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The Deliverances of *Warranted Christian Belief*

Die Philosophen unterschätzen die Schwierigkeit
wirklich zu verstehen, was einer gesagt hat.

Friedrich Nietzsche

We're gonna need a bigger boat.

Martin Brody

After more than 2500 years of philosophy, it is very hard to leave a new and lasting trace in this perennial human enterprise. A pretty sure sign of such a trace is that people begin to wonder what exactly it is that the philosopher claims. To ask such a question is to do historiography of philosophy; its task is not to figure out whether what is being claimed is true and whether how it is argued for is valid. Rather, the task is to decipher *what* is being claimed; after all, how are we to say whether a given proposition is true or an argument sound, if we don't know what the proposition says or the argument is in the first place?¹

But which proposition? What argument in which book? It is one thing, for instance, to interpret Kant's *Grundlegung*, and another to interpret his *Tugendlehre*. Both are written by Kant, both are even written by the so-called 'critical' Kant, and yet there are enormous differences (or so I'd claim). People speak of Kant's *transcendental philosophy*, but they do not (yet) speak of such a thing as *Plantingianism*.² To speak of such a thing as *Plantingianism* would suggest that Plantinga's philosophy is more or less a unified whole; it would suggest that there is one basic idea, or thesis, or an argument, a red line of thought in his oeuvre. (People, and Plantinga himself, do speak of such a thing as *Reformed Epistemology*,³ but the differences within this camp—Alston, Mavrodes, Plantin-

1 Cf. WCRL, 154, for the distinction between asking what a text means and whether what it claims is true.—I shall use the following abbreviations: GOM = *God and Other Minds*; RBG = *Reason and Belief in God*; SP = *Self Profile*; WCB = *Warranted Christian Belief*; WCD = *Warrant: The Current Debate*; WCRL = *Where the Conflict Really Lies. Science, Religion, and Naturalism*; WPF = *Warrant and Proper Function*.

2 Though Geivitt and Jesson (2001, 338) once speak of a "loyal Plantingian". And there is, to be sure, an activity called 'to alvinize' and 'to planting' (and people who do this are 'plantingers'); cf. *The Philosophical Lexicon* by Daniel Dennett and Asbjørn Steglich-Petersen (on the web).

3 Fales (2003, 353) speaks of Plantinga's "trilogy on Reformed Epistemology".—It certainly does not seem clear at all whether the Calvinist ring to this tag is helpful. As we will see, on the A/C model it is important that the human being is created in God's image. As Plasger shows in his

ga, Woltersdorff, among others—are huge; they are probably not as enormous as the differences within, say, *German Idealism*—philosophers such as Hegel, Fichte, Schelling, Herder et al. have next to nothing in common with one another, it seems to me—, but they are significant enough to render such a term almost useless.) What I am interested in here is not (primarily) whether there is such a thing as *Plantingianism*. Rather, my interest is in *Warranted Christian Belief* (WCB). What is the basic idea, or thesis, or argument, or red line of *this* work? My starting point was the impression that readers of WCB take different stances on what this book is really about.⁴ Is its basic idea the same idea that Plantinga already presented in his earlier books and texts, to wit, that one can be rational (or something in this epistemic ‘neighborhood’, to use one of Plantinga’s favorite terms) in one’s theistic beliefs without having arguments for them? Or is WCB substantially different? In the preface of WCB, Plantinga says his book is a “sequel” (WCB, xi, fn.3 and p. 68) to *God and Other Minds* and to *Reason and Belief in God*; to be more precise, Plantinga says WCB is a sequel “in a slightly different direction” (WCB, xi, fn.3, m.e.). This suggests that there is a red line running through those early texts and WCB; there is some ‘slightly different direction’, all right, but more or less WCB is a sequel nonetheless. What exactly makes a book a ‘sequel’, Plantinga does not explain; one may assume, however, that a philosophical book that is such a sequel further develops (or goes into the details of) a basic idea, or a thesis, or an argument already presented in earlier books by the same author.

This is not a paper about the plausibility or soundness of Plantinga’s arguments. To be sure, I have a number of specific observations to make regarding WCB, and I shall draw attention to certain difficulties directly related to the topic of this paper, i.e. to the question of what the central aim of WCB really is; our discussion and critical remarks in this context will help us to see what that ‘red line’ is. However, I shall not (really) get into problems that have already been discussed for quite some while and will occupy both sympathetic and hostile readers for quite a while in the future, questions such as: How do we know that a belief is properly basic? Would not too many beliefs be properly basic? How much interpretation is involved in religious experience? Does Plantinga wind up in voodoo epistemology? Do or may we properly and basically believe in the Great Pumpkin or his grand-son? Are there new Gettier woes? If belief

paper, however, it is doubtful whether on Calvin’s account there is anything left in us after the fall that resembles God, anything like a *sensus divinitatis* (Plasger 2015, this volume).

⁴ As a matter of fact, my very starting point was my reading of a draft of Christian Tapp’s paper for this volume. As I saw it, he placed too much emphasis on what I shall call “TW”. I am grateful to Prof. Tapp for further discussion of this point.

in the Christian God is as properly basic as the belief in other minds and the past, why don't as many people hold that belief as people hold these beliefs? What exactly is Christian belief in the first place? And so on.⁵ So these questions are *not* what concerns me. Rather, the leading question of this essay is this: The main result of WCB seems to be that *if Christian belief is true, then belief in the Christian God is probably warrant-basic*; but can that really be the main result? Is that really what the argument amounts to? One would think not; for even an atheist does not need to deny that if God exists, then in all likelihood he would give us the faculty to know him. That would be so small-bored a result that atheists would have nothing to fear and Christians little to hope from WCB. The principle of charity requires that a given interpretation should not yield the implication that the author of the interpreted text is out of his mind (or something equally implausible) or defends positions that no one denies or would need to deny; and this assumption seems particularly justified in the case of Alvin Plantinga. Thus we have reason to think that such an interpretation of WCB is incorrect. There must be more to it than just that claim. But is there more in WCB? Yes, there is, I submit, and there is a much more. But there is also *less* than in Plantinga's early works.

Obviously, this paper cannot be a comprehensive study of Plantinga's works and their development, and not even a truly close analysis of the aim and structure of WCB. It is at best a very first step in the direction of Plantinga *exegesis*; and there is, of course, some extra appeal to such an attempt given that Plantinga himself will comment upon it. It is quite tempting here to quote Kant's famous dictum that "it is not at all unusual to find that we understand the author even better than he understood himself" (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B 370). Note, however, that Kant continues: "...since he may not have determined his concept sufficiently and hence sometimes spoke, or even thought, contrary to his own intention" (*ibid.*). As I see it, chances are rather slim that Plantinga 'has not determined his concept sufficiently'; but there might be other reasons that he sometimes speaks or writes, nonetheless, in a way 'contrary to his own intention'. I'm not saying that what matters in interpretation is (only) intention; what matters is the text itself, and so the last authority concerning the interpretation of Plantinga's texts are these texts and its interpreters. Plantinga is just one of these interpreters. So even if he should say something to the effect "This is not what I *meant*" a fair reply would be: "Well, but this is what you *wrote*".⁶

⁵ Some of these objections are dealt with in ch. 10 of WCB.

⁶ For interpretation as a method of philosophy cf. Damschen/Schönecker (2013, 205–272).

I shall begin (1) with a sketch of what I think is for the most part a parity argument in the early Plantinga, based mainly on a brief look at GOM as well as RBG. I will then demonstrate that some understand WCB as a ‘sequel’ to that parity argument, others, however, as a book that shows (even) less than the parity argument since it allegedly only shows that *if* Christian belief is true, then it’s probably warranted (2). The next step will be to interpret what Plantinga says himself in WCB about the aim of WCB (3). I’ll then make a proposal on how to understand the deliverances of WCB (4). Finally, I’ll briefly sum up and also have a look at how Plantinga interprets his own position in texts written after WCB (5).

1 Properly Basic Christian Belief: Plantinga’s Parity Argument in the prequels to WCB

God and Other Minds

Let’s begin our sketch of the parity argument with *God and Other Minds* (first published in 1967). The book opens, roughly speaking, with what in WCB is called the *de jure* question⁷: Is it rational to believe in God? The basic anti-evidentialist answer is well-known: It is not true that for every proposition in order to be rationally justified in holding it one must have evidence (reasons) for it; if that were true, then we would not be rationally justified in believing in other minds, simply because we have no convincing argument for that belief; however, we are rationally justified in believing in other minds; therefore, that evidentialist claim cannot be true. What is often called the *parity argument* could also be called the ‘same epistemological boat’ argument. Already in the preface to GOM, Plantinga says that “belief in other minds and belief in God are in the same epistemological boat; hence if either is rational, so is the other. But obviously the former is rational; so, therefore, is the latter” (GOM, viii); and the very last sentence of the book reads as follows: “if my belief in other minds is rational, so is my belief in God. But obviously the former is ration-

⁷ More on this later; in GOM, Plantinga simply says that he “shall investigate the rational justifiability” (GOM, 3) of God.

al; so, therefore, is the latter” (GOM, 271).⁸ This is Plantinga’s early answer to what Woltersdorff later in the introduction to his and Plantinga’s seminal edition of *Faith and Rationality* called the “evidentialist challenge”, namely that “[n]o religion is acceptable unless rational, and no religion is rational unless supported by evidence” (Woltersdorff 1983, 6), where to be supported by evidence means to be supported by propositional evidence. A challenge can be met in two ways: Either you comply and deliver the goods (which in this case is to say you avail yourself of the means of natural theology); or you reject the challenge itself. Plantinga took the latter route.⁹

Reason and Belief in God

The parity argument and with it the basicity claim were developed at some length in *Reason and Belief in God* (1983); therein too we find the ‘same boat’ allegory.¹⁰ Recall that GOM and RBG are officially declared by Plantinga to be the (main) prequels to WCB, and indeed there can be no doubt that much of WCB is a sequel to RBG.¹¹ As in GOM, the crucial question is “whether belief in God—belief in the existence of God—is rationally acceptable” (RBG, 19). Since a belief is rationally acceptable, if (but not only if) it is properly basic, the question is this: Is belief in God properly basic? Now properly basic beliefs are beliefs that one

8 This very same formulation is quoted in WCB (70) in quotation marks, but no reference is given.—In his preface to the 1990 Paperback Edition to GOM, Plantinga combines the allegory (or metaphor) of the ‘epistemological boat’ with the language of ‘parity’ by saying that belief in other minds and belief in God “are on an epistemological *par*” (Plantinga 1990, xii, m.e.).

9 This is not quite true. Looking back to GOM in his preface to the 1990 Edition, Plantinga mentions that he “employed a traditional but improperly stringent standard” (Plantinga 1990, ix) in relation to theistic arguments; as he rightly points out, (almost) no philosophical argument is such that it could only be rejected on pain of irrationality (and who sets the standards for the latter?); cf. WCB, 170. Also cf. Plantinga (2001c, 384f.) for a clarification on how Plantinga relates to philosophers such as Swinburne (namely positively); then again, he also says: “I don’t know of any such arguments” (2001c, 398), i. e. of arguments that actually show that Christian belief is true; and in (2002, 34), Plantinga says that of all the (two dozen or so; cf. Plantinga, 2007a) arguments for God “none delivers *knowledge*” (his emphasis); also cf. Plantinga 2001a, 217ff.

