

Chapter II

Critical Responses: The Evidentialist Objection

In the previous chapter I summarized an important portion of Plantinga's version of Reformed epistemology, mostly contained in his essay "Reason and Belief in God." I now take up an examination of some of those theses by discussing and evaluating a number of critical responses to his project. I do not intend to suggest by doing this that all those who respond to Plantinga's work think he is entirely misdirected; in fact, some works support and defend his project against the criticisms of his fellow philosophers. What I will do in this and the next two chapters is organize and classify many important responses to his work, and I will respond to their work in some detail, so that we might get some perspective about his critics and a clearer view of Plantinga's program.

It is a challenge to classify and organize responses to Plantinga's work for several reasons. First, many critical papers take on several of his theses, raising important questions and concerns about one particular aspect of his work, but less consequential questions about others. Thus, some works can and will be mentioned in more than one section of this chapter, while others are not. I hope my editorial procedure will not overlook any important and relevant criticisms in the literature. Second, there is a logical relationship among many of Plantinga's epistemic perspectives so that taking a position on one particular aspect of his project has important and immediate implications for other parts of his project even when this is not stated. For instance, a pessimistic view of whether or not Plantinga's project escapes the bonds of evidentialism will, I think, be related in some fairly direct, logical fashion to an appraisal of Plantinga's position on the Reformed objection to natural theology and/or his position on God's existence being a properly basic belief.¹ Therefore, there is a sense in which I could discuss all critical responses in this chapter under the rough heading of objections to Plantinga's theistic epistemology or rejoinders to Plantinga's conception of properly basic beliefs. And the nature of the logical relationships may also produce an appearance of some redundancy by his objectors and my responses. However, it suits my

¹More accurately, Plantinga claims that certain propositions in certain circumstances that self-evidently entail God's existence can be properly basic. An example of this might be, "God is speaking to me."

purposes to examine rejoinders as they follow the development of Plantinga's views in RBG. I will confine myself to the explicit arguments of his critics in those contexts and will speak to the implications of these only as I think it is necessary and as length allows. For simplicity's sake, I will follow the development of the previous chapter by discussing objections falling roughly into the following categories in this and the two subsequent chapters: 1) the evidentialist's objection to theistic belief, 2) Aquinas and foundationalism, 3) the Reformed objection to natural theology, and 4) belief in God and properly basic belief.

Third, it is challenging to be comprehensive when there are so many sophisticated and lengthy responses to his work, with various similarities and subtle differences. Naturally I will have to condense and compress many arguments, but I hope I will not too severely abridge their views. As a matter of procedure I will begin with widely held concerns and then handle special cases. Because of length considerations, I will divide these four areas into three chapters and begin in this chapter with the evidentialist objection to theistic belief.

The Evidentialist Objection to Theistic Belief

The heart of Plantinga's assessment of the evidentialist objection to theistic belief is, "belief in God is irrational or unreasonable or not rationally acceptable or intellectually irresponsible or somehow noetically below par because . . .there is insufficient evidence for it."² Plantinga as a theist responds to that challenge in two ways. One, he may ask if the many and varied arguments (presumably taken singly or in combination) that have been proposed for the existence of God do not constitute evidence for the existence of God. Second, the theist could question the thesis that it is irrational or unreasonable to accept theistic belief in the absence of sufficient evidence or reasons. It is to that second option Plantinga wants to steer us.

Those who disagree with Plantinga on this matter do so for several reasons. Generally these concerns could be characterized as having to do with whether or not Plantinga can successfully escape the bonds of evidentialism or if he even needs to do so. Several take issue as to whether God's existence can be known immediately--without inference; others wonder whether there is a necessity for knowing that God

²Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God" in *Faith and Rationality*, edited by Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983). p. 17.

exists without inference when it could be known by inference from other properly basic beliefs.

Additionally, I will address two interesting and unique concerns raised by Plantinga's critics in this section: one critic thinks Plantinga's method is flawed because it implies or uses an epistemological essentialism about which the pragmatist epistemologist has grave doubts. The other critic claims that Plantinga has given evidentialism an unnatural definition which inevitably leads his project astray.

Not every one in the current literature is as pessimistic about establishing the rationality or irrationality of belief in God via evidentialism as is Plantinga. An example of an evidentialist proponent (at least as far as belief in God is concerned) is Stewart Goetz who maintains that belief in God is not immune to evidentialism because it is in fact inferred and thus based on a more basic proposition held to be true by the person doing the believing.³ His argument runs like this: in order to individuate God as the person who is revealing Himself to Plantinga, he must have a prior knowledge of what God is like. Putting his objection into the form of a question, can one have a knowledge of God's properties which allow one to individuate Him when He reveals Himself without having performed any type of inference to obtain knowledge of these properties? Goetz thinks not; he thinks we need to include in our foundational noetic structure some beliefs about oneself. Examples of these are the propositions

(1) I exist, and

(2) I am a contingent being.

According to Goetz, it is from this contingent nature of the self that we infer the existence of a necessary being or beings. In sum, Goetz believes that Plantinga's belief in God rests upon "talk of necessary and contingent beings" and is therefore a conclusion to an evidential argument--it is not a basic belief. It is not fully clear whether Goetz thinks an evidential case for belief in God can be made; but what is clear is that he thinks that Plantinga has not escaped the need for evidential argument because God, if He could be known, could be known only through His properties and they can only be inferred.⁴

³Stewart C. Goetz, "Belief in God is Not Properly Basic," in *Religious Studies*. 19 (December 1983) pp. 475-484.

