

Philosophy of Religion:

First Exam Question: Summarize Plantinga's Religious Epistemology:

From Pojman and Quinn:

I. Is it rational to believe that God exists?

A. But what is "rational"?

1. Only if true? No, Newtonian physics were "true," but then modified.
2. Only if possibly true & not necessarily false? No, you may rationally believe while not being aware of a simple error.
3. Only if there is "evidence" or "sufficient evidence" (evidentialism)? No, do you need evidence for the past?
 - a. This has been the way of much theism (e.g. teleological argument for the existence of God)
 - b. This has been the way of much atheism (e.g. problem of evil in the world) (e.g. Clifford: must have "sufficient evidence")
 - c. What is "evidence"? (and how much do you need?)

B. Many say that belief in God is NOT rational:

1. Clifford says there is insufficient evidence.
2. If you did know, you would have to rest on OTHER evidential propositions, but atheists say there aren't any.
3. Here many theists will give in and say, "I just BELIEVE it." (apart from knowledge)
4. But knowledge is an essential element of faith.

C. Classical Foundationalism has contributed to this mentality:

1. Two kinds of propositions:
 - a. Properly Basic
 - i. Does not need evidential basis
 - ii. It is immediate
 - b. Not Properly Basic
 - i. Accepted only on the basis of evidence
2. Normative character:
 - a. To conform to right duties and obligations is rational.
 - i. Something must seem to be certain for me (I'm sure that I see, am appeared to, a tree; that I had breakfast this morning, etc.)

- ii. “Self-evident” propositions: “so utterly obvious that one can’t even understand them without seeing that they are true.” (Quinn, p. 385)
- b. To fail to conform is irrational.
- c. Non-basic beliefs do not seem certain for me nor are they self-evident, but require evidential basis of other beliefs.
- d. “A rational noetic structure, then, is one that could be the noetic structure of a wholly rational person; and foundationalism, as I say, is a thesis about such noetic structure.” (Pojman, p. 465)

II. Is There Another View of “Rational” and “Properly Basic”?

A. Based on the above, belief in God is properly accepted only if it is accepted on the evidential basis of other beliefs.

- 1. This has been the belief from the Enlightenment to the present.
- 2. The “orthodox” view.

B. This is where Plantinga’s religious epistemology takes issue.

1. Evaluating Foundationalism:

- a. In foundationalism what is properly basic for a person is self-evident to him.
 - i. needs to be epistemic (immediate knowledge)
 - ii. phenomenological component (strong inclination to accept it, luminous obviousness)
- b. Aquinas said self-evident or evident to the senses; other foundationalists make it stronger by saying what SEEMS to be evident to the senses, so **“a proposition is properly basic for S only if it is either self-evident or incorrigible for S.”** incorrigible = cannot be corrected
- c. But why insist that these be the only two kinds of propositions?
- d. If these are the only two, “then enormous quantities of what we all in fact believe are irrational.” (Pojman, pg. 468)
 - i. enduring physical objects
 - ii. persons distinct from myself
 - iii. world has existed for more than 5 minutes
 - iv. you had an orange for lunch yesterday
 - v. **AND PLANTINGA WOULD ADD BELIEF IN GOD!**

- e. There are examples that clearly show the thesis to be false. Many propositions that do not meet these conditions *are* properly basic for me!
 - f. Now even if the foundationalist disagrees, the very thesis itself does not meet its own requirements!!! If the foundationalist goes along with it, he proves that he is violating his epistemic responsibilities!!!
2. The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology:
- a. Arguments and proofs are not the source of a believer's confidence in God nor are they needed for rational justification.
 - b. God has implanted in us all an innate tendency, or *nisus*, or disposition to believe in Him. "An awareness of divinity/sense of deity." Sin makes it less spontaneous, but the creation makes God evident. Apart from all propositions or deductive or inductive argument, a person *knows* that God exists.
 - c. Belief in God is properly basic, the believer is entirely rational, entirely within his epistemic rights, in *starting with* belief in God.
 - d. The Reformers would reject classical foundationalism, they would accept 1) there is a set of basic belief, not on the basis of other beliefs and 2) belief is proportional to support from the foundations, but they *disagreed* with 3) that basic beliefs be self-evident or incorrigible or evident to the senses!
 - e. The Christian ought not believe in God on the basis of other propositions AND should take belief in God as basic.
3. Have we resorted to The Great Pumpkin approach?
- a. No, not just ANYTHING can be said to be properly basic.
 - b. There are widely realized circumstances in which belief in God is properly basic.
 - c. But where do we get a criteria for meaningfulness or justified belief or proper basicity???
 - d. We may still not know, but this does not remove my epistemic rights...it seems it will be inductive.
 - e. Proper basicity must be reached from below rather than above.