10 Cf. RBG, 90: “Belief in the existence of God is in the same boat as belief in other minds, the past, and perceptual objects”.—In his famous *Advice to Christian Philosophers* (1984, on the Web), the parity argument is dominant as well.

11 For instance, Plantinga’s very brief discussion in RBG (19–20) of negative theology (Kant, Kaufman, Hick) is much broadened in WCB (3–63) and the same is true for his discussion of the *sensus divinitatis*, *sin*, and all that.

does hold, and may hold, without the evidential support of other beliefs; they are beliefs not accepted on the basis of other beliefs (i. e. they are not based on arguments or inferences) and yet they are acceptable. Belief in God, says Plantinga, is such a properly basic belief. The main point behind classical foundationalism, as I understand it, is that some propositions are and must be affirmed (and are thus *properly* believed) without (further) evidence because otherwise there would be an endless chain of propositions.¹² Maybe one can doubt even these propositions and remain skeptical. But it's important to see that Plantinga's task is not to refute skepticism. Rather, he must show that Christian belief is *not* "noetically below par" (RBG, 17). Belief in God, Plantinga aims to show in RBG, is just as rational, i. e. epistemically acceptable as other beliefs (about other minds, the past, perceivable objects) that are acceptable insofar as they are properly basic (if neither kind of belief is considered acceptable by a skeptic, then they are both in *this* boat).¹³ From the point of view of classical foundationalism, only beliefs that are self-evident, or perceptual (evident to the senses) or incorrigible beliefs are properly basic; we just *see* them to be true without evidence.¹⁴ Being a non-classical (Reidian) foundationalist, Plantinga adds belief in God to that set of properly basic beliefs. The strategy is twofold:

First, there are two arguments against imperialistic foundationalism (as it were):¹⁵ If only those beliefs are rationally acceptable that are either properly basic or somehow based upon properly basic beliefs, then it would render most (allegedly) non-basic beliefs (about other minds, the past, etc.) that we find rationally acceptable to be unacceptable because it is hard to see how they are based upon basic beliefs; also (second argument), that belief itself (classical foundationalism) is not rationally acceptable because it is neither properly basic nor based on properly basic propositions. So there is no reason to think that *only* beliefs that are self-evident or incorrigible or evident to the senses are properly basic.

12 Cf. RBG, 39. "Not even God", says Plantinga in one of his replies (2001c, 390), "can have a proof" that his beliefs are reliable because for such a proof he would already need to rely on the ways he forms these beliefs; the point is that at one point or other one must *trust* in one's cognitive faculties. It is striking, by the way, that Plantinga (as far as I can see) never reflects upon the possibility of something like transcendental *Letztbegründung* (*à la* Höhle, for instance).

13 There is, says Plantinga, an "analogy between belief in God and belief in the existence of perceptual objects, other persons, and the past" (RBG, 81). On the difference between "God exists" and, for instance, "God is speaking to me" as well as on the difference between "Other persons exist" and "There are other persons" cf. RBG, 80–82.

14 There's quite some (semi-technical) analysis in RBG on 'asymmetry', 'irreflexivity' etc.; I'll ignore all this.

15 "Epistemic Imperialism" is a term used by Alston (1991, 199); but cf. RBG, 28.

However, there is also no reason to think that belief in God is not properly basic and, what is much more: belief in God, *secondly*, has “the *characteristics* a proposition must have to deserve a place in the foundations” (RBG, 59, m.e.). At the end of part II of RBG, Plantinga promises that in part IV¹⁶ he will “look into the proper procedure for discovering and justify such *criteria* for proper basicity” (RBG 62, m.e.). So what are these criteria (characteristics)? To begin with, it is striking that Plantinga in his discussion of the *Great Pumpkin Objection* (which is within part IV) argues that from the fact that reformed epistemologists reject the criteria “of proper basicity purveyed by classical foundationalism” (RBG, 75) one may not infer that they must accept just any belief as properly basic, but that he does *not* explain what exactly a ‘criterion’ is. The first time Plantinga introduces the term ‘criteria’, he actually says “*such* criteria” (RBG, 62, m.e.), referring thereby to proposition “(33)” in RBG (p. 60) which formulates the foundationalist claim that a given proposition (belief) A is properly basic “for me only if A is self-evident or incorrigible or evident to the senses for me” (*ibid.*); this finding is confirmed by the fact that in part IV Plantinga refers to the very same ‘criteria’ of “modern foundationalism” (RBG, 75). But self-evidence, incorrigibility and perceptual evidence are not criteria of proper basicity; they are *instances*. If they were criteria—which really would be “necessary and sufficient conditions of proper basicity” (RBG, 76)—,¹⁷ then obviously the very idea of showing that belief in God could be a properly basic belief alongside self-evident, incorrigible and perceptual beliefs would be doomed from the outset; by means of criteria one can cognize *which* elements belong to a certain group. If self-evident, incorrigible and perceptual beliefs are properly basic, they must have certain qualities *in common*; once we know what it is that they share and what justifies us in subsuming them under one term (which is ‘properly basic’), we can say that other beliefs (Christian belief, for instance) also have these qualities and thus are also properly basic. As far as I can tell, in RBG Plantinga fails to name these qualities.¹⁸

In any event, Plantinga makes an important point which I’d formulate (in my own words) as follows: Whenever we define terms such as ‘knowledge’, ‘justification’, ‘rationality’, or ‘basicity’, we need to offer paradigmatic cases of what counts as a relevant instance of the term in question. And for these paradigms, there is no neutral ground, as it were, to start from. This is not to say that there is

¹⁶ It actually says “Part III” in RBG (62); in private exchange, Prof. Plantinga has confirmed that this is simply an error.

¹⁷ Cf. WCB, 84: “conditions of proper basicity”.

¹⁸ I think that this is a very important point. I’ll deal with it in another paper in detail, but will come back to this later.

or could not be a discussion, no revision of what paradigms to use, and no defeaters; properly basic beliefs, and paradigmatic examples of them, are *prima facie* justified, they are not infallible.¹⁹ But it is to say that one cannot simply (imperialistically) claim that belief in God cannot be properly basic because only self-evident or incorrigible propositions or those evident to the senses are properly basic. For how do you know? This is what you say, but I say something else. Plantinga says: “The Christian community is responsible to its set of examples, not to theirs” (RBG, 77).²⁰ A further important point is this: A belief is basic to me, negatively speaking, if I do not hold it on the basis of other beliefs; still there is a reason why I hold it, some kind of evidence or ground (and this is why Plantinga even endorses a “moderate evidentialism” [Plantinga 2001c, 396]).²¹ For instance, if I believe that there is a tree in front of me, then I don’t hold this belief because I have beliefs about, say, my environment, or my perception; I hold it because I’m having an experience (‘being appeared to treely’). This experience is the reason, so to speak, why I have that belief; and this experience is, along with further conditions, all I need in order to be rational, or justified, or within my epistemic rights, to hold that belief.

19 Cf. RBG, 77 and WCB, 343f.

20 To give my own example drawn from another context: It would be imperialistic to use only examples from (alleged) knowledge in mathematics and natural sciences in order to define ‘knowledge’ and then jump to the conclusion that there is no such thing as *moral* knowledge (such an imperialistic move is really what Mackie’s famous *argument from queerness* is all about). Moral realists can and should reply that from their point of view moral knowledge is just as *paradigmatic* as mathematical or scientific knowledge; thus moral knowledge is at least one of the foundational (properly basic) beliefs we start from.—Plantinga mentions properly basic *moral* beliefs here and there; cf. RBG, 89; WCB, 148, 174; 208 ff., 299, 452f.; and Plantinga (2007a).

21 Therefore, it is a little difficult to see why the version of evidentialism offered by Norman Kretzmann should not be acceptable to Plantinga. According to Kretzmann (the way Plantinga reads him), “what is required is only that the believer have evidence of *some sort*” (WCB, 103). It depends on what ‘evidence’ means, of course. If one understands evidentialism as the position that the belief in God is acceptable only if there is evidence by means of other propositions, then Plantinga is right. But Kretzmann’s position is not a case of evidentialism in this sense. As Plantinga points out, religious experience could be evidence; but if this falls under the rubric of ‘evidence’, why not the following: Upon reading the Scriptures I find myself convinced that the great things of the gospel are true. Why would the gospel, or reading it with a certain doxastic experience, not count as ‘evidence’? You ask me: What evidence do you have for believing in God? I say: the evidence of the Scriptures taken the basic way.

Self-Profile

In his *Self-Profile* (1985), Plantinga says that what he wrote in GOM “still seems to [him] to be substantially true” (SP, 55): “I am obviously rational in believing that there are other minds; so why am I not similarly rational in believing that God exists?” (SP, 156). So “*some* propositions can properly be believed without evidence. Well, why not the proposition that God exists?” (SP, 59). To accept a belief without further propositional evidence is to accept it as basic; Plantinga never tires of arguing for this claim: “my *main aim* was to argue that it is perfectly rational to take belief in God as *basic*—that is to accept theistic belief without accepting it on the basis of argument or evidence from other propositions one believes” (SP, 56, m.e.).²² So after GOM and before the warrant-books, *the* prominent idea in Plantinga’s work—along with an increasing focus on what it means to be *rational, justified*, or something along these lines—is that belief in God is *properly basic* and as such as good as the belief in other minds or the past.

To better understand this, let’s briefly compare it with Alston’s parity argument.²³ Very roughly, Alston’s argument goes like this: Perceptual beliefs are *prima facie* trustworthy (rational, justified, or whatever is epistemically positive); some theistic beliefs are (like) perceptual beliefs; therefore, some theistic beliefs are *prima facie* trustworthy (rational, justified, whatever).²⁴ Alston’s strategy is to show that theists who claim to have mystical (religious) experiences avail themselves of the same, or at least of essentially the same, cognitive tool (the faculty of perception) as everyone else; therefore, their theistic beliefs based on those experiences are just as trustworthy (until proven guilty) as ordinary perceptual beliefs. Thus the parity in Alston’s parity argument is twofold: There is parity regarding the positive epistemic status, *and* there is parity with regard to the source of this status; both ordinary perceptions as well as mystical perceptions have a positive epistemic status, and they do have this status because they are both perceptions (and perceptions are *prima facie* trustworthy, or so the *principle of credulity* says). The parity argument in Plantinga’s work, however, is different. His strategy is not to show that theistic belief is brought about by the same cognitive faculty or the same kind of epistemic input, but by an altogether different faculty of its own; in that sense, theistic belief is unlike other beliefs, and there is no parity in this sense. Still they have something in common with other beliefs;

²² Cf. Plantinga (2007b, 614), where he still speaks of the very same “main aim” (though not with explicit reference to WCB).

²³ Cf. Alston (1991); for a short version, cf. Alston (2005).

