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## **PLANTINGA'S REFORMED EPISTEMOLOGY RECONSIDERED: THE FOUNDHERENTIST OPTION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

One of the most influential proposals in recent literature on the epistemology of religious beliefs has been Alvin Plantinga's reformed epistemology and anti-evidentialist contention, that religious beliefs are properly basic, and so, require no evidence for their justification. Claiming sufficient analogies between perceptual and religious experiences, Plantinga argues for an anti-evidentialist model for the justification of religious beliefs, which he says, are properly basic. Taking a critically look at Plantinga's arguments, this paper notes his commitment to epistemological internalism as the major challenge to the credibility of his thought. It advocates for epistemological externalism implicit in Haack's Foundherentism, instead, as a better option in making reformed epistemology less susceptible to the evidentialist challenge. The analytic and critical methods of study are adopted.

**Keywords:** Reformed epistemology, evidentialism, anti-evidentialism, foundationalism, Foundherentism.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In recent times, there has been a surge of interest in the epistemology of religious beliefs. This is evident in the massive intellectual commitments today towards the exploration of the epistemic status, rationality and warrant of religious beliefs. A major inspiration for these has been the works of Alvin Plantinga, who, along with other reformed epistemologists, seek to refute the evidentialist construal of rationality, that a belief is justified only if "it is proportioned to the evidence" (Forrest, 2017, para.2). This evidentialist assumption has been the basis of standard sceptical arguments against religious beliefs. Kai Nelson, cited in Burr and Milton (2004), for instance, who sees religion in this age of science as an antediluvian aberration, says that it "diverts men's attention from knowledge to unverifiable fantasies" (p.130).

In his reformed epistemology, however, Plantinga presents his anti-evidentialist contentions to challenge this evidentialist assumption that religious beliefs require the support of evidence to be

rationally justified. To support his arguments, he claims sufficient analogies between perceptual experience and religious experience, and on the basis of such analogies, argues that a religious belief, such as the belief in God, can be rationally justified apart from any argument or evidence, because it is (or can be) “properly basic”. This work critically assesses his anti-evidentialist arguments for the justification of religious beliefs. The weaknesses in his arguments are clearly pointed out; and the way in which reformed epistemology can be better modified to make it less susceptible to the evidentialist challenge, is equally proposed.

### **THE EVIDENTIALIST SCEPTICAL CHALLENGE**

Evidentialism is the position that a belief is justified only if “it is proportioned to the evidence” (Forrest, 2017, para.2). In other words, one should proportion one’s belief to the evidence available to support it, if the belief must be justified or attributed with knowledge. Accordingly, the only sort of evidence appropriate for this purpose would be *a priori* argument of some description, or at least some sort of incorrigible empirical evidence. At the heart of evidentialism is the indictment of religious beliefs on the assumption that they are not justified because they are not supported by such conclusive evidential proofs; for, “that believers cannot prove that God exists, either by an uncontroversially sound proof or by direct sensory verification that is available to everyone, their belief in God is irrational, even immoral” (Evans and Zachary, 2009, p.190).

For the evidentialist, one is rationally justified in believing a proposition to be true only if that proposition is either foundational to knowledge or is established by evidence that is ultimately based on such a foundation. Under this construal, since the proposition *God exists* is not foundational, it would be irrational to believe this proposition apart from rational or empirical evidence for its truth. Thus, even if it is true that God exists, one is unjustified in believing that God exists unless one has such evidence supporting that belief. This way, evidentialism sets a high standard for justification that the majority do not, it would seem, meet when it comes to religious beliefs, where many rely on “faith” protocol. The connection between evidentialism and scepticism about religious belief becomes obvious with this line of thinking. Michael Scriven (1966) puts clearly that, “in the absence of evidence rendering the existence of some entity probable, we are justified in believing that it does not exist (p.99).

