

On Plantinga's *De Jure* Objection to Religious Belief: An Evidentialist Reply

1. Introduction. There is an objection concerning the epistemic justification of religious beliefs that has not been adequately rebutted, much less refuted.¹ The objection focuses on the *evidence* sophisticated religious believers possess with respect to propositions expressing special religious assertions that are central to a religious belief system. There are various senses of *belief* that figure in religious practices, but here I am interested only in *belief-that* (i.e. propositional belief). Although some of my commentary can be applied to religious propositional beliefs held by believers from a number of religions, I will direct my discussion to Christian beliefs.² I take it that most Christians actually believe propositions such as those expressed by the following: “God—the all-powerful, all-knowing, wholly good creator of the universe—exists”, “Jesus of Nazareth was God incarnate”, “Jesus of Nazareth was resurrected after his death”, “I will live again after I die”, etc.³ Let us call such propositions *Christian propositions*. The objection, which I will call the *sophisticates’ evidential objection*, is that the total evidence, broadly construed, possessed by sophisticated Christians is not sufficient epistemically to justify their beliefs with respect to Christian propositions.

In developing Reformed epistemology over the years, Alvin Plantinga has provided various arguments that have convinced quite a few philosophers—especially Christian philosophers—that the kind of objection I mention fails to be a proper objection to the epistemic rationality of Christian belief. In this paper, I argue not only that Plantinga has not shown this, but also that, given Plantinga’s own criteria for what counts as a proper objection to the rationality of Christian belief, there is good reason to believe that the *sophisticates’ evidential objection* is proper. If I am right, then my results vindicate the interest that many fine epistemologists have had in wrestling more or less head-on with various evidentialist challenges to the rationality of religious beliefs.⁴

Satisfying my goal for this paper does not require specification of a fully articulated *sophisticates’ evidential objection*.⁵ Noting some particular characteristics of the objection will suffice to make my point. The salient characteristics of the objection are expressed by the following presuppositions. First, although there are various standards of epistemic justification we might consider, I am interested only in a

modest standard: an *on-balance, preponderance-of-evidence* standard. Hence, the objection does not imply anything approaching Cartesian certainty as a requirement for epistemic justification. Second, the objection is intended to construe evidence broadly enough to incorporate experiences of any sort, including widely accepted sources of knowledge such as perception, memory, testimony, introspection, reasoning, and rational insight, as well as religious experience (if there is good reason to think that what is called "religious experience" counts as evidence of a special kind). Third, by "sophisticated Christians", I mean those Christians who (a) are smart, reflective, and graduate-school educated, (b) are well aware of the problem of evil and various arguments that count against the truth of Christian propositions, and (c) have rubbed shoulders with, and are thereby well aware of, many very smart people who either suspend judgment on or disbelieve Christian propositions. The relevant question, then, is this: Does the total evidence (broadly construed) possessed by sophisticated Christians support believing Christian propositions? The objection is that the answer is 'no'; therefore, sophisticated Christians are not epistemically justified in believing propositions that figure prominently in Christian beliefs.⁶

The objection assumes something about epistemic justification (call it the *evidence-justification principle*):

evidence-justification principle: if a person S is epistemically justified in believing a proposition p at time t , then S's total evidence, on balance, supports p at t and fails to support $\sim p$ at t .⁷

I endorse the evidence-justification principle, and I think that one's having epistemic justification for believing p is necessary for one's knowing that p ; hence, I think that having evidence is important epistemologically.⁸ However, there are those who apparently think that any objection along the line of the sophisticates' evidential objection is misguided or irrelevant. Reformed epistemologists, for instance, have tended to think either that one's having supporting evidence with respect to a proposition p is not necessary for one's being epistemically *justified* in believing p , or that one's having supporting evidence with respect to p is irrelevant or unnecessary for one's belief that p to be epistemically *rational* (or to have, as it is sometimes put, *positive epistemic status*). In espousing either of these views, Reformed epistemologists attempt to diminish the epistemic importance of evidence.⁹ The basic thrust of Reformed

epistemology's response to the sophisticates' evidential objection, then, is this: the objection assumes the evidence-justification principle, and the evidence-justification principle says that one's having evidence is necessary for one to be epistemically justified in believing any proposition p ; but, one's having evidence is either (a) unnecessary for one to be epistemically justified in believing p , or (b) irrelevant to whether or not one's doxastic attitude towards p has positive epistemic status; hence, the objection fails to reveal any epistemic problem for sophisticated Christians.

I grant that, if Reformed epistemologists have given us good reason to deny the evidence-justification principle or to believe that having evidence is epistemically irrelevant, then we have good reason not to take seriously the sophisticates' evidential objection. In this paper I take up arguments from the leading figure in Reformed epistemology, Alvin Plantinga, in order to determine whether he provides us with good reason to believe that the evidence-justification principle is false or irrelevant, and, thus, that the sophisticates' evidential objection need not trouble sophisticated Christians. I argue that the answer is 'no'. If I am successful, then there is good news and bad news for Christian epistemologists. The good news is that the epistemological options open to Christians (and, indeed, anyone) are broader than Reformed epistemologists like Plantinga would have us think. The bad news is that Christian epistemologists have some difficult work cut out for them; for, there remains a serious objection to the epistemic rationality of Christian belief.

2. Plantinga's Project in *Warranted Christian Belief*. In his eminently interesting and engaging *Warranted Christian Belief* (hereafter, *WCB*), Plantinga applies his epistemic theory of *warrant* to Christian beliefs.¹⁰ His overall goal is to provide a model—the *extended Aquinas/Calvin model*—which, if true, demonstrates that the central claims of Christianity can be warranted (and thus epistemically rational) for individual believers. Although I admire *WCB* as a work of creative genius, I have serious doubts about the arguments Plantinga provides to motivate interest in his own concept of warrant.

It will be helpful to rehearse Plantinga's treatment of two kinds of objections to Christian belief. One kind he calls a *de jure* objection, which calls into question the *epistemic rationality* of Christian beliefs; the other he calls a *de facto* objection, which directly calls into question the *truth* of Christian beliefs.

Thus, a *de jure* objection concludes that Christian beliefs are irrational (in some epistemic sense), whereas a *de facto* objection concludes or assumes that Christian beliefs are false. Now, Plantinga motivates interest in his own epistemological theory of warrant by criticizing the *de jure* objection. In its broadest form, the *de jure* objection goes like this: Regardless of whether Christian beliefs are true or false, such beliefs are "irrational or unreasonable or unjustified or in some other way properly subject to invidious epistemic criticism" (167). Plantinga whittles away various *de jure* objections, settling finally on what he takes to be the only proper *de jure* objection, the one that calls into question the *warrant* (in Plantinga's sense) of Christian beliefs. Plantinga then argues that there is no version of that objection that does not assume the falsity of Christian beliefs. If he is successful, then Plantinga will have shown that there is no proper *de jure* challenge that is independent of a *de facto* challenge. The relevant result is that there is no cogent *de jure* objection at all to Christian belief.¹¹ This implies, of course, that the sophisticates' evidential objection is also no good.