²⁴ Richard Gale’s reconstruction of this (or a similar) argument is discussed by Plantinga in WCB, 336 f.; Gale speaks of ‘analogy’ rather than ‘parity’.

they are basic, and they are properly so. That they are basic is easily shown. The propriety of these basic beliefs is a different, much more difficult story. From early on, I submit, Plantinga is successful in showing that classical foundationalism is finished because it is self-referentially inconsistent, and because it is imperialistic in only accepting certain beliefs as foundational. For the same reason, evidentialism with regard to theistic beliefs is criticized (though maybe not finished because it is at least not inconsistent); one need not have an argument for believing in God if belief in God is just as properly basic as other properly basic beliefs. But is it a properly basic belief? It would not be so if we had reason to think that belief in God is inconsistent or otherwise somehow false; as we'll see, to show that this is not the case is a major concern of WCB. But how do we know belief in God is proper? What exactly is propriety? 'Well', says Plantinga in SP, why can the proposition that God exists not properly be believed without evidence? Well, one might reply, why *should* it be believed even if we knew that nothing speaks against it? As Plantinga self-critically points out himself,²⁵ the "deeper question" (SP, 56) of what rationality and justification are in the first place remains unaddressed in the early works. But note that this is also why the question of the propriety of basic beliefs was not (or at best unsatisfyingly) answered. In RBG (72), a belief is defined as "properly basic" if "it is *rational* to accept it without accepting it on the basis of any other propositions and beliefs at all" (m.e.).²⁶ So if we don't know what rationality is, we don't know what the propriety of properly basic beliefs is. Do we know better after WCB?

2 The Reception of WCB. Confusion and Friendly Fire

It's too early to say, of course, but if I were to bet on which books of the last 50 years or so will still be read in another 50 years from now, I'd bet that one of them will be Plantinga's WCB. It is extremely difficult to come up with something novel in philosophy, especially in disciplines such as philosophy of religion and epistemology, but I am convinced that Plantinga has managed to give us some truly fresh ideas (and not just some old wine in new analytic bottles).²⁷ But

²⁵ Cf. SP, 56 and WCB, 67–70.

²⁶ Cf. Plantinga's definition in Plantinga (1982, 15) and (2007b, 614, Fn.).

²⁷ To be fair to Plantinga and his predecessors, it should be noted that Plantinga himself always points out that there are predecessors such as Thomas Reid, Herman Bavinck and, of

what exactly are those novel ideas? To be more precise: What is the basic idea of Plantinga's WCB? What is its aim?

To many it seems that WCB boils down to this: "if theistic belief is *true*, then it seems likely that it *does* have warrant" (WCB, 188; let's refer to this claim with "TW", I will be more precise later). But obviously, it is one thing to say that Christian belief *has* warrant, and another to say that it has warrant *provided* Christian belief is true. This is exactly what Plantinga's antipode, Richard Swinburne, finds problematic about WCB.²⁸ According to his interpretation of WCB, it is Plantinga's claim that "we cannot in any interesting sense ask whether it is rational to believe that Christian belief *has* warrant—he [i.e. Plantinga] says, or seems to say" (Swinburne 2001, 207, m.e.). All that Plantinga succeeds in doing, says Swinburne, is "showing what *would* give warrant to Christian beliefs" (op. cit., 205, m.e.), but Plantinga does not show that Christian beliefs *are* warranted: "a monumental issue which Plantinga does not discuss, and which a lot of people will consider needs discussing. This is whether Christian beliefs *do* have warrant" (Swinburne 2001, 206, m.e.).

Swinburne's worry is pervasive. Take Moreland and Lane Craig (2003, 160–169): They are, in principle, certainly friendly readers of Plantinga's project, and yet they also attack his argument in this regard; the "aim of this project" (Moreland/Craig, 167)—that is of what they call the "private" (ibid.) project of providing "from a Christian perspective an epistemological account of warranted Christian belief" (Moreland/Craig, 161)—is just to show TW; and even that, they claim, is not sufficiently argued for. In the same vein, Groothius expresses the worry that "some may be disappointed that Plantinga never tries to make a compelling case that Christianity is true" (Groothius, on the web) which is why these people will seek out resources "to argue that Christianity is not merely warranted, but true"²⁹; similarly, Anderson in his review (on the web) notes that Plantinga's abandonment of a proof for the truth of Christianity "may strike some readers

course, Calvin (and even Aquinas) who already developed some of the principal ideas involved in what has become Reformed Epistemology.

28 It is, by the way, an interesting question whether there really is such an enormous gap (as is often claimed) between Swinburne's approach and Reformed Epistemology. Certainly, Swinburne has much more confidence in arguments for God; but note that the entire cumulative argument rests upon the argument from religious experience: If the probability of theism on the other evidence is not very low, the testimony of those with religious experience strengthens the cumulative probability. Since the argument from religious experience itself is based upon the principle of credulity (which is a reformed principle, as it were), Swinburne is not a complete evidentialist; cf. Plantinga's brief remark in WCB (91, footnote 43); on Swinburne's approach, cf. (Nickel/Schönecker, 2014).

29 There is confusion here; for if Christianity is warranted, then it is (in all likelihood) true.

as an anticlimax and even as a glaring omission”; Moser (2001, 371) is afraid that Plantinga’s achievement “will doubtless disappoint many”; and Helm (2001, 1112) finds Plantinga’s strategy “not so ambitious”. To Greco, the “central thesis of Reformed Epistemology [...] is that some beliefs about God *can* be properly basic” (2007, 629, m.e.); Plantinga’s project, Greco then says, “is to explain how Christian beliefs might be warranted or properly basic, as opposed to *showing* that they are” (op. cit., 636, his emphasis). For Senor (2002, 391), Plantinga’s “aim is not to show that belief in God is warranted but only that there is no good reason to think it is not” (Senor 2002, 392). Then he says: “In sum, what we get in WCB is an argument for a conditional claim” (393), namely TW (‘if theistic belief is true, then it seems likely that it does have warrant’). Daniel von Wachter (2007, 496) also reduces WCB to this claim: “In *Warranted Christian Belief* [...] Plantinga argues that Christian beliefs probably are knowledge if they are true”. Similarly, Forrest in his review of WCB (2002, 109) says: “In this work Plantinga argues for [TW]”. All in all, Forrest (2009) finds the lack of argument for the truth of Christian belief or the A/C model to be the “most pressing criticism of Plantinga’s recent position”.

So what is the impression yielded by a brief survey of the reception of WCB? TW is what really occupies these readers; they tend to take TW as the main result of the entire book, and they also think this is an insufficiently ambitious claim. But is the result of Plantinga’s *opus magnum* really so meagre? The book’s title, after all, is “*Warranted Christian Belief*”, not “*Possibly Warranted Christian Belief*”. As it turns out, there are other readings of WCB. It seems likely that entries in *Wikipedia* reflect a rather common interpretation of his project; if so, it is illuminating that according to the *Wikipedia* article on *Reformed Epistemology* Plantinga, having begun with a parity argument in GOM, has gone on in WCB to “argue that theistic belief *has* ‘warrant’” (*Wikipedia* 2012, m.e.). Similarly, in his contribution to *Religious Epistemology* in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Kelly Clark briefly explains the parity argument and then continues: “For the sake of parity, we should trust the deliverances of the faculty that produces in us belief in the divine (what Plantinga [2000], following John Calvin, calls the *sensus divinitatis*, the sense of the divine)”. Here Clarke—as well as Trigg (2002) and Hibbs (2001)—obviously understands Plantinga’s warrant-argument in terms of the parity-argument: The early Plantinga is well-known for his parity-argument and the concept of proper basicity; thus the expectation is that Plantinga now avails himself of the same strategy, based on the new and seminal epistemological concept of warrant. And this is not just the impression we receive from encyclopedia articles. Take Linda Zagzebski, for instance: In her introduction to a collection of “Catholic Responses to Reformed Epistemology” (1993) she speaks of Plantinga’s “new account of warrant” (Zagzebski 1993, 2), referring

to the publication of *Warrant and Proper Function* (WCB was not yet written). Zagzebski understands the (then new) warrant-project—obviously against the background of GOM and RBG—as providing the “resources to defend the positive position that religious beliefs *have* warrant and, when true, constitute knowledge” (ibid., m.e.); and she finds Plantinga’s new warrant-approach “obviously much stronger than the earlier claim that no one has shown it to be irrational to hold theistic belief in the basic way” (1993, 2).³⁰ Then WCB was published, and other readers also made the same assumption as Zagzebski. Thus Phillips (2004, 251) says: “Basic beliefs in religions *are* as warranted as they are in perception and memory” (m.e.). On Wykstra’s interpretation, TW along with the claim that the idea of a *sensus divinitatis* is possible “entail that for all we know, Christian theism *has* warrant” (2002, 94, m.e.). Paul Copan (2001, 940) begins his brief review by describing Plantinga’s aim as follows: “Theistic belief *has* good warrant, Plantinga wants to show” (m.e.); a little later, however, Copan writes: “Plantinga states that if Christian belief is true, it is also warranted” (ibid.). Yet again, Winfried Löffler (2006)—one of the few German-speaking philosophers that are familiar with Plantinga’s philosophy—has quite another view: With reference to RBG, he says that Plantinga’s claim is only that one “*könne*” (*could*, Löffler 2006, 92) entertain basic theistic beliefs whereas with reference to WCB, Löffler believes that Plantinga’s position became *stronger* because he (Plantinga) now argues, according to Löffler, that most theists are “*tatsächlich erkenntnistheoretisch vernünftig*” (*really* are epistemologically rational, ibid., 94)—as we will see, it is just the other way round.

After GOM and RBG, Plantinga developed his theory of warrant and published *Warrant: The Current Debate* (WCD) and *Warrant and Proper Function* (WPF; both 1993); as a matter of fact, Plantinga considers WCB to be a “sequel” (WCB, 68) to these two books as well. So both the pre-warrant-texts GOM and RBG as well as WCD and WPF are prequels to WCB; and this, I claim, has caused confusion in the book’s reception. Some people read WCB as if its main result were TW; others still see the good old pre-warrant-parity-argument at work and even believe that it is shown that Christian belief is warranted; yet others seem more or less confused. What is the proper reception?

³⁰ In her review of WCB, however, Zagzebski (2002, 117) criticizes Plantinga for showing too little: “if Christian belief is true, belief in it has the kinds of epistemic value that philosophers routinely discuss: it is justified, internally and externally rational, and warranted” (her emphasis).

