evils of the world, to the proposition that a right-functioning cognitive system is part of the legacy with which God has endowed him (by nature and thanks to repairs effected by the HS)? Isn't that probability, at best, inscrutable? Not so, says Plantinga. It is part of the model, part of the Christian story, that God cares for us in this way (WCB, p. 283). Moreover, the Christian doesn't just "accept" this story; he knows it by way of divine revelation. He recognizes the reordering of his cognitive faculties toward the truth when he is reborn.

Does the Christian really know this? Who can tell? That depends upon whether the Christian story is the sober truth (or close). But doesn't the Christian know that? Suppose we grant the cogency of this line of thought. But then we should remember the plight of the poor naturalist, who has to deal with the charge that, relative to naturalism, the reliability of her cognitive faculties is low or inscrutable; that, therefore, she has a defeater for any of her naturalistic beliefs, one that can't be noncircularly removed.

Why can't this benighted soul respond that she accepts an *optimistic* Darwinian tale concerning her cognitive faculties? Indeed, she doesn't just "accept" this tale; she finds it sufficiently confirmed by scientific investigation of those faculties. Of course that reasoning is circular. Perhaps: but just what relieves the Christian of the very same charge?[13]

4. Independent Evidence?

However, maybe we can acquire independent evidence of the existence of the SD/HS mechanisms. After all, we have abundant evidence for the existence of sensory faculties that put us in touch with the world in reliable ways; also memory and reason. We are beginning to decipher the neurological substrata of these cognitive processes. Of course, our evidence here is evidence produced by these very faculties, so its evidentiary status begs the question against skepticism; but at least these faculties are not epistemically isolated from one another, or from utilization in investigations that yield an increasingly ramified picture of the very processes thus employed, and of the grounds for trusting them.

Can anything comparable be done on behalf of the SD and HS?[14] Plantinga certainly invites such an inquiry, when he cites Calvin's own argument for the SD. Calvin appeals to the alleged fact that "there is no nation so barbarous, no people so savage, that they have not a deep seated conviction that there is a God."[15] In Calvin's day, the ignorance reflected in this claim was perhaps excusable. But today, such a view would indicate decided unawareness of the data provided by ethnography. Indeed, in view of the diversity of religious beliefs, including traditions that do not worship gods, one would think that this counts *against* Calvin's conclusion. Nor do the other facts mentioned by Plantinga—the ubiquity of moral conscience, the alleged absence of atheists in foxholes—fare any better.

So far as I know, no competent investigation of the sort required to confirm the existence of a SD *has* been done; and, short of some much more detailed specification of the alleged structures and processes, it is hard to see how it *could* be done. Perhaps there are no such structures; perhaps these "faculties" consist in ways God directly stimulates our thoughts. Absent a physical substratum, there may be no independently detectable evidence to be had. But if so, then so much the worse for the epistemic status of the claim that there are such faculties.

5. The Forked-Tongue Objection

But perhaps matters are worse than this. Perhaps there are good positive reasons for doubting the reliability of the alleged SD and HS. I shall allude only briefly to two of these. The first is a many-contenders objection; it

derives from the apparent fact that, as one might say, Holy Spirit speak with forked tongue.

Plantinga dismisses the worry that it is not clear exactly which truths are to be included in the deliverances of Faith—the great things of the Gospels. But what matters here is what things Christians have in fact taken themselves to be in the know about, indeed dead sure about, thanks to the leadings of the HS (and the SD). The sad fact is that the intersection of the sets of such beliefs is very likely null, or no bigger than the barest sort of theism. Just consider the conflicting sets of beliefs commonly held in three denominations for which the guidance of the HS plays a central role: Quakers, Mormons, and Pentecostals. For Pentecostals, the literal truth of the Bible is guaranteed by the HS. Mormons regularly assert that the HS teaches them the truth of the Book of Mormon. Quakers in the Orthodox wing of the church are theological liberals. Many would deny the Resurrection; some would deny the Sonship of Jesus and the doctrine of the Trinity. Indeed, Quakers historically have rejected creedal commitments, and so stand in a fundamental way outside of the creedal traditions from which Plantinga gleans the central doctrines of "mere Christianity."

