A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE RELIGIOUS EPISTEMOLOGY OF CARL F. H. HENRY AND ALVIN PLANTINGA

A Dissertation

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of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Robert Justin Carswell

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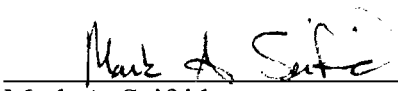

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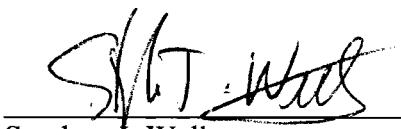

Stephen J. Wellum

Date 5-21-07

To Mandy

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PREFACE

My interest in the work of Carl F. H. Henry and Alvin Plantinga began while I was a Master of Divinity student at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. During the course of my study, I was introduced to the ideas of the Logos doctrine espoused by Henry and the Reformed Epistemology of Plantinga through the writing of Ronald Nash, who employed both of these insights in his apologetical method. My intention was to write my master's thesis discussing the distinctions between the differing versions of the Logos doctrine advocated by Carl Henry, Ron Nash and Gordon Clark; however, at the time, my background in the contemporary epistemological discussion and in the discussions within theology concerning theological method was not as strong as it needed to be in order to do the paper justice. In the following years as a doctoral student, I had the opportunity to see the contours of the different epistemological and theological issues and how closely related the two are, especially as they relate to the doctrine of revelation and theological method.

As I conducted research for various related issues, the writings of Plantinga and Henry piqued my interest in their arguments for the reliability of our cognitive faculties to know truth, especially religious truth as revealed by God. As I read Henry, I noticed that there were definite similarities between his work on religious epistemology and the work of Plantinga. Because of the status they both held within the evangelical community, it seemed that their works should be compared.

In addition to the fact that few have examined these two thinkers together, the research I propose is relevant for several reasons. First of all, these authors each purposefully react to the proposals that developed out of the Enlightenment with similar disagreements and with similar alternative accounts to knowledge. Secondly, the work of

Carl Henry, one of the great evangelical theologians of the twentieth century, needs to be examined alongside the work of Alvin Plantinga who is himself an important contemporary Christian philosopher. Thirdly, the way in which these authors tie the ability of the mind to know truth with the way in which humanity's cognitive faculties were designed has important implications for theology. Potentially, this insight contains implications for theology because it relates the doctrine of special creation to the ability of the human mind to know truth. This shows both Henry's and Plantinga's influence on the various aspects of the current debate within evangelical theology and the relevance of their proposals.

As is the case with a project like this, it could not have been completed without the guidance and encouragement of others. In its infancy, the idea to compare Henry's and Plantinga's religious epistemology was encouraged by Ronald Nash, who initially agreed to supervise the work. Although he was prevented from continuing to oversee the completion of the work due to illness, his encouragement nonetheless played an important role. I also want to thank Ted Cabal for agreeing to take over the supervision of this project and helping me narrow its focus and think critically about the two authors' work.

Finally, I want to thank my family, especially my wife, Mandy, for her constant support and encouragement through the writing of this work. Together, by the grace of God, we have faced and overcome several major challenges in the span of this work, and that in itself is a testimony to her remarkable character and commitment.

R. Justin Carswell

Point Lookout, Missouri

February 2007

CHAPTER 1

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE RELIGIOUS EPISTEMOLOGY OF CARL F. H. HENRY AND ALVIN PLANTINGA

Introduction

Within evangelicalism there is a vigorous debate concerning which epistemological options should be accepted and which should be rejected. The importance of the debate centers on the role that epistemological assumptions and conclusions play in their influence of theology. This discussion within evangelicalism over theological method and appropriate religious epistemologies has recently spilled out into several different projects, each attempting to come to terms with the evangelical emphasis upon the authority of Scripture and recent developments in epistemology in the postmodern context.[1] The current debate over epistemology is not just within evangelicalism; twenty-first century philosophy is coming to terms with postmodernism, and its debates over the theory of knowledge have spawned a variety of epistemological models and options that attempt to add that extra quality to the traditional (but now seen to be lacking) definition of knowledge, which is justified true belief.[2]