I will argue not only that Plantinga has not established that all *de jure* objections are dependent on *de facto* objections, but also that Plantinga's conclusion is false. After showing that there are many *de jure* objections that are independent of *de facto* objections, I argue that the sophisticates' evidential objection is a *de jure* objection that possesses argument-making properties at least as good as the *de jure* objection preferred by Plantinga. My aim is not to show that there is anything wrong with Plantinga's treatment of *de jure* objections that call into question the *warrant* (in Plantinga's sense) of Christian beliefs; rather, my aim is to provide reasons to think that the sophisticates' evidential objection is just as proper an objection to the epistemic rationality of Christian beliefs as is the one concerning warrant. Since evidentialism is a theory of *epistemic justification*, not *warrant* (in Plantinga's sense), my results provide good reason to think that there is a proper *de jure* objection to the epistemic justification of Christian beliefs worth taking seriously.¹²

3. Plantinga on *De Jure* Objections to Christian Belief. Let us first consider how Plantinga seeks to motivate our interest in his own epistemological theory of warrant. The general plan seems to be this: argue that the candidate *de jure* objections to the rationality of Christian belief are all *improper* except for

one, namely, the "Freud & Marx" objection; then, after revealing that the Freud & Marx objection assumes the falsity of Christian propositions, argue that there is no proper *de jure* objection to the rationality of Christian belief that does not assume the falsity of Christian propositions; finally, once we are convinced that the Freud & Marx objection is the only objection in town, we will have clear motivation for taking Plantinga's proper functionalist-reliabilist theory of warrant as the means of responding to the only objection to the epistemic rationality of Christian belief worthy to be taken seriously.

Two questions are worth asking: (1) Does Plantinga show that there is no *de jure* objection that is independent of a *de facto* objection? And (2) Does Plantinga show that the Freud & Marx objection is the only **proper** *de jure* objection to the epistemic rationality of Christian belief? Let us start to answer these questions by considering Plantinga's treatment of various putative *de jure* challenges to Christian belief. Some notable ones may be put in question-form as follows: (1) Can Christian beliefs be *epistemically justified*? (2) Can Christian beliefs be *Alston-justified*? (3) Can Christian beliefs be *Aristotelian-rational*? (4) Can Christian beliefs be *internally rational*? (5) Can Christian beliefs be *externally rational*? (6) Can Christian beliefs be *deliverances-of-reason rational*? Now, for each of these questions, Plantinga provides at least one historical example (and, often, many).¹³ This result straightforwardly implies that there *have* been a number of historical questions that have been asked about the epistemic status of Christian beliefs that do not assume the falsity of Christian propositions. Hence, there have been a number of *de jure* questions asked in the actual world, all of which are perfectly intelligible. However, Plantinga dismisses each of them in turn, usually concluding that the candidate at issue "cannot be the *de jure* question". But, surely this claim is misleading; for, those questions have, in fact, been asked, and they are *de jure* questions. What disqualifies them? Plantinga's view seems to be that, although those questions are *de jure* questions, they are not **proper** *de jure* questions. But, why are they not proper?

Plantinga dismisses the objections regarding (1) epistemic justification, (2) Alston-justification, and (3) Aristotelian-rationality, because they are all *too easy to answer*;¹⁴ he dismisses the objections regarding (4) internal rationality and (5) external rationality, because there are, in fact, Christian believers

who demonstrate that they possess such forms of rationality;¹⁵ and, he dismisses two kinds of objections pertaining to (6) deliverances-of-reason rationality: (a) as for the kind requiring rational beliefs to be *self-evident*, Plantinga points out that religious beliefs are in the same epistemological boat as historical and scientific beliefs: since no level-headed person requires historical or scientific beliefs to be self-evident in order to be epistemically good, there is no principled reason to require religious beliefs to be self-evident, either; (b) as for the kind requiring *consistency* among beliefs, Plantinga says, "Christians who come to realize that they have accepted an inconsistent version [of a religious doctrine] can easily replace that version by one that is not inconsistent" (115). It is apparent that Plantinga thinks that these latter three objections are also much too easily answerable to be proper *de jure* objections. Perhaps his complaint is plainest where he writes, after having canvassed the putative *de jure* objections I've already mentioned: "As we have seen, clear and sensible formulation of the *de jure* criticism--at any rate of one that isn't just obviously mistaken--has proven elusive" (167). Plantinga's general complaint, then, is that the proposed *de jure* objections are so easily answerable that they are just obviously mistaken.

Now, I think that Plantinga is correct that the epistemic goodness (whatever the epistemic feature) of Christian beliefs is not impugned by any of the proposed objections.¹⁶ However, note that none of those objections presupposes that Christian beliefs are false. In other words, each of the putative *de jure* objections is independent of a *de facto* objection. As I pointed out earlier, however, in order for Plantinga's theory of warrant to play a significant role in the book, he needs a *de jure* objection that is dependent on a *de facto* objection. To be sure, he finds one: the Freud & Marx objection, according to which Christian belief is the result of processes and faculties that are not, in fact, aimed at truth. But, why should we accept the Freud & Marx objection as **the** *de jure* objection, especially in light of the fact that Plantinga has not shown that the other *de jure* objections are independent of *de facto* objections?

One attempt to answer this question has already been suggested: all of the initial *de jure* objections Plantinga considers have *flaws*. For each objection, there is good reason to suppose that Christians can, or their Christian beliefs do, satisfy the proposed requirements for rationality. However, isn't this *exactly* what Plantinga wants to show about his own preferred *de jure* objection? That is, isn't it the case that

Plantinga wants to show that the Freud & Marx objection is just as flawed as the other *de jure* candidates? Why, then, prefer the Freud & Marx objection over the others? Why think that the Freud & Marx objection is **the** *de jure* objection, and the other candidates are not? Here is a proposal: the Freud & Marx objection is **the** *de jure* objection (or, at least, a *proper* one) because it does not possess the bad-argument-making properties possessed by the other *de jure* objections. Recall that Plantinga condemns such objections for being "too easy to answer" or "obviously mistaken" or, as he says elsewhere, for failing to have "much of a leg to stand on" (135). He also mentions other properties that apparently prevent a *de jure* objection from being *proper*. The extended list includes lacking viability (169), lacking sensibility (169), being trivial (137), and not being "relevant in the sense that a negative answer to it would be a serious point against Christian belief" (137).

Now, Plantinga does not tell us how to sort through these various properties. Does an objection need to have *several* of these properties in order to count as being improper, or does the possession of one of them suffice?¹⁷ Is *being too easy to answer* or *being obviously mistaken* a function of an objection's possessing one or more of the *other* properties? And what does it mean for an objection to be viable, or trivial, or sensible, or not easy to answer, or a serious point against Christianity? I think we just cannot tell.

Nonetheless, consider the following: Plantinga does provide *answers* to each of the supposedly improper *de jure* objections. He provides, sometimes at considerable length, various kinds of evidence and reasoning in order to argue that Christians have good replies to each objection. Moreover, his early work in the 1960s and 1970s concerning the rationality of religious belief was explicitly designed to show that there are good rebuttals to, and sometimes refutations of, various *de jure* objections to religious belief. Now, if such objections were "obviously mistaken", or "too easy to answer", or "trivial", or "not relevant in the sense that a negative answer to [them] would be a serious point against Christianity", then why did Plantinga spill so much ink on them? Why, indeed, does he take the effort to reply to such objections in *WCB*?