- f. "...God has implanted in us a natural tendency to see his hand in the world around us; the same cannot be said for the Great Pumpkin." (Pojman, pg. 475)
- g. However, there is also an inductive system for knowing the difference:
 - i. Believing in God is properly basic in the sense that one can be perfectly **justified** in holding this belief in the basic way. It is more than possible that after careful reflection and consideration – apart from evidentialism – that it would just seem obvious to me that there IS such a person as God.
 - ii. Believing in God is properly basic when one's epistemic status is **internally rational**. When doxastic response is appropriate and right because cognitive function is working and healthy.
 - iii. Finally, believing in God is properly basic when one's epistemic status has **warrant**. This is what separates knowledge from mere true belief.
 - 1. faculties functioning (like above)
 - 2. in proper cognitive environment
 - 3. producing true belief (as opposed to psychological comfort)
 - 4. is successfully aimed at the production of such belief
- h. "[God] would therefore have created us in such a way that under the right conditions we would come to know him and know about him." (Quinn, pg. 388)

From Class Notes (from Dr. Craig)...

III. Warrant and Religious Belief:

A. Plantinga makes a distinction between *de jure* and *de facto* objections.

- 1. *de jure*: Christian belief unjustified, irrational and unwarranted.
- 2. *de facto*: Factually wrong.

B. Plantinga refutes *de jure* claims:

1. For all we know, it may be true (epistemically possible).
2. If Christian belief IS true, then something like his model is very likely true.

C. Two projects:

1. Public: no reason to believe Christianity lacks justification, rationality or warrant (unless you presuppose the falsehood of Christianity de facto)
2. Christian: Epistemological account of our Christian belief.

D. De jure objection:

1. connects to Plantinga's properly basic beliefs
2. it is rationale to believe in God just as it is rational to believe in other minds
3. neither work evidentially, but if we are justified in the one, we are justified in the other.
4. this is to say that belief in God is BASIC.

E. Reformed Objection to Natural Theology (Plantinga is against evidentialism):

1. Foundational to knowledge
2. or other propositions that are...
3. But evidentialism says no foundational knowledge
4. But why can't the proposition, "God exists" be part of foundation?
5. What are criteria? Evidentialist would say:
 - a. Self-evident
 - b. Incorrigible (can't be mistaken)
 - c. Evident to senses
6. "God Exists" doesn't meet these three says evidentialists
7. Plantinga: How do we know that these are the proper criterion?
8. If only these three are properly basic, then we are all condemned to irrationality (e.g. belief that the world wasn't created five minutes ago; or belief in an external world).
9. The criteria are too restrictive.
10. Do the criteria themselves meet the criteria? NO.
11. So evidentialists cannot exclude the possibility that belief in God is properly basic.
12. So, Plantinga, like Calvin says we know naturally, this is not fideistic.

F. Reason and Belief In God: Plantinga...

4 Claims:

1. Taking belief in God as properly basic doesn't commit to relativistic view that ANY belief is properly basic (don't need criterion). We just don't know.
2. Belief in God is not groundless, not inferring existence of God from religious experience. Rather, being in these circumstances is what renders the belief to be properly basic.
3. A person who believes in a properly basic way can still be open to arguments against ("defeaters for believing in God"). Now, we have to find defeaters for the defeaters. **BUT THIS IS DISQUIETING!**
4. Taking belief in God as properly basic is NOT fideism. It is part of the deliverances of reason to give us a proper faith in God.

G. Plantinga: only prima facie, does not show that God exists, only that belief in God is rationale...

1. So is theism also TRUE?
2. Initially, Plantinga said he just wanted to show belief was rational.
3. But this isn't enough.
4. More recently, Plantinga moves beyond justification to WARRANT, from true belief to genuine knowledge.
5. Plantinga wrote a trilogy, writes a theistic account for warrant ("proper functioning")
6. pg. 529
7. other alternative accounts refuted that these are intuitively obvious that the person doesn't have knowledge
8. So proper account of warrant must have proper functionality.
9. Warranted Christian Belief, Plantinga's current work...classical account too restrictive.