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[1]Recent examples include Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor, eds., *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004); Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000); Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

[2]Recent examples include William P. Alston, *Epistemic Justification* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989); Laurence Bonjour, *In Defense of Pure Reason: A Rationalist Account of A Priori Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Paul Moser, *Knowledge and Evidence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

The current movements within epistemology (both religious and otherwise) have the Enlightenment's exaltation of human reason and its rejection of external authority as a backdrop. Indeed, the epistemologies of the Enlightenment effected a change in the way philosophers and theologians understood the human capacity to know, unleashing the autonomous self as the independent arbiter of truth and meaning, and thereby re-orienting epistemology to the individual. The change would impact social, political, intellectual and religious claims to authority in ways which significantly reshaped the resulting world order.

Although the intricacies of philosophy during the Enlightenment should caution against the types of generalizations which lump all Enlightenment thinkers into the same mold, there are certain characteristics which set the tone of the Enlightenment project, and these characteristics marked the resulting movements in philosophy, science and religion. James M. Byrne cites three distinguishing characteristics of the Enlightenment that can be identified in the majority of the philosophers and thinkers of the era spanning from the work of René Descartes to Immanuel Kant. These characteristics are representative of the influence these Enlightenment ideals have had upon the development of theology and philosophy.[3]

The first characteristic of Enlightenment thought has already been mentioned: the reliance that these philosophers placed upon reason as a critical tool.[4] Enlightenment thinkers employed reason as a tool to find truth independent of authority, whether that authority be political, ecclesiastical or revelational.[5] That the work of Descartes and other thinkers led to the rejection of an external authority can be seen in the work of French

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1989); Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[3]James M. Byrne, *Religion and the Enlightenment: From Descartes to Kant*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 1-26.

[4]Ibid., 5.

[5]Ibid., 6.

philosopher Voltaire, who vehemently rejected the authority of the church and the Scriptures and believed in a deistic order of the universe based on the scientific demonstrations of Isaac Newton.[6] In the thought of many Enlightenment thinkers, the knowledge of the existence or non-existence of God is the result of individual investigation and not the acceptance of authority, whether it be a received tradition or an appeal to divine revelation.

The second characteristic of Enlightenment thought is a general attitude of skepticism toward the institutions and traditions of the past.[7] Although the primary target was the Catholic church the traditional theories of knowledge were also called into question and analyzed, resulting in these theories becoming some of the casualties of the Enlightenment's war with the medieval thinkers.[8] Byrne notes that in the Enlightenment, both knowledge and doubt was ever increasing as to the connections between the actual world and an immaterial human mind; this "speculation made the basis of our knowledge of even everyday objects such as trees and dogs problematic, and had important consequences for the question of the existence of God and value of religious experience."[9] For example, David Hume doubted the connection between cause and effect (holding a special contempt for the reliability of miracle accounts) and subsequently questioned the reliability of the ability of the human mind to rise above a healthy skepticism about matters that were out of the ordinary. His argument eroded confidence in one of the traditional arguments for the existence of God and serves as an

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[6]Frederick Copleston, *From the French Enlightenment to Kant*, vol. 4 of *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Image Books, 1963; reprint, 1994), 20. Copleston cites Voltaire as saying, "I have known many people whom Cartesianism has led to admit no other God than the immensity of things, and, on the contrary, I have seen no Newtonian who was not a theist in the strictest sense."

[7]Byrne, *Religion and the Enlightenment*, 7.

[8]Ibid., 9.