Supposing that there are philosophically satisfying answers to these questions, I remain puzzled by some of Plantinga's claims about the Freud & Marx objection. For instance, he implies that the Freud/Marx objection is *futile*: "We can . . . see the futility of the [Freud & Marx] complaint", he says, "once we see how theistic belief might have warrant" (168). In other words, Plantinga is going to provide an answer to the Freud & Marx objection that shows the futility of that objection. To my ears, this sounds just like the method he uses against those *de jure* objections that he thinks are improper. Again, I confess that I do not know how to rank the bad-argument-making properties that Plantinga mentions. However, an objection's *being futile* sure seems at least as bad as those other bad-argument-making properties. Perhaps, though, the fact that it takes many pages to show the futility of the Freud & Marx objection suggests another candidate for a criterion: **the** *de jure* objection takes more *work* to rebut than any of the others.

I doubt that there is a principled reason to take the Freud & Marx objection to be the only proper *de jure* objection. Nonetheless, Plantinga clearly has a *practical* reason to favor it: the Freud & Marx objection is the one for which his own theory of warrant is relevant, and his main purpose in *WCB* is to show how Christian beliefs can have warrant. Of course, from the fact that Plantinga has a *practical* reason to privilege the Freud & Marx objection, it does not follow that we have a good *epistemic* reason to do so. Even if we take the relevant criterion for a proper *de jure* objection to be one that takes a lot of effort to rebut, the sophisticates' evidential objection, which calls into question the *epistemic justification* of Christian belief, sure seems to do the job.

Lest we draw this conclusion too hastily, however, we should consider Plantinga's other arguments for the conclusion that there is no proper objection to the epistemic justification of Christian belief. Those arguments depend on his treatment of epistemic justification.

4. Plantinga On Epistemic Justification. Plantinga's commentary on epistemic justification focuses on what he calls the *classical picture*, which, he says, forms the basic epistemological framework that most of us have. This classical picture, or *classical package*, as he also calls it, is comprised by three elements: (i) a *deontological view of epistemic justification*, (ii) *evidentialism*, and (iii) *classical foundationalism*.

In this section, I will take up Plantinga's treatment of each element. After rehearsing his conception of each element, I will explain why his commentary fails to show that there is no worthy objection to the epistemic justification of Christian belief.

It is clear enough that Plantinga hears the word "justification" primarily as expressing a *deontological concept* (i.e., a concept involving the notion of what one *ought* to do, or what *duties* one has). Treating John Locke as the source of the classical and modern deontological view of epistemic justification, Plantinga says of Locke's view:

In particular, you are obliged to give assent only to that for which you have good reasons, good evidence: you are to accept a proposition only if it is probable with respect to what is certain for you. . . . You govern your assent "right," he says, and you place it as you "should" if you believe or disbelieve as reason directs you. And if you don't do that, then you transgress against your own lights. One who governs his opinion thus is acting in accord with duty, is within his rights, is flouting no obligation, is not blameworthy, is, in a word, *justified*. (87)

Plantinga provides what I take to be a satisfying reply to an objection, based on Locke's deontological view of epistemic justification, to the rationality of Christian belief.¹⁸ Surely, Plantinga is correct that Christians (even sophisticated ones) can be deontologically justified in believing "the great things of the gospel" (i.e., Christian propositions).

But what of *evidentialism*? Plantinga writes, "*Evidentialism* is the claim that religious belief is rationally acceptable only if there are good arguments for it" (82).¹⁹ It is hard to evaluate this claim, because there is ambiguity in the locution "there are good arguments for it". Interpreting the locution in some ways would imply that some leading, self-proclaimed evidentialists are not, in fact, evidentialists.²⁰

In order to avoid this result, it is better to characterize evidentialism as follows:

Evidentialism: a person *S* is epistemically justified in believing a proposition *p* at time *t* iff *p* is supported by *S*'s total evidence at *t*.²¹

Notice that Evidentialism implies the evidence-justification principle I mentioned earlier.

As I will explain in section 5, Plantinga's objections to evidentialism are cogent only on the assumption that evidentialism implies either that a person's belief is epistemically justified only if that *person* is aware of good arguments for the proposition believed, or that a person's belief can be justified only if that person makes a *conscious psychological inference* from some premises to the proposition

believed. Now, it seems to me that some epistemologists have assumed such requirements, and Plantinga is correct in pointing out that they are too stringent. His own examples concerning the experiences that give rise to memorial beliefs provide very good reasons to think that some versions of evidentialism have requirements that are too strict. However, from the fact that Plantinga has shown that some particular species of evidentialism is mistaken, it does not follow that all versions of evidentialism are mistaken. Moreover, there are many evidentialists who, rightly to my mind, construe evidence much more broadly than Plantinga does.²² To be fair, I want to point out that Plantinga explicitly directs his criticism of evidentialism to its role in what he calls *classical foundationalism* (more on that shortly), and he acknowledges other views of, and about, evidentialism.²³ However, it is curious that he neither raises *de jure* objections to Christian belief from the perspectives of those variations, nor does he explain how Christians can deal with such objections.²⁴

I now turn to Plantinga's treatment of *classical foundationalism* (or, CF), which Plantinga defines as follows:

(CF) A belief is acceptable for a person if (and only if) it is either properly basic (i.e., self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses for that person), or believed on the evidential basis of propositions that are acceptable and that support it deductively, inductively, or abductively.²⁵
(85)

Plantinga objects to (CF) for the reason that there are plenty of beliefs, which we, in fact, hold that seem to be perfectly acceptable from the epistemic point of view but which do not meet the conditions for acceptable belief expressed by (CF):

I believe that I had cornflakes for breakfast, that my wife was amused at some little stupidity of mine, that there really are such 'external objects' as trees and squirrels, and that the world was not created ten minutes ago with all its dusty books, apparent memories, crumbling mountains, and deeply carved canyons. These things, according to classical foundationalism, are not properly basic; they must be believed on the evidential basis of propositions that are self-evident or evident to the senses (in Locke's restricted sense) or incorrigible for me. Furthermore, they must be probable and seen to be probable with respect to propositions of that sort: there must be good arguments, deductive, inductive, or abductive to these conclusions from those kinds of propositions.

If there is any lesson at all to be learned from the history of modern philosophy from Descartes through Hume (and Reid), it is that such beliefs *cannot* be seen to be supported by, to be probable with respect to beliefs that meet the classical conditions for being properly basic.
(WCB, 98)

Even if we find objectionable all the theories of epistemic justification posited by the early modern philosophers, it is worth noting that it is not at all clear that (CF) rules out our being epistemically justified in believing propositions about the external physical world and the past. For starters, note that some of Plantinga's commentary does not apply to (CF). For instance, he says that, according to classical foundationalism, the propositions in question "must be probable and seen to be probable". But, this claim goes beyond what (CF) says. To say that the target propositions must be "seen to be probable" is to posit a higher-order "seeing" condition on epistemic justification. However, (CF) does not itself imply such a higher-order requirement, and for good reason: a classical foundationalist can plausibly hold that no such higher-order "seeing" condition is necessary in order to explain how the target proposition gets its justification.²⁶

A judicious assessment of (CF) depends crucially on what plausible options there are for analyzing the locution *believed on the evidential basis of propositions that are acceptable*. As I will explain in section 5, Plantinga's arguments against the classical package are successful only on the assumption that the locution implies a *conscious inference* from a basic proposition to the target proposition. Here I will note that, if that is the way we are to understand the locution, then Plantinga is correct. There are many kinds of propositions that all we non-skeptics confidently believe can be epistemically justified for us, although it is hard to see how that can be true if we must make a conscious inference to them from more basic propositions we believe.