There are differences in the manifestations of the HS most emphasized in these sects: the still, small voice in the Quaker, the burning breast that confirms the truth of the Book of Mormon, speaking in tongues and being slain in the Spirit for the Pentecostal. But all of these are traditional among Christians; it will not do to reject any of these traditions on the grounds that with them the phenomenology of HS "appearances" is somehow unorthodox or nonstandard.[16]

Plantinga's purposes are ill-served by a narrow sectarianism, so he strives to achieve a carefully gerrymandered ecumenicism by appeal to the "great creeds." This will hardly serve. Who is to say whether Catholics and Calvinists are correctly attuned to the Holy Spirit and Quakers are spiritually in the woods, or whether it is the other way round? Of course, one might try to *argue* this, or simply to stipulate it. But Plantinga officially resists argument for the A/C model, and since Christians of virtually every denominational stripe claim with conviction to be guided by the Spirit, the data provide us with no guidance whatever regarding either which traditions to credit or which doctrines the Spirit itself holds.

Of course, it may be that lots of Christians are just mistaken when they take a belief to be HS-induced or confirmed. But then either there's no telling when the HS is on the phone, or else Faith is an unreliable counsellor.[17]

6. Blinded by Sin

According to Plantinga, human beings were created with a SD, a natural and innate capacity to receive knowledge of God. Unfortunately, original sin has damaged this capacity; this explains why we are not able to regain

this knowledge and restore our natural relationship with God, except, with some difficulty, by accepting salvation through Christ and the help of the HS. The damage wreaked by original sin upon the SD is both affective and cognitive.

As Plantinga is aware, it won't pass muster to claim that every sort of intellectual faculty was damaged by original sin, but is healed in Christians by the HS. There have been too many contributions to our intellectual culture by nontheists to give any plausibility to the view that nontheists are somehow stupider at mathematics, or physics, or history, or art.

The primary damage is rather, it seems, to our moral faculties. We inherit a kind of moral disorder. Christians are in a position, with God's help, to repair this disorder. Nontheists are not, for they have turned a deaf ear to both the gifts of the HS and the intuitions delivered by the SD.[18]

Now a nontheist might perhaps be forgiven for feeling some dismay, even for being a bit scandalized, by this judgment. But why? Why exactly should a nontheist make a protest here? Of course, it is discomfiting to be told that one's life is mired in sin. But that is not a fair complaint. The ubiquity of sin is not just a Christian hypothesis. Every honest person is aware—all too soberingly aware—of how often and deeply he or she has failed on this score.

No; the complaint is a different one. It concerns the vacuousness of the Christian's claim to be better positioned by the SD and HS to address these moral failings. It is not the objection that religious faith does not help many people achieve a higher moral standard, for clearly, it often does. But exactly what evidence is there that Christians have, over two millennia, managed the moral life better than Jews or Muslims or Hindus or atheists—or the BaMbuti or Inuit or Kachin?[19] Fully granting the importance of the inward dimensions of the moral life, we must recognize that not just any record of outward behavior will pass muster as that of a righteous person.

This worry is made acute by a familiar observation. The Bible, most Christians believe, is the inspired word of God. Plantinga does not include this among the Great Things of the gospels, but he affirms it. So the human authors of the Bible were inspired by the HS if anyone has been.[20,21] Now there is no disputing the moral and literary radiance of some Biblical passages. But then there are other passages, passages according to which God performs, commands, accepts or countenances rape, genocide, human sacrifice, punishing David by killing his infant and (for numbering Israel) 70,000 Jews, hatred of family, capital punishment for breaking a monetary promise, and so on. What are we to make of this?[22]

