

Chapter IV

Critical Responses: Is Belief in God

Properly Basic?

According to Plantinga, the short answer to this question is yes. In so asserting this, Plantinga claims that he is not thereby committed to the view that just about anything is properly basic. He takes the position that belief in God as basic is not groundless; further, he holds the position that belief in God needs to be defended against arguments against that belief and that the position he is taking is not felicitously thought of as a species of fideism.

Criticism directed at this component of Plantinga's work could be classified as follows: 1) concerns about how well Plantinga's construal of properly basic beliefs can rule out clearly irrational beliefs, 2) concerns about the clarity of Plantinga's criteria for properly basic beliefs, 3) criticisms related to the closeness of analogy between belief in God and the paradigmatic examples of properly basic beliefs, and 4) objections to Plantinga's apologetic stance related to properly basic belief. Because of length considerations, I will address only the first three classifications of rejoinders to Plantinga. In the first section I will examine the charge that Plantinga's brand of Reformed epistemology has trouble ruling out generally recognized irrational beliefs and more rational but false beliefs given Plantinga's construal of properly basic beliefs. The second section will discuss difficulties related to the clarity of Plantinga's criteria for properly basic beliefs. The third section will focus on critiques of the closeness of analogy between belief in God and the paradigmatic examples of properly basic beliefs.

I

Robert McKim thinks there is something to the Great Pumpkin objection; how is it that such a bizarre belief is not properly basic?¹ His aim is to explore this concern for teasing out Plantinga's notion of rationality and to wonder, after exploring it, if it is not necessary again to engage in some sort of natural theology. The direction that McKim seems to want to take us is: maybe natural theology's contribution is

¹Robert McKim, "Theism and Proper Basicity," in *Philosophy of Religion*, 22: pp. 29-56, (1989).

what separates believers in God from believers in the Great Pumpkin. McKim argues, in so exploring Plantinga's work, that Reformed epistemology is engaged . . ."in large part in a burden of proof shifting exercise."² McKim's aim ". . .has been rather to contend that there is no way to do this without conferring the same status on a host of other beliefs."³ And he therefore concludes ". . .there is a new burden of proof for the theist who contends that the central theistic beliefs but not, say, the basic beliefs of non-theistic groups, may be properly basic."⁴

Here McKim shifts from the question of how Plantinga rejects clearly irrational beliefs to the question of how Plantinga rejects more rationally appearing beliefs but ones that he would ordinarily think are false. McKim is raising the question of pluralism. Roughly speaking, that challenge is something like this--are there not compelling reasons to think, given Plantinga's construal of basic belief, that it is better (epistemically speaking) to live and to let live? Isn't Plantinga obligated to reject exclusivism?

McKim asserts that the Reformed epistemologist ought to be disturbed by this state of epistemic affairs and suggests that the Reformed epistemologist needs reasons for believing as she does but, there ". . .seems to be no room here for such a reason."⁵ Now it would be helpful if McKim spelled out more exactly what epistemic virtue Plantinga's position lacks, or what obligation Plantinga's paradigm fails to satisfy; but he doesn't do so explicitly. What he does do is explore possible ways Plantinga might fix whatever it is that is wrong.⁶ For instance he suggests Plantinga might weaken the sense of what it means to be rational (to a more permissive sense), but that for McKim would have its own problems. Or Plantinga might engage in the task of finding defeaters for defeaters and so on, but perhaps some theists who hold belief in

²Ibid., p. 43.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶McKim suggests that a privileged person (such as the reader of the *Philosophy of Religion Journal*) would be obligated to scrutinize her beliefs if they were controversial or to the extent to which they made a significant difference in her life. See p. 46ff.

God more weakly than other theists might end up gaining assistance or support through those defeaters and would therefore not believe in God in a basic way.

McKim presents Plantinga with a dilemma. If Plantinga wants to maintain a strong or duty sense of rationality (horn A) he must use natural theology--not an attractive option for Plantinga. If Plantinga is using a weaker sense of rationality--permission to believe--then perhaps Plantinga has only escaped an old burden of proof (natural theology) to find a new burden (horn B). Why are not the beliefs of the Great Pumpkin followers and the non-theists properly basic as well? But any reply to this second burden of proof, it is thought, would entail doing things Plantinga sought to avoid, namely doing natural theology or sustaining dependence of belief on knowing defeater-defeaters.

Much of our analysis earlier in this thesis (and Plantinga's analysis) can be brought to bear, I think, on McKim's dilemma allowing Plantinga to escape between the horns. Suppose, as I think he clearly does, that Plantinga intends that basic belief in God be construed as permission to believe; then he has escaped horn A of the dilemma. Horn B wants to say (roughly) that Plantinga can only sustain rational belief in God if he can show that belief in God can be made rational through the use of natural theology or through dependence on defeater-defeaters; otherwise, Plantinga would have no basis for rejecting what he must believe are rational but false beliefs (such as atheism).

We have already concluded (above, Chapter 1) that it is not necessary to sustain belief in God (in the permissive sense of rationality) through natural theology. And we have already concluded that belief in God can be sustained by the intrinsic defeater of belief in God itself (also, Chapter 1); that is, if the problem of evil is the only substantial defeater for theism, then belief in God may not need defeater-defeater arguments. Belief in God taken in a basic way may be an intrinsic defeater for the problem of evil.

