

REVIEW ESSAY

EPISTEMOLOGY AND CHRISTIAN BELIEF

K. SCOTT OLIPHINT

I. *Review*

The long-awaited third volume of Alvin Plantinga's warrant series has arrived, and those who have looked forward to its publication will not be disappointed.¹ Coming some seven years after the first two books in the series, this volume, being sufficiently different in its intent and subject matter, lives up to its already established reputation. It is vintage Plantinga—lucid, cogent, humorous, technical, enlightening, challenging, and entertaining—a combination rarely found in books of philosophy.

Given constraints of space, the review section of this article will not give the book the attention and credit that it deserves. I will focus my discussion on the central thesis of the book in chapters six through nine and will, regrettably, skip over much of the rest. Part II will include the substance of my own comments and questions. First, then, a review of the material, then some questions, comments, and concerns.

Plantinga sets out to answer the question, "Is Christian belief intellectually acceptable?" In attempting to answer that question, he provides a crucial distinction with regard to objections to Christian belief, a distinction between *de facto* and *de jure* objections. *De facto* objections are objections to the *truth* of Christian belief. Even more prevalent, however, have been *de jure* objections. "These are arguments or claims to the effect that Christian belief, whether or not true, is at any rate unjustifiable, or rationally unjustified, or irrational, or not intellectually respectable, or contrary to sound morality, or without sufficient evidence, or in some other way rationally unacceptable, not up to snuff from an intellectual point of view" (ix). While *de facto* objections deal with the truth or falsity of Christian belief, and thus can be fairly straightforward, *de jure* objections are less

K. Scott Oliphint is Associate Professor of Apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary.

¹ This review will focus on Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Vi + 508 pp. \$60.00, cloth; \$24.95, paper. The other two books in the series are Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* and *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). For a review of the latter two works, see K. Scott Oliphint, "Plantinga on Warrant," *WTJ* 57 (1995): 415-35.

clear, diffuse, and often opaque, claiming that there is something other than falsity that is wrong with Christian belief. Christian belief is in some way deficient such that one's holding such belief entails that one inherits its deficiency. So, the topic of the book, by and large, is to respond to the *de jure* objection.

He then goes on to propose that there aren't any *de jure* objections to Christian belief that are independent of *de facto* objections. More specifically, Plantinga wants to argue that

... the attitude expressed in "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)"—that attitude, if I am right, is indefensible. (ii)

Plantinga goes on to show how that attitude is indefensible by construing theism and Christian belief as within the confines of his epistemological project on warrant. If warrant is acquired in the way that Plantinga argues, and if theistic belief generally and Christian belief more specifically are consistent with (at least the essential core of) that project, then theism and Christianity, too, may be warranted. He develops this argument, primarily in chapters six through nine.

For those unfamiliar with Plantinga's warrant project in epistemology, he has been wanting to argue for a "proper function" view of warrant. Warrant is that property or quantity enough of which transforms true belief into knowledge, and warrant is obtained by properly functioning cognitive faculties, along with other qualifiers. More specifically,

According to the central and paradigmatic core of our notion of warrant (so I say) a belief **B** has warrant for you if and only if (1) the cognitive faculties involved in the production of **B** are functioning properly . . . ; (2) your cognitive environment is sufficiently similar to the one for which your cognitive faculties are designed; (3) the triple of the design plan governing the production of the belief in question involves, as purpose or function, the production of true beliefs (and the same goes for elements of the design plan governing the production of input beliefs to the system in question); and (4) the design plan is a good one: that is, there is a high statistical or objective probability that a belief produced in accordance with the relevant segment of the design plan in that sort of environment is true. Under these conditions, furthermore, the degree of warrant is given by some monotonically increasing function of the strength of S's belief that **B**. This account of warrant, therefore, depends essentially upon the notion of proper function.²

² Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 194. In *Warranted Christian Belief*, however, Plantinga adds one condition to his view of warrant that was not developed in *Warrant and Proper Function*, i.e., that of a "minienvironment." He adds this condition to attempt to deal with situations in which all of the warrant conditions mentioned above are met, but in which the belief is true "by accident," e.g., when one looks, at 11:25 a.m., at a clock that stopped at 11:25 p.m. . . and forms the belief that it is 11:25 a.m. The belief is true, but accidentally so, even though there is no fault to be had by the cognitive faculties. Plantinga introduces a minienvironment and a *resolution condition* such that: "(RC) A belief **B** produced by an exercise **E** of cognitive powers has warrant sufficient for knowledge only if MBE (the minienvironment with respect to **B** and **E**) is favorable for **E**" (159) and he concedes

The central part of the argument is contained in what Plantinga calls "the A/C Model," i.e., the Aquinas/Calvin model, providing as it does an explanation for the warrant of Christian belief. "To give a model of a proposition or state of affairs S is to show *how it could be* that S is true or actual. The model itself will be *another* proposition (or state of affairs), one such that it is clear (1) that it is possible and (2) that if it is *true*, then so is the target proposition (168). The A/C Model is presented by Plantinga, therefore, as a model that (1) is possible and (2) if true, then entails the truth of Christian belief.³ We should note here (and we will discuss this further below) that Plantinga believes that the models he presents are true, or very close to the truth, though he does not propose to demonstrate such a thing. "... [T]o show that these models are true, therefore, would also be to show that theism and Christianity are true; and I don't know how to do something one could sensibly call 'showing' that either of these is true" (170).

The A/C model is developed with respect to theism generally, and then extended for the sake of arguing for the warrant of Christian belief more specifically. But first, we will look at the A/C model and its implications.

The A/C model consists essentially of the *sensus divinitatis*. Plantinga contends that the *sensus divinitatis* is something on which both Aquinas and Calvin agreed "(and anything on which Calvin and Aquinas are in accord is something to which we had better pay careful attention)" (170). Having quoted Rom 1:18-20 and select passages from Calvin, Plantinga tells us just exactly how he understands the *sensus divinitatis*.

The *sensus divinitatis* is a disposition or set of dispositions to form theistic beliefs in various circumstances, in response to the sorts of conditions or stimuli that trigger the working of this sense of divinity. (173)

The *sensus divinitatis* works in such a way that, under certain agreeable circumstances, we find ourselves with theistic beliefs. In this, the *sensus divinitatis* is similar to memory or perceptual beliefs. I don't simply decide to believe, when I see a tree outside my window, that I see a tree outside my window; I find myself believing such a thing without inference or argument. The *sensus divinitatis*, according to Plantinga, works in the same way.

Furthermore, the *sensus divinitatis* is, in some important respects, *innate* (173). According to Plantinga, it is likely *not* innate in that knowledge of God is present from birth, but rather that the *capacity* for such knowledge is present from birth. "Here the *sensus divinitatis* resembles other belief-producing faculties or mechanisms. If we wish to think in terms of the overworked functional analogy, we

that it may not be possible precisely to define just exactly when something is favorable and when it is not.

³ It is worth noting here that the "possibility" proposed is not broadly logical possibility, but epistemic possibility, i.e., "consistent with what we know, where 'what we know' is what all (or most) of the participants in the discussion agree on" (169). Plantinga claims that this is stronger than broadly logical possibility, in that (as far as I understand him) there is some agreement on it, but also weaker in that it could still be impossible, even though there is, in fact, agreement.

can think of the *sensus divinitatis*, too, as an input-output device: it takes . . . circumstances . . . as input and issues as output theistic belief, beliefs about God" (174-75). The *sensus divinitatis*, then, *just is* the A/C model.

There are six features of this *sensus divinitatis*, the A/C model, some of which are familiar to those who have followed Plantinga's epistemological expedition, and some of which are not. We can pass over the more familiar features, including basicity, proper basicity with respect to justification, and proper basicity with respect to warrant. The last three, however, deserve a comment or two.

The fourth feature mentioned is "Natural Knowledge of God" (180). Here Plantinga deals, not with a natural knowledge of God, as might be expected from the subtitle of this section, but rather with a brief comparison and contrast (to be expanded on later in the book) between the *sensus divinitatis* and the internal testimony (called by Plantinga, the internal instigation) of the Holy Spirit. He passes up a nice chance to discuss and evaluate the notion that we all, as human creatures, by virtue of the *sensus divinitatis*, possess a natural knowledge of God (more on that below). Instead, he stops short of such a statement, and claims only that part of our original epistemic equipment is to be endowed with the capacity for knowledge of God. This seems to me to be altogether right and true, but may not do justice, at least at this point, to Calvin, following Paul, in their affirmations about the *sensus divinitatis*.

He then asks whether the *sensus divinitatis* requires that our knowledge of God come by way of perception, that is, "would it follow that the warrant enjoyed by theistic belief is perceptual warrant? Not necessarily" (180). Rather than maintaining that there must be perceptual experience, Plantinga maintains that there is another kind of experience necessarily entailed in the *sensus divinitatis*, a *doxastic experience*, which is "the sort of experience one has when entertaining any proposition one believes" (183).⁴

Finally, and leading to the next chapter in which Plantinga begins to develop the *extended* A/C model, a key feature of the A/C model is the reality of sin. According to the A/C model, "this natural knowledge of God has been compromised, weakened, reduced, smothered, overlaid, or impeded by sin and its consequences," so that "failure to believe in God is a result of some kind of dysfunction of the *sensus divinitatis*" (184).

Plantinga then goes on to ask if theistic belief is warrant-basic, i.e., can theistic belief have warrant if taken in the basic way? His answer is twofold. If theistic belief is false, the answer is no; if true, the answer is yes. In this discussion, one can begin to see the differences between, say, the relationship of belief to knowledge and the relationship of belief to warrant. The latter relationship is Plantinga's concern in this section. That is, there are situations, given Plantinga's general proper function approach to knowledge, where one can have *some* degree of warrant (though not enough sufficient for knowledge) even if the

⁴ For more on doxastic experience in light of Plantinga's proper function view of warrant see *Warrant and Proper Function*, 190-93.

proposition believed is false. "First, when does a false belief have warrant? Typically, in a case where the faculty that produces the belief is working at the limit of its capability. You see a mountain goat on a distant crag and mistakenly think you see that it has horns; as a matter of fact, it is just too far away for you to see clearly that it doesn't have horns" (187). The problem, however, is that these examples won't hold for theistic belief. The reason they won't hold is that there is no objective probability that theistic belief can have even the slightest degree of warrant if theistic belief is false. And the reason for *that* is that objective probability accrues to a proposition, with respect to some condition, only if that proposition is true in most of the nearby possible worlds that display that condition. But if there is no such person as God in the actual world, then in any possible world that is "nearby" he will not exist either. Any process producing theistic belief in those worlds would not be aimed at truth (there being no God in those worlds) so it is likely not the case that belief in God in the actual world is produced by properly functioning faculties aimed at truth. So, says Plantinga, "Freud is right: if theistic belief is false, then it is at least very likely that it has little or no warrant" (188).