What I want to make of it here is this. The hypothesis that we are endowed with a corrupted SD but can, through the grace of the HS, transform ourselves and repair the damage is, by its own lights, a model that predicts certain fruits.[23] If the divergent deliverances of the HS, the morally

checkered history of Christendom, and the conflicting moral testimony of Scripture would not count as *prima facie* defeaters, what would?[24] If, on the other hand, the A/C model convicts unbelievers of a kind of cognitive and affective dullness with respect to just the items diagnostic of ("true") Christian faith, and then uses belief in ("true") Christian doctrine as the criterion to identify the presence of the SD and HS, we are left with no independent reason to concede the existence of these mechanisms. Here one might well be put in mind of another influential hypothesis that has claimed near immunity from disconfirmation, explaining even its own hiddenness from those who are not true believers. The analogy to Freud's theory of the unconscious *id* is too close for comfort.[25]

Notes

[1] Evan Fales 1996b, especially Chapter 7.

[2] Descartes' way of proceeding in the *Meditations* is telling. Having set himself the task of distinguishing between true propositions and false ones, he does not then lay down rules or criteria. Rather, he brings before his mind a proposition that is infallible, that cannot intelligibly be doubted, and asks himself what it is that guarantees its truth. These features he calls clearness and distinctness. The fact that this description is rather unhelpful serves to dramatize the fact that Descartes' method is not to invoke, *a priori*, some rule, but to bring directly before the mind an instance of a relation between himself and a proposition that makes transparent to him the truth of that proposition. He *points* (and points us) to that relation. Justification, therefore, derives fundamentally from unmediated recognition of the existence of that relation between myself and a proposition. Conditioning belief on doing this may fulfill some epistemic duty, but doing it does not consist in fulfilling any duty; and by Descartes' lights, one is not justified unless one has done it, whether one has in some other way fulfilled epistemic duties or not.

[3] This certainly looks like it makes for a fallibilist criterion of knowledge. Yet, Plantinga says elsewhere (WCB, p. 186) that "no false belief has warrant sufficient for knowledge." So I confess I do not know how Plantinga is to be understood on this question.

[4] Plantinga can insist that P10 knows that *B*, so long as the value of *r* is high enough and P10's cognitive faculties are functioning properly, etc. So, doesn't he have after all an account that is externalist, fallibilist, and Gettier-proof? After a fashion, he does. Belief-producing mechanisms need not be failsafe, but what (F*) does is to rule out all actual cases in which a true belief is formed by any process containing an external disqualifying condition, on the grounds that, given access, the condition would be seen to undermine justification. (F*) serves as a filter through which only processes in which nothing actually *does* go wrong can pass. Why then worry about the reliability of the unaccessed parts of the process at all? We can just apply (F) itself to *any* condition in *any* belief-forming process that would render true belief a lucky accident. Why not just rest all the weight upon the proper functioning of those parts of the process to which the agent has access? In that case the critical question will be: is *B* known when matters of which the agent is and would be (so as to satisfy (F)) aware do not guarantee the truth of *B*? (A further difficulty is that our information-processing mechanisms may well contain components that, when added to our *DMBE*, yield non-satisfaction of (F*) even when the entire process is reliable. A simple case: visual images are projected inverted onto the retina. Perhaps Plantinga will exclude design features internal to the agent, but of course the same problem might arise with

respect to a microscope or camera. An even clearer case can be constructed from the telegraph game. This time, transmission is error-free, except that, unbeknownst to P10, P5 suffers a slip of the tongue, whispers 'Pluto was a philanderer' to P6, but immediately catches the mistake and corrects himself. Again, (F*) is not satisfied, but there is a pretty clear intuition that P10 nevertheless knows what P1 said. So (RC) and (F*) do not give a necessary condition for knowledge.)