Evidentialism has some historical roots in the works of John Locke in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, who famously wrote in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, that, “reason must be our judge and guide in everything... and that religious beliefs should be put before the tribunal of reason just like any other” (1979, IV, xix. 14). However, as Duncan Pritchard (2003) explains, as far as Locke is concerned, this line of thought did not lead to scepticism about religious beliefs, because he believes that *a priori* grounds were available to support religious belief. His argument

simply centered around his conviction that, evidence must be available to support religious belief in question and that the only evidence suited to the purpose is of *an apriorinature* (p.48).

Evidentialism equally takes its roots from the classical foundationalism, which approach to knowledge justification is often believed to be what “underlies and motivates the evidentialist challenge” (Evans and Zachary, 2009, p.192). Classical foundationalism regards objective certainty as the epistemic ideal and demands that, to be justified, our beliefs must be based on or supported by a foundation that is *properly basic*, self-evident and incorrigible (Pollock and Cruz, 1999, p.32). A belief is *basic* for a person if he does not hold it on the basis of any other beliefs that he holds. Such belief is said to be self-evident. A belief is *properly basic* if it is also rationally justified for him, despite this lack of support from other beliefs. The foundationalist ideal considers two major grounds of epistemic justification.

In its *empiricist* form what is demanded is complete reliance on empirically verifiable facts for the justification of our beliefs. In its *rationalist* form, it demands basic premises that are *a priori* or self-evident to reason for the justification of our beliefs. However, in all its expressions, classical foundationalism seeks some form of justification of knowledge by empirical or rational evidence. Motivated by the foundationalists justificatory standards and epistemic aim, the evidentialists maintain their sceptical attitude towards religious beliefs, insisting that the religious believer is incapable of offering such requisite evidential grounds to justify his religious beliefs. After all, the most obvious way of meeting this evidential demand and objective certainty, is by adducing *a priori* or incorrigible empirical evidence in the manner that classical foundationalism demands.

Nevertheless, in many of the key accounts of reformed epistemology, the locus of evidentialism has often been the provocative statement by the nineteenth century thinker and religious sceptic, W. K. Clifford, that, “[I]t is wrong always, everywhere, and for everyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence” (1998, p.460). By implication, for Clifford, it is not only intellectually dishonest but downright immoral to believe anything beyond what is supported by evidence. Clifford’s statement, according to Evans and Zachary (2009), is often typically understood as “an attack on religious belief, which he seems to presume is not supported by sufficient evidence” (p.190). Over the years, this has raised a flurry of epistemological concerns and debates about the nature and justification of religious beliefs.

One common response to the evidentialist challenge to religious belief has been for the believer to concede and to embrace the sceptical conclusion that religious beliefs are not the sort of beliefs that can be justified by evidential support. Another common approach is to reject that the ‘evidence’ required must not be limited to the empirical, but that it must extend to rational support that can be provided. Often, this sets that stage for the believer to try to marshal the

resources of natural theology and philosophy in order to supply the very sort of rational or *a priori* evidence that are being demanded to justify religious belief (as in the cases of St. Anselm's, Augustine's and Aquinas' rational proof of God's existence). Either of these approaches to the evidentialist challenge carries an implicit acceptance of the nature of the evidentialist sceptical argument such that, any response to that argument must consist in some sort of rapprochement with the conclusion that religious beliefs lack the evidence in question. However, in contrast to these approaches, the third and contemporary approach, championed by Plantinga is the "reformed epistemology", which seeks to directly challenge the very evidentialist assumption that drives the sceptical argument, namely, that religious beliefs should require the support of evidence to be rationally justified.

### **PLANTINGA'S REFORMED EPISTEMOLOGY**

Reformed Epistemology is one of the most significant developments in the epistemology of religious beliefs in contemporary time. Spearheaded and developed by Alvin Plantinga, it is essentially anti-evidentialist in orientation. Hence, William Craig (2016) describes it as "one of the most significant developments in contemporary religious epistemology ... which directly assault the evidentialist construal of rationality" (p.1). Thus, reformed epistemology generally seeks to challenge to the evidentialist assumption that religious beliefs require the support of evidence to be rationally justified. For the Reformed Epistemologists, "such evidential requirement for positive epistemic status would rule out a great deal of beliefs as being epistemically lacking" (Pritchard, 2003, p.51). Based on this conviction, they seek to show that religious or theistic beliefs can be rational or justified without any appeal to evidence or arguments (Evans and Zachary, 2009, p.191).