3 The Aim of WCB: The Official Position

Authors typically describe their aim in a preface, and so does Plantinga. So let's turn to WCB itself, and let us first look at its *Preface* to see what Plantinga himself declares to be the aim of WCB. Central to the entire project is Plantinga's distinction between *de facto* objections and *de jure* objections. De facto objections—such as the argument from evil—are about the truth of Christian belief; if such an objection is viable, Christian belief is false (or very unlikely). WCB is not primarily concerned with these objections, says Plantinga; according to him, de facto objections are not as “prevalent” (WCB, ix) as de jure objections. Roughly speaking, de jure objections concern “the intellectual or rational acceptability of Christian belief” (WCB, vii). To be more precise, there are three main candidates for de jure objections, to wit, “that Christian belief is *unjustified*, that it is *irrational*, and that it is *unwarranted*” (WCB, x). From scratch, Plantinga puts great emphasis on the claim that de jure objections are supposed to work *regardless of the truth of Christian belief*; these objections hold that Christian belief, “whether or not true, is at any rate” (WCB, ix) unjustified or irrational or unwarranted (or all of it). There is, says Plantinga, “the common suggestion that Christian belief, whether true or not, is intellectually unacceptable” (WCB, xiii); what is wrong with Christian belief, according to de jure objections, is “something other than falsehood” (WCB, ix). Thus, Plantinga formulates “the main question of the book” (WCB, x) as follows: “is there a *de jure* objection to Christian belief? One that is independent of *de facto* objections and does not presuppose that Christian belief is false?” (WCB, x).

There are numerous general formulations of the de jure question (JQ). As it turns out later, these general formulations are only preliminary (or sometimes merely summary in character). For there is a “metaquestion” (WCB, 67). This is the question JQ is really asking about; what, exactly, *is* the de jure question? Given those three candidates for de jure objections, the de jure question can be broken up into three questions:

- (JQ1) Is Christian belief justified?
- (JQ2) Is Christian belief rational?
- (JQ3) Is Christian belief warranted?

But this is not the crucial step for answering the ‘metaquestion’. The crucial step is to pose and answer the following question: What do ‘justified’, ‘rational’, and ‘warranted’ *mean*? (Or: What is it for a belief to be justified, rational, or warranted?) It is this question that Plantinga himself says he did not raise when he wrote

GOM (and did not fully appreciate when writing RBG).³¹ When it comes to justification, Plantinga took evidentialism in GOM for granted, and he didn't ask what exactly 'justification' and 'evidence' mean. In WCB, a huge part (the entire second part) is dedicated to the 'metaquestion': What do 'justified', 'rational', and 'warranted' mean, both in general and with regard to Christian beliefs? Once this is accounted for, the 'metaquestion' can be answered, i.e. JQ1, JO2, and JQ3 can be reformulated and, if possible, be answered. To put a highly interesting and useful debate in a nutshell, here are the answers to that 'metaquestion', i.e. here are the reconstructed variants of JQ:

(JQ1)* Is Christian belief justified, i.e. do those who hold Christian beliefs flout any epistemic obligations?

(JQ2)* Is Christian belief rational, i.e. are those who hold Christian beliefs internally and externally rational?³²

(JQ3)* Is Christian belief warranted, i.e. are these beliefs produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly in a cognitive environment, according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth?

In the *Preface* Plantinga himself says that the *de jure* objection both with regard to justification (justification-objection) and to internal rationality (internal-rationality-objection), unlike the external-rationality-objection and the warrant-objection, do *not* presuppose the falsity of theism;³³ so the claim is not that there aren't *any* *de jure* objections that do not depend on *de facto* objections, but there aren't any "*decent*" (WCB xiii, m.e.) such objections.

It is Plantinga's contention that such a dependence between the falsity and the *de jure* objection holds when it comes to warrant as that which "makes the difference between knowledge and true belief" (WCB, xi) and thus to the warrant-objection. The argument for this claim is very simple: "As it turns out, this *de jure* objection [the objection, say by Marx or Freud, that Christian belief lacks warrant] is really dependent on a *de facto* objection. That is because (as I argue) if Christian belief is true, then it is also warranted; the claim that theistic

³¹ Cf. Plantinga (1990).—In RBG, Plantinga uses terms such as 'to be rational', 'justified', or 'within one's epistemic rights' more or less interchangeably; here too, WCB is a sequel, but a sequel that is *much* more detailed and explicit than its prequel.

³² As we shall see later, the proper question is this: (JQ2)** Is Christian belief rational, i.e. are those who hold Christian beliefs internally rational?

³³ Cf. WCB, xiii. The reason is obvious: Neither flouting my duties nor properly sticking to my experience guarantees truth. It is therefore misleading of Plantinga (2001b, 327f.) to say that in WCB he argues that "*all*" (m.e.) *de jure* objections "presuppose the falsehood" of Christian belief.

(and hence Christian) belief is unwarranted really presupposes that Christian belief is false” (WCB, xii). As Plantinga already notes in the *Preface*, in order for a belief to have warrant, it must be produced by a cognitive faculty that is “successfully aimed at the production of true belief” (WCB, xi). So if a belief is warranted, then it is produced by a faculty that is successfully aimed at the production of true belief, and hence it is probably true; and if a belief is unwarranted, then for the same reason it probably is not true. And then a major point Plantinga believes he makes against Freud&Marx&Others is that they, when claiming that Christian belief is unwarranted, already presuppose that it is false: “their objection presupposes its falsehood” (WCB, xii). Again, a de jure objection is dependent on a de facto objection; ‘that is’, says Plantinga, because of TW.³⁴

Judging from our brief glance at the reception of WCB, one might easily get the impression that at the end of the day (and much sharp-witted reasoning) Plantinga’s position really amounts to no more (or not much more) than TW. So it’s about time we looked more closely at TW. In the section that those critics have in mind, Plantinga raises the following question: “Is Belief in God Warrant-Basic?” (WCB, 186). Then there are two brief answers: “If false, probably not” (WCB, 186); and: “If true, probably so” (WCB, 188). These are the headings of the subsections. A little further on, Plantinga provides the following answers to that question: “if theistic belief is false, but taken in the basic way [and not taken on testimony], then it probably has no warrant” (WCB, 186); and: “if theistic belief is true, then it seems likely that it *does* have warrant” (WCB, 188). How are we to understand this? To begin with, we should note that those statements (in WCB, 186 ff.) are statements about ‘theistic belief’ in general because Plantinga has not moved on to the extended A/C model. Once he has done that, he writes: “If *Christian* belief is true, then very likely it does have warrant” (WCB, 285, m.e.). But the difference between theistic and Christian belief is not the problem; rather, the problem is that in the official formulation of his argument there is a probability condition built into TW: If theistic (or Christian) belief is true, then *probably* theistic (Christian) belief has warrant; and if theistic (or Christian) belief is false, then *probably* theistic (Christian) belief has no warrant. I take it that this is not a very serious doubt or possibility; as a matter of fact, in the *Preface* Plantinga himself does *not* say: ‘if Christian belief is true, then it is also *probably* warranted’; rather, he formulates TW *without* the probability caveat: “if Christian belief is true, then it is also warranted” (WCB, xii). So maybe we could put this caveat aside. If we do that and follow the formulation of the *Pref-*

34 Cf. Plantinga (2001c, 387): “My reason for refraining from arguing that Christian belief is warranted is my belief that the latter is warranted if and only if it is true”.

ace, we read Plantinga as claiming ‘if true, then warranted’ as well as claiming ‘if false, then not warranted’. Since the latter is equivalent to ‘if warranted, then true’, we get: If Christian belief is true, then it is warranted, and if Christian belief is warranted, then Christian belief is true. On this reading, therefore, Plantinga’s alleged main position (or proposition, for that matter) would be a bi-conditional:

(TW) Christian belief is warranted if and only if Christian belief is true.³⁵

But the official (more rigid) formulations in WCB are different:

(i) If Christian belief is false, then Christian belief probably has no warrant.

(ii) If Christian belief is true, then Christian belief probably has warrant.

On the assumption that (i) is equivalent to

(i)* If Christian belief probably has warrant, then Christian belief is true.

we get: If Christian belief probably has warrant, then Christian belief is true, and if Christian belief is true, then Christian belief probably has warrant. Thus, in this version, there is also a bi-conditional:

(TWP) Christian belief is probably warranted if and only if Christian belief is true.

But is that assumption (i.e. (i) and (i)* are equivalent) sensible? It depends on how exactly we understand the negation of the consequent of (i) (‘Christian belief probably has no warrant’). Generally speaking, the negation expresses that it is not the case that Christian belief probably has no warrant. But what exactly is being negated? On the first reading it is the claim that Christian belief probably has *no* warrant; the claim is that it probably has no warrant, and this claim is negated by saying that it probably *does have* warrant. Thus we get:

(NC1) Christian belief probably has warrant.

³⁵ This is how Plantinga put it in an interview with Robert Lawrence Kuhn for PBS; cf. the video on the web. Note, however, that in this interview too Plantinga sometimes mentions the probability caveat, sometimes not.

(This is the reading used in (i)*).³⁶ On the second reading the negation refers to the probability condition: the claim is that Christian belief *probably* has no warrant, and this claim is negated by saying that it *not* probably has no warrant. Thus we get:

(NC2) Christian belief improbably has no warrant.

Or more naturally speaking: It is improbable (unlikely) that Christian belief has no warrant. And then the question is this: Is there a difference between saying that Christian belief probably has warrant and saying that it is improbable that it has no warrant?

Possibly yet another meaning comes into focus by a formulation Plantinga uses in a text written after WCB: “I argue that (probably) Christian belief has warrant if and only if it is true” (Plantinga 2001a, 216). Thus we have:

(TWP)* Probably, Christian belief is warranted if and only if Christian belief is true.

Here the probability condition is put in front of the entire bi-conditional itself, and I’m not sure that TWP and TWP* are equivalent.

So on the face of it, there is reason indeed to believe that Plantinga has only claimed something fairly meager and even something that is quite obvious: If God, as Christians typically understand him, exists, then our belief that He does exist is what He wants us to think about Him and so our belief that God exists is true, or as Swinburne in his review of WCB puts it: “It is natural to suppose that God created us in such a way that we would come to hold the true belief that He exists” (Swinburne 2001, 205). I’m not sure what Swinburne means by saying that this is ‘*natural*’; as it happens, Plantinga himself also finds it “*natural*” (WCB, 188). I think what they both mean is that it is obvious or very plausible to think so; if God is a loving God, and if he creates us in his image, then why should He do so in a way that we would have *no* knowledge of Him? Why would he (entirely) hide himself?³⁷ And yet, God’s possible *hiddenness* is a seri-

³⁶ In email-exchanges, Christian Tapp provided the following counter-example to argue that (i) is not equivalent to (i)*: If my car begins to stutter and then stops running, then probably it has no gas; however, if probably it does have gas, then this still does not imply that it does not begin to stutter and stops running.—I am grateful to comments made regarding this issue by Christian Tapp and Gregor Nickel.