On the other hand, if theistic belief is true, then it likely *is* warranted. "How could we make sense of the idea that theism is true but belief in God doesn't have warrant?"

We'd have to suppose (1) that there is such a person as God, who has created us in his image and has created us in such a way that our chief end and good is knowledge of him, and (2) that belief in God . . . has no warrant: is not produced by cognitive processes successfully aimed at giving us true beliefs about God, functioning properly in a congenial epistemic environment. (189)

"The natural thing to think," however, "is that those faculties that produce theistic belief were indeed designed to produce that sort of belief and are functioning properly in so doing" (189).

The last section of this central chapter makes the claim that "the *de jure* question is not independent of the *de facto* question" (190). This seems to be exactly to the point and it relates to the comments and concerns that will be expressed below. The truth of the matter, however, is expressed well by Plantinga.

And this dependence of the question of warrant or rationality on the truth or falsehood of theism leads to a very interesting conclusion. If the *warrant* enjoyed by belief in God is related in this way to the *truth* of that belief, then the question whether theistic belief has *warrant* is not, after all, independent of the question whether theistic belief is *true*. So the *de jure* question we have finally found is not, after all, really independent of the *de facto* question; to answer the former we must answer the latter. This is important: what it shows is that a successful atheological objection will have to be to the *truth* of theism, not to its rationality, justification, intellectual respectability, rational justification, or whatever. . . . This fact invalidates an enormous amount of recent and contemporary atheology; for much of that atheology is devoted to *de jure* complaints that are allegedly independent of the *de facto* question. If my argument is so far right, though, there *aren't* any complaints of that sort. (191)

This is an interesting and accurate analysis, it seems to me, at least for the most part. The question that lies in the background of most of this book, and in the foreground of some of it, is the question of the *truth* of Christian theism. Plantinga, however, wants to address first the warrant for one's Christian belief, and I suspect he sees the truth of such as a question more for theology than philosophy. He does *not*, as far as I can tell, want thereby to undermine the seriousness of the *de facto* question; he just simply sees *that* question as (at least to some extent) outside the parameters of epistemology. So, he says,

... here we see the ontological or metaphysical or ultimately religious roots of the question as to the rationality or warrant or lack thereof for belief in God. What you properly take to be rational, at least in the sense of warranted, depends on what sort of metaphysical and religious stance you adopt. . . . It is at bottom not merely an epistemological dispute, but an ontological or theological dispute. (191)

Most encouraging is the attention Plantinga gives in this book to the problem of sin.⁵ Chapter seven is entitled, "Sin and Its Cognitive Consequences." With this chapter, we begin to see what Plantinga calls the "extended" A/C model, moving beyond theistic belief generally to specifically Christian belief.

Now one important difference between bare theism and Christianity has to do essentially with *sin* and the divine remedy proposed for it; it is sin that occasions Incarnation and Atonement, redemption and renewal. (201)

After discussing the fact of *affective* disorder due to sin, Plantinga turns us to the noetic effects of sin. Plantinga thinks "the noetic effects of sin are concentrated with respect to our knowledge of other people, of ourselves, and of God; they are less relevant (or relevant in a different way . . .) to our knowledge of nature and the world" (213). Plantinga does admit, however, in this connection that "were it not for sin and its effects, God's presence and glory would be as obvious and uncontroversial to us all as the presence of other minds, physical objects, and the past" (214). The problem is that the *sensus divinitatis* is corrupted by us.⁶ The "deliverances of the *sensus divinitatis* can be compromised, skewed, or even suppressed altogether" (216). For Plantinga, then, the most important cognitive consequence of sin is failure to know God. "But if we don't know that there is such a person as God, we don't know the first thing (the most important thing) about ourselves, each other, and our world. That is because (from the point of view of the model) the most important truths about us and them is that we have

⁵ One of the more lucid critiques of the earlier "Reformed epistemology" proposal of Plantinga dealt specifically with the topic of sin. See Merold Westphal, "Taking St. Paul Seriously: Sin as an Epistemological Category," in *Christian Philosophy* (ed. T. P. Flint; Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 200-26.

⁶ This is in keeping with Calvin's discussion of the *sensus divinitatis*. "But, however that may be, yet the fact that men soon corrupt the seed of the knowledge of God, sown in their minds out of the wonderful workmanship of nature . . . must be imputed to their own failing. . . ." John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; 2 vols.; LCC; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 1:5, 15.

been created by the Lord and utterly depend upon him for our continued existence. We don't know what our happiness consists in, and we don't know how to achieve it. We don't know that we have been created in the image of God, and we don't grasp the significance of such characteristically human phenomena as love, humor, adventure, science, art, music, philosophy, history, and so on" (217).

Interestingly for those familiar with Van Til's Reformed apologetic, Plantinga mentions Van Til in the context of an all-too-familiar stereotype. He quotes Calvin, first of all, "As soon as ever we depart from Christ, there is nothing, be it ever so gross or insignificant in itself, respecting which we are not necessarily deceived" (217).⁷ He then surmises that Calvin may be saying that one who fails to know God will fail to know the most important thing about everything else. But, says Plantinga,

He may mean to go even further, however: perhaps he means to say that those who don't know God suffer much wider ranging cognitive deprivation and, in fact, don't really have any knowledge at all.⁸ (This view is at any rate attributed (rightly or wrongly) to some of his followers, for example, Cornelius van [sic] Til.) That seems a shade harsh, particularly because many who don't believe in God seem to know a great deal more about some topics than most believers do. (217)

The next two chapters fill out the "central part of the story" and can really be seen as two sides of the same coin. Chapter eight is entitled, "The Extended A/C Model: Revealed to Our Minds," and chapter nine is, "The Testimonial Model: Sealed Upon Our Hearts." And here the question is,

How does this model, with its excursion into theology, provide an answer to an epistemological question? How can it be a model for a way in which Christian belief has or could have justification, rationality warrant? The answer is simplicity itself. These beliefs . . . come . . . by way of the work of the Holy Spirit, who gets us to accept, causes us to believe, these great truths of the gospel. These beliefs don't come just by way of the normal operation of our natural faculties; they are a supernatural gift. (245)

⁷ This notion of being self-deceived in everything will be discussed below. It is a crucially important notion for apologetics.

⁸ It is possible that what Plantinga is attempting to set forth is akin to Van Til in certain important respects. Of course, it would be ludicrous to hold such a position as absolute agnosticism without qualification, and Van Til makes them in abundance. Of interest in this regard is David Reiter's article, "Plantinga on the Epistemic Implications of Naturalism," *The Journal of Philosophical Research* 25 (2000): 141-47. In that article, Reiter argues, among other things, that if Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism (found in *Warrant and Proper Function*, and elsewhere) is sound, then the perceptive naturalist has no propositional knowledge at all. Of course, the perceptive naturalist *does* know some things (again if knowledge is qualified in certain ways). The point is simply that his philosophical system cannot allow for such knowledge. There is immense pressure, then, to give up on the system. This kind of argument, it seems to me, is directly in line with the kind of thing Van Til was attempting to argue for and to do in his Reformed apologetic. There are implications of Reiter's argument, to the extent that it is true to Plantinga, particularly with respect to an externalist approach to epistemology, but those cannot be discussed at this point.

This supernatural gift is the Spirit's work of faith in us. In describing faith, Plantinga refers us to John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and to the Heidelberg Catechism—three sources of supreme significance in Reformed theology. In his discussion, however, there is a tendency to see faith as essentially directed toward propositions. Of course, the thrust of this chapter is to emphasize the cognitive element of faith—an emphasis that is needed today. But his discussion here leaves out the all-important point that faith's object is a Person rather than a proposition. The *πιστεύων εἰς* construction, so familiar to the New Testament but unfamiliar to the Greek language generally, could be obscured if belief is construed primarily as having as its object propositions. Nevertheless, Plantinga wants here to emphasize the cognitive element of faith—in line with Calvin and the Reformation generally—so that faith not be seen, as Plantinga says quoting Mark Twain, as “believing what you know ain't true” (247).

Faith, in this model, “is a work of the Holy Spirit” (249). This, according to Plantinga, is in line both with Calvin and with Aquinas. Here is where Plantinga introduces us to his IIHS—the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit—taking his cue from Aquinas.⁹ Faith, as a work of God the Holy Spirit, has as its object the divine teaching as given in Scripture (249). There are three things involved, then, in coming to believe “the great things of the gospel” (Plantinga borrows this phrase from Edwards): Scripture, the IIHS, and faith, the latter of which is “the human belief that results” (249-50). Furthermore, those beliefs constituting faith are taken as basic. They do not come as a result of any argument or inference on the part of the believer.¹⁰ Plantinga then notes, in a by-this-time-familiar pattern, that this faith can be justified, internally rational, and externally rational and warranted.

With regard to proper basicity and the role of Scripture, Plantinga begins by affirming that “in the typical case, therefore, Christian belief is *immediate*; it is formed in the *basic* way. It doesn't proceed by way of argument from, for example, the reliability of Scripture or the church” (259). He then works out what he thinks is a legitimate construal of Calvin's notion of Scripture's self-authentication. We should note a couple of key points here.

What is meant by self-authentication, according to Calvin according to Plantinga,

... is that we don't require argument from, for example, historically established premises about the authorship and reliability of the bit of Scripture in question to the conclusion that the bit in question is in fact true; that the whole process gets short-circuited by way of the tripartite process producing faith. Scripture is self-authenticating in the sense that for belief in the great things of the gospel to be justified ... no historical evidence and argument for the teaching in question, or for the veracity or

⁹ Plantinga quotes Aquinas from the *Summa Theologiae*, “The believer has sufficient motive for believing, for he is moved by the authority of divine teaching confirmed by miracles and, what is more, by the inward instigation of the divine invitation” (249).

¹⁰ A point well worth reading, but which we cannot take the time to repeat here, is Plantinga's response to the charge of arrogance, given this view of faith.

reliability or divine character of Scripture . . . are necessary. The process by which these beliefs have warrant for the believer swings free of those historical and other considerations; these beliefs have warrant in the basic way. (262)

Is this what Calvin means by self-authentication? Admittedly, the discussion in this particular section of the *Institutes* is not as perspicuous on that topic as it might have been. The chapter itself has to do with the witness of the Holy Spirit and the certainty of Scripture's authority. It is arguably the case, however, that Calvin is thinking of the self-authentication of Scripture *in the context* of the Spirit's testimony and our own certainty of Scripture, rather than as of a piece with it. More specifically, there seems to be a distinction between a particular aspect or attribute of *Scripture* and our response to Scripture. Self-authentication seems to best apply to the former, while the Spirit's testimony and our certainty has to do with the latter.