Plantinga, is particularly convinced that the evidentialist challenge against religious beliefs, is rooted in the classical foundationalist claim that a belief is properly basic just in case it is self-evident, incorrigible or evident to the senses, and for this reason, one is unjustified or irrational in believing that God exists because the belief is not properly basic in this sense. On the contrary, however, Plantinga believes that this theistic belief is properly basic. He writes: "belief in God is properly basic and needs not to be inferred from other truths to be rationally justified" (2000, p.156). But why does Plantinga consider a belief in God as properly basic? To demonstrate how this is possible, he begins with his critique of the classical foundationalism's criteria that a belief needs to meet if it is to be "properly basic", which he characterizes as follows: "For any proposition *A* and person *S*, *A* is properly basic for *S* if and only if *A* is incorrigible for *S* or self-evident for *S*" (1981, p.49).

However, he points out that, if classical foundationalism stipulates that properly basic beliefs are restricted to just beliefs of these kinds (self-evident, incorrigible or evident to the senses), then, it

is self-referentially self-refuting, and no one can be justified in believing it, since the requirement that a belief be properly basic in the sense just described above, is itself neither properly basic nor inferable from properly basic beliefs (2000, p.84). Since evidentialism is rooted in classical foundationalism, by implication then, Plantinga (1983) argues that, “evidentialism is self-referentially inconsistent, for there is no evidence for evidentialism” (60). Plantinga argues that, “in order for the evidentialist objection to be successful, its proponents must specify a criterion for proper basicity that is free from self-referential difficulties, rules out belief in God as properly basic and is such that there is some reason to think it is true” (1998, p.138). Plantinga believes that the evidentialist objection to religious beliefs fails, because no one has been to do this.

To circumvent this problem and to show that the evidentialist argument is unsound as well as to demonstrate that belief in God ranks among those beliefs that are properly basic, Plantinga adopts a model of basic belief – one that is still foundationalist (with its internalist epistemological model), but which is (unlike classical foundationalism) fallibilist, admitting that the basic beliefs are subject to defeat. He says that, “theistic belief could certainly not be immune to argument and defeat just by virtue of being basic. In this, theistic belief only resembles other kinds of beliefs accepted in the basic way” (2000, p.343). However, for Plantinga, as cited in Koon (2011), a basic belief, such belief in God’s existence, is essentially a foundational belief, a non-inferential belief (p.3); and paradigm examples of such theistic beliefs are perceptual beliefs (as when one sees an orange sphere and forms the belief ‘there is a basketball’) as well as memory belief (as when one remembers ‘I had banana for breakfast’). In neither case is the belief inferred from another belief: it is immediate, non-inferential, basic.

Plantinga, therefore, endeavours to exploit this parallel between religious belief and perceptual belief as a means of putting religious belief on the same sort of secure footing that is typically granted to perceptual belief. The thought is that, religious belief can sometimes enjoy the very sort of “directness” that is often found in perceptual belief, and that, in the perceptual case, licenses the adoption of non-evidentialist epistemology. Laurence Bonjour (1985) avers that ordinary perceptual beliefs tend to arise “spontaneously” out of certain perceptual experiences, and the same might be said regarding how certain religious beliefs arise in response to particular religious experience (p.23). William Alston (1983) calls this line of reasoning a “parity argument”, which aims to show that, “‘Christian Practice’, has basically the same epistemic status as ‘Perceptual Practice’ and that no one who subscribes to the latter is in a position to cavil at the former” (p.12). In the spirit of this parity argument, Plantinga (2000) explores the possibility that, religious experience is basic to religious belief in somewhat the way in which sense experience is basic to our belief about the physical world; for, in both cases, we form certain beliefs about the subject matter (God, the physical environment) on the basis of

experience (p.33). He, therefore, believes that the kind of non-evidentialist epistemological model that is applied in the perceptual case ought to just as apt in the religious case (p.33).