³⁷ Geivett and Jesson (2001, 333) think that this point brings TW “close to the edge of tautology”; maybe that is rather strong, but Moreland and Lane Craig (2003, 167) are certainly right in saying that Plantinga’s argument for TW “is surprisingly thin”.

ous and much discussed topic; so I think it is surprising that Plantinga says little (in WCB) about the possibility of God hiding himself.³⁸ Given that TW obviously is a very important result of WCB (to some even the main or only result), this is quite disappointing. (Note that the subsections in which these answers are given are hardly four pages long.) This objection is all the more relevant given that TW is introduced with regard to theism in general, not with regard to Christian belief; so even if the God of Christianity cannot be understood as a (completely) hidden God, another God (a God from a Non-Christian perspective) could possibly have reasons not to reveal himself so TW wouldn't be 'natural'.³⁹

In the *Preface*, Plantinga goes on to describe what happens in part III the title of which is "Warranted Christian Belief". This title is, *nota bene*, identical with the title of the book itself. So one would expect it to be the central part of the book; as a matter of fact, Plantinga says that part III (except for chapter 10 that deals with objections) is the "central part of the story line" (WCB, xiv). In this part, Plantinga lays out his extended Aquinas/Calvin model which is a theory of a Christian *sensus divinitatis* as a cognitive faculty⁴⁰ that, supported by the Holy Spirit, produces Christian beliefs; the extended A/C model is thus a theory of what warrant is when it comes not only to theistic belief, and theistic belief before the Fall (then the model is unextended), but to Christian belief proper.⁴¹ And then Plantinga says: "I propose the extended A/C model; according to this model, Christian belief is warranted" (WCB, xii, m.e.). That certainly sounds as if, at least according to this model, Christian belief 'is' warranted;

38 There is only a brief discussion of a similar objection by Keith Lehrer (WCB, 282–284).

39 However, the God relevant in these subsections is already described as a "person who has created us in his image [...] who loves us" (WCB, 188), etc.

40 The *sensus divinitatis* itself (not just the instigation of the Holy Spirit) is sometimes described as a "process" (cf. WCB, 256, 331) rather than a faculty; I'll ignore this difference.

41 For my purposes, I will not (usually) differentiate between the A/C model and the extended model and often just speak of the 'model'.—Sometimes it sounds as if the model is a model of how a broad theistic belief in (some kind of) personal God is brought about and can have positive epistemic status (cf. the "essence" of the unextended model as described in WCB, 204) and the extended model of how "*specifically* Christian belief" (WCB, 200, 241, m.e.) is triggered; sometimes, however, it sounds as if the extended model is the model that describes our cognition and volition *after* the "fall into sin" (WCB, 205) whereas the unextended model is the model that accounts for the *sensus divinitatis* *before* the 'Fall'. But knowledge of God based on the *sensus divinitatis* *before the Fall* must still be knowledge of the Christian God, and thus, among other things, knowledge of the (typically Christian) Holy Trinity.—By the way, Plantinga has a good deal to say about the cognitive and affective effects of sin, but in WCB he is almost silent on how we are to understand the 'Fall' as described in *Genesis* (he says that "the model need not take a stand" on this issue, WCB, 207 and 213; cf. 211f., however, and 212 for a brief case of "speculation" regarding how the very first act of sinning sin was possible).

since the model is one ‘proposed’ by Plantinga, one would think that he claims Christian belief is warranted. But then he continues: “What I officially claim for the extended A/C model is not that it is *true* but, rather, that it is *epistemically possible* (i.e., nothing we know commits us to its falsehood); I add that if Christian belief is true, then very likely this model or something like it is also true” (WCB, xii). Christian belief is warranted, but only ‘*according to*’ the model.

Several things are noteworthy here: *First*, TW is presented here as something *added* (‘I add...’); it’s not the only claim, and it seems it isn’t even the *main* claim. Rather, *secondly*, the main claim seems to be this:

(EP) The extended A/C model is epistemically possible.

(I’ll get back to this.) *Thirdly*, we should note that EP is what Plantinga ‘officially’ claims. So officially he doesn’t claim that the extended A/C model is true (but only possible). This is to say, obviously, that *unofficially* (personally) he very well believes it to be true⁴² (though, certainly, he doesn’t *know* he is warranted for then he would need to know that his beliefs are true which he doesn’t).

Plantinga himself puts his two claims—TW and EP—in a certain perspective. WCB, he says, “can be thought of in at least two quite different ways” (WCB, xiii): as an “exercise in apologetics and philosophy of religion” (ibid.) and as an “exercise in Christian philosophy” (ibid.). In this context, Plantinga repeats that what he claims for the extended A/C model “is twofold: first, it shows that and how Christian belief can perfectly well have warrant, thus refuting a range of *de jure* objections to Christian belief. But I also claim that the model provides a good way for Christians to think about the epistemology of Christian belief, in particular whether and how Christian belief has warrant” (WCB, xiii). Here Plantinga seems to promise an answer to the question of ‘*whether*’⁴³ Christian belief has warrant; and a little later in the *Preface* Plantinga says the A/C model “is a defense of the idea that Christian belief *has* warrant” (WCB, xiv)—on pain of contradiction, however, it can only be a defense inasmuch the ‘idea’ itself is epistemically possible and thus *could* have warrant.⁴⁴

The “public” project, says Plantinga, “does not appeal to specifically Christian premises or presuppositions” (WCB, xiii), whereas the “Christian” (ibid.) project is “starting from an assumption of the truth of Christian belief” (ibid.).

⁴² Cf. WCB, 347 and 499, where Plantinga clearly says that he holds Christian beliefs to be true (and thus probably warranted).

⁴³ On page xiv of the *Preface*, Plantinga repeats this point: “... asking *whether and how* such [Christian] belief has warrant” (my emphasis).

⁴⁴ Maybe this observation made Copan write what he did write (see above, p. 13).

It is very important *not* to interpret this from a logical point of view (so to speak). The point is not that the A/C model can convince only those who already believe in Christianity. It is certainly particularly helpful to Christians to be offered an epistemology that fits their basic beliefs; but since officially the truth of this epistemology (the A/C model) is not claimed, in principle everyone could have come up with it. Dennett could have done so:⁴⁵ Assume, for the sake of the argument, that Christian belief is true; how could we then account for knowledge of God? How is knowledge of God possible? How is it brought about? So to argue “from a Christian perspective” (*ibid.*) is not to claim that what speaks for the A/C model is that God exists; what speaks for the appropriateness of the model is that if God exists, then it is probably true.

So much for the *Preface*. Later in the book Plantinga says that he claims “four things for these two models” (WCB, 168, m.e.), i.e. for the A/C model and the extended A/C-model. Plantinga begins, *first*, with epistemic possibility; “related to” this claim, he says, is, *second*, the claim “that there aren’t any cogent objections to the model” (WCB, 169). It seems rather difficult to see what the difference is to the first claim; I’ll get back to this once we understand what exactly epistemic possibility is. The *third* claim really is not a claim at all, but rather a proposition Plantinga says he does *not* claim: “I don’t claim to *show* that they [the models] are true” (WCB, 169); this is an important piece of information when it comes to our understanding of the aim and scope of WCB, and I’ll get back to this as well. The *fourth* claim is a variant of TW inasmuch the idea is that there might be other models than the (extended) A/C model and that, in any case, for these other models as well it is also true that “if classical Christian belief is indeed true, then one of these models is very likely also true” (WCB, 170).

Still later in the book, Plantinga says that what he claims for the model is *threefold*, namely that “it is (1) possible, (2) subject to no philosophical objections that do not assume that Christian belief is false, and (3) such that if Christian belief is true, the model is at least close to the truth” (WCB, 351). Here, (1) is EP, and (3) is TW (or very close to it). (2) is a variant of the second claim; what is missing is the idea that no claim to truth is made regarding the model, which, again, is no direct or positive claim that something is the case.

Last but not least, it should not go unnoticed that Plantinga offers, I think, a brilliant critique of negative theology or, put another way, a defense of theolog-

⁴⁵ Cf. Plantinga (2001c, 400), where he says that “non-Christians may find it [the model] of interest in the same way that Christians may be interested in seeing whether and how naturalists can give an account of, say, intentionality”.

ical realism: Human beings, argues Plantinga, can meaningfully think and speak about God. I only mention this in passing, but it should be mentioned nonetheless.⁴⁶

So according to the *Preface* and some other strategic passages, the aim of WCB is to argue for the following propositions:

(TR) Human beings can meaningfully think and speak about God.

(EP) The (extended) A/C model is epistemically possible.

(TW) Christian belief probably has warrant if, and only if, it is true.

Based on this analysis, we can already see that TW is far from being the only claim in WCB, and that it isn't even the main claim; after all, TW is presented in the *Preface* as something 'added'. To understand TW as the main target of Plantinga's theory is thus a misunderstanding; and even TR, EP and TW are not all that is argued for. This will become clearer once we look a bit deeper into the deliverances of WCB.

4 The deliverances of WCB: Epistemic Possibility, the Parity Argument, Proper Basicity, and TW

Plantinga presents JQ as 'the main question of the book'. He does so despite the fact that he himself admits that the de facto question (is Christian belief true?) is "the *more important* question" (WCB, 63, m.e.). Since Plantinga presents JQ as 'the main question of the book', he seems mainly interested in arguing for the A/C model and TW. And yet at the very end of WCB, Plantinga writes: "But is it [the extended A/C model] true? This is the really important question" (WCB, 499), a question, however, which he acknowledges he is unable to answer within "the competence of philosophy" (*ibid.*). If the model is true, i.e. if we do have a *sensus divinitatis* that works according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth, then, in all likelihood, we are warranted. But are we? If Plantinga really did not argue for more than the A/C model and TW, then atheists could feel safe. But there is more.

⁴⁶ For a discussion cf. Tapp (this volume, p. 41ff.).

4.1 Epistemic Possibility

The (extended) A/C model, says Plantinga, is epistemically possible. The claim, he says, is not simply that the model is logically possible; the idea is not only that the model is in itself consistent. It certainly is, but many theories are possible in that sense. Rather, the claim is “much stronger” (WCB, 168). The claim really is that the model is “consistent with what we know, where ‘what we know’ is what all (or most) of the participants in the discussion agree on” (WCB, 169); thus, to say that the model is epistemically possible is to say that “nothing we know commits us to its falsehood” (WCB, xii). We would be committed to its falsehood if either there is a successful objection—such as the notorious *Great Pumpkin Objection*—to the model as a model (these objections are dealt with in chapter 10); or if there were successful defeaters, i.e. good reasons to believe that Christian belief itself is false,⁴⁷ such as historical Biblical criticism, postmodernism, pluralism, or the problem of evil (these are all dealt with in part IV of WCB). Other possible defeaters could arise from the sciences, such as classical mechanics, quantum mechanics, evolutionary theory, evolutionary psychology, but they are dealt with only in Plantinga’s latest book *Where the Conflict Really Lies. Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (WCRL, 2011).⁴⁸

I already mentioned that Plantinga’s first claim regarding the two models is EP; the second is the claim that there are no ‘cogent objections’ to the model. But what is the difference? To show that the model is epistemically possible is to show that it is consistent and that there is no contradiction with something else most of us claim to know. Accordingly, one way to show that there is a cogent objection to the model is to show that it is somehow internally inconsistent, in which case it would be epistemically impossible; another is to show that it is not consistent with something else we know, in which case it would also be epistemically impossible. A third way to cogently object to the model, I take it, would be to demonstrate that one of its (entailed) propositions is just false; not because

⁴⁷ For the difference between objections to the model and defeaters for Christian belief, cf. WCB, 285.