[5] Two further Gettier problems (these emerged in conversation with Richard Fumerton): (1) (RC) and (F*) may not be sufficient. Consider a case in which the message in the telegraph game is transmitted flawlessly, but in which P3, just after correctly transmitting the message, suffers a sudden brain malfunction which severely impairs his ability to process auditory information. Then there is a state of affairs in the minienvironment, viz., P3's impairment during the course of the game, which, if it were added to P10's *DMBE*, would undermine his claim to know what the message is. But many epistemologists—intuitions here vary—would allow that P10 nevertheless knows what the original message is. (2) Consider nascent Christian C, who as yet knows nothing about original sin or about the *sensus divinitatis*, but whom the HS has begun to teach, albeit sporadically and with limited success. C, still laboring under the corruptions of sin, often mistakes false beliefs for deliverances of the HS. So consider *B*, a Great Truth which the HS has caused C to believe and sealed upon her heart. Here there is a state of affairs *S* in C's minienvironment—namely the presence of sin and its damaging effects—which is such that the objective probability of *B*'s being true when *S* is added to C's *DMBE* is less than *r*. In that case, *B* hasn't enough warrant for knowledge. Just when does a Christian begin to know the Great Things?

[6] A further point: in various places, Plantinga argues that Christian beliefs, arrived at via the means of Faith (that is, the instigation of Scriptures, the inspiration of the HS, and the response of faith) are not only warranted but justified, where justification is supposed to be what CF demands. But Plantinga's construal of justification is a deontic one—satisfactory performance of one's epistemic duties. Since, as I believe, justification is quite a different matter, one that requires a certain kind of transparency of access to the truth-makers of a proposition (or, at least, of the probability of their obtaining), satisfaction of certain "duties" is neither here nor there, and the really important *de jure* question—the question whether Christians have that kind of access—remains a standing challenge.

[7] Ironically, Plantinga himself repudiates acceptance of the agreed-upon as a basis for arriving at the truth (see WCB, p. 418).

[8] Plantinga's argument for this claim goes astray, but in an instructive way. "A proposition is objectively probable, with respect to some condition C," he says, "only if that proposition is true in most of the nearby possible worlds that display C." (WCB, p. 188). Suppose theistic belief is warranted; then the process that produced it is reliable; in most nearby possible worlds, it produces true beliefs. Then, "assuming that in those nearby possible worlds it produces the same belief [in God] that it does in fact," in most of these worlds God exists. But then—so Plantinga—these worlds could not be close to our world, if we suppose for the sake of argument that our world is one which lacks God. So, probably, belief in God produced by the process isn't true in most nearby worlds; hence, the process is unreliable.

This argument is multiply flawed. Why—supposing there is no God—should we assume that in nearby possible worlds the process produces belief in God? If the process *is* reliable (warrant-conferring), and in nearby worlds there is no God, then in most of those worlds, the process does *not* deliver belief in God. Worse, most theists hold, with Plantinga, that God is a necessary being: if He exists, He exists in every possible world; conversely, if He doesn't exist, then He exists in none. So God's existence (nonexistence) is irrelevant to the closeness of worlds, and the objective probability of theism is either 1 or 0.

Thus a cognitive mechanism that produces theistic belief is on Plantinga's account either 100% reliable or 100% unreliable.

Yet it seems clear that a false belief—even a necessarily false belief—can have warrant. Consider Frege's belief that his second-order theory of classes was consistent. That belief, one would think, met Plantinga's conditions for warrant, prior to Frege's reception of Russell's fateful letter.

[9] I am assuming here that theism is true, but that the question whether anyone knows this (in Plantinga's sense) remains to be settled. That is, I am assuming that, even if a Christian speaks truly when she says she knows that God exists, we are not yet in a position to decide whether what she says is true.

[10] A Christian might protest that he does not *need* any such independent evidence. But the demand for such evidence is entirely in order when the question at issue is whether his beliefs are indeed produced, in a reliable way, by the SD/HS mechanism. We demand this kind of independent evidence all the time—for example, when questions are raised about the reliability of a measurement technique in chemistry, or the reliability of a sensory mechanism.

Consider beliefs based on memory. To the extent that we discover our memories to conflict with those of others—e.g., when checking childhood memories with siblings or parents—we decrease (or should decrease) our confidence in the reliability of memory. Studies that show how memory reshapes the past, often in conformity with self-interest, should diminish it further. Nor, given that, should we repose a great deal of confidence in a memory even when shared long-term memories agree, if the agreement admits of alternative explanation (e.g., a history of collective story-telling about the past which provides opportunity for joint reshaping).