⁴Donald Hatcher briefly makes a similar claim in his essay "Some Problems with Plantinga's Reformed Epistemology," in *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy*, Volume 10, No. 1 (January, 1989). See page 25. Though, I think, his claim is so similar to Goetz's that my response to Goetz below is relevant to both, Hatcher's does have a particular spin on this that merits some response. This problem of interpretation (of experience or data) or

In a similar way Frank Schubert argues that Plantinga's position on this is untenable for "one very specific reason--namely, belief in the existence of God suggests a clearly discernable reliance upon a specific type of evidence, the evidence of ancestral testimony."⁵ He argues that Plantinga relies upon ancestral testimony as evidence to undergird and inform his belief in God's existence. Since, Schubert argues, Plantinga fails to escape the bonds of evidentialism, then belief in God must be understood as not properly basic. Schubert instead sees theistic belief akin to what he calls "umbrella beliefs" which, for certain specified reasons, possess a type of power like unto basic beliefs. Schubert raises the question, "Why is it that some beliefs, such as theism, are more compelling in a given society than other rival umbrella beliefs within that particular society?"⁶ In part, he argues, this power is due in some sense to the reliable character of those who elicit "profound commitment" to those beliefs. Just where that will lead is not relevant right now. The most relevant point I wish to discuss is that Schubert is saying something closely akin to Goetz. Both Goetz and Schubert think belief in God must be based on evidence which is more basic than the immediately formed belief that God exists; that is to say, belief in God is not basic.

One way Plantinga could respond to Goetz, Schubert, and the others is to call attention to the proposition

individuation, he argues, is not analogous to one's experience of pain. Hatcher notes that one doesn't infer pain, one merely is aware of it. For example, presently I'm aware of moderate pain in my left knee; I didn't infer that, I knew that immediately and without inference. To weaken the apparent weight of that analogy, Hatcher seems to assert that the experience of pain is common but the experience of God is "not a common occurrence." But the force of this claim is lessened in view of Plantinga's doctrine of sin and its suppressing influence on belief in God; Reformed epistemologists assert that belief in God is a widely experienced phenomenon but that it is suppressed.

Hatcher also asserts that according to Kierkegaard, it is reasonable to imagine even Abraham having trouble deciding if it is really God commanding him to sacrifice Isaac. The main problem with this speculation is that it lacks the grounds to support the view. On what grounds does Kierkegaard have the authority to declare this interpretation? The biblical text in question does not tell us how Abraham individuated God from, perhaps, voices in his own head or Satan's voice. The text simply does not tell us how Abraham dealt with his experience of God there; it is conceivable and more plausible that Abraham was responding in faith to the same voice that told him that through Isaac's seed the nations of the world would be blessed. Perhaps in that promise Abraham foresaw that God would provide a way of escape either by a substitute sacrifice or through the resurrection of Isaac. But neither more plausible interpretation even remotely demands that Abraham could not individuate God's voice speaking to him. The point of all this is that Hatcher simply doesn't give a satisfying argument here. He merely cites Kierkegaard's view, which standing by itself as it does, offers little in the way of substantiation.

⁵Frank D. Schubert. "Is Ancestral Testimony Foundational Evidence for God's Existence?" in *Religious Studies* (27, 1991) pp. 499-510. See p. 499.

⁶Ibid., p. 508.

(3) God exists

and ask exactly how these critics have shown it cannot be known immediately. Plantinga could, perhaps, grant that belief in God could be inferred from the fact of self-contingency, though that is not completely an uncontroversial position in philosophy, but the key issue Plantinga would want to raise would be whether they have shown that his belief in God cannot be known immediately--that is, known without inference. How has Goetz shown he cannot? The crux of Goetz's assertion is that unless one infers belief in God from properties already known about God, one would not be able to individuate or distinguish God's revelatory presence from presumably indigestion or some other such psychological projection.

However, look at the case of encountering a tree; or using Chisolm's way of expressing it, "I'm being appeared to treely." One could say that the presence of the tree is inferred from the stimulation of light on certain kinds of light-sensitive cells in the back of the eye. And further, it is inferred from the input given to me by important "ancestral" authorities in my life when similar such experiences of being appeared to treely occurred with them present with me. However, the possibility exists that the present experience of my being appeared to treely does not involve any of that sort of inference. I simply am in a certain kind of circumstance and I immediately form the belief expressed by this proposition

(4) There is a tree.

And surely in those circumstances, I think, this is rationally permissible; that is, I've broken no epistemic responsibilities or lack no commonly achieved epistemic virtue to believe I have *prima facie* grounds to hold the belief (4) and no inference was made. I simply was attending mainly to the qualitative aspects of my visual experience. But if no inference was made at that particular time when the particular belief was formed, then it was formed immediately or non-inferentially at that time. But then by analogy the same could be said for belief in God. So then both Goetz and Schubert have not shown that belief in God cannot be basic for someone at time T for some rational subject S. Or, in other words, the same reasons which would justify taking (4) as a non-inferred, immediate belief, would apply to taking (3) as a non-inferred, immediate belief.