So then the remaining problem of the dilemma to be faced is exclusivism; how can exclusivism be asserted in this weaker permissive sense of rationality? Plantinga has spoken to this pluralist concern recently; he has not directly responded to McKim so far.⁷ But there is enough data to form some opinion about where Plantinga will go on this; in RBG Plantinga has asserted that ". . . the Reformed epistemologist

⁷Alvin Plantinga, "Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism," unpublished paper, pp. 1-27.

can properly hold that belief in the Great Pumpkin is not properly basic, even though he holds that belief in God is properly basic and even if he has no full-fledged criterion of proper basicity."⁸ Elsewhere on the topic of rational but false beliefs he says:

And third, in the West and since the Enlightenment, anyway, there are people--naturalists, we may call them--who don't believe any of these three things. And my problem is this: when I become really aware of these other ways of looking at the world, these other ways of responding religiously to the world, what must or should I do?⁹

and

A fresh or heightened awareness of the facts of religious pluralism could bring about a reappraisal of one's religious life, a reawakening, a new or renewed and deepened grasp and apprehension of (1) and (2). From Calvin's perspective, it could serve as an occasion for a renewed and more powerful working of the belief producing processes we come to apprehend (1) and (2). In that way knowledge of the facts of pluralism could initially serve as a defeater, but in the long run have precisely the opposite effect.¹⁰

In the context of these three quotes it is clear that Plantinga does assert that rejection of irrational beliefs like belief in the Great Pumpkin and atheistic belief can comport with his project of basic belief in God.

It exceeds the objectives of this chapter to show in any detail just how he tries to do that.

However, it may be necessary to discuss some of the general contours of Plantinga's work on this problem; indeed before McKim's concerns can plausibly be dismissed, a loop hole for Plantinga must be identified.

Is there anyway Plantinga's approach can use the permissive sense of rationality and avoid relativism?

Regarding the Great Pumpkin type of objection, Plantinga asserts that he may concur with Calvin ". . .in holding that God has implanted in us a natural tendency to see his hand in the world around us; the same cannot be said for the Great Pumpkin, there being no Great Pumpkin and no natural tendency to accept beliefs about the Great Pumpkin."¹¹ With regard to the swirling diversity of religious (and non-

⁸Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," p. 78.

⁹Plantinga, "Pluralism," p. 2.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 26,27.

¹¹RBG, p. 78. Plantinga refers us in this passage to his earlier essay, "On Reformed Epistemology," in *The Reformed Journal* (January 1982), pp.13-17. See especially pp. 15-16 where Plantinga argues that it is not necessary for a theist to prove his contentions to the satisfaction of the skeptic. Being unable to either demonstrate God's existence or show God's existence is probable with respect to self-evident beliefs accepted by everyone not entail that one could not know that God exists.

religious) opinions that exists Plantinga can take a similar stance--there is no natural tendency to reject belief in God. In some sense Plantinga is saying that both believers in the Great Pumpkin and atheists do not have the same internal markers (phenomenology of belief) as do the theist; at best they are only similar.

In Plantinga's words the theist may think ". . .that there is an important epistemic difference: she thinks that somehow the other person has made a mistake or has a blind spot, or hasn't been wholly attentive, or hasn't received some grace she has, or is in some way epistemically less fortunate."¹² Does not the pluralist hold her position in the same manner? What the critic of properly basic belief (or the advocate of pluralism) cannot demand is an argument derived from premises that are known to be true by all. In other words, the inability to prove belief in God (or for that matter the paradigmatic beliefs discussed above) does not necessarily imply relativism.

This construal of Plantinga's project may mean that basic beliefs are not polemically useful, but that may just be the epistemic condition that we find ourselves in. It seems reasonable that we can still know that God exists and yet be unable to prove it to the skeptic.¹³ Alternatively, said another way, it does not follow that because we cannot prove or show that God exists from premises that are self-evident for everyone, that therefore we cannot know that He exists.

In summary, McKim's dilemma can be avoided by escaping between its horns. Plantinga can avoid natural theology and reliance on defeater-defeaters (horn A) because his project is defending a permissive sense of rationality; but it does not follow that this permissive view necessarily entails the rejection of (religious) exclusivism or the acceptance of relativism (horn B).

¹²Plantinga, "Pluralism," pp. 15-16.

¹³There are many implications to this perspective, not the least of which is how it affects the apologetic stance. This may mean theistic arguments are best understood as person relative. They may not move the non-theist who is skeptical but they ought to do so; this sense of ought is not related to whether the premises of the arguments are self-evident to everyone. Rather the ought is related to our response to the epistemic endowment God has given us which includes the knowledge of his existence in certain characteristic circumstances. Rejection of that endowment is not purely an epistemic issue; it is also a moral issue.

II

John Zeis in his paper, "A Critique of Plantinga's Theological Foundationalism," seems to think that Plantinga's approach is "untenable because it does not provide clear criteria for a foundationalist theory of justification. . . ." ¹⁴ He seems to hold that Plantinga's conception of basicity ". . . was obscure." ¹⁵ At the bottom of this for Zeis, I think, is that Plantinga's system lacks incorrigibility in its foundation and has "no suitable substitute." ¹⁶ This roughly means, according to Zeis, that Plantinga's type of foundationalism is faced with the "same problem he thinks is inherent in coherentism; namely, how warrant for the noetic structure is guaranteed." ¹⁷ And thus armed, Zeis wants to say that Plantinga's rejection of coherentism or the no-foundation view of epistemology is premature. I want to focus this section on Zeis' case for claiming that Plantinga's account of properly basic beliefs is an obscure and inadequate notion.