However, even if Plantinga has shown that *classical* foundationalism yields counterintuitive results, it does not follow that *all* versions of foundationalism are incorrect. Moreover, many contemporary foundationalists are *modest foundationalists*, not classical foundationalists. Modest foundationalists tend to deny that properly basic beliefs must be either self-evident or incorrigible or evident to the senses for the believer. On many versions of modest foundationalism, ordinary memorial beliefs and sensory beliefs can be both psychologically basic and epistemically justified for believers.²⁷ Plantinga's criticisms of classical foundationalism clearly do not apply to such versions of foundationalism.²⁸

What is most troubling about Plantinga's treatment of the *de jure* objection based on epistemic justification is not that he relates epistemic justification to evidentialism (for I think that epistemic justification is, in fact, concerned with evidential factors), but rather that he explicitly relates evidentialism to a *deontological* view of epistemic justification. Plantinga writes:

Locke's thought initiates the classical package: evidentialism, deontology, and classical foundationalism. It is according to the first two that Christian belief requires evidence; that is, Christian believers are within their intellectual rights and conforming to intellectual duty, only if they have evidence for that belief. It is according to the third that the evidence must trace back, finally, to what is certain for them: what is self-evident or incorrigible or evident to the senses. This connection between justification and evidence has been at the center of the whole justificationist tradition in Western epistemology; it has been of particular importance for subsequent thought about the *de jure* question for Christian belief. According to this tradition, the *de jure* question is really the question whether Christian belief is rationally justified--that is, whether believers are justified in holding these beliefs, and whether they are conforming to intellectual duty in holding them. (88)

Note how Plantinga runs evidentialism and deontology together: "It is according to [evidentialism and deontology] that Christian belief requires evidence; that is, Christian believers are within their intellectual rights and conforming to intellectual duty, only if they have evidence for that belief" (88).

Plantinga provides some historical corroborating evidence from W.K. Clifford and William James, both of whom did run evidentialism and deontology together. Plantinga follows his discussion of Clifford and James by pointing out their influence on contemporary philosophers: "the last half-century has seen a host of evidentialist objectors to Christian belief, thinkers who hold both that this sort of belief, if it is to be rational, must be accepted on the basis of propositional evidence, and that the evidence is insufficient" (89).²⁹ Note that there are two very different general issues under discussion here: (1) whether or not we have a *duty* to believe according to our evidence; and (2) whether or not we *have* sufficient evidence to be epistemically justified in our beliefs. Although I think Plantinga is correct that Clifford and James conflate evidentialism and deontology, his comment about the more recent evidentialist objectors to Christian belief (quoted above) does not imply a commitment to deontology at all. Moreover, one may object that a person has insufficient evidence to be epistemically justified in believing a proposition without thereby implying that that person has violated any duty whatsoever. It may well be that the *classical package* includes a deontological view of epistemic justification, but it does not follow that an

evidentialist or a foundationalist is committed to a deontological view of epistemic justification.³⁰ Indeed, even among those who think that there are some doxastic duties, most deny that duties are constitutive of epistemic justification.³¹

My conclusion is, by now, a familiar one. Although Plantinga exposes important flaws in some influential views of evidentialism, he does not thereby show that a proper *de jure* objection cannot focus on the quality of *evidence* Christians possess with respect to their religious beliefs; and, since there are leading, non-classical views of epistemic justification that have evidence as the salient feature, his treatment of the classical package fails to motivate his claim that **the** *de jure* objection is not about epistemic justification.

5. The Master Argument: Proper Basicity. There is a particular epistemological argument that has provided Plantinga with considerable mileage over the years. The argument has been useful in both his early and recent attempts to defend the rationality of theistic belief, in his objections to what he takes to be evidentialism, and (most significantly for mainstream epistemology) in his claim that his own concept of warrant is the property "enough of which distinguishes knowledge from mere true belief" (153). Plantinga's master argument is roughly this: there are several kinds of beliefs we humans have that are not believed on the basis of evidence but which we intuitively consider to be perfectly acceptable from the epistemic point of view; moreover, they *are* perfectly acceptable from the epistemic point of view; hence, evidentialism is false. The key question, then, is this: does Plantinga provide good reason to think that evidentialism is false?

In *WCB*, Plantinga provides several variations and commentaries on the master argument. He typically supports the argument by comparing theistic beliefs with perceptual beliefs, memorial beliefs, and apriori beliefs. For instance, he says that there is a way in which

the *sensus divinitatis* resembles perception, memory, and *a priori* belief. Consider the first. I look out into the backyard; I see that the coral tiger lilies are in bloom. I don't note that I am being appeared to a certain complicated way (that my experience is of a certain complicated character) and then make an argument from my being appeared to in that way to the conclusion that in fact there are coral tiger lilies in bloom there. . . . It is rather that upon being appeared to in that way (and given my previous training), the belief that the coral tiger lilies are in bloom spontaneously arises in me. This belief will ordinarily be *basic*, in the sense that it is not

accepted on the evidential basis of other propositions. The same goes for memory. You ask me what I had for breakfast; I think for a moment and then remember: pancakes with blueberries. I don't argue from the fact that it *seems* to me that I remember having pancakes for breakfast to the conclusion that I did; rather, you ask me what I had for breakfast, and the answer simply comes to mind. Or consider *a priori* belief. I don't infer from other things that, for example, *modus ponens* is a valid form of argument: I just see that it is so and, in fact, *must* be so. All of these, we might say, are starting points for thought. But (on the model) the same goes for the sense of divinity. It isn't a matter of making a quick and dirty inference from the grandeur of the mountains or the beauty of the flower or the sun on the treetops to the existence of God; instead, a belief about God spontaneously arises in those circumstances, the circumstances that trigger the operation of the *sensus divinitatis*. This belief is another of those starting points for thought; it too is basic in the sense that the beliefs in question are not accepted on the evidential basis of other beliefs. (176)

Based on the passage, an argument against evidentialism could go as follows: Perceptual beliefs, memorial beliefs, and apriori beliefs can be epistemically justified for a person even if they are not believed on the evidential basis of other propositions; but, evidentialism requires that epistemically justified beliefs be believed on the evidential basis of other propositions; so, evidentialism is false.