Moreover, for Plantinga, a belief is properly basic if in addition to being basic, it is *warranted* for the individual. In Plantinga's view, warrant (what many call justification) is defined as the property of beliefs that makes them knowledge. For him, *justification* is a matter of fulfilling one's epistemic duties, whereas *warrant* is what transforms true belief into knowledge. A perceptual or religious belief, in his view, can enjoy an *immediate* warrant that arises directly out of the agent having an experience of a certain sort rather than a *transferred* warrant, or *partly transferred* warrant, which is dependent on an evidential grounding. He explains that a belief's warrant depends on the circumstances of the belief's production or what he refers to as *proper functioning* of the believer's cognitive faculties (1993, p.4). This *proper functioning* is a necessary condition of having warrant, whereby, "one's belief-forming and belief-maintaining apparatus of powers are functioning properly, working the way it ought to work" (p.4). Plantinga summarizes the conditions for warrant as follows: "a belief has warrant for a person *S* only if that belief is produced in *S* by cognitive faculties functioning properly (subject to no dysfunction), in cognitive environment that is appropriate for *S*'s kind of cognitive faculties, according to a designed plan that is successfully aimed at truth" (2000, p.156).

But is our belief that God exists justified/warranted in this sense, and therefore knowledge? Plantinga argues in the affirmative, indicating that, a properly basic belief in God is warranted when produced by a sound mind, in an environment supportive of proper thought in accord with a design plan successfully aimed at truth (1993, p.viii). Accordingly, God has so constituted us that we naturally form this belief under certain circumstances; and since the belief is thus formed by properly functioning cognitive faculties in an appropriate environment, it is warranted for us, and, insofar as our faculties are not disrupted by the noetic effects of sin, we shall believe this proposition deeply and firmly, so that we can be said, in virtue of the great warrant accruing to this belief for us, to know that God exists. He explains that, belief in God can, like perceptual or memory belief, be properly basic; for, it is likely that if there is God, He wants us to know Him, and has given us a way of knowing Him. Following in the tradition of the Protestant Reformer and Theologian, John Calvin, Plantinga postulates "a kind of faculty or cognitive mechanism, what Calvin calls *sensusdivinitatis* or sense of divinity, which in a wide variety of circumstances produces in us the beliefs about God" (2000,p.172). As this cognitive mechanism is designed to produce beliefs about God, such beliefs can be warranted, and we can indeed have knowledge of God produced by this *sensusdivinitatis*.

Plantinga insists that, a belief produced by *sensusdivinitatis* may be without evidence, but not groundless. It is his conviction that, God has so created us that we have a tendency or disposition to see his hand in the world about us (1981, p.46). Hence, one may have an experience, for

instance, seeing the glory of nature, or the beauty of some aspects of creation, or feeling danger—and while this experience does not serve as the premise for an argument to belief in God, it does ground belief in God through the operation of the *sensusdivinitatis* (2000, pp.173-174). When one has an experience and then (on the basis of this experience) forms a basic belief about God, one's theistic beliefs "are not accepted as the conclusion of an argument from religious experience... It is rather that (as in the case of perception) the experience is the *occasion* for the formation of the beliefs in question, and plays a causal role (a role governed by the design plan) in their genesis" (2000, p.258). Therefore, as Koons (2011) explains, properly basic theistic beliefs (those produced by the *sensusdivinitatis*) are non-inferential in every sense (p.839). They depend for their warrant purely on the operation of *sensusdivinitatis*, the circumstances in which the *sensusdivinitatis* operates being appropriate, and perhaps on the experience which grounds or occasions the operation of the *sensusdivinitatis* (Koons, 2011, p.842).