Now this account might not be found entirely satisfying to many. Is there some problem left untouched lurking in the neighborhood of this concern? It might be objected that the rationality of belief in

God in such a case might regress transitively until it necessarily came under evidential argument.⁷ In other words, the rationality of my belief in God might be provisionally transferred to the rationality of my ancestor's belief in God, but somewhere this buck passing needs to stop; the rationality at that point, it might be thought, would depend in determinative ways on the qualitative kind of evidence or argument or grounds independent of ancestral heritage. Are we not back at square one again?

Philip Quinn argues that even if it is the case that propositions which self-evidently entail that God exists were properly basic for some people in certain circumstances and time, it would be a ". . . relatively unimportant feature of such propositions because they would be at least as well justified if properly based on other properly basic propositions and could always be so based."⁸ He goes on to say that "such propositions would seldom, if ever, be properly basic for intellectually sophisticated adult theists in our culture."⁹ Accordingly, Quinn perhaps might grant that ancestral testimony would justify the rationality of belief in God for some people in certain circumstances, one of them being when the subject is less than an "intellectually sophisticated adult theist in our culture," but Quinn clearly implies that such justification would not obtain if one were. In other words, he thinks that though Plantinga may be able to defeat the evidentialist objection to theistic belief in some cases, it is, however, only a temporary and perhaps illusory victory. Eventually the immature believer comes of age and must face evidentialism head on.

Plantinga has responded to Quinn on this.¹⁰ He reminds us of Quinn's two paradigmatic propositions

(5) I see a hand in front of me

and

(6) It seems to me that I see a hand in front of me

⁷Philip L. Quinn, "In Search of the Foundations of Theism," in *Faith and Philosophy*. Vol.2 No. 4 (October 1985). Quinn argues that occurrent belief in God, such as held by Plantinga's hypothetical Ted, would not be acceptable for an intellectually sophisticated adult theist in our culture.

⁸Ibid., p. 470.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Alvin Plantinga, "The Foundations of Theism: A Reply," in *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 3, No. 3, (July 1986). p. 304.

which Quinn used to make his point on this. Quinn thinks that (6) confers "a certain degree of justification on the proposition expressed by (5). Plantinga thinks that is not the case. He asserts that the ". . . whole development of modern philosophy from Descartes to Hume and Reid show that they [propositions like (6) taken as good evidence--deductive, inductive or abductive] are not."¹¹ The reason Plantinga asserts this is because there is nothing much in the way of (non-circular) evidence for proposition (5)."¹² While I'm inclined to agree with Plantinga on this, the claim that propositions like (6) are not in fact good evidence for (5), it is indeed a strong statement and by no means entirely evident to all. It appears to me that it requires a long and very carefully constructed argument or series of arguments.

Plantinga refers us to Thomas Reid. Reid and Plantinga agree that there is little by way of non-circular evidence for (5). They conclude there is little warrant for (5) given (6), but that there is warrant or positive epistemic status for (5) on the basis of taking theistic belief as basic. Now if this is true, then Quinn's criticism about the relatively unimportant feature of such basic propositions (propositions which self-evidently entail God's existence) is misguided; this is because they and they alone would provide positive epistemic status for belief in God. In other words, if appearances do not provide positive evidence or improved epistemic status for beliefs like (5), then beliefs expressed in propositions like (5) must either be irrational to hold or must gain their epistemic status some other way (most relevantly via a basic belief).

Now I am inclined to agree with this line of reasoning, as I think many philosophers are who are impressed with skepticism's power, but Plantinga's position needs a carefully detailed explanation of why this is so. What is surprising is that there is so little by way of explicit argument from Plantinga to show this. What also adds to the confusion, I think, is that Plantinga does not make more clear the distinction between rationality understood in terms of permission to believe and rationality understood in terms of duty to believe. There are many philosophers (though not all) who argue rationality in terms of duty when it comes to the existence of an external world; there are many fewer philosophers who argue that they mean rationality in those same stronger terms when it comes to defending the rationality of belief in the nature of

¹¹Ibid., p. 305.

¹²Ibid. Emphasis mine.

external objects. It is not entirely clear how Plantinga comes down on this issue, but I take it he is defending the rationality of belief in the nature of external objects and God in the weaker sense--permission to believe or being within one's epistemic rights.¹³

Returning to Quinn's second assertion which is, roughly speaking, that while belief in God could be provisionally basic for some at certain times and under certain circumstances, an important exception to this would be that it would be seldom thought of as properly basic for sophisticated adult theists in our society. Quinn does not hold this position because there are potential defeaters for theism that the sophisticated adult would surely know about and that demand necessarily on hand potential defeaters for those defeaters. Rather, he holds that belief in God would be properly basic for him ". . . 1) only if he has no sufficiently substantial reasons to think that any of its potential defeaters is (sic) true and 2) this is not due to epistemic negligence on [his] my part."¹⁴

Unfortunately, Quinn thinks that such defeaters exist which have those qualities of being very substantial reasons for thinking that God does not exist. And after reflection, Quinn thinks they are sufficiently substantial so as to hold that belief in God is no longer properly basic (ie. *prima facie* justified) in the condition in which he finds himself, and he also thinks that most sophisticated theists would find themselves in the same situation. Now Quinn does not argue that it would be irrational to believe in God in light of having very substantial reasons for believing that God does not exist (he cites the problem of natural or non-moral evil as an example of a very substantial reason to think God does not exist). The theist could, in fact, have more substantial arguments, reasons, etc. to believe that those defeater reasons are false. So Quinn believes that it does not follow that intellectually sophisticated adult theists in our culture cannot be justified in believing that God exists. But he thinks such people could only do so if they had already done the kinds of tasks traditionally thought of as natural theology.