Interpreting what Zeis means by all this is somewhat perilous. His formalization of Plantinga's position seems acceptable to me and his analysis of Plantinga's perspective of classical foundationalism (both ancient and modern) as asserted in RBG seems quite correct. Zeis seems to take issue as to whether Plantinga has given sufficient argument to substantiate the claim that belief in God is more than just rational, that it is to be accepted as a basic belief; Zeis is astonished to think that Plantinga has made this move.

Zeis thinks the distinction that Plantinga makes between evidence and grounds is not plausible for two reasons. The first "is whether, in this context, having an experience of a certain sort that serves as a ground can be distinguished from the belief that one is having an experience of a certain sort." ¹⁸ He seems to want to say that if having the experience of being "appeared to truly" is what justifies my believing that

¹⁴John Zeis, "A Critique of Plantinga's Theological Foundationalism," in *Philosophy of Religion*, 28:173-189 (1990). See page 173.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 186.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Zeis, p. 177.

I see a tree, doesn't that mean that I believe the proposition, "I am being appeared to treely?" Putting aside what Plantinga is attending to in that experience, his point seems to be that if Plantinga would reflect upon his belief that he saw a tree, would it not be true that Plantinga gives assent to some proposition like, "I'm being appeared to treely?" Zeis thinks these two things are indistinguishable. But the question is whether or not Plantinga is entitled to hold the basic belief, "There is a tree," before he considers whether he believes the proposition, "I am being appeared to treely." How has Zeis shown that he cannot?

This is reminiscent of the concerns that Goetz, Kretzmann and a host of others discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis. But we concluded that the epistemic status of the basic belief, "There is a tree," in a certain characteristic condition could be sufficient to be classified as a basic belief (not believed on the basis of other beliefs) before there is any reflection as to whether one is basing the belief on the propositional evidence. In fact, it is quite normal to expect that in certain conditions you or I might form the belief, "There is a tree," and never even consider whether or not you believe the proposition "I am being appeared to treely." What is so astonishing about that? And if one did reflect upon the fact you did believe the proposition, "I am being appeared to treely," Zeis has not shown how that propositional evidence has improved the epistemic status of the basic belief a bit, nor has he shown that non-propositional experience of being appeared to treely does not ground the basic belief.

Again, what might be the problem is that Zeis expects that Plantinga is attempting to construct his project using a duty sense of the term "rationality." But, in fact, I think he is not. In the permissive sense of rationality, the characteristic experience (of being appeared to treely) grounds the basic belief. This is a subjective ground; it would require that there is actually a tree which is causing my experience to be objectively true. But how can we show or know that there is an objective tree there? Clearly, metaphysical considerations will impinge on this; I will discuss this more fully in the Addendum to this thesis. For now, we can see that Zeis has failed to make his case.

A second concern Zeis raises is familiar--he thinks Plantinga's construal of basic beliefs allows Plantinga to form false beliefs. He cites an example where a person may have on rose-tinted glasses but does not believe it. The person may have that "characteristic sort of experience" associated with seeing

rose-colored walls, and may take that as a basic belief. He then complains that Plantinga's construal of properly basic beliefs does not accomplish what incorrigibility does for classical foundationalism--insuring the justification of true beliefs with greater probability than the justification of false beliefs.

My interpretation of what Zeis is saying is that classical foundationalism's incorrigibility principle may not deliver much (things as they appear to me), but at least it does not lead me astray to believe false basic beliefs. But if his charge is that Plantinga's epistemic view embraces defeasibility, he has not shown all that much; Plantinga concedes his approach embraces defeasibility--he concedes he could be wrong about, "There is a tree." Just what is defective about admitting to defeasibility? Is he claiming that Plantinga's position is subject to a certain undermining relativity? But Plantinga has argued that defeasibility does not imply relativity (as did I in the previous section).¹⁹ Also, it can be added, in response to Zeis' charge that Plantinga's foundationalism lacks the means to make the justification of true beliefs any more probable than the justification of false beliefs, that doing so was never the intention of Plantinga's approach anyway. It seems that metaphysical factors supervene upon the basic beliefs such that they play a determinative role as to whether or not such beliefs constitute knowledge.

Plantinga's account of basic beliefs, as I see it, has little or nothing to do with the probability that certain beliefs held in a basic way are true or not. Plantinga's account of properly basic beliefs has to do with epistemic status, per se, related to a certain characteristic experience. We will learn later that this is all to be understood in the context of properly functioning cognitive faculties (without malfunction), formed in an environment congenial to those faculties, according to a design plan aimed successfully at the truth. It is true that Plantinga's epistemic picture is not fully developed in RBG and so it might be proper for Zeis to call for more light. The point to see is that Zeis has not given sufficient reasons to doubt that this could be accomplished. Plantinga does not need to revise his account of properly basic beliefs to answer Zeis properly, but Plantinga does need to continue to fill out his project--but there is no major fault in that--and, as we will see, he does so.

¹⁹In fairness to Zeis, more recently, Plantinga has made this clear; but in principle, it was implicit in Plantinga's presentation. See Plantinga's forthcoming, "Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism," unpublished paper, pp. 1-27.

In summary to this section, Zeis complains that Plantinga's account of basic beliefs is obscure and implausible for two reasons. First, Zeis argues that the grounds for holding a certain basic belief are indistinguishable from the evidence for that same belief. I have argued that they are distinguishable. But that aside, Plantinga is using a permissive, subjective notion of rationality; for that, the characteristic subjective experience is sufficient to ground it. Plantinga's notion of basic beliefs is then neither obscure nor inadequate; they are subjective and limited. Of course, there are limitations to what subjectivity means in this case but Plantinga, as I see it, has not overstepped those limitations, nor indulged a view that spawns relativism.