For Plantinga, just as perceptual beliefs like "There is a tree" are not based on arguments from more basic beliefs but arise spontaneously in me when I am in the circumstances of a tree's appearing to be there, so the belief "God exists" arises spontaneously in me when I am in appropriate circumstances, such as moments of guilt, gratitude, or awe at nature's grandeur, as a result of working of the *sensusdivinitatis*. Plantinga insists that God's existence is not inferred from such circumstances—such an argument would be manifestly inadequate. Rather, the circumstances form the context in which the *sensusdivinitatis* operates to produce a basic belief in God. Thus, belief in God is not arbitrary; it is grounded by the appropriate circumstances and so is properly basic. Hence, if such a model of theistic belief is true, the theist whose belief is produced in the described way violates no epistemic duty in believing and so is justified in believing that God exists.

With these arguments, Plantinga tries to show that there is no reason to think that Christian belief lacks epistemic justification, rationality, or warrant; as well as to provide from a Christian perspective an epistemological account of warranted Christian belief. The basic idea of Plantinga's account is that a belief is warranted for a person just in the case his cognitive faculties are, in forming that belief, functioning in an appropriate environment as God designed them to – to successfully aimed at truth (2000, pp.188-89). The more firmly such a person holds the belief in question, the more warrant it has for him, and if he believes it firmly enough, it has sufficient warrant to constitute knowledge. Plantinga maintains that, if his model is true, theistic belief is both justified and warranted.

However, to particularly defend Christian theism, Plantinga extends his account of divine inspiration to include not just the *sensusdivinitatis* but also the inner instigation of the Holy Spirit, in what he calls the Aquinas/Calvin model. Relying upon the doctrine of Original sin, Plantinga claims that most humans suffer from a cognitive-affective disorder; but that as a

result of Redemption, the Holy Spirit heals us so that we are able to function properly, and come to believe the Christian revelation in an immediate, non-inferential manner. The internal instigation of the Holy Spirit is therefore “a source of belief, a cognitive process that produces in us belief in the main lines of the Christian story”(2000, p.206). In Plantinga’s view the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit is the close analogue of a cognitive faculty in that it, too, is a belief-forming “mechanism.” Therefore, one can be said to know the great truths of the Gospel through the instigation of the Holy Spirit. And because we know the great truths of the Gospel through the Holy Spirit’s work, we have no need of evidence for them. Rather they are properly basic for us, both with respect to justification and warrant.

### **COGNITIVE PROBLEMS IN PLANTIGA’S VIEW**

Notwithstanding its seeming plausibility, Plantinga’s reformed epistemology seems to be fraught with a series of cognitive or epistemological problems that tend to frustrate his anti-evidentialist contention. For instance, his supposition of a sufficient analogy that holds between perceptual and religious experiences in his parity argument, is highly questionable. There are, in particular, some reservations about the presumed analogous “spontaneity” of religious and perceptual beliefs. As noted above, Plantinga believes that, like perceptual beliefs, religious beliefs can have the same sort of “directness” that one might find in the perceptual case; as if one were directly responding to a religious being in a way that one is directly responding to objects in the physical world through perception.

However, the problem, is that, whereas this sort of “directness” is the common in the perceptual case, it is hardly the situation in the religious case. For, as Duncan Pritchard (2002) says, “whereas perceptual beliefs seem to be in the main, ‘forced’ upon us, religious beliefs often seem to be formed in a far less immediate and compelling fashion” (p.55). Keith DeRose, cited in Pritchard (2003, p.55), explains further that, “normal religious belief is rarely understood in terms of being ‘zapped’ by a divinity, as Plantinga seems to understand it; instead, the more common way of conceiving of such belief is in terms of being ‘nudged’ or ‘invited’ towards a certain sort of doxastic commitment”. In general, there does seem to be a certain “voluntary” element in religious belief that is absent in most forms of perceptual beliefs. Consequently, whereas one might gain a warrant for his perceptual belief without engaging one’s reflective capacities at all, religious beliefs seem to implicate such reflective capacities directly.

This explains why we are generally quick to attribute perceptual knowledge to small children, but not to such people who lack reasonably developed capacities, the most basic religious knowledge. This is due to the fact that well-formed religious beliefs seem to demand more of the subject than well-formed perceptual beliefs. Of course, for the parity argument to go through, all that is needed is for *some* religious belief to be basic in the same way that *some* perceptual



beliefs are. But as we see it, this is not the case. This disanalogies between religious belief and perceptual belief forces us to question Plantinga's argument that, on grounds of parity, we should consider religious beliefs to be basic. Therefore, seeing that properly formed religious belief may be constrained by more imposing demands than properly formed perceptual belief, then it becomes clear that certain perceptual beliefs are basic, and that hardly any religious beliefs are basic as well.