¹³See George Mavrodes, "Jerusalem and Athens Revisited," in *Faith Rationality*, edited by Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 192-218. Mavrodes makes clearer the distinction between permission to believe (being within one's epistemic rights in believing) and duty to believe. Since Plantinga has not disclaimed any of Mavrodes' assessments in that article, there is reason to think he has a fundamental agreement about this distinction.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 480.

An interesting aside is that apparently Quinn does not see himself as fitting either into the naive but innocent condition where theism could be construed as properly basic for him, nor into the hypothetical advantaged sophisticated person who has done his natural theology non-negligently and concluded that he has good reasons to believe the defeaters are not true. It makes one wonder if Quinn means to say he is agnostic or perhaps cannot help himself believing that God exists despite his current circumstances.¹⁵

Nonetheless, Plantinga takes issue with Quinn on the grounds that what Quinn thinks is "very substantial grounds" for believing that God does not exist is in fact not substantial at all.¹⁶ Plantinga begins his defense by questioning whether Marxist or Freudian speculations provide anything near an argument. Instead he thinks they are simply either a naturalistic explanation for belief in God or some kind of attempt to show that theism originated from a "disreputable source." Plantinga does not make it explicit that offering alternative explanations for phenomena (world-view dependent data) does not amount to anywhere near decisive evidence or that the second criticism concerned with the notion of "source" has the features of a classic case of genetic fallacy. Nonetheless, Plantinga asserts the only real problem for the theist is the argument from evil. Condensing Plantinga's argument substantially (since this is discussed at greater length in the previous chapter), the problem of evil is clearly not a logical incompatibility nor, according to him, even a probable problem with respect to the amount and kind of evil that exists. For it to be a substantial problem for a theist would require the sophisticated theist to know that God could not in any case have good ultimate purpose(s) in allowing the amount and kinds of evil we experience. Possessing this kind of knowledge seems implausible to Plantinga.

Plantinga says he is inclined to believe that Quinn thinks the only kinds of successful defeaters that could be posed to a potential defeater would be extrinsic or independent evidence. But Plantinga asks, couldn't it be the case that the non-propositional basic belief itself is all that is needed to maintain rationality without further independent evidence? Plantinga creates a hypothetical example of himself

¹⁵Quinn, "The Foundations of Theism." Quinn's agnosticism seems to be implied beginning on p. 481, following (12) through the first paragraph on p. 483. However, the point was made to me in a conversation with Plantinga that this is not necessarily the case. Quinn at that time may have found himself a believer despite his doubts; not all of our beliefs at all times are within our control.

¹⁶Plantinga, "The Foundations of Theism: A Reply," p. 308 and following.

having applied to the National Endowment for the Humanities for a fellowship. Suppose Plantinga tries to bribe a colleague to write a glowing letter in his behalf and suppose that colleague turns over the bribery request letter to the chairman's office. But the letter soon disappears from the chairman's office under mysterious circumstances and there is strong evidence that Plantinga stole it. The "facts of the matter, however, are that I didn't steal the letter and in fact spent the entire afternoon in question on a solitary walk in the woods; furthermore I clearly remember spending that afternoon walking in the woods. Hence I believe in the basic way

(7) I was alone in the woods all that afternoon, and I did not steal the letter."¹⁷

Now Plantinga admits he has strong evidence for the denial of (7); he set up the hypothetical situation such that he had a motive to steal the letter, the opportunity, he's done these things in the past, and a reliable colleague saw him sneaking into the office about the time the letter was found to be missing. Plantinga knows all this evidence is against him. In this case the only evidence that Plantinga has is (7); and he doesn't have any independent reason to think the defeater is wrong. But he takes it that it is obvious that he is rational to go on believing (7) in a properly basic way. The point to see, I think, is that in some cases properly basic beliefs are intrinsic defeaters for defeaters, that is, there is no need for independent evidence or argument to buttress the basic belief and yet the defeater is defeated. By analogy, Plantinga is saying the same holds true for belief in God and the probable argument from evil. It is conceivable that belief in God has a higher degree of non-propositional warrant than does the probable argument from evil. Belief in God is an intrinsic defeater-defeater in that case.

Thus on two grounds he holds Quinn's claims to be mistaken. First, there isn't a necessary need for independent defeater-defeaters. Belief in God could be an intrinsic defeater-defeater and that is all that is needed to maintain a rational status. And second, extrinsic defeaters come in two varieties. They need not be evidence for the falsehood of the defeaters--what Plantinga calls rebutting defeaters; they may need only to undercut the alleged defeaters by offering refutations (of which the free-will defense might be a paradigmatic example of the latter). On this I judge Plantinga is correct in concluding that even

¹⁷Ibid., p. 310.

sophisticated adult theists are rational to hold their belief in God as a properly basic belief because held as such, it has greater warrant than an independent rebutting defeater for the problem of evil (since I, in agreement with Plantinga, am not aware of a non-circular rebutting defeater). At this point I will stop with Quinn but will consider some of his other concerns when I discuss the second special case below.