The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, I.4, seems to catch this distinction. In that section, the Confession notes,

The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.

The Confession goes on (e.g., in section ten of chapter one, in chapter ten, "Of Effectual Calling," and in chapter fourteen, "Of Saving Faith") to speak of the Spirit's testimony to Scripture and in us. At this particular point, however, the focus and emphasis seems to be on Scripture itself, whether or not we believe it. It seems to be the case that self-authentication (αὐτόπιστον) refers to *Scripture* itself, rather than to us. If the authentication were to us, the term would likely be something like ἀλλόπιστον.

In any case, the process of this believing, according to Plantinga, is something that is instituted by God because, without such initiation on God's part, we could not have belief suitable for warrant; the best we could have would be probable belief. Plantinga then shows, responding to Swinburne's probability argument in the latter's *Revelation*, that such arguments cannot conclude with belief sufficiently capable of warrant; thus, we could not know the great things of the gospel.

Chapter nine is a fascinating and engaging chapter, dealing with the affective aspect of faith. Here Plantinga makes use of Jonathan Edwards. Worth noting here is Plantinga's discussion of the question of priority of intellect or will. Though Plantinga concludes that Edwards thought intellect was prior, he himself believes that neither is (294). Questions as to Plantinga's understanding of Edwards here remain. Is it the case that the affections are so closely linked to the will, in distinction from the intellect? Or could it be that Edwards saw the affections as affections of *the heart* such that the whole person was included? Certainly distinctions are to be made between intellect and will, but it seems to me that

Edwards was more intent on bringing such human aspects together.¹¹ This is, however, a most illuminating chapter and brings a good and helpful balance to the previous chapter.

At this point we will need to move to some comments and questions. Much helpful and fascinating material cannot be discussed at this point. Chapters dealing with "Objections" (chapter ten), defeaters (chapter eleven), higher biblical criticism (chapter twelve), postmodernism and pluralism (chapter thirteen), and the problem of evil and suffering (chapter fourteen) cannot be surveyed here. They are, however, most illuminating chapters and would greatly benefit the reader who takes the time to study them.¹² We move now to some comments and questions.

II. Comments and Questions

The crux of Plantinga's argument in *Warranted Christian Belief* is (what Andrew Dole has rightly called) an "unresolved conditional."¹³ As noted, he wants to clear the way for a discussion of the *de facto* question by removing obstacles presented to Christian belief by the *de jure* question. Thus, the conditional argument—if Christianity is true, then its beliefs, or at least many or most of its essential beliefs, are or may be warranted.

I would like to propose in my analysis of Plantinga's argument that much of what he argues, by good and necessary consequence, bears directly on the *de facto* question to the extent that that question, the *de facto* question, is a substantial part of the discussion. In order to show this, we will attempt a modification of the *sensus divinitatis* as one crucial aspect of Plantinga's model. We will attempt to show that the *sensus divinitatis*, at least as it is presented to us by Paul (and we assume that Calvin was following Paul) is more in keeping with the tripartite distinction in Plantinga's extended A/C model, and thus is even more akin to that model than Plantinga himself seems to admit.

¹¹ Specifically, Edwards seemed to resist the kind of "faculty psychology" that was prevalent in his day, and that gave rise to the "enthusiasm" that he sought to reject. See K. Scott Oliphint, "Jonathan Edwards: Reformed Apologist," *WTJ* 57 (1995): 165-86.

¹² Just to cite one example, on Plantinga's analysis of a postmodern insistence on objectivity with respect to the enterprise of higher biblical criticism, Plantinga responds,

Is this true, and is objectivity required or desirable in this enterprise? . . . [I]t is far from obvious that if you want to learn the truth about a given area, the reasonable thing to do is to employ only assumptions accepted by everyone party to the dispute. Maybe you know something some of the others don't. . . . The traditional Christian thinks he knows by *faith* that Jesus was divine and that he rose from the dead. Hence, he will be unmoved by the fact that these truths are not especially probable on the evidence to which non-Troeltschian HBC limits itself—that is, evidence that explicitly excludes what one knows by faith. Why should that matter to him? . . . For a Christian to confine himself to the results of non-Troeltschian HBC would be a little like trying to mow your lawn with a nail scissors, or paint your house with a toothbrush; it might be an interesting experiment if you have time on your hands, but otherwise why limit yourself in this way? (417)

¹³ See Andrew Dole, "Cognitive Faculties, Cognitive Processes, and the Holy Spirit in Plantinga's Warrant Series" (Unpublished paper, August 2000).

We will then need to show, briefly, that, due to Plantinga's discussion of cognitive *processes* rather than cognitive *faculties*, it is the *de facto* question that is more directly addressed rather than the *de jure* question.

Finally, we will suggest that Plantinga's argument, by and large, goes a long way toward responding to the *de facto* question, and thus is (happily) more apologetically offensive in much of its discussion.

These are the three particular areas of comment, question, and concern that I would like to pursue. Their choice relates directly to a Reformed apologetic approach and therefore are useful for our more specific purposes. Much more, of course, could be discussed, but we will restrict ourselves to the above areas.

1. *The sensus divinitatis*

Because this element is central to Plantinga's argument, indeed it could be argued that it is *the* central focus of his A/C Model, it is all the more important that we try to be as clear as possible with regard to its character. It is crucial, it seems to me, that a construal of the *sensus divinitatis* be as accurate, as precise, as exact as possible in order for the model itself to have maximal credibility. Plantinga takes his cue about the *sensus divinitatis*, primarily, from Calvin. That, of course, is a legitimate and natural place from which to take one's cue, given that Calvin was, in many ways, *the* champion of such a notion. Calvin, however, simply saw himself as following the apostle Paul, particularly, as Paul works out this notion in Rom 1:18–2:17. If Calvin's formulation, then, is directly dependent on Paul's (more generally, on the *biblical* notion), its own warrant is only as strong as its adherence to the biblical teaching on the matter. It would be important for us, then, to see just exactly what Paul says with respect to the *sensus divinitatis* (to put the matter somewhat anachronistically).

The *locus classicus* for the *sensus divinitatis* is Rom 1:18–2:17. In that passage, according to Calvin, "Paul shows that the whole world is deserving of eternal death. It hence follows, that life is to be recovered in some other way, since we are all lost in ourselves."¹⁴ Paul's point, in other words, is initially to show that we are *all* under the grip of sin, and that the way out of that condition requires something outside of us (*extra nos*). It is crucial to note here that Paul's purview in this passage is *universal*; he is not attempting, in this passage, to describe the way things are or have been in particular circumstances only. He is not saying that *some* people have a *sensus divinitatis* and are therefore rendered without excuse, while others lack such knowledge and are thereby excused from judgment. Paul's point here in Rom 1 and 2 is to argue that we *all* are in the same depraved boat. Since we all are under the same curse of sin, the gospel, therefore, is for *all* of us as well—to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (v. 16).

Beginning in Rom 1, and into Rom 2, Paul's particular purpose is to describe just what our condition of sin looks like, how it works, what processes it engages

¹⁴ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul, the Apostle, to the Romans* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849).

in while we remain in such a condition. It is important for us, briefly, to look at Paul's analysis.¹⁵ We will focus our attention on Rom 1:18-25:

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. ¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; ²¹for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. ²⁴Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen. (RSV)

In order to make this as brief as possible, we will confine our discussion of this passage to elements germane to the *sensus divinitatis*. I would like to suggest the possibility, at this point, of revising Plantinga's discussion of the A/C model such that it is a kind of analogical mirror to the extended A/C model. There should be, I am suggesting, a tripartite account of the *sensus divinitatis*, given Paul's discussion, that is similar and analogous to the tripartite elements of the extended A/C model. Specifically, just as the extended A/C model includes Scripture, so also the *sensus divinitatis* is prompted by revelation from God; it is a kind of "speech" itself; just as the extended A/C model includes the IIHS, so the *sensus divinitatis*, to use Calvin's phrase, is internally "implanted by God" (IIG); just as the extended model includes faith, so also the *sensus divinitatis* includes (and essentially is) knowledge. We shall take the last element, knowledge, first.

What is Paul telling us in this passage? Notice, first of all, that we *all*, born as we are into our sinful state and continuing in that state by virtue of our wickedness, nevertheless, *know God*. The way in which Paul introduces this notion is not, in v. 18, to tell us first of all about our knowledge of God. His concern is the *reason* for the expression of God's wrath. And the reason for such an expression by God is, according to Paul, our suppression of the truth. But Paul immediately realizes, as he writes, that he should explain what he means by suppression and by truth. He takes up the latter first. He affirms, beginning in v. 19, a universal knowledge of God in the context of elaborating, first, our suppression of the truth (v. 18), and then by explaining what that truth *is* that we suppress. In sum, the truth that we suppress is not truths about nature, first of all, or about

¹⁵ We should recall here Plantinga's analysis of the teachings of Scripture. We come to believe these things, quoting the Belgic Confession again, "because the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that they are from God, and also because they prove themselves to be from God." Thus, in looking at what Paul teaches, we are not simply comparing what Paul says to what Calvin says about the *sensus divinitatis*, rather we are attempting to see what *God* says, through Paul, about the *sensus divinitatis*, according to which Calvin sought to be faithful.

aspects of this world. The truth that we suppress in unrighteousness is simply this—the “clearly perceived” (καθορᾶται) and “understood” (νοούμενα) knowledge of God. This is no obscure knowledge, neither is it knowledge that is beyond our capacity to understand. This knowledge that we have is both perceived—clearly perceived—and understood.

And it is knowledge with significant content. We know much, by virtue of this knowledge, about God. We know his invisible nature (ἀόρατα), namely, his eternal power (ἡ τε αἰδὶος αὐτοῦ δύναμις) and deity (θεϊότης). We know these things to such an extent that Paul can pronounce, in v. 21, that, since the creation of the world to the present, human beings are creatures who “knew God” (διότι γινόντες τὸν θεόν).

This is strong language. It indicates that all of us, “since the creation of the world,” have been people such that we knew (and know) God—we know his deity, his power, those things that are a part of his invisible nature. And what are those things that are a part of God’s invisible nature? Charles Hodge, in his commentary on Romans, says that Paul means to delineate here “all the divine perfections”¹⁶ in his affirmation of those things which we know about God. Presumably, then, human beings are created such that they know God to be a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.¹⁷ Important truths such as these (and we could say these truths are really the *most* important ones) God has seen fit not to leave to our own reasonings to discover; they are not left to the schools or seminaries; they are not in any way dependent on the capacities of human creatures themselves for the process of knowing. They are given to us, revealed, implanted in us, by the creative power and providence of God the Creator.