Second, Zeis' charge that Plantinga's notion of properly basic beliefs is defective because it does not guarantee us a higher probability of forming true beliefs than forming false beliefs misses the point. Plantinga could acknowledge this (according to Zeis' construal) without any serious damage done to his project. This is because basic beliefs are not probable with respect to propositional evidence. Does it make sense to say that the proposition, "I am being appeared to treeily," makes it more probable that there is a corresponding tree?

More relevantly, Zeis would need to show how such evidence provides rational justification for that belief; but I don't see how that could work. A Cartesian devil could undermine such a project and I have no way to get at whether there is a Cartesian devil among us. However, if the basic belief, "I see a tree," is formed in a characteristic experience, it is grounded in that experience. It follows that the metaphysical conditions in which that belief was formed play an important role in determining the rational justification (or more accurately the warrant) for our basic beliefs.

III

Like a good host who wishes to save the best wine to last, I will conclude this chapter by investigating perhaps the most interesting, complicated, and highly relevant set of concepts related to properly basic beliefs. This section will be devoted to examining in greater detail than before the relationship between the three paradigmatic examples of properly basic beliefs (perceptual beliefs, memory beliefs, and belief in other minds) and belief in God within the context of the current debate. Examples of

the paradigmatic beliefs are respectively (1) I see a tree, (2) I had breakfast this morning, and (3) That person is angry.

One of the charges leveled against Plantinga's recommendation to include belief in God in the same epistemic boat as the paradigmatic examples is that there exist significant and crucial disanalogies between (1), (2), and (3) and belief in God. There is a bit of historical development to this objection. The first to begin the discussion in a general way on Plantinga's use of analogy as a part of his case for properly basic belief in God was James Tomberlin; later the subject was more focused on by Richard Grigg when he began to assert certain disanalogies between the paradigmatic beliefs and theistic belief.²⁰ There were, I think, two important responses to Grigg by Mark McLeod and further criticism by David Wisdo.²¹ More recently, Richard Grigg has again weighed into the discussion.²²

Because of length considerations, I will summarize and compress a great deal here. Grigg has argued that there are three significant disanalogies between the widely accepted paradigmatic basic beliefs and belief in God.

First, there is a psychological benefit to belief in God, and hence a bias toward that belief, which does not exist in the case of the paradigm beliefs. Second, there is a universality about the genesis of the paradigm beliefs that does not attach to the genesis of belief in God. . . Third, Plantinga argues that beliefs

²⁰James Tomberlin, "Is Belief in God Justified?" in *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. LXVII, No. 2:31-38, (January 29, 1970) and Richard Grigg, "Theism and Proper Basicity: a Response to Plantinga" in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 14:123-127 (1983).

²¹See Mark McLeod, "The Analogy Argument for the Proper Basicity of Belief in God," in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 21:3-20 (1987), Mark McLeod, "Can Belief in God Be Confirmed?" in *Religious Studies*, 24, pp. 311-323 (1988), and David Wisdo, "The Fragility of Faith: Toward a Critique of Reformed Epistemology," in *Religious Studies* 24, pp. 365-374. See especially Wisdo's remarks on the last paragraph of p. 366 to the second paragraph on p. 367. Length considerations will not allow me to discuss this suggested disanalogy (people could do without belief in God but could not do without belief in other minds). But for the record I will say that I do not think such a suggestion carries much force. It could be fairly argued that the notions "could do without" and "could not do without" are used somewhat ambiguously. Just what sense does Wisdo mean by his use of those terms?

You certainly could not do without the beliefs in other minds or memory beliefs if you engaged in that particular epistemic practice. You certainly can not do without the belief in God if you engage in that epistemic practice. But at the bottom, I think, the terms "could do without" and "could not do without" are loaded. I think the theist, especially the Christian theist, will want to say that those who reject theistic belief can survive, at least temporarily, but it is the theist only who eternally survives.

²²Richard Grigg, "The Crucial Disanalogies Between Properly Basic Belief and Belief in God," in *Religious Studies* 26, pp. 389-401, (1990).

such as (1), (2), and (3) are properly basic as long as we have no reason to suppose that our experiential equipment is defective. . . [these paradigmatic beliefs can] almost always be subsequently confirmed by empirical evidence.²³

McLeod does speak to all three objections in his first work, but, in the second paper, he focuses on Grigg's assertion that while the non-religious paradigmatic beliefs can be confirmed, theistic belief cannot. It suits my purposes to compress the discussion on the issue of bias toward belief in God and the issue of whether or not there is universality about the genesis of the paradigm beliefs that does not attach to the genesis of belief in God into one sub-section. I will explore the issue of confirmation of these beliefs in somewhat greater detail in the sub-section following.

Bias and Universality

Richard Grigg argues that bias ordinarily does not enter into the paradigmatic belief-forming mechanisms, but it does raise its ugly head when forming belief in God. McLeod suggests by way of rebuttal that there are instances where belief in the paradigmatic beliefs are affected by bias and that there are instances when theistic beliefs surely lack bias to be believed in. For example, in the latter case, the theist is probably not biased toward believing "God disapproves of me" or "God is angry with me;" but the theist may yet form those beliefs which self-evidently entail God's existence. Grigg is not sympathetic to this point of view because it is a specific rather than a general case. He also maintains that we do not have a bias toward believing the paradigmatic beliefs, because in order ". . . to desire to hold a belief, there must be room for doubt about that belief; desire, epistemic or otherwise, implies lack of immediate possession."²⁴ So Grigg is suggesting that desire to believe enters (partly due to the presence of doubt) into theistic belief such that it does seriously undermine the argument Plantinga gives for the proper basicity of belief in God.