⁴⁸ With regard to the sciences, the idea is, roughly speaking, that there is no *conflict*: Evolutionary theory, for instance, can be true and Christian belief can be true belief as well. This is possible because evolutionary theory gives room for evolution to be guided. Nothing we know about evolution (if we know anything here: that there is an evolution at all, and if so, that the earth is very old, that men and other living beings have common ancestors, that evolutionary descent is governed by the mechanism of natural selection based upon random genetic mutation, and so on) commits us to believe that Christian theism is false.

it entails a contradiction or is inconsistent with what we know but simply because what is claimed to be the case really is not.

EP is a very important part of WCB, and as such it has not received the credit it deserves; there is more involved than just TW, and Plantinga, in his reply to Swinburne, is entirely right in pointing this out.⁴⁹ If one understands Plantinga's WCRL as an addition to part IV of WCB, one can easily see how important this defense is for the entire project. To have a good defense is no warrant that you will win; however, it *almost* is. For if warrant is what makes a true belief knowledge, and if there are only two possible worldviews that have an account for how such warrant (and hence knowledge about the world) is possible, to wit, theism and naturalism, and if naturalism is self-defeating, then theism remains; and then we not only have an account of how on such a view knowledge of God (and other things) is possible, but also of how it is possible in a 'strong' sense (by means of countering alleged defeaters); I shall get back to this in a moment.

4.2 The Parity-Argument in WCB: Answering the *de jure* justification-objection and the rationality-objection

The answer to JQ1*

Recall the first version of JQ:

(JQ1)* Is Christian belief justified, i.e. do those who hold Christian beliefs flout any epistemic obligations?

If one understands justification deontologically, i.e. in terms of epistemic duties (such as a duty to search for and stick to the truth, to reflect objections, to be honest and serious in one's intellectual activities, and the like), then the answer to (JQ1)* is quite easy, and Plantinga says so; if this is what it means to be justified, then a Christian at least can be justified and often "*obviously*" (WCB, 101)

⁴⁹ Cf. Plantinga 2001a, 217.—Another example of how deeply Plantinga can be misunderstood is Rentsch's interpretation. According to Rentsch (2005, 191), Plantinga argues that theistic belief is warranted if it can be reconstructed as possible. Rentsch even charges Plantinga for uncritically adopting scientific criteria of sense (or meaning); this is not only against the spirit of everything Plantinga says, but the latter explicitly argues that we should *not* understand "belief in God as or as like a sort of scientific *hypothesis*, a *theory* designed to explain some body of evidence" (WCB, 330).

is; no epistemic obligation is flouted in holding Christian beliefs. In this sense, responsible Christians and Non-Christians are in the same boat.

As we shall see later, however, there is a problem here; for the claim could be stronger and actually *was* much stronger in RBG. Still it is regrettable that Plantinga himself downplays the importance of (JQ1)*. He considers it (and the de jure objection) hardly “worthy of serious disagreement and discussion” (WCB, 102); and he says twice that JQ cannot be (JQ1)*.⁵⁰ Now it might be true that the answer to (JQ1)* is obvious. But it’s only obvious once you have the insights provided by Plantinga’s analysis. ‘Justification’ is a concept that still plays an important role in epistemology and certainly in ordinary language and discourse. Plantinga’s treatment of (JQ1)* is therefore very important and of great help for the theist; to show that on any sensible interpretation of justification, Christian belief is justified is of tremendous value and should be recognized. There’s more to the argument than just TW.

The answer to JQ2*

Let’s now turn to the second version of JQ, the de jure question with regard to rationality. Plantinga distinguishes at least *six* different conceptions of rationality, and so there are (or would be) six different ways to further specify JQ2 or JQ2* respectively.⁵¹ I have no space to discuss this. The really important conceptions are *internal* and *external* rationality.⁵² A belief, says Plantinga, is “externally rational if it is produced by cognitive faculties that are functioning properly and successfully aimed at truth” (WCB 204; cf. 112). Obviously, the concept of external rationality is very close to the concept of warrant, so close that it’s *prima facie* hard to see what the difference really is. In any event, Plantinga himself says that because external rationality “is *included in warrant*, the real question, here, is whether Christian belief does or can have warrant” (WCB, 204, m.e.).⁵³

⁵⁰ Cf. WCB, 102 and WCB, 108.

⁵¹ Cf. WCB, 109. Note that there is some overlapping here; e.g. justification broadly construed is very close to what Aristotelian rationality is.

⁵² Plantinga discusses Alston-rationality at length (WCB, 117–134); but whenever he returns to the JQ-issue (203f., 255–258, 365), he only discusses internal and external rationality.

⁵³ Cf. Plantinga (2001c, 394): “the notion of warrant, as I understand it, includes rationality”.— In WCB, 257, Plantinga identifies external rationality with “the *first* condition of warrant” (m.e.), namely with the proper function of the cognitive faculties; however, in that passage in WCB (204), ‘successfully being aimed at truth’ (the fourth condition of warrant) is part of the definition of ‘external rationality’.

For this reason I suggest that we can further reconstruct JQ with regard to rationality as follows:

(JQ2)** Is Christian belief rational, i.e. are those who hold Christian beliefs internally rational?

My cognitive faculties work properly (in the sense of *internal* rationality), if I only form beliefs that are “*coherent*” (WCB, 112)⁵⁴ and “*appropriate*” (WCB, 111) with regard to my experience, that is, with regard to my “phenomenal imagery and doxastic experience” (WCB, 111). The basic idea of internal rationality, I take it, is that one is not insane *on one’s own standards*. This is important because one can be a madman without being internally irrational; external rationality, on the other hand, excludes this. When it comes to internal rationality, there is (as with the justification-objection) no serious *de jure* objection.

As he did with JQ1, Plantinga repeatedly claims with regard to the different concepts of rationality, that *none* of the different variants of JQ *can be* (‘can’t’ he says several times) equivalent to the *de jure* question. But what does that mean? One certainly *can* ask (both logically, physically as well as psychologically speaking) whether, for instance, Christian belief is internally rational.⁵⁵ The answer is easily given in this particular case, that’s right. But still those questions *can* be raised, they certainly *have been* raised and still are *being* raised by one philosopher or other, and, what is more, the answers are not always straightforward. Plantinga writes: “What we have seen so far is what the *de jure* question and criticism are *not*: it is not the complaint that the believer is not within her intellectual rights in believing as she does” (WCB, 135)—and this holds for any of the other versions of the *de jure* questions and objections: “None of these criticism has much of a leg to stand on. So the *de jure* criticism has proven elusive” (*ibid.*). Again, this is misleading. *All* these objections can be raised, and they have been raised; they might be easily fended off, but that does not make them elusive; they can clearly be stated and discussed. When it comes to the objections against his model, Plantinga calls those critics “excessively naive” (WCB, 325) who simply assume that the meaning of terms such as ‘justified’, ‘rational’, and so on, is clear; these critics, he says, “seldom make a serious attempt to explain what they

⁵⁴ There’s some tension here between saying that coherence is part of internal rationality and presuming (as Plantinga does in WCB, 115) that those who raise the rationality-objection do not (or could not) mean to claim it is inconsistent; the objection could indeed be this: It is irrational of you to hold firm to Christian belief given that this belief is full of inconsistencies.

⁵⁵ As Plantinga points out himself (WCB, 112, Fn.4) philosophers such as Rorty and Dennett tend to think Christians are somewhat insane.

mean by these terms” (ibid.). But once it is clear what ‘justification’ is, “the question of justification is too easily answered to be interesting” (WCB, 327). Yes, once you see things right, it might be easy to answer this question; and yet, since such an attempt at clarification is seldom made, it is worthwhile to pursue and successfully complete one.⁵⁶

The answer to JQ3*

By asking whether this or that variant of JQ really is *the* de jure objection (both ‘is’ and ‘the’ emphasized) and claiming in each case that it is not, Plantinga tends to downplay the effort he puts into discussing those ‘questions’ and ‘objections’. But these are important discussions even if, as Plantinga says, the “*proper de jure* question” (WCB, 137, m.e.) is this:

(JQ3)* Is Christian belief warranted, i.e. are Christian beliefs produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly in a cognitive environment, according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth?

The warrant-objection (the ‘F&M objection’) claims that Christian belief (or rather holding on to it) is “*irrational*” (WCB, 151); what this means, however, is that such belief is either produced by cognitive faculties (reason, perception, memory, introspection, etc.) that *malfunction* (Marx) or by faculties and processes that are *not aimed* at the production of true beliefs to begin with (Freud). The de jure objection behind JQ, Plantinga says, “is best construed as the claim that Christian belief, whether true or false, is at any rate without warrant” (WCB, 153).

Before we look at the answer to (JQ3)*, let us consider whether the issue behind JQ is really ‘best construed as the claim that Christian belief, *whether true or false*, is at any rate without warrant’. I already argued that the other versions (or constructions) of JQ are just as good.⁵⁷ But there is another problem. Already in the *Preface*, Plantinga puts much emphasis on his claim that JQ actually *cannot* be answered without answering the de facto question. There is a certain “attitude” (WCB, xii), he claims, described as an “agnostic attitude” (WCB, 499),

⁵⁶ Note that crucial parts of Plantinga’s critique of Anthony O’Hear (WCB, 326–328) and John Mackie (WCB, 328–331) rest upon the conceptual analysis of ‘justification’, ‘rationality’ and ‘warrant’. The importance of Plantinga’s achievements here is particularly evident in his reply to Michael Martin’s version of the (Son of) Great Pumpkin Objection (WCB, 343–349).

⁵⁷ Plantinga says JQ3* is “viable” (WCB, 152). As it turns out, it’s not ‘viable’ at all; so why is it, as a question, in any better position than JQ1* and JQ2**?

which is the main target of his critique. The attitude is this: “Well, I don’t know whether Christian belief is *true* (after all, who could know a thing like that?), but I do know that it is irrational (or intellectually unjustified or unreasonable or intellectually questionable)” (WCB, xii); at the end of his discussion of the M&F complaint, Plantinga describes the position again as follows: “Christian belief may be true, and it may be false; but at any rate, it is irrational to accept it” (WCB, 152).⁵⁸ It is striking, however, that Plantinga claims he addresses an important question (JQ), but really does not provide any evidence regarding who *actually has* such a pseudo-agnostic attitude. There are plenty of examples for foundationalism, evidentialism, and so forth; but is there an example of someone who has that *de jure* attitude? Plantinga refers to “Freud, Marx and Nietzsche” (WCB, xi).⁵⁹ But do they share that attitude? Take Freud, for instance. He “seems to assume”, says Plantinga, “that such [theistic] belief is false, and then infers in rather quick and causal fashion that it is produced by wish-fulfillment and hence doesn’t have warrant” (WCB, 186); Freud “simply presupposes that theistic and hence Christian belief is false” (WCB, 498). But if this is a correct interpretation of Freud, then he is *not* the alleged opponent who has that ‘agnostic attitude’; it’s at best a *pseudo*-agnostic attitude. For it is one thing to argue that people *have* that attitude, or claim to have it, and quite another to argue, as Plantinga does, that they cannot or could not sensibly hold it (i.e. cannot or could not argue that they do not know whether Christian belief is true but still claim to know it is intellectually questionable). If Freud *assumes* or *presupposes* that Christian belief is false (and knows that he assumes it), as Plantinga claims he does, then he does not even entertain that attitude; for if he did, he would not make any claims, or assumptions, as for the truth of Christianity (‘well, I don’t know whether Christian belief is true’); after all, Freud calls it an *illusion*. To be sure, Plantinga claims that according to Freud an illusion is “not necessarily false; and he goes on to add that it isn’t possible to prove that theistic belief is mistaken” (WCB, 139). This is what Freud “says” (*ibid.*), according to Plantinga; but he provides no textual evidence for his claim, and it contradicts what he (Plantinga) says later in WCB (186, 498) about Freud ‘assuming’ and ‘presupposing’ that Christian belief is false. It even contradicts what Plantinga says just one page later where he says that according to Freud psychoanalysis “provides arguments against the truth of religious belief” (WCB, 140); according to Plantinga’s Freud, the function of illusion and wish-fulfillment

⁵⁸ Very similar formulations of this attitude can be found in WCB, 169, 191, 242, in Plantinga (2001a, 215), and in Plantinga (2001c, 380); in the latter text, Plantinga calls it the position of a “skeptical” (a.a.O).