This seems altogether plausible and consistent with God’s character. There would seem to be something amiss if God chose to create creatures such as us, but also chose to hide himself from us, leaving us either without a witness to himself, or, perhaps worse, leaving us to ourselves to try to figure out what he was like.¹⁸

Just what kind of knowledge this is and how it might function is another question, but the import of Paul’s pronouncement here should not be lost. He is affirming that human beings, *all* human beings “since the creation of the world,” know, and have always known, the character and attributes of the true God.

This would indicate in fairly strong terms that, whatever else we might want to say about the *sensus divinitatis*, it seems that it is *more* than merely a capacity

¹⁶ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 37. Hodge likely got this from Calvin; see Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:5.11.

¹⁷ *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question 4.

¹⁸ It is worth noting here that the *Westminster Confession* rightly attributes our inability to know and serve God, not, in the first place, to our sinfulness, but to our constitution as *creatures*. We are, as created, inherently limited in our ability to understand and to worship God. Thus, God’s revelation of himself to us, as Paul notes, was necessary, not simply because of or after the fall of man into sin, but at creation’s inception. See *Westminster Confession of Faith*, VII.1.

that we have. The *sensus divinitatis* is more than a function of our human constitution. The "sensus" is, in fact, "notitia."¹⁹

Plantinga's references to the *sensus* seem to shy away from the *sensus* as knowledge. He refers to the *sensus* as a "faculty," a "cognitive mechanism," a "disposition" or "set of dispositions" to form theistic beliefs in different circumstances; it is a kind of "input-output device"; it has its own deliverances, and it resembles perception, memory, and *a priori* beliefs. These descriptions are primarily functional; they look more like functional operators with a view to knowledge rather than knowledge itself. It seems, however, that, in Paul's mind, the *sensus* is more a *deliverance* itself than a device, more content than capacity, more *sensus* than set of dispositions.

I say that the *sensus* is *more* "this" than "that" because, even if knowledge, there still must be, presumably, a "capacity" for such. Perhaps Plantinga is wanting to emphasize the functional aspect of the *sensus* in order to further support his notion of warrant as proper function. But the fact that it constitutes *knowledge* might change the way in which the *sensus* is able to find its place in a "proper function" epistemology. For example, if the *sensus* is knowledge, and not simply a capacity or functional process toward such, then, whatever else we want to say about the *sensus divinitatis*, its content necessarily entails warrant. It is not within the realm of Paul's purview at this point that the *sensus divinitatis* would, or even *could*, malfunction.

The second aspect of the *sensus divinitatis* is the internal implanting by God of this knowledge (IIg). Notice, again, how Calvin describes it:

To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God *himself* has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty. Ever renewing its memory, he repeatedly sheds fresh drops. Since, therefore, men one and all perceive that there is a God and that he is their Maker, they are condemned by their own testimony because they have failed to honor him and to consecrate their lives to his will.²⁰

And further,

Men of sound judgment will always be sure that a sense of divinity which can never be effaced is *engraven upon men's minds*. Indeed, the perversity of the impious, who though they struggle furiously are unable to extricate themselves from the fear of God, is abundant testimony that this conviction, namely that there is some God, is naturally inborn in all, and is fixed deep within, as it were in the very marrow. . . . For the world . . . tries as far as it is able to cast away all knowledge of God, and by every means to corrupt the worship of him. I only say that though the stupid hardness in their minds, which the impious eagerly conjure up to reject God, wastes away, yet the sense of divinity, which they greatly wished to have extinguished, thrives and presently burgeons. From this we conclude that it is not a doctrine that must first be learned in

¹⁹ How could we explain knowledge of this sort? An explanation is not essential to the argument, but perhaps this kind of knowledge would be akin to something like Russell's acquaintance theory of knowledge.

²⁰ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:3.1 (my emphasis).

school, but one of which each of us is master from his mother's womb and which nature itself permits none to forget, although many strive with every nerve to this end.²¹

We know God, not because we have reasoned our way to him, or have worked through the necessary scientific procedures, or have inferred his existence from other things that we know, but we know him "because God has shown it" to us (ὁ θεὸς γὰρ αὐτοῖς ἐφάνερωσεν, Rom 1:19). The knowledge we have of God is knowledge that has been given to us *by* God. It is "implanted" in us, "engraven" in our minds, "naturally inborn" in all of us, "fixed deep within" us, a knowledge "which nature permits none to forget." As Creator, God has guaranteed that he will never be without a witness to those creatures who have been made in his image. He has insured that all of his human creatures will, and will always, know him. The *sensus*, then, is not "a doctrine" or teaching that is learned, but which is present within us "from our mother's womb." Such is the case because this knowledge is not dependent on us to be acquired; it is given by God.

But how could that be the case? How could it be the case that something within us, we flawed and imperfect human beings, could be such that its content was always and everywhere warranted? This brings us to the third element of the *sensus divinitatis*—revelation.

Traditionally, this section of the book of Romans has been understood to be discussing the topic of natural, or general, *revelation*. The knowledge of God which human beings possess is not a knowledge that depends for its acquisition and content on something that is within us.²² It is a knowledge that is *given*, and it is given by God himself. It is the revelation of the character of God, given to God's human creatures, in and through the things that are made. Thus, the *sensus* is regarded by Paul as *knowledge itself* which comes directly and repeatedly from God himself through the things that God made and sustains. This, of course, is consistent with the Old Testament understanding of natural revelation as well. The Psalmist, therefore, can say,

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. (Ps 19:1-2, RSV)

Of course, it is not, strictly speaking, the *heavens* that are declaring God's glory, but it is *God* declaring his glory "through the things that are made" (τοῖς ποιήμασιν, Rom 1:20).

It would seem then, if the above is true or close to the truth, that the A/C model is, in significant and substantial ways, more closely akin to the extended

²¹ Ibid., 1:3.3.

²² Of course, to some extent it "depends" on us in that it would be impossible for us to have it if we did not exist, exist as human beings with cognitive capacities, etc. The distinction here is akin to that between an externalist and internalist notion of warrant. This knowledge does not depend on us in that it is acquired externally, as God himself implants it in us.

A/C model than Plantinga himself has indicated. The extended A/C model, we will remember, consists of the three elements of Scripture as God's revelation to his people, the IHS and the faith given by God to us. It should not escape our notice, then, that, given our discussion of the *sensus divinitatis* above, the A/C model itself consists substantially of the same three elements. The A/C model, with its central focus on the *sensus divinitatis*, is itself (natural or general) revelation. Thus, this model also consists of a knowledge of God and his ways in the world. The A/C model also has, as one of its elements, the Internal Implanting of God. That is, like the extended A/C model, the knowledge that we have of God is instigated and implanted by God, and is not dependent on our cognitive faculties for its creation, sustenance or content. And just as the extended A/C model includes the faith that is given to us by the Holy Spirit, so the A/C model includes the knowledge that is given to us by God.²³ In light of these three elements—revelation, IIG, and knowledge—it would seem that the *sensus divinitatis* and thus the A/C model is in important ways (important, that is, for an externalist account of warrant) relevantly and strikingly similar to Christian belief, and thus to the extended A/C model. Given this fact, this fact of the *sensus divinitatis* being relevantly similar to Christian belief, the A/C model is more similar to the extended A/C model than Plantinga himself has indicated.

Turning back to our passage from Romans, there is another factor that we need to see from Paul's discussion. We should remember that Paul began his discussion of the *sensus divinitatis*, not directly, but indirectly, as an elaboration of the notion of our suppressing the truth. Specifically, it is the *truth* suppressed that is the subject of Paul's description of the *sensus divinitatis*. It is not, we should note, the *suppression* that is a part of the *sensus divinitatis*, but the *truth* suppressed that is. The suppression itself is, rather, an elaboration of what it means to be ungodly and wicked.²⁴

This said, I think Plantinga and Calvin are correct, as we noted in Part I, to attribute any malfunction or dysfunction with respect to theistic belief, not to the *sensus divinitatis per se*, but rather, "the *seed* of the knowledge of God," as Calvin puts it, or the *deliverances* of the *sensus divinitatis*, as Plantinga has it.²⁵

²³ There are, of course, important differences between the tripartite elements in these two models, but they cannot be discussed here.

²⁴ This seems to be what Paul means when he describes the ungodly (ἀσέβειαν) and wicked (ἀδικίαν) as ἀνθρώπων τῶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐν ἀδικίᾳ κατεχόντων.

²⁵ There are places in *Warranted Christian Belief* where Plantinga does attribute malfunction and dysfunction to the *sensus divinitatis*. There are other places where the dysfunction relates to *what we do* with the *sensus divinitatis* itself. I suspect the latter is closer to what Paul means. I can't see, at this point, that highlighting this truth would significantly alter Plantinga's model, except to say that dysfunction itself lies somewhere beyond the *sensus divinitatis*. There are two reasons, at least, that the *sensus divinitatis* should be construed as, by definition, warranted. The first reason is that, as was noted above, it just *is* knowledge. The second reason, however, is as important. The *sensus divinitatis*, as knowledge, is, in its nascent form, *given* by God. The process by which human creatures acquire that knowledge is the process of God's "implantation." Thus, both the process of acquisition and the status of the *sensus divinitatis* guarantee its warrant. So how should we think of that knowledge once it is suppressed, exchanged, subverted, and perverted? We should, it seems, see these processes

Thus, while the *sensus divinitatis* itself is always functioning properly, improper function lies elsewhere; that malfunction lies somewhere "beyond" the knowledge of God given to us by God in natural revelation.

The implications of this for Plantinga's epistemology, and for Christian apologetics generally, are multifold and abundant, exciting and stimulating. We can only touch on certain elements here.

First, as was said above, it seems to be altogether true and right, that human beings, by virtue of their being created in the image of God, always and everywhere carry the knowledge of God with them. This knowledge does not come by the proper and diligent exercise of their cognitive, emotive, or volitional capacities; it rather comes by God's own revelatory activity within them.²⁶

Here, it seems to me, Reiter is right. In his "Calvin's 'Sense of Divinity' and Externalist Knowledge of God,"²⁷ Reiter argues (among other things) the following concerning Calvin's Sense of Divinity:

(CSD) For any sane human being S, if S has any propositional knowledge at t, then S knows at t that God exists.²⁸

This formulation has numerous implications for (an externalist) epistemology. One implication is that it allows for an explanation of the attainment of knowledge for those who, perhaps for reasons of age, lack of effort, or malfunction in some other faculty, would otherwise be deemed cognitively incompetent to know such things. It allows, in other words, for the knowledge of God to reside in *all* human beings, to the extent that they can attain knowledge at all.²⁹

One important qualifier needs to be added here, and should be developed, but cannot be elaborated. Since this knowledge of God that all people have is both *knowledge* and *implanted* by God through the dynamic of his revelatory activity, it is a knowledge that is in many ways quite different from most other kinds of knowledge that we acquire. It is a knowledge, we could say, that is presupposed by any other kind of knowledge. For this reason, it may be best to think of it as more *psychological* than *epistemological*. It is a knowledge that God imposes on his human creatures, and continues to impose on them, even as they deny or ignore him. It is a knowledge that he implants "through the things that

as presupposing the true knowledge of God, as Paul does, and thus as secondary to and dependent on the *sensus divinitatis* itself.