On the face of it, the charge that desire to believe theistic beliefs which originates from the presence of doubt as to whether theistic belief is true or not seems ridiculous--at least to me. The presence

²³Ibid., p. 390. Note: These are the same three alleged disanalogies given in Grigg's previous paper on this subject in slightly different order, but with more detail.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 392.

of doubt attends a vast array of our beliefs (excepting only our self-evident and incorrigible beliefs), but can we let uncertainty seriously undermine the confidence we have in those beliefs? I think not. Neither should our lack of complete certainty about theistic beliefs cause us to think we are unduly biased in believing them.

My own view is that this is a place where the distinction between belief that God exists and belief in God (commitment to God) can be helpful. The theist can argue, I think, that belief that God exists is a widely experienced phenomena, if not universal, among both those who become committed to God and those who do not enter into that commitment. The theist may rationally argue that the issue of bias first raises its ugly head when the issue of commitment to God is considered. In this case, both the committed and the non-committed are influenced by their biases; but this in no way affects the rationality of believing that God exists since that belief in certain characteristic circumstances is immediately formed--suppression in whole or in part in the formation of theological belief may be due to sin.²⁵ Grigg's charge fails because both theistic basic beliefs and a number of the paradigm beliefs can be doubted. But even though they may be doubted it is surely rational to hold both those paradigm beliefs in a basic way and to hold belief in God in a basic way.

I now turn to explore the issue of universality as it applies to theistic and the paradigm beliefs.

Grigg and McLeod agree that there is a certain universalism that obtains with respect to the paradigmatic

²⁵I do not mean to limit sin to merely one's own personal sins as the source of influence for the suppression of commitment to God. It can include many other things such as the sin of one's culture and its influence on its members.

There are two additional ways I think the charge of bias in forming belief in God can be discussed. First, it should be discussed in terms of the profound bias against forming belief in God. See Paul C. Vitz's article, "The Psychology of Atheism" in Truth, Volume 1 (1985). Vitz, a professor of psychology at New York University, argues there are strong personal and social motives to adopt atheism and also strong psychoanalytic motives (atheism as Oedipal wish fulfillment) for rejecting God. Any discussion about the propriety of forming belief in God (or rejecting such a belief) is severely abrogated without considering both influences. It might well be that the influences for rejecting God are stronger (as Vitz argues) than the influences for believing in God; but this would undermine the charge of bias in forming belief in God. Second, this whole notion of bias as it relates to paradigmatic beliefs and belief in God has not yet received thorough analysis (space limits a full discussion here). Is there any sense to the notion that there is in general a bias with regard to the paradigmatic beliefs?

Suppose it was argued that one may have a general bias toward believing the perceptual beliefs because one could not survive without so doing. Would not the need to survive be considered a possible factor motivating belief in perceptual objects? I think it could be construed that way; as a minimum, this area deserves consideration. However, even if this isn't considered weighty, Vitz's case above should be.

beliefs. McLeod thinks that such beliefs are "first-level" beliefs but that "second level" beliefs like "God made all this" or "the universe is a brute fact" occur as well. The second level beliefs seem to perform the function of interpreting or giving meaning to the first level beliefs. Grigg thinks this scenario leaves McLeod with a "'very complicated set of background beliefs', indeed the 'very substantive beliefs', that would have to be present to generate the right sort of second-level belief about God, . . ." ²⁶ But Grigg wants to know what justifies those background beliefs. It must be either evidence (but Plantinga has rejected natural theology), or they are based on other basic beliefs. This presents McLeod with a dilemma:

. . . either we find ourselves in an infinite regress, or there must be, at some point, a theistic belief that does not require other theistic beliefs as background. That is, there must exist some theistic belief that is not a second-level belief, but a first-level belief. But there are no first-level theistic beliefs, that is, theistic beliefs that follow automatically for all persons from a given experience. We are right back at the disanalogy. ²⁷

Grigg thinks that the lack of "automatic belief for all persons" is the significant disanalogy for theistic belief.

But this round of debate could be avoided, I think, by merely calling attention to a specific belief which self-evidently entails God's existence, for example, "God made this flower," and to the universality of that characteristic experience or the near universality of that experience. As I suggested earlier in this sub-section (and other places), Reformed epistemologists maintain that this kind of characteristic experience is widely obtained. There is widely circulated evidence that belief in one Supreme Being was and remains a widespread multi-cultural phenomena. But if this is so, then belief in God is more closely analogous to the paradigmatic beliefs with regard to the universality of experiencing the beliefs in a basic way. If there is anything different it seems to be more along the lines of the impingement those beliefs have on one's life. Suppressing or rejecting the paradigm beliefs has rather severe and immediate debilitating effects on the survival of the believer. Theistic belief does have profound effects but perhaps not as immediate as the paradigm beliefs. Nonetheless the upshot of this is that Grigg does not pay enough attention to the fact that theistic is a widespread, nearly universal cultural artifact. Grigg's charge fails.

²⁶Ibid., p. 394.

²⁷Ibid.

Summarizing this sub-section, Grigg's contention that belief in God is disanalogous to the paradigmatic beliefs because belief in God is subject to bias whereas the others are not, fails. It fails because he has not taken into account strong motives (rejection of commitment to God) that may suppress forming belief in God in appropriate circumstances. Grigg's analysis is also defective because it does not thoroughly explore the belief-forming phenomena of the paradigmatic beliefs. It was suggested that there are strong motives (including survival of the organism--a fairly strong motivator as any that I can think of) for forming the paradigmatic beliefs; thus Grigg's bias charge is inadequately substantiated.