⁵⁹ Nietzsche, however, is later dismissed; cf. WCB, 136.

“is not to produce *true* belief” (WCB, 142).⁶⁰ So Freud does *not*, as a matter of brute fact, raise his de jure objection ‘*whether true or not*’; neither does Marx, and so neither of them actually evinces the ‘agnostic attitude’.⁶¹ Nor do they *pre-suppose* that there is some malfunction or wishful thinking in order to then come to the conclusion that, *therefore*, Christian belief is false (this is what Plantinga claims in WCB, 162). Rather, they assume, for whatever reasons (materialism,⁶² psychoanalysis, evidentialism) that Christian belief is false and *then* they seek a naturalistic *explanation*⁶³ of how people come to hold that belief (just as Plantinga assumes that Christian belief is true and then seeks an Christian explanation of how people come to hold that belief). This is even what Plantinga at the very end of his discussion of the F&M complaint says himself: Freud “takes it for granted that there is no God and that theistic belief is false; he *then* casts about for some kind of explanation of this widespread phenomenon of mistaken belief” (WCB, 198, m.e.).⁶⁴—In his reply to Swinburne, Plantinga claims that “many or most objections to Christian belief” (2001, 215) are of that pseudo-agnostic ilk (‘Well, I don’t know...’). But not only is there a big difference between ‘many’ or ‘most’; there is no evidence that even many, let alone most or “an enormous amount of recent and contemporary” (WCB, 191) people argue this way;

60 Plantinga says that, according to Freud, “the proper intellectual attitude toward these beliefs isn’t merely agnosticism; it is that the beliefs in question are unwarranted and furthermore are very probably false” (WCB, 162). Elsewhere, Plantinga describes it somewhat differently: “Freud thinks, once we see that theistic and religious belief has its origin in wishful thinking, we will also see that it is very probably false” (WCB, 162). In WCRL, Plantinga says: “in fact Freud thinks theism is false” (2011, 148).

61 Plantinga quotes Marx: “The basis of irreligious criticism is *man makes religion*” (WCB, 140); that is hardly compatible with the de jure attitude. Nor do the other philosophers who are mentioned by Plantinga and argue along Marxian and Freudian lines actually have that attitude either. Plantinga quotes Hume’s observation, for instance, that the Christian religion “cannot be believed by any reasonable person without [a miracle]” (WCB, 143); and so too with the others (Carroll, Cupit, Daniels, Ellis, Frye, Rousseau, Wilson). Wykstra (2002, 94) coins the de jure attitude “Demure De Jure Objection”; but note that he too provides no evidence about who actually made or makes such an objection.

62 As a matter of fact, this is what Plantinga says *himself* when it comes to Marx: He (Marx) draws the conclusion that Christian belief is false from materialism: people “will see that materialism is very probable true, *in which case* Christian and theistic belief is very likely false” (WCB, 162, m.e.).

63 Cf. WCB, 145, where it says Freud and Marx give “naturalistic explanations of religious belief”.

64 Cf. WCB, 315, where Plantinga speaks of Freud’s “presupposition” that God doesn’t exist with regard to a possible Freudian explanation that some human beings have a desire for union with God.

Freud and Marx appear not to. So I think Plantinga is right in claiming that one *cannot* “adopt” (WCB, 191) the de jure attitude because it is not independent of the de facto question; but he should not argue with such emphasis that Freud&Marx&Nietzsche&others “can’t *any longer* adopt” (WCB, 191, m.e.) that de jure attitude because they never really had adopted it in the first place.

Now what is Plantinga’s answer to (JQ3)*? The answer is not, as some commentators think it is, that Christian belief is warranted; the answer is just TW. The gist of the whole story is this: By definition, one necessary condition (among others) for a belief to have warrant for a person is that it is produced by a cognitive faculty according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth; that it is ‘successfully aimed at truth’ is to say that there is a (very) high objective probability that the belief is true.⁶⁵ Since we cannot say whether Christian belief is true, we cannot say that Christian belief is warranted, and that the A/C model is true. But we can say that the model is epistemically possible, that there are no (other) cogent objections to it, and we can say that Christian belief is true if, and only if, it has warrant.

4.3 Proper Basicity

Basicality

Just as in RBG, Plantinga understands a belief as basic if one does not hold it on the evidential basis of other propositions or some inference; rather, such beliefs are *occasioned* in us by certain circumstances—we *find* ourselves having them. The perception of a tree brings about the belief that there is a tree; and so it goes with God: “we find ourselves with [beliefs about God], just as we find ourselves with perceptual and memory beliefs” (WCB, 172f.). Circumstances in which belief in God is triggered are, for instance, seeing a wonderful night sky or feeling guilty about having done something bad. With regard to basicality, says Plantinga, the *sensus divinitatis* “resembles perception, memory, and a *priori* belief” (WCB, 175, partly m.e.); in this respect, Christian beliefs “are like memory beliefs, perceptual beliefs, some *a priori* beliefs, and so on” (WCB, 343, partly m.e.).

⁶⁵ For a final word Plantinga’s on warrant cf. WCB, 153–156; for the idea of a successful aim with regard to truth cf. *Warrant and Proper Function*, in particular 49, 55, 75, 194.

Propriety as justification

What about *proper* basicity? That depends on what propriety consists in. As we saw, there are three fundamental epistemological concepts for interpreting JQ: justification, rationality, and warrant. So is theistic belief properly basic if we understand the propriety of such a belief to consist in being justified, and justification in turn as a deontological concept? Yes.

But there are two problems here. Proper basicity is discussed in a brief section as one of the “six further features of the model” (WCB, 175). The first ‘feature’ is the very idea of there being a *sensus divinitatis* that, under certain circumstances, triggers belief in God as something that we ‘find’ in ourselves. The second feature is that this *sensus* is a “capacity” (WCB, 173) or “disposition” (ibid.) for belief in God rather than innate knowledge in a strict sense. Then basicity is introduced as the first of those ‘six further features of the model’. “According to the A/C model” (WCB, 175, m.e.), says Plantinga in the first section on these ‘features’, theistic belief is basic; and he begins the next section on proper basicity with respect to justification Plantinga by saying: “On the A/C model, then, theistic belief as produced by the *sensus divinitatis* is basic” (WCB, 177, partly m.e.). That sounds as if Plantinga is saying that only ‘according to’ or ‘on’ the model is belief in God (properly) basic, i.e., only if the model is true.⁶⁶ Then, however (since it cannot be argued that the model is true), we cannot argue that belief in God is properly basic; as a matter of fact, Plantinga points out that the A/C model is a *model* inasmuch it shall show “how it could be” (WCB, 168, Plantinga’s emphasis) that belief in God is true. Yet when he discusses *proper* basicity as the fourth ‘feature’ of the model, Plantinga says that “it is really pretty obvious that a believer in God is or can be deontologically justified” (WCB, 178, m.e.). And then the claim, it seems, really is that belief in God can be and often even ‘is’ justified and hence properly basic: “the believer in God is within her epistemic rights in accepting theistic belief in the basic way” (WCB, 179). The problem, I think, is that the A/C model is a model “of theistic belief’s [sic] having warrant” (WCB, 168, m.e.), and if the concept of warrant is part of the model itself, it cannot be shown that belief in God is basic and justified (properly basic in that sense). However, if we understand the A/C model just as the claim that human beings have the ‘capacity’ to form ‘basic’ beliefs about God, then, given a correct understanding of what justification really is, the claim is this:

⁶⁶ Later too Plantinga speaks as if Christian belief is justified and internally rational “If” (WCB, 252) the model is right or “On” the model (WCB, 255); maybe passages like these have led Zagzebski (2002, 117) to her interpretation (s.a., p. 12f.).

(BJ) Belief in God is basic and justified.

And so, later in chapter 8, when he discusses the extended A/C model, Plantinga says that “even *apart* from the model” (WCB, 255, m.e.), Christian belief often is justified.

The second problem is much harder; as a matter of fact, I think it is crucial both to the interpretation of Plantinga’s philosophy as well as to his philosophy proper. For lack of space, however, once again I can only be brief here: As Plantinga points out (WCB, 85–8), there is a deontological and theological ring to the terms ‘justification’ and ‘justified’; in the epistemological context, to be justified means to abide by one’s epistemic duties. But *what* duties? According to what Plantinga calls the “classical package: evidentialism, deontologism, and classical foundationalism” (WCB, 88), one is obliged to believe only in propositions that are properly basic, i.e. in propositions that are self-evident, incorrigible or evident to the senses, or in propositions that are, in one way or other, supported by these properly basic propositions; if one does so, one is justified. As we saw, the strategy in RBG was to find a bigger boat: Belief in God is *just as* properly basic as self-evident propositions, memory beliefs et al. But we also saw that Plantinga had difficulties in RBG to find a way to identify necessary conditions such that they are jointly sufficient to define what makes a belief *properly* basic. Now in the context of his discussion of the A/C model and its ‘six features’, Plantinga claims that belief in God *is* basic and justified (BJ). The section in which he does so is very short, just half a page; Plantinga obviously thinks that he can be brief because he can refer back both to RBG and chapter 3 of WCB. But this self-interpretation is misleading: Whereas in RBG he has a strong concept of justification such that the propriety of theistic basic beliefs consists in their being in one bigger boat alongside self-evident propositions (et al.), the concept of justification in WCB—the one that is used to claim BJ⁶⁷—is weak, much weaker indeed: one is weakly justified if one thinks carefully, pays attention to possible problems, reacts to counterarguments, is open to discussions, maybe reads a lot, and the like; it is only the weakness of this concept of justification that makes Plantinga believe that it is ‘obvious’ that Christians at least often are justified.⁶⁸ As I have argued, in RBG Plantinga failed to provide ‘criteria’ by which we can define ‘properly basic’ such that we can subsume theistic belief under properly basic beliefs; but he did at least *claim* that theistic belief *is* justified

⁶⁷ This concept is expounded in sec. V of chapter 3 (WCB, 99–102).