²⁶ Notice Paul's point that that which is known about God is made manifest within us (*φανερὸν ἔστιν ἐν ἀνθρώποις*), and Calvin's that "God himself has implanted" this knowledge and that "God himself, to prevent any man from pretending ignorance, has endued all men with some idea of his Godhead." The actor, clearly, according to both Paul and Calvin, with respect to the *sensus divinitatis*, is God, not us; we are the (unwilling?) patients.

²⁷ David Reiter, "Calvin's 'Sense of Divinity' and Externalist Knowledge of God," *Faith and Philosophy* 15, no. 3 (July 1998): 253-70.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 256.

²⁹ *Ibid.* Reiter does take note of the difficulty of attributing knowledge to infants and to those who are judged to be insane. I think Paul allows for knowledge in such cases, but to argue the point here would take us too far afield.

are made." Thus, it comes always and anon, whether or not the human creature claims to know God, or to have reason for not knowing. This, of course, needs more discussion.

Another implication of this formulation is that theistic belief of this kind always and everywhere has warrant. That is, there can be no situation in which God implants the knowledge of himself and in which the person to whom this knowledge is given fails to know God. What, we may now ask, does this mean for Plantinga's proper function epistemology? We have already seen that a construal of the *sensus divinitatis* as relevantly similar to Christian belief in its tripartite aspects could be useful. It seems further refinement might be helpful as well, including at least the following three elements.

(1) If it is the case that the *sensus divinitatis* constitutes knowledge, and knowledge given by God himself, then, while there can easily be similarities between the *sensus divinitatis* and other basic ways of acquiring knowledge—ways like perception and memory—we may also need to affirm that there are important and crucial differences between the *sensus divinitatis* and other ways of acquiring knowledge or warranted belief. As Plantinga now has it, beliefs formed as a result of the *sensus divinitatis* are similar to beliefs acquired by way of perception, memory, etc. That is, Christian beliefs "can have warrant that they don't get by way of being believed on the evidential basis of other beliefs; they can have warrant they don't get by way of warrant transfer from other beliefs. . . . The beliefs of the Christian faith . . . are a proper *starting point* for thought" (342-43).³⁰ The point here is that there are ways in which the *sensus divinitatis* is relevantly similar to the deliverances of memory, perception, and so on. That seems to me, with certain qualifications, to be right.

But there are also significant differences between the *sensus divinitatis* and other ways of acquiring belief and knowledge. And here, it might be best to approach this question in light of the analysis given of Plantinga's epistemology by Michael Sudduth in his fine article, "Can Religious Unbelief Be Proper Function Rational."³¹ Sudduth's primary problem, it seems, with Plantinga's proper function approach to epistemology is that, when it comes to the warrant of theistic belief, there seems to be a conflict with respect to the model Plantinga wants to present. Sudduth notes,

Although Plantinga is certainly free to develop his own epistemological model for warranted theistic belief, the problem is that in fact he has two different models. . . . The first is consistent with the [proper function] rationality of religious unbelief in some circumstances; the second is not.³²

In order to follow Sudduth's suggestion, we should summarize his argument. The thesis that Plantinga initially wants to affirm with regard to theistic belief, according to Sudduth, is the following:

³⁰ Plantinga is referring here to Christian belief. I am not attempting to equate Christian belief with the knowledge that is the *sensus divinitatis*. That point will not concern us here, however.

³¹ Michael C. Sudduth, "Can Religious Unbelief Be Proper Function Rational," *Faith and Philosophy* 16, no. 3 (1999): 297-314.

³² *Ibid.*, 306.

[P1] There are circumstances C such that, given any human person S, if S is in C and S's (relevant) truth-aimed cognitive faculties are functioning properly, then S holds a firm basic theistic belief.³³

This thesis assumes the *sensus divinitatis*, which is what is meant in [P1] by "(relevant) truth-aimed cognitive faculties." The question that Sudduth raises with respect to this thesis is this: can theistic *unbelief* be proper function rational (hereafter, PF-rational)? In attempting to answer this question, we have to understand something of the nature of defeaters. Plantinga, according to Sudduth, holds to what he calls the *rationality defeater principle*:

[DP] Given any person S and any belief B, if S acquires a(n) (undefeated) defeater D for B, then S is no longer rational in holding B (at least not with the same degree of firmness).³⁴

If a person, therefore, acquired a defeater for theistic belief, then holding theistic belief would be PF-irrational and not holding theistic belief would be PF-rational.

The question, however, is whether or not a person *could* acquire a defeater for theistic belief. Plantinga holds that, if theism is not true, religious unbelief could be PF-rational. If theism is true, on the other hand, then religious unbelief is PF-irrational. Sudduth thinks this latter statement is replete with problems, given Plantinga's epistemological model.

It is important to point out that the argument here for the PF-rationality of religious unbelief is logically consistent with [P1]. What follows from [P1] is that if a person is in the relevant circumstances and does not hold a firm theistic belief, holds no theistic belief, or believes the negation of theism, he suffers from some cognitive malfunction, or perhaps his cognitive state has been produced by something other than truth-aimed cognitive faculties. In addition to circumstances C (that call for firm theistic belief), there are plausibly circumstances C* which include having an undefeated defeater for theistic belief. Here, depending on the actual defeater, the appropriate doxastic response for a reasonable person will be withholding theistic belief, holding the negation of theism, or merely holding a less than firm theistic belief.³⁵

There are two other principles, given by Sudduth, of Plantinga's theistic epistemology, but they need not be mentioned here in order to grasp Sudduth's complaint.³⁶

³³ Ibid., 297.

³⁴ Ibid., 300.

³⁵ Ibid., 307.

³⁶ Specifically, Sudduth notes: [P2] Given any fallen person S(f), if S(f) acquires a defeater D for some theistic belief T, then S(f)'s acquiring D depends on cognitive malfunction in another relevant cognitive module; and [P3] Given any fallen person S(f), if S(f)'s acquiring a defeater D for some theistic belief T depends on cognitive malfunction in another relevant cognitive module, then the cognitive state of religious unbelief is not PF-rational. Premise 2 is given as consistent with Plantinga's discussion of the problem of evil in chapter fourteen of *Warranted Christian Belief*. There Plantinga notes that if a person did, in fact, acquire a defeater for theistic belief, there would have to be cognitive malfunction in the person, likely in the *sensus divinitatis* itself. Sudduth's concern is that

It is, however, in the fourth premise, [P4], that Sudduth locates Plantinga's perceived inconsistency.

[P4] Given any fallen human person S(f), S(f) has some cognitive faculty F (i.e., the *sensus divinitatis*), such that if F is functioning properly, S(f) holds a firm theistic belief T.³⁷

Sudduth's complaint is that [P1] and [P4] constitute two models of warranted theistic belief. Sudduth sees [P1] as allowing for situations in which a person's *sensus divinitatis* is functioning properly and yet that person is not holding theistic belief. The reason for this is that a person might acquire a defeater for that belief.

Distinctions must be made here, distinctions that, as far as I can tell, would be true given any of the classical Christian positions. Put simply, we must give full weight to the distinctions made with respect to the conversion of a person to the Christian faith. As Plantinga explains, there are certain beliefs that are caused in us by the testimony of Scripture and the IIHS. More specifically, as Plantinga notes, there are three things that are involved in a believer's coming to embrace the gospel: "Scripture (the divine teaching), the internal invitation or instigation of the Holy Spirit, and faith, the human belief that results" (249-50).

It should be noted here that, not a part of the tripartite belief set is the *sensus divinitatis*, and rightly so. The *sensus divinitatis*, as Calvin and as Paul conceive of it, is something that is *universal* to human beings, while the above tripartite set applies only to Christian believers. Thus, when discussing the *sensus divinitatis* relative to Christian belief there can easily be a confusion as to the former's role in the latter. The *sensus divinitatis* does *not* serve to render Christian belief warranted, or to bring it about that Christian belief is produced. Rather, the role of the *sensus divinitatis* is to guarantee that human creatures, as made in God's image, know the One in whose image they are made, and, given that knowledge, the *result* of the *sensus divinitatis*, at least in part, since the fall, is to render us all "without excuse," or, perhaps a better translation would be, *without an apologetic* (ἀναπολογία). It is not the case, therefore, that the design of the *sensus divinitatis* is to play a causal role in the establishing or maintaining or forming of Christian belief.³⁸

The second thing to note with respect to the *sensus divinitatis* is that it is not a disposition such that it may or may not produce theistic belief depending on the relevant circumstances. While it may be (and, I think, *is*) circumstance-dependent in important ways, it is identical with the knowledge of God. Thus,

these premises denote a kind of irrationality transference principle such that my belief, B, is irrational if based on an irrational belief, A, and Sudduth argues, given his construal of a defeater system, that such a principle is mistaken.

³⁷ Ibid., 304.

³⁸ A reminder here that, as we have construed the *sensus divinitatis*, the acquisition of knowledge of God that is the *sensus divinitatis* is itself similar and analogous to the acquisition of Christian belief.

there is no situation in which one will have a *sensus divinitatis* and not have knowledge of God. To put the matter in theological language, entailed in being made in the image of God is that one have, and always have (to a greater or lesser degree, perhaps) the knowledge of God.

How does this comport with the *sensus divinitatis*'s being circumstance-dependent? The circumstances on which the *sensus divinitatis* is dependent are, in a word, all of creation itself. The circumstance that must obtain for the *sensus divinitatis* to exist at all in a person is that one must be created and be in God's creation as one of his creatures made in his image. This, I think, is true to what Paul is arguing in Rom 1. He is *not* saying that there are only certain circumstances that *produce* theistic knowledge or belief in us. Rather, that knowledge or belief comes "through the things that are made" and thus through everything there is, except God himself (given that God is the only one having the property "not having been made"). This means that there simply are *no* circumstances in which theistic belief or knowledge is absent from a person.