Grigg's charge that the paradigmatic beliefs are universally experienced but that belief in God is not universally experienced is also inadequately substantiated. How has he shown that belief in God is not as universally experienced as the Reformed epistemologists suggest? Surely the Reformed epistemologists can argue that belief in God is, at least, a widely experienced phenomena by the mere fact such belief is a widely held belief (albeit nominal in some cases). Part of the reason belief in God doesn't appear to be universal is that it is suppressed by sin.

Confirmation

McLeod seems to admit that there is a kind of intuitive force behind Grigg's claim that there is a confirmation disanalogy, but his purpose is to show that Grigg's charge is either irrelevant or false.

McLeod thinks part of the problem with Grigg's claims is that Grigg is not clear about just how theistic beliefs are lacking confirmation. He understands Grigg to be presenting the following dilemma:

. . . either (A) a given belief-forming practice is validated because beliefs generated by the practices are confirmed relative to other beliefs delivered by the practice or (B) no belief generated by the practice can be confirmed until (i) the practice generating it is independently validated or (ii) the belief itself is confirmed independently of the new practice.²⁸

McLeod thinks that horn (B) cannot be escaped by any of the paradigmatic examples. There are simply no independent means by which to validate them. Can you think of how you might validate your memory beliefs, like, "I had breakfast this morning," completely and independently of any memory beliefs? For McLeod, it seems that is the lesson to be learned through the abundant examples from the history of

²⁸Mark McLeod, "Can Belief in God Be Confirmed?", p. 313.

skepticism. This seems entirely correct to me. And so, according to McLeod, Grigg's "challenge collapses into branch (A) of the dilemma."²⁹

McLeod begins his exploration of horn (A) by contrasting the difference between a "general theistic belief" like "God created the world" to a more "specific theistic belief" like "God created this flower." McLeod wants to say that it is less clear that certain specific theistic beliefs lack confirmation than when you use more general theistic beliefs. He believes the central difficulty standing in the way of confirmation of specific beliefs in God has to do with the lack of predictive confirmation of the type associated with perceptual beliefs. For example we can predict the presence of one less egg in the refrigerator confirming the memory belief I had an egg for breakfast.

It is important to note that even with this kind of predictive confirmation, the confirmation does not escape some circularity. But McLeod sees predictive confirmation as not necessary to a kind of confirmation of a more general nature.³⁰ The key, according to McLeod, lies in trustworthiness, not predictive confirmation. Predictive confirmation may be one way of identifying trustworthy epistemic practices but it may not be the only way. McLeod admits to a difficulty--how can this be done without sneaking in natural theology (which has already been rejected as a means of effectively answering the predictive confirmation question) and yet explain this lack of predictive power?

The answer, it seems, lies in the nature of God, whether His interaction with us is regular or not and just what that means. McLeod, following Alston, wants to say that there is a disanalogy between belief in God and the paradigmatic beliefs, but that it is irrelevant. God doesn't present His dealings with us in a regular fashion such as does the perceptual world around us. McLeod goes on further to say, ". . . [t]he features also show that if we did discover great regularity in God's dealings with us we would have a reason to distrust the deliverances of the practice." However, just how this is so is not clearly explained. McLeod concludes by asserting that belief in God can be confirmed if God is particularly gracious to you (similar to

²⁹I am condensing a great deal here. See McLeod's "Can Belief in God be Confirmed?" pp. 313, 314.

³⁰McLeod is relying heavily on William Alston's case for this. See McLeod, "Can Belief in God be Confirmed?" pp. 318-320.

the paradigmatic beliefs--in a circular way). In sum, McLeod thinks God acts non-predictively, yet He and the theistic epistemic practice are trustworthy. There is no good reason to think we cannot engage in theistic epistemic practice.

Grigg, apparently in an attempt to strengthen his disanalogy argument, believes he can escape the charge of circularity with regard to the paradigmatic beliefs--at least, straight-forward circularity in the case of the memory belief mechanism. He attempts to escape the charge by claiming that memory confirmation can "stand outside the realm of memory to a sufficient degree that it can, and in actual practice does, provide a check on the reliability of memory."³¹ To show this he cites the example of people who, when they grow older, forget certain things and draw the conclusion that their memory is unreliable. He asks us to suppose that I am

saying to myself that I need to turn on the oven to prepare dinner. When I go into the kitchen, I see a red light on, and I say to myself, 'I forgot that I had already turned the oven on.' If this sort of thing occurs more and more frequently, I begin to worry that my memory is not reliable.³²

Then he asserts that if his memory is totally useless, "he couldn't possibly employ this confirmation procedure (or even remember that memory can in theory be unreliable and needs to be checked)."³³ His point seems to be that he would be unable to test the reliability of his memory if his memory is totally deficient, but, as a matter of fact, people are able to do this. In doing this Grigg asserts that he is not trying to accomplish the "ill-fated quest" to prove that his epistemic equipment puts us in touch with the external world. Rather, he thinks he is able to step outside his "memory in order to consult other epistemic mechanisms."³⁴

Grigg also seems to accuse McLeod of switching ground; Grigg notes that McLeod first claims that belief in God could be confirmed in the same way as the paradigmatic beliefs are, and in his second essay on the subject, he changes to the view God cannot be confirmed in the same way. In light of that,

³¹Grigg, "The Crucial Disanalogies Between Properly Basic Belief and Belief in God" p. 395.