The need for independent evidence is made more acute if, as is the case, the atheist has his own naturalistic story to tell about how the theist has come by his beliefs, and by the fantastic variety of beliefs allegedly inspired by the HS (and by Scripture and mystical experience). This does not—or need not—require trying to settle whether theism is true. We can just investigate directly whether there are such faculties as the SD and HS-guidance. Of course, we don't *ordinarily* raise an explicit methodological demand for independent checks. In part, such checking proceeds all the time *sub rosa* and in general quite inattentively, when, e.g., the deliverances of one sensory modality confirm those of another. And we certainly *should* consider the demand in order when, as here, a faculty or its reliability is in question. In the end, there are worries about the circularity of appeals to such cross-checks. But (a) it is not as obvious as many epistemologists (e.g., Alston) think that we encounter hopeless circularity or underdetermination here; and (b) theists and atheists should agree that the question is not usefully framed by raising the specter of radical skepticism. We should take it as a starting-point in this debate that ordinary sense perception, memory, deductive, inductive, and abductive reasoning and the like, are sufficiently trustworthy. Whatever basic epistemic premises that presupposes will, of course, be available to the theist.

[11] For a discussion of the complexities of inferring anything from this claim, see Fales 1996a, p. 447, ft. 16.

[12] This objection has been offered by me and by others, to Plantinga's argument in the last chapter of WPF. In WCB, he tackles it in the form given it by Keith Lehrer.

[13] Plantinga claims to elude the circularity charge (WCB pp. 351–52) on the grounds that, while accepting the A/C model requires accepting the Great Truths, it is not true that accepting the latter requires accepting the former: a Christian need not (typically, will not) accept the latter on the basis of an argument from the former. Well, then, consider the optimistic Darwinian. She believes that all there is, ontologically speaking, is space-time and matter; she also has lots of firmly held convictions of the ordinary sort: that there are trees, planets and stars, other people, and the like. She has a Darwinian story according to

which it is highly likely that her cognitive faculties will have evolved to be reliable when generating these beliefs. (She might not know exactly how to construct such a story, but reason thus: most of my ordinary beliefs are true, hence my cognitive capacities must be reliable; and so it's probable that such mechanisms are a likely outcome of Darwinian processes.) Since her naturalistic beliefs are part of the story, she's warranted in holding them if she's warranted in believing the story. Her being warranted in holding the beliefs doesn't entail her being warranted in accepting the story, as would be the case if the beliefs were warranted because she *derived* them from the story. But she doesn't do that: she had them long before she began theorizing about epistemological matters. Indeed, these beliefs are properly basic: she doesn't derive them from *any* other beliefs. It just seems to her that this is certainly the way things are. Phenomenologically, she finds these beliefs attended by a strong feeling of rightness; she just can't take seriously any alternative. (And this is no fantasy: there are plenty of atheists who fit this description.) Why can't such a naturalist argue, in lockstep with Plantinga, that her model is (a) possible, (b) subject to no philosophical objections that do not assume that naturalism is false, and (c) such that if naturalism is true, then the Darwinian model is at least close to the truth (for the naturalist, it's "the only game in town")? She, then, too, would elude a charge of circularity.

Plantinga presumably believes the Darwinian has no right to her optimism, in view of his argument showing that the probability of reliable cognitive faculties relative to Darwinian naturalism is low or inscrutable. But why should that deter the optimistic Darwinian? Confidence in her cognitive abilities no doubt confers a considerable selective advantage; evolution has ensured that she is endowed with it. She believes the world is as it seems, and that it seems as it really is because that is just what natural selection makes likely. I have argued in Fales 1996a that this is just what a Darwinian *should* think. Of course, the Darwinian picture, however adumbrated, if necessary, to support the Darwinian's confidence, may be *false*, just as mere Christianity might be false. But those are empirical questions; neither view suffers from some internal or philosophical infirmity, given a reliabilist conception of warrant.