⁶⁸ This concept of justification is so weak that even someone believing in “rotational reproduction” could be justified; cf. WCB, 101f.

in this strong sense, just like other paradigmatic examples of properly basic beliefs. (I shall return to this.)

Propriety as internal rationality

On rationality there is only a footnote in this context,⁶⁹ but later Plantinga clearly states that “just as for theistic belief, I’ll argue that many or most Christians *can* be but also *are* both justified and internally rational in holding their characteristic beliefs” (WCB, 200).⁷⁰ So a further result is:

(BIR) Belief in God is basic and internally rational.

Propriety as warrant

When it comes to warrant (and external external rationality as part of warrant) things are “harder” (WCB, 200). Plantinga explicitly does talk about proper basicity with respect to warrant. Here the claim is much weaker; it’s only claimed that according to the model belief in God “*can*” (WCB, 178; 186; m.e.) have warrant. Then the question is raised whether belief in God “*is*” (WCB, 186, Plantinga’s emphasis) warranted. The answer is a conditional; the answer is TW.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Cf. WCB, 179, Fn.15.

⁷⁰ Cf. WCB, 203f. and 324 for other clear statements of this kind. In early replies to critics of WCB, Plantinga repeats that he argues that Christian belief is justified and internally rational; cf. Plantinga (2001c, 387) and Plantinga (2002, 132). Thus, Zagzebski (2002, 117), for instance, underrates the deliverances of WCB when she says that in this book “Plantinga wants to show that such [Christian] beliefs *can* be properly basic, rational and warranted” (m.e.).

⁷¹ Cf. WCB 245f. for a brief summary of the epistemic status of specifically Christian belief. Note, however, that Plantinga in this summary speaks as if Christian belief is justified, internally and externally rational as well as warranted only “given” or “on the model”; but that caveat is only necessary for warrant.

5 Ecce WCB! Interpretation and Self-Interpretation

We noted in the beginning that there is some confusion in the reception of WCB. So let's, by way of summary, see what the deliverances of this work really are; let's also have a brief look at how Plantinga himself interprets WCB—*ecce WCB!*

What are the deliverances of WCB?

We now have the deliverances of WCB at hand (well, at least as far as I interpret WCB). To begin with, there is a solid foundation:

(TR) Human beings can meaningfully think and speak about God.

Then, we have a clear understanding of how to apprehend the vexing problem of the intellectual acceptability of theism and Christian belief:

(JQ1)* Is Christian belief justified, i.e. do those who hold Christian beliefs flout any epistemic obligations?

(JQ2)** Is Christian belief rational, i.e. are those who hold Christian beliefs internally rational?

(JQ3)* Is Christian belief warranted, i.e. are Christian beliefs produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly in a cognitive environment, according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth?

Not only is there a detailed analysis of what these questions mean; there are even answers to (or related to) these questions:

(EP) The (extended) A/C model is epistemically possible.

(BJ) Belief in God is basic and justified.

(BIR) Belief in God is basic and internally rational.

(TW) Christian belief has warrant if, and only if, it is true.

And there is one more thing I haven't mentioned yet; there is an evolutionary argument against naturalism that, if correct, yields the following conclusion (I'll get back to this in a moment):

(NSR) Naturalism is self-refuting.

On Plantinga's interpretation, WCB is a 'sequel' to GOM and RBG, though in a 'slightly different direction'. Since the decisive move in GOM and RBG was to provide a parity argument, for WCB to be a 'sequel' it also needs to contain a parity argument. So what happens to the good old parity argument? Is it no use any more? Well, not quite. Theists (or Christians) cannot claim that their belief is warranted without answering the de facto question; and if one assumes that the de facto question cannot be answered ('after all, who could know a thing like that?'), then the question of whether Christian belief is warranted cannot be answered by the theist either. However, it *cannot* be answered by the atheist either; and so the theist and the anti-theist are back in 'same boat' again. But we should note that the boat they are both in is a different boat from the one they used to be in on the basis of the old parity argument. By introducing the concept (and theory) of warrant, Plantinga makes it impossible to use the old parity argument any longer. A crucial aspect of the old parity argument, as I understand it, is that it works even if the belief that is shown to be justified or rational inasmuch it is properly and basically believed is not true. On the old parity argument, one can be justified and (internally) rational in one's beliefs (and justified and rational in believing that one has true beliefs) without actually (but not knowingly, of course) having true beliefs. The theist can reply to the atheist: I'm just as justified as you, even if what I believe should be false; I'm just as (internally) rational as you, even if what I believe should be false. He cannot, however, reply: I'm just as P-warranted⁷² as you, even if what I believe should be false, and he cannot do so for two reasons. First, P-warrant for a theist is obviously very different than P-warrant for an atheist (not with regard to the formal conditions but with regard to what they mean; a naturalistic account of design and proper function is different—"by God or evolution" (WCB, 155)—from a theistic account). Secondly, and again, for a belief to be P-warranted it must in all likelihood be true. But who could know a thing like that?

So does WCB make stronger or weaker claims than GOM and RBG? I think both yes and no. If I were to put Plantinga's early philosophy in one sentence, then, I think, it would be this: *Christian belief is properly basic*. In WCB, this claim is considerably weakened: TW is a conditional; the claim is only that Christian belief *can* be warranted, and if true, probably is (and in that sense can be properly basic). Certainly, WCB's claim that Christian belief is justified and internally rationally (and in *that* sense properly basic) is helpful; but since justifica-

72 Note that "warrant" is first introduced in WCB (xi, cf. 153) in very general terms as that third element that distinguishes knowledge from mere true belief; so what is called 'warrant' here is what others call 'justification', for instance. What Plantinga then specifies as warrant (proper function and all that) is what I mean here by P(lantinga)-warrant.

tion and internal rationality are understood in a much weaker way than in RBG, the claim is weaker here too. Put another way: The claim in RBG that Christian belief is properly basic—that is, is in the same boat as self-evidential beliefs et al.—is reduced to the claim that it is properly basic in a somewhat unchallenging way, and only *can* be properly basic in a substantial way (by way of warrant), and this only if true.

What are the deliverances of WCB? Self-Interpretation

A major problem, I think, in the literature on Plantinga is the, sometimes exclusive, focus on TW; Swinburne, for instance, made this point *cum organo pleno*. As we have seen, however, there is much more than just TW involved; as a matter of fact, TW is one of several findings, and in one place it is even characterized as something ‘added’. As was shown in passing already, Plantinga in his early replies (2001a, 2001b, 2002c, 2002) does (almost) his best to clarify things; all in all, I think he does a good job in interpreting himself and WCB in these early replies. (His interpretation of GOM and RBG is not as convincing.) He is also right in defending himself against the charge that, on account of TW, he does too little to support theists who have their doubts or even agnostics or atheists to overcome their lack of faith. He says as much in his reply to Swinburne, and he says it even more clearly in another reply: “I don’t provide argument for Christian belief in WCB [...]; it doesn’t follow, however, that there is nothing in my program that might help the nonbeliever reconsider his or her doubts” (Plantinga 2001c, 385). In his reply to Zagzebski, Plantinga (2002, 132) indirectly (and modestly) refers to EP and the deliverances in part IV of WCB: “And finally, is it really all that difficult to defend the truth of Christian belief? As far as I can see, none of the objections to its truth have much to be said for them; all are easily refuted”. Not so easily, really; so it is good to have that little help from our *spiritus rector*.

On the negative side, there are three problems: First, Plantinga (and his future readers) should not join or even conduct the choir of those who understand the claim that there is no sensible *de jure* objection to Christian belief that does not presuppose the falsehood of the latter as the main thesis in WCB.⁷³ It is only an implication of TW (or rather of the concept of warrant); it is based on a straw-man-attitude; and there is more, and more important, material to consider here.

73 Cf. Greco (2001, 461) who thinks that to refute the pseudo-agnostic attitude “is the main target of the book”; according to Geivett/Jesson (2001, 329f.), the “major thesis [of WCB] is that there are no *de jure* objections to Christian belief that do not presuppose some *de facto* objection”.

Second (and again), Plantinga (and his readers) should resist the temptation to focus on TW. I see such a tendency in Plantinga's most recent work. In his debate on "Science and Religion" with Daniel Dennett (Dennett/Plantinga, 2011), Plantinga argues, among other things, that contemporary evolutionary theory with its doctrine of random mutation is compatible (unlike naturalism) with theistic belief, and that, even if it weren't, "it wouldn't follow that theistic belief is irrational or unwarranted" (Dennett/Plantinga, 2011, 3). The reason Plantinga provides for his claim is this: "As I argue in *Warranted Christian Belief*, if theistic belief is true, then very likely it has both rationality and warrant in the basic way, that is, not on the basis of propositional evidence" (Dennett/Plantinga 2011, 9). Putting aside that Plantinga here parallels rationality and warrant (as we saw, external rationality is part of warrant), the basic argument ('as I argue in WCB...') or claim of WCB seems to be TW; there's no mention of EP at all, and also no word on justification and internal rationality. (Something similar can be said for WCRL.)

What happens then in the further debate with Dennett is all the more remarkable, and not so much because Dennett in his opening essay does *not* deny the compatibility of evolutionary theory and theism; rather, it is striking that Plantinga in his reply to Dennett's essay does *not* rely on TW. Dennett's main point is that the compatibility of theism and evolutionary theory doesn't prove anything; many quite absurd theories (Flying Spaghetti Monsterism et al.) are compatible with evolutionary theory, and still Plantinga believes in the Christian God (and not in Buddha, Allah, Krishna, monsters, or whatever). So the "burden of proof", says Dennett, "falls on Plantinga to show why his theist story deserves any more respect or credence than" (Dennett/Plantinga 2011, 28) Dennett's Supermanism (which is a version of the Flying Spaghetti Monsterism). It is tempting to think that the reason why Plantinga in his reply does not get back to TW is that he can at best show that theism is not as silly as Flying Spaghetti Monsterism; but why believe in it in the first place? Given the basic idea of WCB and Plantinga's critique of evidentialism, this question might seem to miss the point; for the very point is that theists do not need a reason to be warranted. All they need to be warranted is that theism is true, i.e. that God exists: "if theistic belief is true, it probably doesn't require propositional evidence for its rational acceptance" (Dennett/Plantinga 2011, 9), says Plantinga. Fair enough; but is it true? That we cannot know, as Plantinga must say (and does say).

This brings me to my last and final point. Would it be fair to reconstruct Plantinga's most important argument (or strategy) as follows: The best way to understand what knowledge is to say that it is warranted true belief. But there are only two models to understand the elements of design and proper function in such a theory of knowledge as warranted true belief: theism and naturalism.

Whereas naturalism is epistemically impossible (and hence false), theism is epistemically possible. Now skepticism cannot be refuted; we never know anything in a very strict sense, because we never can be sure whether what we believe is true. And since warrant and truth are closely related to each other, we can also never say that our beliefs are warranted. Still we cannot help but have certain beliefs such as beliefs about the past, other persons, external things, or God; we also feel that these beliefs constitute knowledge. But if they do, they must be warranted; but they only can be warranted if theism is true; hence theism is true, if anything is true. Or in one sentence: If anything is warranted, then Christian belief is warranted.

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