³²Ibid., p. 395.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., p. 396.

Grigg wants to focus his response on McLeod's new direction. Grigg accepts McLeod's admission that there is a disanalogy between belief in God and the paradigmatic basic beliefs; thus, Plantinga's argument from analogy among the paradigmatic beliefs and belief in God has this serious flaw. He concludes that Plantinga or others must find a new way to show that theistic beliefs are properly basic.

Before going on to discuss the ways Grigg feels he has cut off alternative possibilities to solve this problem, I wish to respond to the case as it now stands. Grigg takes McLeod's admission that there is a disanalogy between belief in God and the paradigmatic beliefs to mean that McLeod has sort of thrown in the epistemic towel. But this certainly isn't a felicitous reading of McLeod. For instance, McLeod concludes his essay by saying "[e]ven if one is not given that special grace, however, one's theistic beliefs do have epistemic parity with beliefs delivered from dispositions we all share, at least so far as predictive confirmation is concerned, for predictive confirmation is irrelevant to theistic belief. The confirmation challenge fails."³⁵ So what are we to make of this? Grigg does not in any detail respond to this assertion.

The surprise, at least to me, is that neither man devotes any discussion to what are the principles that relate to appraising analogical arguments and just what these principles disclose about Plantinga's argument. The closest thing to doing so is found in Grigg's essay titled, "The Crucial Disanalogies Between Properly Basic Belief and Belief in God (emphasis mine)." The term "crucial" in the title suggests the notion of relevance as it relates to the argument. Here the principle, it seems, should be applied to establish "the presence of a given attribute provided that it is drawn with respect to other circumstances affecting it."³⁶

Now what typically is said to account for the efficacy of evaluating analogical arguments is usually some causal relationships that are discovered empirically. For instance, suppose I argue by analogy that since my car performs better with higher-octane gas, it follows that your car will likely do the same if you change to a higher-octane gas. You can see immediately that the results of this argument are going to

³⁵McLeod, "Can Belief In God Be Confirmed?", p. 323.

³⁶Irving M. Copi, Introduction to Logic, Seventh Edition, (New York: New York, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986). p. 414.

be less than a deductive kind of argument, but there is some good reason for believing the conclusion. Namely, that there are empirical grounds for believing that raising the level of octane in gas does likely improve the performance of car engines and this could be tested empirically and established inductively. Nonetheless, this understanding of both analogical arguments and their dependence on empiricism can be loaded against the theist.

What underpins our confidence in empirical arguments is generally thought of as the regularity we find in our sensory world. Nevertheless, we must be careful. Is there some kind of contradiction inherent in saying that our sensory world is remarkably regular and that there exists a personal God, who supports the empirical world and can act within it? Assuming provisionally that there is no contradiction here, a theist could justifiably argue that it may be the case that our dependence on the regularity of the sensory world (and that alone) for confidence in analogies is a loaded item. It is certainly not self-evident! This is what I think Alston and McLeod are saying. At the bottom, Alston and McLeod are saying that trustworthiness is the key virtue. Regularity provides some predictability that confers a sense of trustworthiness, but it is a jump in logic to say that the only way trustworthiness can be established is through the medium of regularity.

At this point it might be helpful to formalize Plantinga's analogical argument and then discuss the general topic of appraising analogical arguments. Let P be "lacking independent confirmation," Q is "having adherents who are both rational and form the belief (1), (2), and (3) and belief in God in characteristic experiences," R is "if one dismisses either (1), (2), or (3) or belief in God as a rational epistemic practice, then for practical purposes that person will not be able to function cognitively in those spheres." And PBB is properly basic belief. Then Plantinga's argument could be formalized like this:

The paradigmatic beliefs (1), (2), and (3) and belief in God have the attributes P, Q, and R.

The paradigmatic beliefs (1), (2), and (3) have the attribute PBB.

Therefore, belief in God probably has the attribute PBB.

Having formalized the argument, let us review the principles of appraising analogical arguments, which include: 1) the number of entities between which the analogies are said to hold, 2) the number of

respects in which the things involved are said to be analogous, 3) the strength of their conclusions relative to their premises, 4) the number of disanalogies or points of difference between the instances mentioned only in the premises and the instance with which the conclusion is concerned, 5) the greater the number of instances appealed to in the premises, the less likely it is that they will all be disanalogous to the instance mentioned in the conclusion, and 6) (the most important one which we discussed above) basing relevance.³⁷

The question to me seems to be: how does Plantinga's analogical argument stand up to this criteria? Of course, as we do our analysis we have learned to watch for loaded terms sneaking into our arguments.

Thus armed, let us return to Plantinga's analogical argument to see if we can get clear on how it is to be assessed given these criteria. Plantinga supposes there is an analogy "between belief in God and belief in the existence of perceptual objects, other persons, and the past."³⁸ The first question is, what is the number of entities that the analogies are supposed to hold? This is a difficult first question. That's because among theists (or those who engage in theistic epistemic practice) many, if not all, of their theistic experiences have that characteristic quality of conferring basic belief status. But there is also a multitude of those other characteristic experiences that confer proper basicity on paradigmatic beliefs. Therefore, the number of entities on which the analogies could hold seems quite high.

The second question is, what is the number of respects in which these analogies are said to hold? One crucial respect in the conclusion where the analogy is said to hold, all of the beliefs are properly basic in certain characteristic circumstances. Another crucial respect in the conclusion is that all of those who hold both the paradigmatic beliefs and belief in God are rational in doing so.