Besides, if pushed to its logical conclusion, Plantinga's epistemological account of warranted Christian beliefs lead to a radical or a corrosive 'do as you please' relativism in epistemology. For, if Plantinga can claim, from his warranted Christian perspective that the theistic beliefs are properly basic, then any other *situated* epistemologist, or community of epistemologists, for example, such as Voodoo epistemologists, can also legitimately claim that their beliefs are properly basic from their perspective or with respect to warrant, no matter how bizarre that might be. In this way, a Voodoo version of Plantinga's model is epistemically possible; though, of course, philosophically unobjectionable. His argument may serve even as a ledge to justify *atheism*. For with respect to his account of the circumstances warranting the proper basicity of the theistic belief, belief is warranted for a person just in the case his cognitive faculties are, in forming that belief, functioning in an appropriate environment as God designed them to – to successfully aimed at truth (2000, pp.188-89). Now, we can imagine someone placed in circumstances in which belief in the non-existence of God would be justified for him in a properly basic way. For example, perhaps one's parents assured one of the non-existence of God, just the same way some normally trustworthy parents assure their children of the reality of Santa Claus. Since beliefs grounded in testimony are on Plantinga's analysis properly basic, it follows that one's belief in the non-existence of God, is in such circumstances properly basic with respect to this process of justification.

Furthermore, Plantinga's reformed epistemology reduces to fideism rather than knowledge. All of the intricate machinery concerning proper functioning, cognitive environment, design plan, and so forth, along with the operation of the *sensus divinitatis* and internal instigation of the Holy Spirit have not justifiably served any intention of objective knowledge about his claim concerning the belief in God. Knowledge requires objectivity to the extent that, if it is reasonable to *A* in circumstance *X* to believe that *P*, then it has to be so for anybody else – and conversely, otherwise, one's claim cannot qualify for knowledge. But, unfortunately, this is not the often case, especially when it comes to the belief in God's existence, which has been a controversial one. Though Plantinga views the belief in God as warranted by these processes, yet, one may ask: Does the belief in God being warranted to one in this manner, justify one's full belief in it or make it objective, even if one knows of those of equal or greater intellectual ability to whom it is not warranted or objective? If, as Plantinga argues, the belief in God is present in everyone

through the operation of *sensusdivinitatis* that we all have this inborn cognitive mechanism that produces belief in God and could be activated by such experiences which are common to all as guilt, awe at nature's grandeur, etc., why then do we equally have atheists, who as humans, are exposed to similar experiences that are identical in the relevant respects? What this shows is that, Plantinga's argument is about his belief in the circumstantial realization of the theistic belief in line with the operation of the Christian faith, as his claim may not obtain objectively. This much is clear from his statement that, if God existed, then He would want us to know Him and so would provide a means to do so. Thus, if Christianity is true, it is likely to be warranted.

Moreover, Plantinga's postulation of the instigation of the Holy Spirit as a belief-forming process analogous to a cognitive faculty is a distortion to the epistemic process of belief-formation. Certainly, it is something of oversimplification to say that propositional knowledge is a species of belief. This belief is a "propositional attitude" which is generally taken as the mental state of the subject "having some attitude, stance, take, or opinion about a proposition or about the potential state of affairs...." (Schwitzgebel, 2019, *Introduction*). Thus, being a propositional attitude, a belief is not an imposition but an initiation of the subject about a state of affairs unproblematically available to him and to which he has a commitment at a given instance. However, Plantinga's supposition of the Holy Spirit as a belief-forming mechanism in man creates an impression of an external faculty operating outside us which forms beliefs in us, or more precisely, which forms the belief about God in us! This not only depersonalizes man, at least as far as the formation of theistic belief is concerned, it also takes away from us the epistemic right to maintain any personal legitimate propositional attitude concerning it. For, since this faculty or process is not ours (but that of the Holy Spirit), not being part of our cognitive equipment, then it cannot literally be true that "*I have believed in God*". Although, the belief is formed in me, yet, I am not the one who formed it, and, therefore, I have not truly believed.