[14] Considerable progress has been made in unravelling the neural basis of mystical experience, but so far, this has shown no indication of pointing toward any supernatural etiology. Nor is the biological purpose of the neural substrate of mystical experience that of producing these experiences. The brain structures involved, the temporal lobes, amygdala, and hippocampus, serve quite different functions when operating normally. It is rather a (typically, but not invariably, benign) malfunctioning—proto-epileptic microseizures—that produces mystical states. This—theistic beliefs produced by the malfunctioning of some system dedicated to a different set of purposes—is precisely what Plantinga deems a highly implausible source of theistic beliefs, at least if there is a God (WCB, p. 189).

[15] Calvin 1960, p. 44.

[16] Plantinga comes close to conceding the difficulty when he asks (WCB, p. 268), "Given that there is a church that God has preserved from error, which church is it?" He has replied (in conversation) that some supposed deliverances of the HS are more confidence-inspiring than others. He makes an analogy to our cognitive attitude toward, say, mathematical truths: to some of these we attach complete certainty, whereas other, less obvious ones are held with less confidence. But on Plantinga's model, confidence in its various degrees is simply a subjective psychological state, albeit one correlated with warrant in properly functioning individuals. Be that as it may, psychological certainty (concerning the gifts of the HS and all manner of other matters as well) is provided all too freely by nature (or God). Many—probably most—Mormons are every bit as certain that they have the testimony of the HS as to the truth of the Book of Mormon, as is Plantinga of the HS's testimony to the Great Truths of the Gospels. If we do not take seriously this phenomenological evidence for the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit, the claim that there

is a central body of Christian doctrine communicated by the Spirit becomes wholly *ad hoc*. There just is no careful selection of the doctrines of what Plantinga calls 'mere Christianity' that will survive the data concerning claims to be guided by the Holy Spirit, claims whose intensity and sincerity is regularly correlated with what Locke calls 'enthusiasm'—and with heresy.

[17] Of course, if the HS *is* reliable, then those Christians who get things right will be in the know, by Plantinga's lights. But that sort of knowledge should, with the salvation of one's soul at stake, be cold comfort. Indeed, a reflective Christian to whom this worry occurs should become unsure of the security of his own spiritual leadings, in which case he will cease to satisfy Plantinga's confidence-condition for knowledge.

This objection is analogous to one offered by Michael Martin that Plantinga calls Son of Great Pumpkin (see WCB 345–51): why wouldn't voodooists, say, be equally rational in accepting beliefs in loa spirits as properly basic? Is mine the same objection as Martin's? Not exactly, though it is a near kin. The difference—and it is a crucial one—is that the many contenders here are all positions held by faithful devotees of the HS.

[18] Just what sort of moral failing or defect is it that Plantinga considers the unreborn to be subject to? He speaks (WCB pp. 207–10, 217f.) of sin's grip producing a cognitive disorder—primarily, an inability to know about God and about what in His creation is to be valued and what hated—and an affective disorder, a disorder of the will and what it inclines toward. Is it then that the unsaved suffer some inability to understand the difference between right and wrong, between good and evil? Is there some failure to recognize the obligation moral norms place us under? Surely there is none to which Christians are not in equal degree prey. Perhaps, then, it is that non-Christians operate with different moral standards or principles than Christians? This suggestion would be hard to fashion into a coherent claim. Just which non-Christians—and which Christians—would Plantinga have in mind? Or, could it be, perhaps, that Christians, unlike non-Christians, can allegedly ground their moral commitments in a defensible conception of the basis of moral truths? Or that their love of the world and of the moral law is informed by the recognition that these are creations of God—a fact that the atheist, at least, won't recognize? Or again, the recognition that, in spite of our deeply sinful nature, we can take courage for the reforming of our lives in the salvific sacrifice of Jesus? But these last three, while distinguishing many Christians from non-Christians, can hardly be appealed to by way of *independent* evidence of greater Christian success at pursuing the moral life.

Of course, non-Christians (especially atheists) might be *assumed* by Christians to be particularly shiftless, amoral, even determinedly evil. There are thoughtful Christians who believe that atheism must be motivated by a self-serving desire to rationalize freedom from moral constraints. No doubt there are such atheists, just as there are Christians who have used their religion to rationalize everything from slavery to genocide. There is no cogent evidence that the moral lives of Christians are better ordered toward the good than those of non-Christians.