[9]Ibid.

example of the arguments that skeptical philosophers used to pave the way for an intellectual atheism.[10]

The third characteristic of Enlightenment thought was the increasing appeal to scientific knowledge as the pure, or true, form of knowledge.[11] This feature combined the best of the previous aspects: it relied upon reason as a critical tool to establish hypotheses and interpret conclusions, and it did so independent of authority.[12] This viewpoint would eventually overthrow theology as the "Queen of the Sciences" and relegated theology and other subjects to be seen as secondary because they were incapable of "scientific" results.[13] One of the targets of the critical and independent use of the scientific method in service of human reason was the biblical text. As the Enlightenment began, the dominant position viewed the Scriptures as the divine revelation of an omnipotent and omniscient God who makes no mistakes concerning spiritual or scientific matters. The interpretation of the Scriptures belonged to the church, be it Protestant or Catholic. In both traditions conflicts between the Bible and science were either settled by showing that the origin of Scripture was divine and therefore unquestionable or the conflict was settled by making an appeal to the church fathers.[14] In both cases the appeal to authority (whether it was the Scriptures or the Catholic hierarchy) ran counter to the claims of the Enlightenment, and as scientific knowledge increased, the authority of the Bible's as divine revelation was

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[10]Ibid., 10.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid.

[13]This led to the creation within these disciplines of attempts at achieving scientific accuracy. An example of is the work of Auguste Comte, who believed that the phenomena of history are subject to universal laws. Accordingly, these universal laws could now be discovered because human knowledge has passed through the theological and metaphysical stages, arriving at the superior scientific age when all truth will be the result of the scientific method. For a discussion of Comte and its influence upon Christianity, see Ronald H. Nash, *Christian Faith and Historical Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984; reprint, Lima, OH: Academic Renewal Press, 2002), 19-28.

[14]Byrne, *Religion and the Enlightenment*, 11.

called into question.[15] As a result, the "scientific" came to dominate the "religious" as the way to explain knowledge.[16]

The three characteristics of Enlightenment thought are readily illustrated in the philosophy of David Hume and Immanuel Kant.[17] Hume and Kant are the ideal models of the Enlightenment spirit, and although both men lived and wrote in the 1700s, their impact upon philosophy and theology continues to be discussed today.[18] Specifically, their claims about the limits of human knowledge called into question the competency of the human mind to have true knowledge about God. Although this was the explicit goal of Hume's skepticism, for Kant it is ironic that his attempt to "make room for faith" turned out to exclude the possibility of true knowledge about God.

The Impact of the Enlightenment

The epistemology of David Hume paved the way for a purely "natural" way to explain phenomena, a way that excluded appeal to faith and God.[19] Hume believed that religion was a primal reaction to humanity's fear of death and anxiety over humanity's

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[15]Ibid.

[16]For a survey of the effect of Enlightenment theories of knowledge regarding the deity of Christ, see C. Stephen Evans, *The Jesus of Faith and the Christ of History: The Incarnational Narrative as History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

[17]In addition to Hume and Kant are René Descartes and John Locke. The chief characteristics of the epistemology of both Descartes and Locke will be discussed in the section on Alvin Plantinga. I chose Hume and Kant as examples of the Enlightenment due to their specific suggestions concerning the capability of knowledge of God.

[18]For example, Peter Gay describes David Hume as "both courageous and modern; he understood the implications of his philosophy and did not shrink from them.... he followed his thinking where it led him, and he provided...a pagan ideal to which many aspired but which few realized." Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation,* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 418.

[19]David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp, in *The Clarendon Edition of the Works of David Hume*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp, David Fate Norton, and M. A. Stewart (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); idem, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); idem, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1947).

inability to discover the causes of the events in life. Consequently, humanity created polytheistic religions to explain events for which they did not know the causes. As scientific discovery reduced the amount of uncertainty in the world, man's dependence upon religion to answer the question of causation would wane in favor of a scientific explanation of life.[20] As such, man's knowledge of God was knowledge of an effect, and according to Hume's epistemology, it is not possible to infer beyond what one has experienced. Because man's experience of nature does not provide evidence for a causal connection between God and the universe, Hume thought it is better for humanity to remain skeptical about God's nature and existence, opting for the best natural explanation of cause and effect.[21] Hume states,

> If the whole of natural theology, as some people seem to maintain, resolves itself into one simple, though somewhat ambiguous, at least undefined proposition, *that the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence*: If this proposition be not capable of extension, variation, or more particular explication: If it afford no inference that affects human life, or can be the source of any action or forbearance.... If this really be the case, what can the most inquisitive, contemplative, and religious man do more than give a plain, philosophical assent to the proposition, as often as it occurs; and believe that the arguments on which it is established, exceed the objections which lie against it?[22]

In other words, belief in God is a minimal belief based on the evidence. In this, religious belief is but a mere probability based on what one finds in nature. One simply follows his convictions and should be skeptical of religious beliefs which assign moral attributes to a cause because it cannot be reliably demonstrated by the human mind.[23]

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[20]Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, section 11.