The argument involves two salient claims: (1) we do not typically infer sensory, memorial, or apriori beliefs from any propositional evidence; and (2) sensory, memorial, and apriori beliefs spontaneously arise in us as a result of particular experiences. I am inclined to think that Plantinga is right about both claims. What we want to know is whether those claims imply that evidentialism is false. (1) seems right. In any case, we rarely *consciously* infer a proposition from another proposition about how things seem to us. Note, however, that there are two ways an evidentialist might respond to (1). One way is to claim that, although we do not typically make a conscious inference from our sensory or memorial or apriori evidence to our beliefs, we nonetheless *unconsciously* make such inferences.³² This is, of course, an empirical claim, and we must await results from science to settle the issue. However, the evidentialist has another reply: the crucial issue for evidentialism is not whether one makes an inference, conscious or not, from believed propositions to the target proposition; rather, the crucial issue is whether one's total evidence with respect to a proposition supports or fails to support that proposition. Evidentialism, by itself, implies neither deontologism nor the making of an inference from propositions about one's evidence to a target proposition.³³

Nevertheless, there is a different criticism in the neighborhood that would, if correct, make trouble for the general evidentialist thesis, a criticism that is implicit, if not fully explicit, in other passages in which Plantinga discusses proper basicity. Consider, for instance, a passage from *WCB* in which Plantinga criticizes William Alston's "ground" view of epistemic rationality:

Consider memory. You remember what you had for lunch: lentil soup and a doughnut. This belief isn't based on propositional evidence. You don't infer it from other things you know or believe, such things, perhaps, as your knowledge that you always have a doughnut and lentil soup for lunch, or your knowledge that it is now shortly after lunchtime and there are doughnut crumbs on your desk and an empty plastic soup dish on your trash. . . . But it also isn't based on an experience. At any rate, it is clear that memory beliefs are not based on anything like *sensuous* experience or phenomenal imagery. There may *be* a bit of such imagery present (a fragmentary and partial image of a doughnut or a bowl, perhaps), but you certainly don't form the belief *on the basis of* that image. It is clear that you could remember without having that imagery—or, indeed, any other imagery So the imagery isn't necessary. It is also insufficient; you could also have that imagery without remembering. The reason is that the imagery that goes with *imagining* that you had a doughnut and lentil soup for lunch, or *entertaining the proposition* that you did, is indistinguishable (at least in my own case) from the imagery that goes with *remembering* that you had a doughnut and lentil soup for lunch. And even if you do have fairly explicit imagery in connection with this memory, you surely don't know that it was *lentil* soup on the basis of that imagery; the image isn't nearly clear, detailed, and explicit enough to enable you to distinguish it from, for example, imagery of pea soup, or bean soup, or many other kinds of soup.

Accordingly, it isn't that you know it was lentil soup *on the basis of* this experience; you don't form the belief that it was lentil soup with that experience as ground. (The image seems to be more like a disposable decoration.) Instead, you simply remember, simply form that belief. Or perhaps more accurately, that belief is formed in you: you don't yourself, so to speak, take much of a hand in forming it.

The same goes (though perhaps more controversially) for *a priori* belief. I believe the proposition *Necessarily, if all men are mortal and Socrates is a man, then Socrates is mortal*. Now there is, indeed, a sort of imagery connected with this belief when I entertain it—perhaps something like a fragmentary image of the relevant English sentence written on a blackboard as in a logic class. But surely the belief isn't formed on the *basis of* that imagery; that imagery isn't anything like a *ground* for it; it doesn't stand to that imagery in anything like the way in which my belief that the snow in my backyard is melting stands to the visual imagery I now enjoy. (105-106)

To his familiar point that we do not typically get a memory belief via a conscious inference from propositions about how things seem to us, Plantinga here adds a stronger claim: "But it also isn't based on an experience" (105-106). This gives us the seed of an objection to even the general version of evidentialism: if we can have epistemically justified beliefs that are not related in any epistemic way to an experience, then it is hard to find any principled reason for maintaining that all epistemically justified beliefs are those supported by evidence; for, if there is no experience at all that gives rise to a belief, then

it seems that there is no evidence either; and, if there is no evidence, then obviously there is no evidence supporting such beliefs.

However, it is clear enough that Plantinga does not really think that any epistemically rational beliefs are unrelated to experience. Notice that the sentence subsequent to "But it also isn't based on an experience" is this: "At any rate, it is clear that memory beliefs are not based on anything like *sensuous* experience or phenomenal imagery" (106). Let us be careful here: it is one thing to say that a memory belief is not based on an experience, but it is a very different thing to say that a memory belief is not based on sensuous experience or phenomenal imagery. Plantinga's argument in the passage about the epistemic status of memory and apriori beliefs gives reasons to think only that such beliefs are not based on sensuous experience or phenomenal imagery. He may well be right about that claim (or, it may well be that such beliefs need not be formed on the basis of such experience), but he does not show, nor does he believe, that experience plays no role in determining the epistemic status of memory and apriori beliefs. In order to get clear on this matter, consider one more passage, where Plantinga compares the epistemic status of religious beliefs to perceptual beliefs, memory beliefs, and apriori beliefs:

In a certain sense, there isn't anything to go on in any of the three cases. You don't accept memory and obvious *a priori* beliefs on the basis of other beliefs; but you also lack the detailed phenomenological basis, the rich and highly articulated sensuous imagery that is involved in perception. What you do have in all three cases is another kind of phenomenal evidence, what I have been calling *doxastic* evidence. (In WPF I called it *impulsional* evidence.) There is a certain kind of phenomenology that distinguishes entertaining a proposition you believe from one you do not: the former simply seems right, correct, natural, approved—the experience isn't easy to describe (WPF, 190ff.) You have this doxastic evidence in all three sorts of cases (as, indeed, in any case of belief), and you have nothing else to go on. But you don't *need* anything else to go on: it is not as if things would be better, from an epistemic point of view, if you believed, say, $2 + 1 = 3$ or that you had oatmeal for breakfast this morning on the evidential basis of other propositions, or on the basis of some kind of sensuous imagery more or less like that involved in perception. (264)

Based on what Plantinga says here, a case against evidentialism might go as follows: When it comes to perceptual beliefs such as visual beliefs, evidentialists might be able to argue for the presence of experiential evidence from the senses concerning the phenomenal quality of that experiential evidence: things *look* a certain way to you, and the way things look to you can legitimately be construed as supporting evidence you have for your visual beliefs; however, in the case of memory and apriori beliefs,

there is no such thing as the way things look to you (e.g., there are no images present to you) that play a role in your forming the beliefs that you do; hence, you have no evidence for memory beliefs and apriori beliefs.

However, if this were taken to be an objection to the general evidentialist thesis, then it would fall short of its mark. From the fact that no sensory phenomenology is present with respect to a belief, it does not follow that there is no evidence for the belief. Notice that Plantinga himself says that there is "phenomenal evidence" for memory beliefs and apriori beliefs. He calls this kind of evidence *doxastic evidence* (or, *impulsional evidence*). Furthermore, Plantinga implies that such evidence is good enough for acceptable belief, from the epistemic point of view. But, if there is *evidence* involved in all epistemically good memory and apriori beliefs, then this result seems to lend *support* to the general evidentialist thesis. As Plantinga says, the phenomenal experience that constitutes doxastic or impulsional evidence for a proposition makes the proposition seem right. I confess that I do not have a firm grip on the concept of impulsional evidence, but having an experience that makes a proposition seem right strikes me as the sort of thing one wants to include in one's inventory of the kinds of things that count as evidence. In any case, Plantinga's point about the lack of sensuous experience in the case of memory and apriori beliefs does not show that the general evidentialist thesis is wrong. I conclude that Plantinga's arguments concerning proper basicity do not impugn evidentialism. As I have said, his arguments do provide powerful reasons to deny certain versions of evidentialism, but they neither impugn the general evidentialist thesis nor the more plausible versions of evidentialism.