Does this substantially alter Plantinga's PF-rationality thesis according to Sudduth's [P1]? I don't think so, at least not *prima facie* as it is stated. As stated, [P1] says that there *are* circumstances such that if the *sensus divinitatis* is functioning properly in those circumstances then one holds a firm theistic belief. That seems to be consistent with our understanding of the *sensus divinitatis*, as long as one affirms (and here there *are* some differences) that such circumstances are creation itself, rather than a narrower set including the stars, flowers, etc. It is also consistent in that it affirms the proper functioning of the *sensus divinitatis*, which, as we have seen, is a given. So, at least *prima facie* there seems to be no conflict with the *sensus divinitatis* as understood above and [P1]. There is, of course, a conflict with the way in which Sudduth parses [P1], given that the circumstances relative to the production of theistic belief are limited and thus the possibility of PF-rational unbelief is affirmed. The latter, however, does not follow from [P1] as stated, since, as stated, the only constraint on the circumstances is that they exist, not that they be limited.³⁹

The underlying concern for Sudduth, however, relates to the title of his article. He thinks that Plantinga allows for the PF-rationality of religious unbelief in much of what he says, but excludes such a notion in other formulations of his model. And this concern brings us to a discussion of the possibility of defeaters for theistic belief, and the question of the affirmation of the rationality of religious unbelief.

Sudduth sees an inconsistency between [P1] and [P4]. What follows from [P1] is the possibility of a defeater for theistic belief in certain circumstances. In that formulation of PF-rationality, there is a wide-ranging set of circumstances in which theistic belief is formed in us. What follows from [P4], however, is that

³⁹ Of course, I am disagreeing with Sudduth's understanding of [P1], and since [P1] is Sudduth's own formulation his understanding of it is the correct understanding. The only point I am wanting to make here is that, unless Sudduth sees the circumstances of [P1] as necessarily and inherently limited, then my understanding of [P1] is plausible.

religious unbelief isn't PF-rational in *any* circumstance. Now [P1] is consistent with the rationality defeater principle:

[DP] Given any person S and any belief B, if S acquires a(n) (undefeated) defeater D for B, then S is no longer rational in holding B (at least not with the same degree of firmness).⁴⁰

[P4], however, is not consistent with [DP], and therein lies Sudduth's complaint. If Plantinga's model is [P1], then the possibility of theistic belief being PF-irrational and theistic unbelief being PF-rational is granted. If Plantinga's model is [P4], then no such possibility is allowed. Sudduth gives us an example of the application of [DP] to theistic unbelief, given [P1].

Lisa has been raised in a Christian family. During her youth she holds her theistic belief in a basic way, but in her later teenage years her theistic belief isn't as strong. The cares of college life, sexual indulgence, and late-night parties slowly erode her thoughts of God. While a senior in college, she is exposed to Sigmund Freud's idea of wish fulfillment. She becomes convinced that the belief she had in an invisible friend called Merlin while a young girl was one such belief. Upon further reflection, though, she sees that her belief in God is significantly analogous to the belief she once had in the invisible Merlin. So she comes to believe that (p) her belief in God is really the product of wish fulfillment, a convenient defense mechanism against the hostile forces of one's environment. Her readings in Freud confirm this. Moreover, she also believes that (q) the objective probability of a belief being true given that it is produced by wish fulfillment is either low or inscrutable. (I say "or inscrutable" here because perhaps she is simply agnostic about the probability of a belief being true given that it was produced by wish fulfillment, rather than estimating that probability to be low). She then believes that the objective probability of her theistic belief being true is either low or inscrutable. Lisa has acquired an undercutting defeater for her theistic belief. If her defeater is partial and itself undefeated (as might be the case if she didn't hold either p or q very firmly), then the rational thing to do would be to hold her theistic belief less firmly than she did before acquiring this defeater. Perhaps her defeater is complete and itself undefeated (e.g., she has great enthusiasm for projective theories of religious belief or alternatively her theistic belief is very weak before encountering p and q), then if she is PF-rational she will no longer hold her theistic belief at all.⁴¹

There are two concerns that motivate Sudduth's complaint here. First is the consistency problem. Sudduth argues that there are inconsistencies in Plantinga's models for PF-rationality. One model, [P1], allows for the PF-rationality of theistic unbelief given undefeated defeaters for theistic belief.

We should note here that Sudduth's complaint applies both to Plantinga's notion of the *sensus divinitatis* as well as to mine. If the *sensus divinitatis* is warranted knowledge of God, and if it is the case that it is continually implanted by God in all of his creatures made in his image, why is it problematic to assert that beliefs that counter such knowledge are irrational? Sudduth mentions why:

⁴⁰ Sudduth, "Can Religious Unbelief Be Proper Function Rational," 300.

⁴¹ Ibid.

The likelihood of [P1] given the truth of theism is itself controversial, as it is not clear how the truth of theism makes it likely that we should hold theistic belief in a basic (as opposed to nonbasic) way. [P4] would be even more controversial. It would require affirming that God not only wants us to have true beliefs about him that are formed in a basic way, but that it is likely that he wants us to have basic beliefs about him (or at least his existence) that could not be subject to defeat, except on the condition of irrationality.⁴²

The point here is that Plantinga's position (as well as the position taken above), if closer to [P4] than [P1] is even more controversial than his initial position. But the degree of controversy surely can't be a reason, in and of itself, to give up on one's position. If that were the case, believers in Christianity would be better suited giving up on their beliefs as well. Degree of controversy, then, can't really be what Sudduth is after. And it isn't. He continues:

For instance, when it comes to defending basic theistic belief against the charge of fideism (in chapter 10 of WCB), Plantinga is quick to establish the similarity between basic theistic belief and other basic beliefs that are not immune to defeat just because they are basic. Plantinga says: "Theistic belief would certainly not be immune to argument and defeat just by virtue of being basic. In this, theistic belief only resembles other kinds of beliefs accepted in the basic way. . . ."⁴³

The more important problem for Plantinga, according to Sudduth, is not the problem of degree of controversy, but rather the problem of fideism. If [P4] is correct, then, according to Sudduth, the charge of fideism is not evaded by Plantinga. And, if [P4] is correct, then, unlike perceptual, testimonial, and memorial beliefs, theistic unbelief can never be PF-rational because there will be no relevant circumstance in which it can acquire an undefeated defeater. And if it can never acquire an undefeated defeater, then, presumably one's theistic belief is necessarily maintained in the face of the possibility of all kinds of contrary grounds or evidence. What Plantinga means to say is this: "The fact, if it is a fact, that belief in God is properly basic doesn't for a moment imply that it is immune to argument, objection, or defeat; it is surely no consequence of my . . . A/C model . . . that basic beliefs are beyond rational appraisal" (344).

Now Sudduth interprets Plantinga here as affirming that "the design plan for basic theistic belief is similar to the design plan for some other basic beliefs in that they share the property of being susceptible to defeat, and defeat without irrationality anywhere else in one's cognitive system."⁴⁴

How might we construe theistic belief, given the above? Return to Sudduth's example of Lisa. Lisa determines that the probability of her theistic belief being true, given reflection and the irresistible force of Freud's analysis, is too low to sustain any longer. So, says Sudduth, if she is PF-rational she will no longer hold her theistic belief at all. But why does Sudduth want to affirm Lisa's denial of previously held theistic belief as PF-rational? Presumably, at least in

⁴² Ibid., 306.

⁴³ Ibid., 306-7.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

part, because the defeater system has done its work in a PF-rational way. That is, it follows from [P1] and [DP] that one would be epistemically weak or inferior (in an externalist sense) if one chose not to do what the design plan of the defeater system required, and, given Lisa's experience, the design plan requires that she give up her theistic belief.

But there seems to be another way to construe Lisa's predicament, a way that is consistent with Paul's discussion of the *sensus divinitatis* and related matters in Rom 1.⁴⁵ There Paul notes that, though we all have the knowledge of God implanted in us by God himself, the effects of sin in us are such that we inevitably (inevitably, that is, unless the tripartite elements of Christian belief are applied to us) suppress that truth in unrighteousness. This suppression is done in a number of ways which Paul lists in graphic and profuse terms in vv. 24-32. The general process of this suppression, however, is this: we exchange that truth that God has given to us by way of revelation, truth about his own character, for a lie (ἀλήθειαν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν τῷ ψεύδει, v. 25). It is plausible to understand Lisa in Sudduth's example as an incident of working out the process that Paul describes as suppression of the truth. The very theistic belief that she has, as given by God through the things that are made, is exchanged. Through education and reflection, she determined that the probability of the truth of her belief was considered by her to be too low for her to continue to hold theistic belief. She exchanged the truth given by God for a lie, a false notion that theistic belief was merely the fulfillment of a wish.

Sudduth's concern, however, centers around whether or not Plantinga, given the above discussion, must concede that this exchange renders Lisa PF-rational in her unbelief. It seems to me at this point that we would have to admit that it does not. Again, taking Paul's cue, it seems to be no part of the design plan to affirm that those beliefs that go contrary to belief in God are PF-rational. They may be rational on a purely internalist or deontological model (though I think that, too, is highly questionable), but in order to affirm their PF-rationality on an externalist model, we would need to affirm that the *sensus divinitatis*, for Lisa, was consistent with her theistic unbelief. We would have to affirm that Lisa's not believing in God, her exchanging the truth of the knowledge of God for a lie, a lie which entailed theistic unbelief, was consistent with the knowledge of God that she has as one made in God's image. And that affirmation, it seems to me, runs counter to Paul's argument in Rom 1.⁴⁶

There is a further question, perhaps more important to Sudduth than the above question, as to the consistency of Plantinga on this point. Here I think all

⁴⁵ I realize that I am presently ignoring the distinction that is crucial to make between theistic belief according to the *sensus divinitatis* and Christian belief according to the tripartite conditions mentioned above. I will address the latter below, but, for the sake of clarity, will attempt to stay with the former here. I suspect that the same could be said in either case of belief sets.

⁴⁶ We should note here that Paul's notion of exchanging the truth of God for a lie does not seem to indicate that the knowledge of God given by God is thereby absent or destroyed. Since the knowledge of God is entailed by being made in God's image, there is no possible way that such knowledge can be obliterated. This needs further discussion, which cannot be advanced here.

that Plantinga needs to do is extend C of Sudduth's [P1] to include creation itself, and then [P4] would follow from [P1] such that, if one thought one acquired a theistic belief, such a defeater would be a result of some cognitive, emotive, or volitional malfunction—in a word, a result of suppression of the truth, the effects of sin. It would be a defeater that was PF-irrational.⁴⁷ Similarly, any argument or objection to theistic belief would likewise be an argument or objection that was, in the main, PF-irrational.