[21]Gordon Clark, *Thales to Dewey* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957; reprint, The Trinity Foundation, 2000), 306.

[22]Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 227.

[23]Frederick Copleston, *Modern Philosophy: The British Philosophers from Hobbes to Hume*, vol. 5 of *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Image Books, 1963; reprint, 1994), 309.

Immanuel Kant, writing in response to the skepticism of David Hume,[24] attempted to answer the most important and basic metaphysical questions of his day by first examining the epistemological questions which plumb the depths and limits of human understanding.[25] Kant's insight was that the human mind is actively involved in the acquisition of knowledge rather than something which just receives perceptions about the world as it exists independently of human perception.[26] Kant's results are an unfortunate consequence of the Enlightenment's overconfidence in the ability of humanity to reason. Kant's philosophy came at the height of the Enlightenment, when the human mind was thought to have been set free from the authoritarian dominance of the church and old ways of thinking. Kant's "Copernican Revolution" in epistemology separated the reality of God from what can be known about God. One of the results of the Kantian turn was the loss of confidence in the ability of the human mind to have certain knowledge about God, whether revealed in Scripture or not.[27] This loss of confidence in the human mind to know is, in many ways, an ironic consequence of the Enlightenment's enthronement of reason over faith as the primary source of justified true belief. However ironic it might be, however, it is the inheritance of the Enlightenment's emphasis on the ability of reason to discover universal and necessary laws of the universe.

With the Enlightenment came the triumph of reason over faith, the triumph of science over scripture, the created over the Creator. Under the microscope of the Enlightenment, Christianity would be scientifically dissected, especially the claim that Scripture is God's revelation. The Scriptures were no longer viewed as the authoritative

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[24]Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), B20.

[25]Patricia Kitcher, "Introduction," in *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1996), xxviii.

[26]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B314.

[27]Harold Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 57.

revelation of God and became the object of various types of criticisms which were more concerned with sources and histories resulting in the Bible becoming another human text. The reason that scholars rejected the Scripture as divine revelation was that most scholars accepted the characteristic epistemology of the Enlightenment that ruled out faith as a source of knowledge. In place of faith, philosophers sought a foundation to knowledge that eliminated "all prejudice, bias, and unjustified conjecture," thereby relegating knowledge to what is self-evident, incorrigible or perceptible to the senses or in some way rationally connected to one of these ways of forming beliefs.[28]

This epistemology was termed "classical foundationalism" and has been the dominant epistemology in the Western tradition. Classical foundationalism is marked by the characteristic that a belief is justified if it meets certain conditions or requirements which are not the result of other beliefs. These basic beliefs are foundational to other beliefs and all other beliefs are the result of a relationship with one of the basic beliefs. One was justified in holding a belief based on its relation to these foundational beliefs. However, these inferred beliefs were considered rational only in light of their connection to the foundational beliefs. Thus, for one to believe that God exists, one would have to prove that belief by appealing to the foundation or evidence. Classical foundationalism classifies basic beliefs as those which are self-evident, immediate to the senses or incorrigible. In other words, for belief in God to be rational it would have to be a basic belief. However, after the Enlightenment's emphasis upon the autonomy of unbiased reason examining the natural world, belief in God was neither self-evident, immediate to the senses nor incorrigible. Belief in God, therefore, was justified as it could be proven by evidential arguments.[29] One of the results of the Enlightenment emphasis upon the autonomy of reason in the search for knowledge was the acceptance of the evidentialist

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[28]Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984; reprint 1999), 28.

[29]Kelly James Clark, *Return to Reason* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 135.

challenge to religious belief, which is the position that in order for belief in God to be rational one must have proper evidential support.[30] Proper evidential support was limited to the deliverances of empiricism. The combination of classical foundationalism and evidentialism caused problems for Christianity because belief in God was not viewed to have been established based on the available evidence.