6. Conclusion. Over the years there have been a number of philosophical views according to which the evidence religious believers have is irrelevant to, or unnecessary for, the epistemic value of their religious beliefs. Wittgensteinian fideists, certain pragmatists with respect to epistemic justification, and Reformed epistemologists share this dismissive attitude about the epistemic import of having evidence. Although there are some plausible aspects to Wittgensteinian fideism and pragmatism, their plausible aspects are irrelevant to the kind of epistemic rationality at issue in the sophisticates' evidential objection.³⁴ And, as I have shown, although Plantinga's arguments on behalf of Reformed epistemology are relevant to the

objection, they do not show that the argument is improper or lacking in philosophical interest. The best kind of *de jure* objection pertaining to the epistemic justification of Christian beliefs is as worthy as the Freud & Marx objection to be considered a proper *de jure* objection.

Plantinga's arguments do, however, help us to constrain the sophisticates' evidential objection in particular ways. Although a fully articulated sophisticates' evidential objection will have to await another day, in light of considerations above, we can specify the following features of the objection: First, the objection is consistent with Plantinga's assumption that widespread skepticism is false. In particular, no premise in the objection relies on any principle that implies that perceptual beliefs, memorial beliefs, and apriori beliefs are not typically justified for individual persons.³⁵

Second, the sophisticates' evidentialist objection does not entail what Plantinga calls "classical foundationalism". As I have pointed out, there are various plausible versions of modest foundationalism. Compared to the classical foundationalist, a modest foundationalist has either relaxed restrictions on the kinds of beliefs that can be properly basic, or relaxed restrictions on how proper non-basic beliefs may be related to properly basic ones, or both.³⁶ The sophisticates' evidential objection assumes modest foundationalism.

Third, take the evidentialist objection not to imply deontology about epistemic justification. Accordingly, the objection does *not* imply that a person has a *duty* to believe a proposition iff that proposition is supported by that person's evidence. It does not imply that Christians are blameworthy in believing "the great things of the gospel". The objection is just that the actual evidence possessed by typical intelligent, well-educated, contemporary Christians does not, on balance, support the main claims of Christianity. Hence, the objection is consistent with what Plantinga calls a *de jure* objection, since it does not assume the falsity of Christian beliefs.

Finally, although I am not an evidentialist objector to Christian belief, I think I understand something of what might prompt someone to raise this kind of *de jure* objection, and I can imagine the sort of thinking that would help us develop a fully articulated objection worth responding to. For instance, I can imagine the following sort of thinking from a non-skeptical evidentialist objector:

Although Plantinga is wrong that *warrant* explains why memory and apriori beliefs can be perfectly acceptable from the epistemic point of view, he's right to think that they *are* acceptable from the epistemic point of view. They are acceptable epistemically because the evidence we have for such beliefs typically *does* support the propositions believed. For example, having the peculiar experience that goes with remembering just is, other things being equal, a good reason (i.e., good evidence) for beliefs I have about my past. Furthermore, everyone I've ever known seems often to have had the sorts of memorial experiences that I have had, and those experiences have given rise to memorial beliefs on a par with mine. I have lots of testimonial evidence from other people that corroborate my own beliefs about the past; and, I have good reasons to think that other people have lots of testimonial evidence from others that corroborate their own beliefs about the past. Likewise, having the peculiar experience that goes with some particular kinds of reasoning just is, other things being equal, a good reason (i.e., good evidence) for apriori beliefs that I have.

However, I doubt that Christian propositions are supported by the total evidence that sophisticated Christians actually have. After all, they are human beings just like I. They have memory beliefs, apriori beliefs, perceptual beliefs, and they have presumably the same kind of evidence for those beliefs that I have. But, when I honestly consider what I take my overall evidence to be, I don't find much evidence indicating the truth of Christian propositions.

Perhaps Christians have some evidence for Christian propositions due to mystical experience, testimony from other believers, and natural theology, but such evidence strikes me as deeply problematic, at least for sophisticated Christians who also have reasons to doubt what that evidence indicates. Although it is plausible that many children have evidence that makes some of their religious beliefs epistemically justified, it is doubtful that sophisticated Christians do. After all, in contrast to whatever testimonial evidence, mystical experience, and arguments sophisticated Christians are aware of that seem to support Christian propositions, they are also aware of the problem of evil, evidentialist objections to religious belief, plausible scientific understandings of our world—including their own mystical experiences—that do not require positing God's existence, the fact of religious diversity (which reveals that some equally smart people believe propositions inconsistent with Christian propositions), not to mention intelligent anti-religionists who have no religious beliefs at all. Sophisticated Christians, then, have substantial defeating evidence for Christian propositions. So, when we judiciously consider the total evidence possessed by a smart, cosmopolitan, erudite person in today's world, it sure seems that such evidence does not support believing Christian propositions. At best, that evidence supports suspending judgment on Christian propositions.

My point is not that there is something wrong with Christians for holding their beliefs. I can understand something about why they hold them, and I can even see certain practical advantages to holding such beliefs, but I don't think that their evidence supports thinking that Christian propositions are true. Thus, I doubt that sophisticated Christians are epistemically unjustified in believing such things.

I do not think that it is easy for a sophisticated Christian to answer the evidentialist objection. In any case, it is not obvious that sophisticated Christians have a good reply to the objection. Providing a good reply will involve a lot of thinking about the total evidence such persons typically have, and this will surely require much more work than has been done about how religious experiences can provide evidential support for Christian propositions.

The sophisticates' evidential objection strikes me as viable, sensible, non-trivial, and relevant. In short, it seems to meet all the conditions that Plantinga seems to put on a proper *de jure* objection. Perhaps, in the future, the objection will be shown to be as futile as is the Freud & Marx objection. But, is it not as **proper** a *de jure* objection as the Freud & Marx objection?³⁷

¹ In the last chapter of *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Cornell University Press) 1991, William Alston discusses the various grounds for religious belief that I think are salient for providing an adequate rebuttal or refutation. Nevertheless, it is clear to me that more work needs to be done to provide an adequate rebuttal or refutation.

² Not only do I know more about Christian beliefs and Christianity, but also much of the paper wrestles with Alvin Plantinga's arguments for the rationality of Christian beliefs.

³ I do not mean to suggest that having propositional beliefs is the most important aspect of typical religious practice, much less that having propositional beliefs is all there is to religious belief. Indeed, there are various senses of religious belief that play roles in typical religious practice, including the fideistic role that Wittgensteinians such as Rush Rhees and D.Z. Phillips have championed. See, for instance, D.Z. Phillips (ed.), *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy* (Cambridge) 1997. However, my interest here is solely on typical Christians' propositional beliefs, which surely play some cognitive role in most Christians' religious practice.