Third, what is the strength of their conclusions relative to their premises? Plantinga claims that since it is rational to hold the paradigmatic beliefs as properly basic, it follows that it is rational to hold theistic beliefs as properly basic. Plantinga is not claiming they (theistic basic beliefs) have either greater rationality or lesser rationality than the paradigmatic beliefs--he is arguing for parity.

³⁷Ibid. pp. 411-414.

³⁸Plantinga, RBG, p. 81.

Fourth, what are the number of disanalogies or points of difference between the instances mentioned only in the premises and the instance with which the conclusion is concerned? So far Plantinga has not conceded any disanalogies. Grigg claims that memory beliefs, other person beliefs, and perceptual beliefs ordinarily have an additional empirical confirmation and theistic belief does not have a similar confirmation. Grigg argues that this is the crucial disanalogy. It is clear that theistic beliefs are not directly open to empirical verification; but it is not at all clear how much weight should be given to this because Grigg, for one thing, offers no detailed analysis of just what regularity and empirical verification mean.

Fifth, what are the number of instances appealed to in the premises, because the greater the number the less likely it is that they will all be disanalogous to the instance mentioned in the conclusion? The short answer to this is that there are three instances appealed to in the premises (mentioned above).

Sixth, I'm back to our previous discussion which focuses on the basing relationship. McLeod, on Plantinga's behalf, focuses his attention on the claim that any confirmation in the three paradigmatic examples is in some important sense circular. Grigg, by contrast, points to his assertion that the paradigmatic beliefs can, in some sense, get outside their epistemic mechanisms and confirm their paradigmatic beliefs (somehow people do learn that their memory beliefs are reliable or not). Another important basing relationship to consider is that in all cases those who hold the paradigmatic beliefs and theistic beliefs in a basic way are holding them rationally.

Now Plantinga's parity argument looks strongest when one considers this case as a whole. There are several ways the analogies hold, but the most relevant respect is that neither the paradigm beliefs nor belief in God can be confirmed by completely independent means. But if the paradigm beliefs are rationally held as basic beliefs, theistic belief is probably rational as well. Grigg's point that the paradigmatic beliefs can have some other means of confirmation--empirical confirmation (though ultimately circular)--carries some weight, but if circular evidence is allowed for the paradigm beliefs, the theist can justifiably protest that her circular evidence--natural theology--be counted as well. Therefore, Grigg's charge of disanalogy is not substantiated enough and his argument fails. It fails if circular evidence is allowed because the theist can marshal some of her own circular evidence for her beliefs. It fails if all

circular evidence of any kind is ruled out; the paradigm beliefs and belief that God exists are then closely analogous and clearly Plantinga's parity argument succeeds.

Summarizing this last sub-section, confirmation is a two-edged sword. If no so-called circular evidence is allowed at all in assessing Plantinga's analogy argument, then all of the paradigm beliefs fail the test as well as theistic beliefs. But if the paradigm beliefs are clearly rational to hold as properly basic, then it follows that so are theistic beliefs. If "circular evidence" is allowed to confirm the paradigm beliefs, then the theist's "circular evidence" (natural theology) should be allowed to confirm theistic beliefs. In either case, Grigg's objection fails; Plantinga's analogy argument succeeds.

Conclusion

Given Plantinga's construal of properly basic beliefs, McKim fears it would be hard to rule out both clearly irrational beliefs and more rational but false beliefs. This fear is unjustified on both counts. Plantinga does rule out beliefs like belief in the Great Pumpkin and atheism but he cannot show this using arguments whose premises are either self-evident to everyone or are traceable to self-evident beliefs. Plantinga would want to say that even though he cannot be polemically successful, there is a relevant and significant difference (internal markers in the phenomenology of belief), between forming beliefs about the Great Pumpkin (and for that matter more rational but false beliefs) and forming the belief that God exists in certain circumstances.

Zeis' charge that Plantinga's account of basic beliefs is obscure and implausible also fails. It fails first of all because, as I argued, the non-propositional grounds for holding certain basic beliefs are distinguishable from propositional evidence. It was argued that certain characteristic experiences can confer higher epistemic status to non-propositional grounds than can be conferred to propositional evidence. Second it fails because Zeis' claim that properly basic beliefs do not guarantee us a higher probability of forming true beliefs than forming false beliefs is irrelevant. This is because basic beliefs are not probable with respect to propositional evidence. All such beliefs are subject to cognitive malfunction, Cartesian devils, or the brain-in-the-vat kind of arguments. So the issue of whether basic beliefs constitute

warranted knowledge or not seems to depend on metaphysical conditions. But none of this shows Plantinga's account of properly basic beliefs is either obscure or implausible.

Plantinga's analogical parity argument for the status of theistic properly basic beliefs does not fail when tested by Grigg's criticisms. Grigg's charge that there is a bias for forming theistic beliefs fails because there are also important and strong motives for not forming theistic beliefs. His charge that theistic beliefs are not universal as are the paradigmatic beliefs fails because he has not shown that theistic beliefs are either parochial or nearly parochial. It was argued that theistic beliefs are actually formed in widely available conditions and that their apparent absence might well be due to other suppressing factors such as sin.

Finally, it was argued that Plantinga's parity argument succeeds against Grigg's confirmation criticism because 1) if no "circular evidence" at all is allowed to confirm the paradigmatic beliefs, they are no better off than theistic belief, and 2) if "circular evidence" is allowed, such as Grigg suggests for memory beliefs, then natural theology could be proffered for theistic beliefs. In either case, Plantinga's parity argument succeeds.