Finally, might the claim be that Christians, however great their failures in the sphere of action, are able to achieve greater purity of heart, a more nearly righteous ordering of the soul and will? In the absence of actions that confirm such elevated intentions, this is to divorce intention from performance and to retreat to a purely speculative claim about inner states. I have known more than one serious Christian who apostatized because of the yawning gap between what was preached in church—that the saved are released from their sinful nature (see e.g. Rom. 6, 1 Jn. 3, James 2, Lk. 6:46, and cp. Mt. 7:15–20)—and the lack of any visible change in the lives of the faithful. (In some, the gap yawns wider than in others. One is reminded of John Calvin who, no doubt in this as in other matters being convinced of the guidance of the HS, engineered the judicial murder, by burning at the stake, of Michael Servetus, for the crime of disagreeing with Calvin's theology: see Bainton 1953.)

[19] See Barna 1997.

[20] Plantinga does not take this to mean that the prophets fully understood what they were writing at God's behest. There may be lessons to be gleaned from their writings that God knew only future generations would understand. But for present purposes, it doesn't matter whether the meaning of the text is to be understood as what God intended or as what an inspired human understood himself to be saying.

[21] Plantinga's quite cavalier dismissal of critical Bible scholarship deserves a discussion it can't get here. Certainly, the wide disagreements among scholars—one reason for Plantinga's dismissiveness—shows that the issues are difficult, and ought to teach modesty. But Plantinga thinks there is no great difficulty here, at least with respect to the Great Things, such as the Resurrection, which we are directly taught by the HS. To propose this is virtually—and perhaps Plantinga intends this—to turn the clock on Bible scholarship back to the 16th century. Does Plantinga imagine that during the Reformation, when the HS spoke in every village and hamlet, there was greater agreement about Biblical matters great and small? Or consider the authors of the Gospels themselves who, if they were not eyewitnesses, enjoyed at least the intimate tutelage of the HS. Why could they not craft biographies that permit a consistent chronology of the Life and Passion? How is it—here I offer just one illustration—that Mt. 27:51–53 relates a general resurrection of the saints at Jesus' death, a resurrection not elsewhere attested in the NT, and concerning which Josephus, who displayed a lively interest in portents, breathes not a word? Is that resurrection apocryphal, but Jesus' historical?

[22] Are these passages just another instance of the problem of evil? Would it do to respond that God may have His own good but inscrutable reasons for commanding/permitting these things, even contradicting what He elsewhere commands? Perhaps: but here, for the Biblical inerrantist, at least these things are laid directly at God's feet. There is no space to engage the often Byzantine apologetic maneuvers that are deployed to make these passages palatable. I do not see how they can succeed without affording us the right to excuse almost any text, or action, whatsoever. Nor will it do to appeal to mystery, mystery which has justified or fomented the suffering of countless human beings throughout the ages. This is no way to teach humanity justice. I do not deny that there are hermeneutical subtleties to be confronted. But the very fact that these subtleties permit natural interpretations that rationalize evil itself condemns the texts.

[23] See, e.g., Heb. 10:14.

[24] In his discussion of the problem of evil, Plantinga raises the question what could serve as a defeater for the Great Things, given that belief in them is properly basic (whether warranted or not). Here, he allows that if a hypothesis H, whose only support comes from data it explains, is challenged by a competing hypothesis H* which better explains those data, then H* is a *prima facie* defeater for H. The A/C model is not itself, according to Plantinga, a deliverance of Faith; its support derives from various facts about religious belief which it serves to make sense of. If so, then a naturalistic hypothesis which can better explain the relevant facts, including those just mentioned, would be a *prima facie* defeater. Is there such a naturalistic defeater? I believe there is, though it is to be found more nearly in the neighborhood of Durkheim than in Marx or Freud.

[25] I thank Alvin Plantinga for useful comments on this essay.

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