It is appropriate now to turn to the first of two special problems raised in conjunction with Plantinga's appraisal of evidentialism. I consider them special problems because both of these special cases tend to use assumptions or raise questions which more radically alter the discussion of Plantinga's work. The first case concerns itself with the pragmatic outlook of Robbins.¹⁸ There's a bit of irony involved in this critique. Plantinga thinks that epistemology took a wrong turn by failing to see the evidentialist objection was rooted in classical foundationalism, and to the extent it was so rooted it was flawed. In a somewhat similar fashion Robbins argues that the Reformed epistemologists (here Plantinga and Alston) have naively rooted their epistemology in the essentialist perspective rather than in a pragmatic perspective. Robbins then explains what he means by pragmatism by quoting Richard Rorty, ". . .the doctrine that there are no constraints on inquiry save conversational ones--no wholesale constraints derived from the nature of the objects, or of the mind, or language, but only those retail constraints provided by the remarks of our fellow-inquirers."¹⁹ In Robbins' terms, "pragmatism is simply anti-essentialism so far as truth, knowledge, rationality, evidence, and the like are concerned."²⁰

In this view theories or methods of inquiry which try to establish the truth are reactionary; such a view might even be guilty of divisiveness within the Christian community. An example of this cited by Robbins would be the "mean-spirited" divisiveness that exists between the Christian world-view

¹⁸Wesley Robbins, "Does Belief in God need Proof?" in *Faith and Philosophy* Volume 2, No. 3, (July 1985). pp. 272-286.

¹⁹Richard Rorty, "Pragmatism, Relativism, and Irrationalism," in *Consequences of Pragmatism*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982). p. 165. Robbins quotes Rorty in "Does Belief in God Need Proof," p. 274. Rorty is known for his famous quote, "Truth is what your colleagues will let you get away with."

²⁰Robbins, "Does Belief in God Need Proof?," p. 274.

philosophers and the more liberal hermeneutic philosophers.²¹ For an apparent pragmatic epistemologist like Robbins, "truth" is the name for a "collection of practices that have in common their being expedients for keeping us in 'working touch' with the world."²² New expedients are made up out of old ones and at best there is only relative truth.²³ Referring to William James, Robbins challenges Plantinga to read the history of philosophy and draw a moral about these two (essentialism and anti-essentialism) images of ourselves as truth seekers. Nevertheless, this view has at least two serious and related difficulties. First it implies that there isn't any such thing as objective truth and if that were the case, then it follows from that, that one paradigm is as good as another. However, the question is, is this true? Do the flat-earthers of this world really have as good a case as those who think the earth is more round or pear-shaped? It seems there are obvious counter-example cases like the one I chose from the history of science which indicate that at least some of our theories or methods of inquiry are more accurate or closer to the truth than others. Surely, Robbins is mistaken here.

A second and related serious difficulty arises if the pragmatist wants to claim this view of relative truth is absolutely true.²⁴ She is faced with some sort of fairly obvious and glaring self-referential incoherence. It might be a tempting move for the pragmatist to lower her sights and claim only relative truth in so far as it is concerned, but what could she sensibly mean by that? If there is no objective truth any paradigm is as good as another, including the direct contradiction of the pragmatic epistemology. So it seems that despite the movement in post-modern epistemology toward pragmatism, it has serious flaws and, as I see it, offers no serious challenge to Plantinga's project. One other thing worth mentioning here

²¹J.Wesley Robbins, "Christian World View Philosophy and Pragmatism," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. LVI/3 1988. p. 538.

²²Ibid., p. 536.

²³Ibid. Robbins says for pragmatists, truth is in the making. Douglas Groothuis suggested that such a theory seems to entail that truth could also be unmade--a particularly valuable property when things go against you.

²⁴In fairness to Robbins, he does not make this move. See Robbins, "Christian World View Philosophy and Pragmatism," p. 537. However, there are plenty of pragmatists who in practice behave like they have the truth and as C.S. Lewis observed in *Miracles*, "The fact surely is that they nearly always are claiming to do so. The claim is surrendered only when the question discussed in this chapter is pressed; and when the crisis is over the claim is tacitly resumed." *Miracles*, The Macmillan Company, (1947). p. 24.

and developing later--it is precisely the theist's account of knowledge that includes God creating the categories in our minds such that there exists a non-conventional link between ideas and language and other reality. That gives us our hope of knowing some of the way things are and fulfilling our creation mandate to rule the earth.²⁵

The second special case I will discuss poses a different, yet again, very radical criticism of Plantinga's views. This second case suggests that Plantinga has given an unnatural interpretation to evidentialism and thereby misinterprets evidentialism.²⁶ Kretzmann puts Plantinga's assessment of the evidentialist's objection into the two principles which can be organized into a syllogism

(8) It is irrational or unreasonable to accept theistic belief in the absence of sufficient evidence or reasons.

(9) There is no evidence or at any rate not sufficient evidence for the proposition that God exists.