⁴ I have in mind the interest shown in the work of philosophers such as William Alston, Robert Audi, Richard Swinburne, William Rowe, William Hasker, William Wainwright, Richard Gale, Evan Fales, Bruce Russell, Stephen Wykstra, Paul Draper, Daniel Howard-Snyder, Keith Yandell, William Lane Craig, and (somewhat ironically) Alvin Plantinga, as well as some of those whose work is showcased in collections such as Radcliffe and White (eds.), *Faith in Theory and Practice: Essays on Justifying Religious Belief* (Open Court) 1993, Thomas D. Senor (ed.), *The Rationality of Belief and the Plurality of Faith* (Cornell University Press) 1995, Daniel Howard-Snyder (ed.), *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Indiana University Press) 1996, Audi and Wainwright (eds.), *Rationality, Religious Belief, & Moral Commitment* (Cornell University Press) 1986, Eleonore Stump (ed.), *Reasoned Faith* (Cornell University Press) 1993, and large anthologies such as Brian Davies (ed.), *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology* (Oxford University Press) 2000.

⁵ This paper is the first part of a three-part project: to (1) establish some basic parameters of an objection that focuses on the evidence possessed by sophisticated Christians, for the purpose of defending philosophical interest in such an objections against anti-evidentialist arguments due to work by Alvin Plantinga; (2) provide and explain the strongest, fully articulated sophisticates' evidential objection; and (3) provide, if possible, a response to the strongest sophisticate's evidential objection that shows that it is reasonable to think that sophisticated Christians can be epistemically justified in believing Christian propositions. In the present paper I seek only to satisfy (1).

⁶ The sort of epistemic justification I am thinking about may be better understood by thinking in terms of what is widely said to be the epistemic goal for epistemic justification, namely, the *truth goal* of now believing those propositions that are true, and now not believing those propositions that are false, for all those propositions one understands. This truth goal is a *synchronic* goal. Thus, the kind of epistemic justification I focus on does not pertain to a diachronic, future-oriented goal or a long-term goal. This point is important for the following reason: one could be epistemically justified with respect to a diachronic goal in believing a proposition *p* even when one's evidence does not support *p*. This is because believing what one's evidence does *not* support at time t_1 could, in some instances, cause one to gain knowledge that *q* at time t_3 that one would not have gained had one not believed *p* earlier at t_1 . Although I think that epistemic justification with respect to a diachronic goal involving truth is interesting (for one thing, it could explain how some type of epistemic justification pertains to *faith*), such a concept is not the subject of this paper.

⁷ I have no precise analysis of the support relation implied by the evidence-justification principle. Nevertheless, the basic idea seems clear enough: if one has, say, more and better evidence in favor of proposition p at time t than one has in favor of $\sim p$, then one is epistemically justified in believing p at t ; and, if one has more and better evidence in favor of $\sim p$ at t than one has in favor of p , then one is epistemically justified in disbelieving p at t ; and, if one has no more and better evidence in favor of p than one has in favor of $\sim p$, then one is epistemically justified in suspending judgment on p and $\sim p$ at t .

⁸ I do not mean to suggest that my reason is the only reason one might think that having evidence is epistemologically important. After all, one might deny that having evidence is necessary for knowledge but nevertheless think that having evidence has epistemic value of some kind or another. For development of this line of thinking, see William P. Alston, *Beyond "Justification": Dimensions of Epistemic Evaluation* (Cornell University Press) 2005.

⁹ The same general point goes for those who espouse any non-evidentialist theory of epistemic rationality, including Nozick's truth-tracking theory, Goldman's Causal Theory, and various versions of reliabilism.

¹⁰ Plantinga describes warrant as follows: "the property enough of which distinguishes knowledge from mere true belief, is a property or quantity had by a belief if and only if . . . that belief is produced by cognitive faculties or processes functioning properly in a congenial epistemic environment according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth". See Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford University Press) 2000, p. 204.

¹¹ Plantinga takes this to imply that there are no good reasons to deny that Christian believers can have beliefs that are epistemically good. The purpose of his extended Aquinas/Calvin model, then, is to show *how* Christian beliefs can be epistemically good for Christian believers, if the main lines of Christianity are true.

¹² I take *evidentialism* to be (minimally) the view that a person S is epistemically justified in believing a proposition p at time t iff S 's total evidence, on balance, supports p at t and fails to support $\sim p$ at t . Hence, the evidence-justification principle is entailed by evidentialism.

¹³ See chapters 3-4 of *WCB*.

¹⁴ He says that the objection regarding epistemic justification is "too easy to answer" (93), the objection regarding Alston-justification is faulty because that kind of justification is "too easy to achieve" (107), and the objection regarding Aristotelian-rationality he dismisses because it has "much too easy an answer" (109).

¹⁵ Plantinga replies to objections pertaining to internal and external rationality as follows: "I suppose it would be widely conceded that Christian belief can be held by people whose rational faculties are not malfunctioning, or at any rate not malfunctioning in a way that involves clinical psychoses. The fact is many Christian believers are able to hold jobs, some even as academics So presumably the *de jure* question is also not the question of whether Christian belief can be held by people whose cognitive or rational faculties are functioning properly, at least in this clinical sense" (112-113).

¹⁶ That is, not by any of the proposed objections as Plantinga characterizes them. As I point out, there is a proper objection regarding epistemic justification but not as Plantinga characterizes epistemic justification.

¹⁷ Apparently it takes *more* than one of them, for in the section of *WCB* where Plantinga discusses the *de jure* question: "Can Christian beliefs be epistemically justified?", he says the following: "We are construing justification in a broadly deontological way, so that it includes being within one's epistemic rights and also includes being epistemically responsible with respect to belief formation. . . . This is a perfectly reasonable requirement: if Christian belief cannot be held in such a way as to satisfy it, then there is something wrong with Christian belief" (100). Now, here, Plantinga seems to treat a challenge to the deontological justification of a Christian's belief as "relevant in the sense that a negative answer to it would be a serious point against Christian belief" (137), but having that property appears on Plantinga's list of what would render a *de jure* objection as *proper*. Perhaps, though, Plantinga would reply that although the deontological justification objection could show that something is wrong with Christian belief, this would not be a *serious* point against Christian belief.

¹⁸ Plantinga writes: "But it isn't at all difficult for a Christian—even a sophisticated and knowledgeable contemporary believer aware of all the criticisms and contrary currents of opinion—to be justified, in this sense, in her belief.

. . . it seems to her that she is sometimes made aware, catches a glimpse, of something of the overwhelming beauty and loveliness of the Lord; she is often aware, as it strongly seems to her, of the work of the Holy Spirit in her heart, comforting, encouraging, teaching, leading her to accept the "great things of the gospel" (as Edwards calls them), helping her see that the magnificent scheme of salvation devised by the Lord himself is not only for others but for her as well. After long, hard, conscientious reflection, this all seems to her enormously more convincing than the complaints of the critics. Is she then going contrary to duty in believing as she does? Is she being irresponsible? Clearly not. . . . She could be wrong . . . in thinking these things; nevertheless, she isn't flouting any discernible duty. She is fulfilling her epistemic responsibilities; she is doing her level best; she is justified" (*WCB*, 100-101).

¹⁹ I take it that he doesn't mean evidentialism *simpliciter* here but rather 'evidentialism with respect to religious belief'.