Again, it seems rather glib and fallacious for Plantinga to argue that the evidentialist objection to religious beliefs fails, because no evidentialist has been able to "specify a criterion for proper basicity that is free from self-referential difficulties, rules out belief in God as properly basic and is such that there is some reason to think it is true" (1998, p.138). Even if one concedes to Plantinga that no evidentialist has been able to specify such criterion for proper basicity that rules out belief in God, this by itself, however, gives no reason to think that belief in God is properly basic. To think otherwise is indeed to commit a fallacy of *argumentum ad ignorantiam* (appeal to ignorance). In short, Plantinga argument here amounts to saying that, 'since it has not been proved that *p* is false, therefore, *p* is true'!

## **THE FOUNDHERENTIST OPTION**

Perhaps, to sufficiently contend the evidentialist sceptical challenge against religious belief, the sort of epistemological internalism implicit in the kind of foundationalism behind Plantinga's version of reformed epistemology as it currently stands, must be rejected. There is also the need to commit to some form of epistemological externalism that obtains in Susan Haack's Foundherentist. Haack proposed the epistemological model of Foundherentism as an intermediate theory that can capture insights from both the foundationalist and the coherentist theories of justification in epistemology. For the Foundationalists, who favour a linear approach to justification of knowledge, knowledge has foundations in certain basic beliefs, which are non-inferentially justified and self-evident (Pollock and Cruz, 1999, p.32). However, for the Coherentists, who see knowledge as a web of beliefs, the justification of a belief depends on its logical consistency or coherence with other members of the beliefs-set (Dancy, 1991, p.116).

Often, a major challenge against foundationalism is the *arbitrariness* charge against its so-called "basic beliefs". Critics have questioned the possibility of such beliefs that are so certain, self-evident and self-justified that would be immune from error or doubts, especially given the reality the fallibility of our human cognitive experience. For D. Hamlyn, as cited in Joseph Moregbe (2000), such beliefs as "impossible, hopeless and undesirable" (p.55). Rescher (2003) says that, under the present predicament of cognitive imperfection, "any attempt to state the truth of things will always include misstatements as well" (p.17). Besides the *plurality objection* against the coherence theory, according to which the theory has no means of distinguishing truth or knowledge between two or more possible sets of coherent beliefs, what is often mostly noted as frustrating the credibility of the theory is its emphasis on absolute logical *consistency* of beliefs in a set – a condition most critics consider too strong and unattainable in any epistemic circumstance. Rescher, for instance, submits that, "no amount of coherence of beliefs in a set though consistency with one another can totally eradicate the liability of its error or inconsistency in the set" (2003, p.20).

Given such obvious weaknesses in these two theories and believing that they do not exhaust the options, Haack sees a "logical space" in between them and proposes *Foundherentism* as a mediatory theory. Thus, in her work, *Double-Aspect Foundherentism: A New Theory of Empirical Justification*, she argues that, "foundherentism, is an intermediate theory which (unlike coherentism) allows the relevance of experience but (unlike foundationalism) requires neither privileged beliefs justified exclusively by experience nor an essentially one-directional notion of evidential support" (1993a, p.113). The thought here is that, Foundherentism retains a core thesis from both Foundationalism and Coherence theories, as it includes the relevance of experience for the justification of beliefs (as Foundationalism does but Coherentism does not), and at the same time, allowing for the pervasive mutual dependence among beliefs (as

Cohherentism does but Foundationalism does not) instead of requiring a privileged class of beliefs justified exclusively by experience with no support from other beliefs (1993b, p.19).