The conclusion of the objection, should the premises be true, is left implicit by Plantinga: it is irrational to believe that God exists. Kretzmann sees (9) as a strong claim and notes that Plantinga cites arguments that are a rejoinder to (9), not the least of which is the development Plantinga has given to the ontological argument in *The Nature of Necessity*. In light of this Kretzmann wonders aloud whether (9) should read as

(9') There is not sufficient evidence for the proposition that God exists.

That is, in light of what Plantinga has said so far in RBG and in earlier works, the most plausible approach one would assume Plantinga to take would be to defend (9').

But Kretzmann complains that in RBG "Plantinga neither quotes nor draws on this assessment; he simply refers, without comment, to the chapter in which the argument and the assessment appear."²⁷ This lack of clarity on Plantinga's part, according to Kretzmann, is such that "no one could confidently draw on

²⁵Gordon Lewis suggested, in a conversation, the link Augustine makes between the categories in our minds and their link to other reality as a solution to Kantian agnosticism. See Gordon Lewis, in *Faith and Reason in the Thought of St. Augustine*, doctoral dissertation, 1959, especially pp. 25-54. See also Ron Nash, *The Light of the Mind: St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge*, Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1969 and *The Word of God and the Mind of Man*, Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 1982. See especially pp. 79-90. See the last section of the Addendum to this thesis for more discussion of this issue.

²⁶Norman Kretzmann, *Evidence Against Anti-Evidentialism*, unpublished paper presented to the faculty at Colorado University 1991.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 8.

his 1974 assessment of the evidence of theism in order to settle the question of his attitude toward (9'), a question left open in RBG.²⁸ But Kretzmann does not suppose that Plantinga could mean that there is no evidence for the existence of God. Certainly, Kretzmann remarks, (8) is well suited to that interpretation (the sufficiency issue) because it discusses the lack of sufficient evidence, not the "no evidence" view. It is therefore somewhat puzzling to Kretzmann that Plantinga instead takes up (8) to defend in the substantial portion of RBG. But the fact remains that Plantinga defends neither (9) nor Kretzmann's hypothetical (9') but instead focuses on (8).

Kretzmann sees Plantinga's project of calling (8) into question as an indirect attack or refutation of evidentialism with two main elements. The first component involves tying the evidentialist objection to classical foundationalism and the second involves showing that classical foundationalism is untenable. Kretzmann thinks that neither of these components works but focuses on the first component of Plantinga's project, that of tying the evidentialist objection to classical foundationalism.²⁹

Kretzmann wants to set aside any argument over the details of just how Aquinas's theology, Aristotelian science, and classical foundationalism interrelate. His cause of disagreement is that evidentialism is "logically, psychologically, and, no doubt, historically prior to any such system; it is a truistic, pre-theoretic, typically implicit canon of rationality itself."³⁰ More to the point he suggests that ". . . It's unthinkable that that intuition could have grown out of foundationalism or, for that matter, coherentism or any other epistemological system."³¹ He asserts to the contrary of Plantinga that ". . . we can get a better understanding of the classical foundationalist if we see him as attempting to elaborate and codify the intuition expressible as evidentialism. Foundationalism is rooted in evidentialism."³²

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., p. 10. Kretzmann says he doesn't have anything to say in the present essay about whether Plantinga is successful in his attempted refutation of classical foundationalism. He sees that Plantinga's project, at this point, is dependent on successfully tying evidentialism to classical foundationalism; if Plantinga cannot do that then the project fails.

³⁰Ibid., p. 11.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid., p. 12.

Kretzmann sums up his difficulty with Plantinga's project thus far by recounting the difficulty of reconciling Plantinga's earlier position on the sufficiency of the evidence for theism with the obvious availability of some evidence for God's existence, and he wonders out loud what Plantinga means by the ". . . claim that theism without evidence is rational."³³ This apparently surprising move forces Kretzmann to draw the conclusion that Plantinga is narrowing the normal notion of evidence; he thinks that even though Plantinga doesn't expressly declare this, it is implicit in his program. This narrowing of the notion of evidence has two assumptions: ". . . [1] all evidence [is] (what I have been calling) ulterior evidence, grounds other than the nature of the believed proposition or the circumstances of the formation of the belief, and [2] all evidence is propositional."³⁴ It is on this particular point that Kretzmann takes issue with Plantinga--". . . it is far too narrowly sophisticated to suit evidentialism in general, which is not now and never was expressible as 'It is irrational to believe anything on insufficient evidence, by which is meant anything that is not probable with respect to some body of propositions that constitutes the evidence.'³⁵ Subsequently, he makes the point, "All that the evidentialist canon demands for beliefs that do not carry their evidence with them is sufficient support or backing of some sort, and 'evidence' has long been and is still the ordinary English word for that ordinary notion."³⁶

The upshot of this, according to Kretzmann, is that Plantinga's strategy is actually developing and maintaining

(AP) S can be rational in believing that God exists, even if S's acquisition of that belief is based on no other occurrent belief(s) of S's.³⁷

Kretzmann asserts that this position ". . . might fairly be read as claiming no more than that in forming one's religious beliefs one need not first engage in conscious apologetic or philosophical theology of any sort, which is just what the great theistic evidentialists have always claimed, although of course they went on to

³³Ibid., p. 13.