²⁰ For instance, one interpretation of Plantinga's construal of evidentialism implies that *propositions* are the only things that can count as evidence (since it is propositions that figure in arguments). Such a view precludes the views of evidentialists who think that experiences themselves can count as evidence. For instance, Norman Kretzmann writes, "Someone's evidence for a rational belief might, of course, sometimes be purely propositional and as fully cooked as Plantinga's exposition . . . suggests it must always be, but it might equally well be raw experience itself." See Norman Kretzmann, "Evidence and Religious Belief" in Brian Davies (ed.), *Philosophy and Religion: A Guide and Anthology* (Oxford University Press) 2000, p. 101. Also, Richard Feldman's "isolation objection" to coherentism strongly suggests that Feldman thinks that experiences themselves can constitute part of one's evidence. See Richard Feldman, *Epistemology* (Prentice Hall) 2003, pp. 68-70.

²¹ This specification of evidentialism has several advantages. One is that it is consistent with formulations given by leading evidentialists such as Richard Feldman and Earl Conee. Feldman writes, "The central idea of evidentialism can be stated in the following evidentialist principle about justification: EJ. Believing *p* is justified for *S* at *t* iff *S*'s evidence at *t* supports *p*." See Richard Feldman, *Epistemology* (Prentice Hall) 2003, p. 45. Similarly, Feldman and Conee characterize evidentialism as follows: "Doxastic attitude *D* toward proposition *p* is epistemically justified for *S* at *t* if and only if having *D* toward *p* fits the evidence *S* has at *t*." See Richard Feldman and Earl Conee "Evidentialism", in Earl Conee and Richard Feldman, *Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology* (Oxford University Press) 2004, p. 83. Another advantage of the formulation I use is that it is broad enough not to preclude any self-proclaimed evidentialist from the evidentialist table. It seems to me that evidentialists have a number of options about how to understand the support relation mentioned in **Evidentialism**. Some, such as Richard Swinburne and Timothy McGrew, conceive the support relation as some kind of probability relation with propositions serving as the relata, but I am open to alternative ways of characterizing the support relation, especially ways in which experiences themselves can support propositions. Recent advocates of the latter view include Daniel Howard-Snyder and Christian Lee. See their "On a 'Fatal Dilemma' for Moderate Foundationalism", *Journal of Philosophical Research* (30) 2005, p. 253.

²² As Norman Kretzmann points out in his perceptive criticism of Plantinga's attack on evidentialism, without Plantinga's artifice of "his artificially narrow notion of evidence when characterizing evidentialism or his own position . . . he would not be an anti-evidentialist; without that artifice he would have no means at all of defending the rationality of theism without any evidence at all". See Norman Kretzmann, "Evidence and Religious Belief" in Brian Davies (ed.), *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology* (Oxford University Press) 2000, p. 102.

²³ See *WCB* 90, where Plantinga lists Basil Mitchell, William Abraham, Stephen Wykstra, Anthony Kenny, Richard Swinburne, Terence Penelhum, Gary Gutting, and John Mackie as either evidentialists or as those for whom evidentialism plays a large role in their work.

²⁴ The exception is John Mackie's evidentialist challenge, which Plantinga responds to. See *WCB* 91-92.

²⁵ Note that this definition is actually an amalgam of views that various foundationalists have held. For instance, Descartes would not allow beliefs that are evident to the senses to be properly basic, nor would he allow acceptable non-basic beliefs to be believed on the basis of induction or abduction. And, Locke, it seems, allowed induction but did not consider abduction.

²⁶ See, for instance, Timothy McGrew, "A Defense of Classical Foundationalism" in Louis P. Pojman (ed.), *The Theory of Knowledge: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, 3rd ed. (Wadsworth) 2003, p. 200.

²⁷ My own view is that the kinds of beliefs that Plantinga often points out as being psychologically basic (e.g., external physical world beliefs such as *there is a tree in front of me*) are epistemically justified for an agent partly in virtue of the fact that the agent is epistemically justified in believing a proposition that is more fundamental (e.g., *it seems to me that there is a tree in front of me*). The experience as of seeing a tree provides epistemic justification for believing *there is a tree in front of me* whether or not I form the belief *it seems to me that there is a tree in front of me*.

²⁸ The same point is made by Michael Martin, "A Critique of Plantinga's Religious Epistemology" in Louis P. Pojman (ed.), *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, 3rd ed. (Wadsworth) 1998, pp. 478-479.

²⁹ Plantinga lists the objectors as Brand Blandshard, Bertrand Russell, Michael Scriven, Antony Flew, Wesley Salmon, J.C.A. Gaskin, Anthony O'Hear, Richard Gale, and John Mackie. See *WCB* (89-90).

³⁰ Plantinga himself notes that the deontological component in the positions of the contemporary objectors he criticizes "is often more muted than the evidentialism", although Plantinga adds that "it is clearly present" (90).

³¹ Perhaps Plantinga intends to acknowledge the existence of non-deontological versions of evidentialism, where he writes, "Note that we can also ring the analogical changes on the deontological component, and we can mix and match the extensions in a dazzling variety of combinations" (103-104). Nevertheless, Plantinga writes: "I can't possibly examine all these multifarious versions of evidentialism in all their permutations and combinations . . ." (104). Indeed, the only variation he discusses is *Alston-justification*. He adds in a footnote: "I leave as homework the problem of showing that Christian belief can indeed be justified on these construals" (note 60, p. 104). If what I'm doing is homework, then it seems to me that I'm dealing with a problem as least as difficult as the Freud & Marx objection.

Note that some epistemologists hold that some sort of duty goes with belief but that nothing deontological is constitutive of epistemic justification.

³² This is Timothy McGrew's view, as expressed in his "A Defense of Classical Foundationalism" in Louis P. Pojman (ed.), *The Theory of Knowledge: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, 3rd ed. (Wadsworth) 2003, pp. 194-206.

³³ I want to be perfectly clear on this matter. To be sure, there have been, and still are, evidentialists whose views explicitly relate evidentialism to deontologism or require an epistemically justified belief to be the conclusion of an argument from propositions about one's evidence. It seems to me that Plantinga has a pretty strong case against such evidentialists. However, there is nothing about the general thesis of evidentialism that commits an evidentialist to any position that is subject to Plantinga's criticisms mentioned in the quoted passage above.

³⁴ Wittgensteinian fideists are, of course, correct to point out that the religious practice of many includes the use of belief-language that functions as a means of valuing life in a particular religious way (and is thereby non-assertoric); however, from the fact that some religious belief-language functions thus, it does not follow that religious believers never have propositional beliefs that are central to their religious practice. For an argument that Wittgensteinian fideists thus misdescribe the grammar of some religious-belief language for many religious believers, see my [citation withheld for blind review].

Pragmatism about epistemic justification has some plausibility insofar as we consider epistemic justification relative to various long-term goals (even long-term, diachronic goals having to do with believing truths). However, such matters are irrelevant to the kind of epistemic justification I am focusing on here, since my concern is what a

person is epistemically justified in believing at some particular time, given the total evidence that person possesses at that very time. See also footnote 6.

³⁵ The objection is, of course, skeptical about one particular domain of propositions (Christian propositions) for sophisticated Christians.

³⁶ I am here using “modest foundationalist” in a broader sense than it is sometimes used. Although Timothy McGrew defends requiring strong (Cartesian) foundations, even his view is modest compared to how Plantinga characterizes “classical foundationalism”, since McGrew does not require justified non-basic beliefs to be consciously inferred from basic beliefs.

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