By this theory, Haack, therefore, makes justification of knowledge a product of both the belief which comes from one's immediate experience (Foundationalism) and mutual support from other beliefs (Coherentism) in a given epistemic circumstance. This paper subscribes to this model of epistemic justification for the justification of religious beliefs in reformed epistemology, instead of Plantinga's foundationalist-based arguments, which cannot effectively contend the evidentialist sceptical challenge – as seen in our discussion above. We may also espouse Haack's metaphor of a crossword puzzle for a better understanding of our arguments here. Haack describes her position in terms of a crossword puzzle, where the clues stand for experience. It could well be that certain clues directly point to a certain answer (epistemologically supported beliefs), and thus, that the gaining of this answer is not dependent upon any other answers that one might already have. This would thus represent the standard perceptual case where our perceptual beliefs directly gain a sufficient positive epistemic status "without that status being dependent upon the epistemic status of any other belief we hold (qtd. Pritchard, 2003, p.58).

In contrast, other clues will not suggest any particular answer, but one could determine an answer by looking at the way that certain possible answers "cohere" with the answers already gained. These appear to be two extreme cases. However, more usually, our belief formation falls between these two poles. Employing the crossword metaphor again, it could be said that, often a clue directs us towards a small selection of answers, but that the final determination of the correct answer depends on our forming a judgment about which of these possible answers best cohere with the other answers that we already have. This corresponds to cases where we "form beliefs that enjoy some degree of direct positive epistemic support but where this support does not take one to the threshold necessary for warrant" (Pritchard, 2003, p.58). In such cases the epistemic support in question needs to be augmented with further epistemic support from one's other beliefs if it is to meet this threshold. An example of this might be a case where there is some ambiguity present in experience, as when one is unsure whether the person one sees in a distance is one's sister or one's mother. Here one might call on further beliefs that one already has (that she is too tall to be one's mother, for example) in order to form one's final (warranted) judgment. Foundherentism thus offers a spectrum of possibilities, from completely direct non-inferential warrant at one extreme (foundationalism), to completely indirect transferred warrant at the other extreme (coherentism), with various degrees of combination of these two alternatives.

The advantage of employing this model in reformed epistemology is that, it can accommodate the thought that religious belief enjoys some measure of direct epistemic support (perhaps even a

sufficient measure in certain rare cases) while also allowing that, in general, this support is insufficient by itself to warrant the religious belief in question. What must be added is thus, further epistemic support from other beliefs in order to bring the positive epistemic status up to the required threshold of warrant. This account allows us to mark the contrast with perceptual beliefs (which generally enjoys sufficient direct epistemic support) in a way that accords with the intuition that religious belief is formed in some way that are analogous with perceptual belief. In particular, it allows that one's religious beliefs do enjoy some measure of positive epistemic status that is direct and therefore not dependent upon the epistemic status of any other beliefs that one holds. In this sense, the foundherentist modification of the reformed epistemology thesis is just resistant to the evidentialist sceptical.

For so long as the religious belief is indeed formed in the right kind of circumstance, then, even though the agent might lack good reflectively accessible grounds for his belief, it can still have, *contra* the sceptic, a significant degree of positive epistemic status. Again, we find an externalist thesis emerging, and it is this externalism that is doing the work of undermining the evidentialist sceptical challenge: If coherence of one's religious beliefs can contribute to the epistemic status of those beliefs, then it is little wonder that an inchoate set of religious beliefs would seem to be lacking in rationality. Thus, evidence does not have a central role to play in religious epistemology after all; it is just not quite as central as the evidentialist contends.

## **CONCLUSION**

We have not only critically accessed Plantinga's reformed epistemology in this paper, but also, in the light of the identified weaknesses of his anti-evidentialist arguments, offered a compromise view between evidentialism and Plantinga anti-evidentialism. Whereas the evidentialist sees epistemic support as being entirely concerned with evidential considerations and Plantinga views evidential considerations as only relevant once we have moved away from basic religious beliefs, this proposed Foundherentic account contends that the evidential considerations are always relevant but usually only in concert with other epistemic support that is direct and non-evidential. In this way, evidential considerations can be accorded a role in the determination of religious belief's epistemic support without this role thereby inviting the usual evidentialism-based sceptical challenge.

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