³⁴Ibid., p. 14.

³⁵Ibid., p. 15.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., p. 17.

insist that faith thus formed seeks understanding if it isn't deficient."³⁸ Kretzmann agrees with Quinn that belief that God exists is acceptable for Plantinga's example, Ted, the uninitiated and unsophisticated theist, but not properly basic for the sophisticated adult theist.³⁹ Kretzmann sees Plantinga as treating differently the propositional and the ". . .sub-propositional experiential circumstances [which] are now and always have been among the things whose adequacy concerns the evidentialist. . ." ⁴⁰ He argues that these adequacies can be drawn out by asking "Chisolm-like questions" in order to raise the sub-propositional evidence to the propositional level "where it can be organized and assessed."⁴¹ They should not be treated differently.

Kretzmann's evaluation of Plantinga's handling of the evidentialist objection can now be summarized in a number of theses:

- (10) Plantinga's RBG analysis of the evidentialist objection is ambiguous.
- (11) The root of classical foundationalism is in the evidentialist intuition.
- (12) Plantinga is wrong about the root-shoot relationship between evidentialism and classical foundationalism.
- (13) Plantinga defines evidentialism too narrowly by defining sub-propositional evidence as not evidence.
- (14) Sub-propositional evidence has always been considered a part of what is evaluated by the evidentialist.
- (15) Sub-propositional evidence could temporarily justify a naive, prima facie belief in God.
- (16) Sub-propositional evidence can be transformed into propositional evidence by asking "Chisolm-like questions."
- (17) Sub-propositional evidence must necessarily be transformed into evidence (by Chisolm-like questions) to be considered part of the justification for a mature adult theist's case for a rational belief in God.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 17, 18.

³⁹Space will not allow me at this point to condense Plantinga's hypothetical example of a 14 year-old theist, which Kretzmann calls Ted. See p. 33, RBG.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 28, 29.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 29.

Now I wish to state some of my thoughts about these formalizations of Kretzmann's position. It appears to me that (10) through (12) and (15) are correct, but I do want to say some things about them. It seems to me that Kretzmann is correct in saying there exists some ambiguity on just how to understand Plantinga's (perhaps call it early Plantinga?) position on the availability of evidence for theism when comparing his earlier work in *The Nature of Necessity* with his presentation in RBG.⁴² Therefore, I see (10) as an important but not crucial problem to Plantinga's overall project. It is important because there is an obvious need for clarity when it comes to laying out an epistemic project. His portrayal of the evidential value of natural theology may appear ambiguous, but it is not necessarily so. Plantinga would do us all a favor to spell this out definitively.

Kretzmann's (11) seems to me to be correct though I cannot find any argument he gives in support of that. Because of space I can only say here, that it seems to me that most systems of thought begin with an initial intuition about the way things are. What follows, typically, is the articulation of that intuition. Showing that to be the case in general would, perhaps, involve a careful study of just how systematic beliefs are formed in a typical rational noetic structure and may involve a historical judgment as to how sophisticated systems have come about as they have. But that is too expansive an endeavor for this paper. Nonetheless, Kretzmann seems to me to be correct on this.⁴³

(12) looks correct to me. It is closely related to (11), but as I suggested above, (11) may be hard to demonstrate. Therefore, I think, Kretzmann should develop some kind of convincing argument for it if he can.

(15) doesn't seem to be controversial, at least among Kretzmann, Quinn, and Plantinga. Thus in the case of hypothetical Ted, the naive theistic believer, he is justified in his circumstances to hold theistic

⁴²The appearance of ambiguity might be due to the claim that the ontological argument is sound for Plantinga. He could merely mean that for himself it is a sound argument and that is quite different from saying it is sound for every or nearly every philosopher. In this construal of Plantinga's position, the ontological argument can be both sound and not of great evidentiary value because the argument is person relative; the skeptic may deny a crucial premise. And this seems to be precisely his position with regard to natural theology in RBG.

⁴³In a recent conversation with Plantinga about this he suggested that the deontological nature of Descartes' and Locke's project might just as well be understood as a response to the skeptic or concern with the Enthusiasts of that period rather than to, *per se*, the evidentialist intuition.

belief. It seems that Ted has not committed any breach of epistemic duty at that age or stage in life. His predisposition to believe that God exists, given the circumstances which he was in (which include the community in which he grew up), delivers a sort of rough and ready justification for that belief. I see no need to pursue this further here.

However, theses (13) and (14) deserve attention. The judgment "too narrowly" carries with it a normative element. There could be several ways to take that. Kretzmann could mean that it is "too narrowly" defined for his own taste, or he could mean "too narrowly" defined for nearly every philosopher acquainted with evidential epistemology. What I think Kretzmann is asserting is closer to the latter of the two proposals. Certainly he would want to express more than just his personal disapproval. In so far as I can see, he neither quotes any authority to show this, nor does he formulate an argument to substantiate that Plantinga has violated some generally recognized epistemic rule of evidentialism. Now, it is clear that Plantinga's definition of evidentialism is narrower than what Kretzmann wants to accept, but that is another issue. As long as Plantinga remains consistent in his use of the term evidentialism, the complaint should not be considered substantial. (14), which is redundant to (13) in so far as the normative element is concerned, also lacks substantiation.