Does this mean that the *sensus divinitatis* is *not*, after all, relevantly similar to other modes of belief acquisition, perception, memory, and *a priori*, for example? It has certainly been a significant part of Plantinga's argument to insist on the contrary. The point, here, however, is that the *sensus divinitatis* is *analogous*, though perhaps not *identical*, to the other modes of belief acquisition. For example, in *Warranted Christian Belief*, Plantinga wants to exclude testimony as an avenue through which a proposition might be taken as properly basic. It is excluded, he says, "because testimony, like inference, is not an ultimate source of warrant; a belief taken on testimony has warrant for someone only if that belief has warrant for the testifier" (186, n. 23). In the case of the IIHS, however, testimony would seem necessarily to be an ultimate source of warrant since *anything* to which the Holy Spirit testifies necessarily has warrant. This, however, would only be the case when it is *God* testifying (as he does in natural revelation). There would be, therefore, a distinct *disanalogy* between proper basicity in this context as compared to all others.⁴⁸ Like every analogy, there are elements that are alike and elements that are different. The assertion of an unqualified parity thesis, therefore, between these kinds of belief is highly questionable. I am not at all sure Plantinga makes such an assertion, nor am I convinced that he needs to for his argument in this area to hold.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ In personal correspondence, Sudduth notes modifiers and qualifications to the notion of PF-rationality that may serve to modify Plantinga's (and my) understanding of defeaters here. Specifically, Sudduth would argue that "defeater-based religious unbelief has *proximate* external PF-rationality, but not *remote* external PF-rationality. It has a kind of *local* external rationality associated with the proper functioning of the defeater system, which I regard as a source of experience (doxastic and otherwise)." This may be right. Clearly, the notion of rationality needs much more discussion and clarification than I have given it here. Not only so, but if the contention of the *sensus divinitatis* as the ever-present and indestructible knowledge of God is correct, there needs to be some kind of revision, or addition, or codicil added to the notion of proper function as an externalist account of knowledge such that this *psychological* knowledge is inextricably related to, and presupposed by, the *epistemological*. It would seem that the design plan (if we think of it here, loosely, as the revealed will of God) is that the two types of knowledge be consonant. When they are not, there has been some malfunction in the person, rather than the plan.

⁴⁸ It may even be the case that our notion of the *sensus divinitatis* will need to be seen as *grounding* all properly basic notions, and thus as presupposed by them. This would locate the *sensus divinitatis* in a unique place, entailing unique epistemological implications as well.

⁴⁹ I attempted to make this point in my review of Plantinga's first two volumes on warrant. There I complained that Plantinga's argument seemed to entail that theistic belief was dependent for its status as a properly basic belief on other, less controversial, more universal, properly basic beliefs. My argument there was flawed, it now seems to me. There is some asymmetrical relationship between those more universal properly basic beliefs, like belief in other minds, and the more

2. *Sin and Self-deception*

There is another, related, aspect of the *sensus*/suppression dynamic as set forth by Paul that relates directly to a proper function epistemology and that is this: it would seem that any notion of "proper" in "proper function" must be qualified in order to allow for the influences of sin. More specifically, if an essential aspect of the proper functioning of our cognitive faculties is that they operate according to a design plan, and if sin's effects have substantially altered that plan, then it would seem that the cognitive faculties are not, when enslaved by sin, operating at any one time according to that plan. Thus, whatever "proper" means in the notion of proper function must take account of such dysfunction.

Plantinga does mention, in *Warrant and Proper Function*, that we all know, at least to some extent, what it means that, say, a kidney is functioning properly, and presumably we all should know what it means for our cognitive faculties to function properly as well. While this comparison is undoubtedly legitimate in some respects, there are also properties of our cognitive faculties that are exclusive to them alone. Unlike other organs of the body, for example, our cognitive faculties can ponder, think, analyze, synthesize, carry on internal conversation, etc. It is our cognitive faculties as well that play a crucial role in assuring that we properly make our way in the world in which we live. They do that by believing, knowing, understanding, perceiving, etc. those things given to us in the world.

But assume, as Plantinga notes, that, except for the entrance of sin in the world and its influence on our cognitive faculties, we would all believe in (in the biblical sense) and acknowledge the existence of God. Given what Paul has said in Rom 1, we would all acknowledge that fact, in part, because we would acknowledge our constant perception of God through the things that are made; we would see God everywhere and acknowledge that we do. *That*, it seems, describes, in part, the proper functioning of our noetic faculties.

But our faculties no longer function that way. They have been damaged, fractured, broken, impeded, hindered, hampered, thwarted from doing what they were designed to do since the effects of sin have enslaved and influenced them. Whereas we were designed to do all things to the glory of God, whether eating, drinking, thinking, knowing, etc., sin has constrained us so that, enslaved to sin, we do all things to our own glory, or to the glory of something or someone other than God. If every fact is such that it reveals God, we may take that fact and believe it to be what it is, but in our sin we believe such without acknowledging the God who is revealed in that fact. In every aspect of knowledge or belief, therefore, in which the effects of sin's enslavement are operating, our cognitive faculties fail to function as they were designed to function. There is, we could

specific ones, like Christian belief, but I'm not at all sure just what it is that constitutes the asymmetry. I *do*, however, think it is next to impossible, particularly given my construal of the *sensus divinitatis*, to posit an unqualified parity between theistic belief and other properly basic beliefs. There may certainly be *some* parity with regard to proper basicity per se, but there are, no doubt, other, significant differences that will, or should, come into play in a discussion of such beliefs.

say, in every functioning of our cognitive faculties in which sin dominates, an element, perhaps a strong element, of self-deception.⁵⁰

There are fascinating and stimulating aspects to self-deception that cannot be explored here. In order to flesh this out a bit, however, it may be helpful to highlight some of the properties of self-deception that are relevant to this discussion.⁵¹

According to Paul, there are things about God that we all know, yet which we suppress. One way that we suppress those things is by believing things that are false, "exchanging the truth of God for a lie." There is, therefore, a process of self-deception that takes place wherein we choose to believe things that are false in order to avoid acknowledging things that we know to be true.⁵² Could it be the case, then, that we hold contradictory beliefs, believing at one and the same time that (1) God exists and (2) God does not exist or that we are not sure whether or not he exists? It certainly seems so. It would seem that we are capable of holding beliefs that are in direct conflict with each other. Indeed it would seem that because of our sinfulness we are determined to hold such beliefs with respect to God and his character. But how could that be?

It might be, as Robert Audi has suggested, that in holding contradictory or conflicting beliefs one of the beliefs is, as a matter of fact, an unconscious belief.⁵³ Here, a person would know that God exists, but would deny such knowledge, or at least deny that he had such knowledge, and would deny all that such knowledge entailed. He would look at the world, not as created, but as somehow getting by on its own. In terms of the classical understanding of sin, the driving force behind his interpretation of the world would be to assert its, and his, autonomy from anything like a Creator. No matter how difficult it might be to give a coherent account of his life, his beliefs, his thoughts about the world, his family, etc., he will maintain a staunch belief in his own independence. We could even say that he maintains a staunch belief in his own autonomy as a result of the proper functioning of his defeater system—he looks around and sees so much evil in the world that he simply cannot sustain anything like a belief in God. This would lend itself to a view of self-deception that would see the knowledge of God given by God as an unconscious knowledge.

⁵⁰ Recall Calvin's point above (p. 151 and n. 7) with regard to self-deception.

⁵¹ Most of these properties can be found in B. P. McLaughlin and A. O. Rorty, *Perspectives on Self-Deception* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

⁵² Could this be a description of our defeater system with respect to theistic, and Christian, belief? Could it be that Lisa's defeater system (to use Sudduth's example above) could be said to function properly when she chose to exchange the truth of her knowledge of God for the falsehood proposed by her professor with respect to Christian belief? I am not yet sure that such is the case, but if so, then Lisa's defeater system could be said to be functioning properly, though she would still be PF-irrational in her belief.

⁵³ Unconscious, for Audi, simply means a belief that someone cannot come to know "without special self-scrutiny or outside help." This, of course, would be the case for one who is self-deceived in this way, given that such self-deception cannot be known until and unless one begins to see it as a product of one's sinful state (special self-scrutiny), which, of course, according to the extended A/C model, would not take place without Scripture and the IIHS (outside help).

This person would thus be self-deceived with respect to his knowledge (entailing belief) of God. According to Audi, a person, S, is in a state of self-deception with respect to a proposition, p, if and only if:

1. S unconsciously knows that not-p (or has reason to believe, and unconsciously and truly believes, not-p);
2. S sincerely avows, or is disposed to avow sincerely, that p; and
3. S has at least one want that explains in part why S's belief that not-p is unconscious and why S is disposed to avow that p even when presented with what he sees as evidence against it.⁵⁴

But maybe the situation is worse than that. It may be that the self-deception is of such a nature that, given (at least two) conflicting beliefs, we simply have no access to one (or more) of the beliefs. Using Brian McLaughlin's characterization of inaccessible beliefs,⁵⁵ it might be the case that, due to the ravages of sin, one desires his own autonomy to such an extent that he denies his known dependence on God.

Consider Jim. Jim knows that God exists by virtue of Jim's being created in the image of God. Jim thus has a true knowledge of God; as a person made in God's image, he has within him a *sensus divinitatis*. But, because of the sin into which Jim was born, and because he delights to do those things that are in opposition to the God he knows, Jim wants desperately to assert his independence; he will admit dependence on no one and nothing. He does not want to believe in God. Due to these latter desires, Jim acts in ways that assert his presumed independence—he makes up his own moral code that consists chiefly of the principle that he always be happy. Thus, he drinks too much alcohol, he abuses people who get in his way, he even abuses his own family. These things serve to support Jim's strong desire for independence, and provide him evidence for it. His actions support his belief in his own independence to such an extent that the knowledge of God that Jim has, and continues to have, is such that Jim cannot access it. Even if someone were to come to Jim and give him a good argument or evidence of this God whom he knows, Jim would not be able, in and of himself, to access his knowledge of God.

That scenario, too, is consistent with the effects of sin, in that our enslavement to sin entails that we simply cannot do the things that are necessary to free ourselves from it, without intervention from the outside.

Whether the self-deceived person holds some beliefs unconsciously, or whether they are inaccessible, or perhaps suppressed in some other way, the truth remains, it seems, that we all are, in our sins, self-deceived. And it seems we are self-deceived about *everything*.

Being self-deceived about everything, however, does not mean that everything that one believes is necessarily false or irrational or unwarranted. My wife calls the office and says she is baking a cake for me for dessert tonight. I come

⁵⁴ Robert Audi, "Self-Deception, Rationalization, and Reasons for Acting," in *Perspectives on Self-Deception* (ed. B. P. McLaughlin and A. O. Rorty; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 94.