#1: Justification: clearly justified, just know.

#2: Rationality: a person with properly functioning faculties believe in those circumstances,

- really a question of warrant
- and this gets to proper function

#3: Model of Theistic Belief with Warrant:

#1: Epistemically possible.

#2: No cogent objections.

#3: Cannot show the model is true.

#4: If Christian Belief is True, then something similar to Plantinga's model is true.

H. More on Warrant:

1. He appeals to innate sense, Calvin's "sensus divinitatis"
2. Plantinga says there is a kind of faculty in us in respect to warrant in belief in God, but is different than Calvin, Calvin speaks of an awareness, but Plantinga speaks of an actual faculty
3. Anyone who fails to believe in God is irrational. There is a dysfunction.
4. If Theistic belief is true, then it has warrant.
5. So dispute as to whether theistic belief is rational, does not depend on simple evidentialism, because it is ontological/theological.
6. No reason to say de jure is false until you show de facto is false.
7. Is Plantinga circular? Not viciously, transcendental type of argument.

I. Now, the "Christian" Project (see III. C. 2. above):

#1: Epistemically possible and no good objections.

#2: If Christian teaching is true, then warranted for most Christians.

#3: One good way of thinking of the epistemological status of Christian beliefs.

1. Because of Fall, the divine image has been damaged.
2. Salvation, rebirth, restoration includes repair of the image of God.
3. He refers to Calvin: Known three ways:
 - a. Scripture (cognitive)
 - b. Presence and action of the Holy Spirit (affective)
 - c. Production of faith in us by the Holy Spirit
4. Instigation: a belief forming process (the work of the Spirit), analogous to faculty (cognitive)
5. Holy Spirit works a faculty of mine, but outside of me and truths of the Gospel are self-authenticating by the Holy Spirit.
6. There are no successful philosophical objections to this claim. If Christianity is true, then something like this model is true.

7. Martin says Plantinga leads to epistemological chaos.
8. Can ANYONE claim their belief is rationally basic?
9. Plantinga: “What do you mean by rational?”
10. Must be “internally rational”: If a drunk actually “sees” pink elephants on the lawn, he would be internally rational, but NOT externally.
11. Now, externally rational corresponds to what is real.
12. So, Voodoo could be internally rational, but...
13. We must ask if belief is properly based on warrant (not just justified or simply internally rational)
14. So what is basic with respect to WARRANT?????????????????
 - a. Couldn't anyone set up these three claims? NO!
 - b. Plantinga: not just any belief.
15. Warrant: indefinable characteristic that turns true belief into knowledge (from hist. Evidence or testimony, etc.)
16. Warrant is a graded notion... “defeaters” can come along to diminish warrant, then we need “defeaters for the defeaters” to re-establish warrant.

J. Craig's Assessment:

1. Public Project: Christian has justification, rational and warrant, there is no de jure objection (apart from de facto objection), yes, he does this! Epistemically possible. Martin is unsuccessful in defeating Plantinga.
2. Christian Project: How does Plantinga work hold up here? Craig has reservations: Plantinga argues that if God exists, He would provide a way to know Him and evidentialists would agree...Plantinga doesn't say anything to refute evidentialism.
3. So what happened to proper basicity when you leave the door open for evidentialism?
4. How do you know Scripture is part of the model?
5. It seems that Plantinga must go to the Scriptures, and if he does this, then his model will probably work, but here Plantinga relies on the foundation of the Word and Spirit (my summary).
6. Plantinga also argues vs. hist. Apologetics -- a posteriori argument – and Plantinga works an a priori claim.
7. So #1: Weak argument...he will need Scripture
8. #2, but when you DO go to Scripture, other problems come up, Calvin speaks of sense of divine, but Plantinga is different, for him, it is a faculty. Scripture attributes to the Holy Spirit, but Plantinga something of a faculty.

9. Craig says he messes up witness of the Holy Spirit.
10. #3 role of defeaters...crypto-evidentialism, requires a defeater for the defeater! Far cry from Reformers, belief in God properly basic.
11. Finally, Plantinga does move towards N.T. version of faith as full confidence...internal witness of H.S. is more powerful than all external arguments and evidence.
12. Plantinga is right here, but Christian model needs adjusting.