(16), it seems to me, is controversial. But if (16) is arguable then (17) can be provisionally called into question as well. What Kretzmann does not discuss is just how, following "Chisolm-like questions," the sub-propositional transformation into propositional creates evidence and, it should be added, becomes evidence of greater warrant than the basic belief formed by a person in those circumstances. For example, suppose you are asked a "Chisolm-like question" about the experience of "being appeared to treely." Suppose you are asked, "Why do you believe there is a tree there?" Let your answer in this case be, "It appears to me that there is a tree there." Now we have put the sub-propositional experience in the form of a proposition, but what makes that proposition evidence for the proposition, "There is a tree there?" Are we not back to Quinn's concern which we discussed in Chapter 1? The important thing to see is that

Kretzmann has not offered an account of how this works; my call then is for more light on this from Kretzmann.⁴⁴

In conclusion, we have seen thus far how several of Plantinga's critics (Goetz, Hatcher, Schubert, and Quinn) argue that he has not escaped the bonds of evidentialism. They generally assert that some kind of inference is necessary, either to individuate God or infer his existence from contingent beings. But whether God's existence could be inferred or not, it was argued that it does seem reasonable that God's existence in certain circumstances (such as in the case of Ted, the naive believer) could be rationally known, immediately or without inference. The basis for this conclusion was that the present experience of being appeared to (eg. being appeared to treely) does not involve necessarily any immediate sort of inference and beliefs formed in those experiences are certainly rational--a person is within her epistemic rights to believe them. The same could be said about the experience or perception of God.

It was also concluded, in agreement with Plantinga's case, that even a sophisticated, adult theist could know that God exists immediately or without inference. This was the case despite the problem of evil (I'm inclined to agree with Plantinga this is the only substantial a posteriori defeater for belief in God's existence). Instead of requiring an argument to defeat the problem of evil (as many suppose is necessary), it was argued that it can be defeated by the intrinsic defeater of immediately formed belief in God's existence (as argued above); but then it is rational to believe that God exists without inference! It simply is not necessary to have independent propositional justification to hold rationally that God exists (even granting the possibility that the independent propositional evidence could be successful in improving the belief's epistemic status). What may be necessary is that the sophisticated theist understand just how the "free will" defense against the problem of evil works (and perhaps how a defeater-defeater defeats a defeater); however, rebutting defeaters like the "free will" defense do not provide evidence for belief in God.

Robbins observation that Plantinga's approach assumes an essentialist perspective seems correct; however, Robbins' has not shown how this is a defect or that a non-essentialist (pragmatic) theory of

⁴⁴The major hurdle to doing this, I think, is providing evidence that is not worldview dependent. This is not to say it cannot be done, but that so far as I know it has not been done.

knowledge provides a better alternative. Robbins' brand of non-essentialist pragmatism suffers from several important defects, not the least of which is that it asserts there is no objective truth which would mean that both pragmatism and the negation of pragmatism could be both true at the same time and in the same sense. Plantinga's approach does not necessarily embrace this kind of relativism.

Kretzmann's analysis documents that Plantinga does tie the evidentialist objection to classical foundationalism. And Kretzmann has given valid reasons to think that the evidentialist objection is not limited to classical foundationalism. This means Plantinga's refutation of the evidentialist objection to theistic belief in RBG is incomplete; Plantinga has subsequently recognized this and has responded to a coherency theory expression of the evidentialist objection. Kretzmann seems correct that classical foundationalism is rooted in the evidentialist intuition (rather than vice-versa). But none of this really damages the direction of Plantinga's project (which is claiming belief in God held in a basic way is rational) because these mistakes are at the periphery of his project.

Further, Kretzmann seems correct that Plantinga is using evidence in a narrow sense (Plantinga is not including sub-propositional experience as evidence as does Kretzmann). However, I noted that Plantinga uses the term "evidence" in a consistent way in RBG and that the crucial issue is whether subpropositional experience can be translated into propositional arguments which improve the epistemic status of the propositions they allege to support. What Kretzmann lacks is a credible argument to show that they do just that. The difficulty here is not in showing that sub-propositional evidence can be translated into propositional arguments, but rather in showing how this improves the status of the conclusion.

There are some important but not crucial corrections that need to be made to Plantinga's view of the evidentialist's objection, for instance, the root to shoot relationship between evidentialism and classical foundationalism and other epistemic systems, and some ambiguity in his presentation on just how he sees the evidential value of theistic arguments). Nonetheless, I conclude that Plantinga's strategy thus far does not suffer critical failure. Plantinga's central epistemic thesis (inherited from John Calvin) has not so far been critically damaged: God has placed a nusus or tendency to believe that He exists within us; in forming that belief without inference in certain widely realized circumstances, sufficient warrant is appropriated to successfully defeat the evidentialist objection to theistic belief.

Again, this does not settle the truth value of the proposition, "God exists;" it does provide grounds for maintaining that belief in God held in a basic way is within one's epistemic rights--it is rationally permissible. No doubt what may seem a minimalist conclusion will raise eyebrows, but, I think, concluding that Plantinga is giving away the store is premature. The issue is where is Plantinga going with this approach and does such an approach necessarily embrace relativism and universalism? For that we must read on.