⁵⁵ Brian P. McLaughlin, "Exploring the Possibility of Self-Deception in Belief," in *Perspectives on Self-Deception*, 29-62.

home from the office and find a cake in the kitchen with the inscription, "From Your Wife," written on it. For some unknown reason, I may deceive myself into thinking that this cake was formed in my kitchen through an elaborate, albeit virtually instantaneous, confluence of events. I may believe that materials present in my kitchen, combined with a coincidental consecution of random events, served to produce this cake.

Does my being self-deceived in this situation mean that I hold no rational beliefs whatsoever about this situation? It doesn't seem so. I still believe that what was concocted was a cake and not a telescope; I still believe that it sits in my kitchen and not on Jupiter; I still believe that I am in my house and not in heaven, etc. Thus, there are beliefs that I still hold that are true and thus rational to hold, beliefs about the very situation in which I am self-deceived. I am deceived about this cake, but there are still beliefs that I hold that comport with the nature of things surrounding this cake.⁵⁶

So suppose I am self-deceived about *everything*. It could still be the case, and I would suggest actually *is* the case, that many of the beliefs that I hold are true; true, that is, as far as they go. If my brother were to come into the kitchen and begin quizzing me about the cake, we might have a pleasant conversation in the beginning. He might ask me what is on the kitchen counter, what it says, etc. The questioning would not have to go on too long, however, until the irrational beliefs would begin to manifest themselves.

So it is with the *sensus*/suppression dynamic. There is an aggressive acedia present such that we seek diligently to deny what is obviously the case. This would suggest that, however we understand proper function, we should be quick to qualify such a designation as limited in scope and content. If Calvin, following Paul, is right, we all suffer, when enslaved to sin, from a kind of spiritual dysesthesia, a condition in which we simply do not function properly with regard to the way the world actually is, the way in which it operates and according to which it is maintained.

Or perhaps we should say that the proper functioning of the cognitive faculties can only obtain when the extended A/C model is applied to us. Perhaps, that is, we should say that, apart from the breaking of the bonds of sin and the re-creation of our natures such that we are renewed unto knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, whatever knowledge we do obtain is present without a significant degree of warrant, due to the fact that our cognitive faculties are mired in self-deception, and thus are not functioning according to the design plan.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ The situation is actually more complex than this. I may believe that I am in the kitchen, but because of other beliefs I hold I may not be able to give an adequate account even of *that* belief. Not only so, but the kitchen in which I rightly believe I am, is not, according to me, "the kitchen in which my wife baked a cake," or, "the kitchen in the house in which my wife baked a cake." The kitchen in which I rightly believe, then, has different properties than the "real" kitchen, properties with respect to my wife, with respect to the cake, the house, etc. So, deception at the point of the baker of the cake extends to the surrounding context as well. This has sweeping ramifications for Christian apologetics that cannot be discussed here.

⁵⁷ Could it be, given this understanding of the design plan, that, even after regeneration and renewal, our cognitive faculties are *still* not functioning according to the design plan, since that plan did not include the fall into sin? Perhaps, but it seems plausible to maintain that the regeneration

Whatever the case, the notion of "proper" in a proper function epistemology needs, it seems to me, some more clarification in light of the noetic effects of sin and related truths.

All of this, of course, entails that there *are* aspects of theistic belief that are wholly unique according to the Christian construal of things. That uniqueness relates to the *sensus divinitatis* and to the acquisition process of Christian belief. It comes to focus in Plantinga's development of the IHS—the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit, but also in the second part of my tripartite account of the *sensus divinitatis*, the IIG. Here we can only touch briefly on something that has already been broached. It seems more needs to be done to conjoin the notion of cognitive *processes* with cognitive *function*. If it is the case that our knowledge (in the case of the *sensus divinitatis*) and our faith (in the case of the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit) are *given* to us by God, then it seems also to be the case that, whatever role our cognitive faculties play, they play a less-than-direct role with respect to that knowledge and that faith.⁵⁸ Not only so, but given that the process itself is instigated and motivated by God, and that the content of knowledge or faith is put there, implanted, given, by him, it seems impossible that such a process could be in any way liable to error or falsehood. That, of course, is not the case with typical cognitive function. As Dole put it,

I find it difficult to imagine better credentials for an item of human knowledge besides its being produced directly by God. If beliefs produced by our cognitive faculties deserve to be called knowledge when they display satisfactory epistemic credentials, then beliefs produced directly by God, it seems to me, have even more right to the title whether or not they satisfy the criterion for warrant as this applies to the productions of our cognitive faculties.⁵⁹

Given God's activity in this process, it seems what we have here is an argument for the truth, not simply the warrant or lack thereof, of Christianity. Given that it is God who implants these truths in us, who reveals himself to us, who causes us to believe in him, we can claim that certain things are indeed free from error and altogether true, not because we have produced them and can trust our cognitive faculties never to err, but precisely because we *have not* produced them, and can trust the one who has never erred.

3. *The de facto objection*

There is one final point that needs to be addressed before we call this review to a close. The issue of the truth of Christianity is an issue that is front and center through a good bit of Plantinga's discussion, but is, after all is said and done,

and renewal of our cognitive faculties bring us back to the situation of the original design plan to such an extent that the two conditions, *in that sense*, are virtually identical.

⁵⁸ What is meant here by less-than-direct is hard precisely to define. At least what is meant is that the external instigation in each case, rather than the functioning of our faculties, is the initial *sine qua non* of the faith and knowledge produced. It is also the case that, unlike other, perhaps most other, cognitive situations, in these cases we are relatively passive in the gaining and acquiring of the knowledge or faith. It is *given, implanted, instigated* within us.

⁵⁹ Dole, "Cognitive Faculties."

an issue that lies, for the most part, dormant in the discussion. This is not, in itself, a critique in that Plantinga makes abundantly clear from the outset that he is concerned in WCB to address the *de jure* question—the question of the rationality of theistic and Christian belief—rather than directly addressing the *de facto* question. At the end of the book, Plantinga notes concerning Christian belief:

But is it true? This is of course the really important question. And here we pass beyond the competence of philosophy, whose main competence, in this area, is to clear away certain objections, impedances, and obstacles to Christian belief. Speaking for myself and of course not in the name of philosophy, I can say only that it does indeed seem to me to be true, and to be the maximally important truth. (499)

Plantinga also admits that he would not know how to do something that one could sensibly call “showing” Christianity to be true (170). I suspect what Plantinga means here is that, as he has argued through much of his career, the history of attempting to show Christianity to be true has been less than stellar such that the *de facto* question may plausibly be something that is best left up to each individual’s conscience.

I would like to suggest however, that, contrary to Plantinga’s own protestations, he in fact does know how to show Christianity to be true and that we have a splendid show by Plantinga himself in (among other places)⁶⁰ his argument against naturalism. Consider his argument against naturalism. Attempting to avoid the typical longeurs of the argument, we can summarize it to make the point. The crux of the naturalist’s claim is summed up by Patricia Churchland:

Boiled down to essentials, a nervous system enables the organism to succeed in the four F’s: feeding, fleeing, fighting and reproducing. The principal chore of nervous systems is to get the body parts where they should be in order that the organism may survive. . . . Improvements in sensorimotor control confer an evolutionary advantage: a fancier style of representing is advantageous *so long as it is geared to the organism’s way of life and enhances the organism’s chances of survival* [Churchland’s emphasis]. Truth, whatever that is, definitely takes the hindmost.⁶¹

Plantinga takes Churchland’s claim to be:

$P(R/N\&E)$ is low where “R” is the proposition that our cognitive faculties are reliable, “N” the proposition that naturalism is true, and “E” the proposition that we have evolved according to the suggestions of contemporary evolutionary theory.⁶²

Plantinga relates this to what he calls “Darwin’s Doubt.” Expressed by Darwin himself, the doubt is this:

With me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man’s mind, which has been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at

⁶⁰ See also, for example, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 218–27, for Plantinga’s refutation of Humean skepticism. It certainly is not the case that a refutation of skepticism of this sort per se, positively demonstrates the truth of Christianity, but it does limit the options, and severely so for a Humean skeptic, and that, it seems to me, given the *sensus divinitatis*, is a useful argument for Christianity.

⁶¹ Alvin Plantinga, “Naturalism Defeated” (Unpublished paper, December, 1994).

⁶² Ibid.

all trustworthy. Would any one trust in the convictions of a monkey's mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?⁶³

The doubt, therefore, is that there could be a reliable belief-forming process, given evolutionary naturalism. The conclusion to Plantinga's analysis is that,

... if naturalism is true, then so, in all probability, is evolution; evolution is the only game in town, for the naturalist, with respect to the question how all this variety of flora and fauna has arisen. If *that* is so, finally, then naturalism *simpliciter* is self-defeating and cannot rationally be accepted—at any rate by someone who is apprised of this argument and sees the connections between N&E and R.⁶⁴

Now why could not an argument of this kind be an argument for the truth of Christianity? Granted more may need to be said, why could not an argument for the self-defeating character of evolutionary naturalism also serve to show the strength of a position that claims, among other things, a rational and orderly origin to the cosmos?

If Christianity alone is true, then it would follow that any position opposed to Christianity is false. Would it not be of some force, therefore, particularly given the presence in every person of the *sensus divinitatis*, if an argument were presented that showed the bankruptcy of an opposing view? Granted that *every* view could never be presented, and thus shown to be false, couldn't an argument showing the self-defeating character of a particular position, *based on that position's own construct*, serve to show the strength of the Christian position? I can't see why not.

As a matter of fact, it could just be that one of the best ways to show something of the truth of the Christian position would be to attempt to demonstrate the utter inconsistency of the opposing position, based on its own agreed principles. This seems to me to be a legitimate and forceful way to proceed to argue for the truth of Christianity, provided we remember that the *sensus divinitatis* is present in every person, and provided that we set forth the positive case for Christianity and the gospel as well.

There is, therefore, a way to show the truth of Christianity, but it is an indirect way, rather than the more direct way that has been typical of most apologetic discussions. Though indirect, it is no less forceful, particularly given the fact that the person to whom we speak knows God and is confronted by him in his creation as he lives and moves and has his being.

There are avenues and angles left to pursue in Plantinga's stimulating suggestions, but we cannot pursue them here. We have attempted to look more specifically at the *sensus divinitatis*, the notion of cognitive process, and the truth of Christianity in order to highlight areas that may be worth consideration in the future. The book itself must be read by any and all who want to continue the discussion in any worthwhile fashion.⁶⁵

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ I would like to thank Michael Sudduth, Paul Helm, and Alvin Plantinga for comments and criticisms on an earlier draft of this article.

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PO Box 27009
Philadelphia, PA 19118
wtj@wts.edu

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