Theologians who wrote in the aftermath of Kant and Hume, such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, responded to the Enlightenment's evidentialist challenge by magnifying the religious experience of the believer over the cognitive truth of its claims.[31] For Schleiermacher and those who followed his lead, what mattered was a religious encounter with God, not true knowledge about God. This tradition continued into the twentieth century but would face considerable challenges by theologians such as Karl Barth and Emil Brunner who criticized liberal theology's deference to philosophy over and above the biblical call to faith. Although they were critical of this liberal tradition, these "neo-orthodox" theologians would continue in the epistemological stream of Kant and would deny the human mind's cognitive access to God's truth.[32]

In recent decades the epistemological foundationalism of the Western tradition has come under a withering assault by a great many critics who have examined the structures of epistemological theories.[33] This study of the structures of epistemology is termed metaepistemology, and it has yielded a great deal of information about the epistemology inherited from the Enlightenment.[34] Critics of classical foundationalism

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[30]Ibid., 6.

[31]Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism*, 232.

[32]See Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20th Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 31.

[33]For two important criticisms, see the essays by Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

[34]Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Introduction," in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 1.

charged that the foundation was too narrow and could not justify many of someone's commonly held beliefs. With the rejection of classical foundationalism as an acceptable epistemology, philosophers began developing different approaches to epistemology in order to meet the demands of justified true belief.[35] Although the criticisms of classical foundationalism have resulted in its demise, the result of classical foundationalism and evidentialism upon contemporary theology and religious thought has been enormous. Contemporary theology is a divided lot, due in large measure to the Enlightenment's rejection of all sources of knowledge except those which are scientific and the contemporary rejection of the project of the Enlightenment by many thinkers. Both conservative and liberal theologians recognize the demise of modernism, due in large measure to the increased awareness among philosophers of the structures of various epistemologies.

Within theology, epistemology most directly affects theological method. With the variety of available epistemologies, there seems to be no consensus as to what the next step for theology should be, and this is a result of the move from modernity to postmodernity. Should theology be realist or anti-realist? Should theological method be foundationalist or non-foundationalist? Should the theologian be open to the prospects of natural theology or not? Are there any good arguments for rationalism? How much epistemic capacity does an individual have, and can we have access to it? Compounding this problem within theology is the fact that the world which theology attempts to address is itself becoming increasingly divided and disinterested in forms of theological expression, opting instead to expend its efforts in discovering practical tips on how to survive today. Theological explanation of the God who transcends this world is considered by many to be irrelevant and beyond their ability to grasp. In assessing this problem Don Cupitt writes, "Western thought has been getting more and more skeptical

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[35]See Paul K. Moser, Dwayne H. Mulder, and J. D. Trout, *The Theory of Knowledge: A Thematic Introduction* (New York: Oxford, 1998).

for a long time. The main theme is very simple: it is the realization that our knowledge-systems, our belief, our myths, our norms, our meaning, even our values, are as human and local and transient as we are. *That* is the thought that freezes the blood."[36]

Alternative Approaches

Despite these difficulties, however, many theologians and philosophers of religion are attempting to make headway in the current context. In many ways this has led to a wealth of discussion over the proper place certain ideas have played in the history of theology and how those ideas have influenced theologies of the past several hundred years. For example, theologians Hans Frei and George Lindbeck have rejected the classical foundationalist epistemology and in their critique make the claim that the narrative of Scripture was lost as the historical biblical critics furiously sought to determine with scientific accuracy the sources of Scripture.[37] Some evangelicals have also broken with classical foundationalism. Among evangelicals, a commonly adopted epistemology is some form of modest foundationalism such as Reformed Epistemology.[38] Other evangelicals, however, have moved completely away from foundationalism toward postmodernism and a coherentist epistemology in the hope that its pluralistic perspective will leave room for the Christian community's statements of faith.[39]

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[36]Don Cupitt, "After Liberalism," in *Readings in Modern Theology: Britain and America*, edited by Robin Gill (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 251.

[37]See, for example, Hans Frei, *Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974); and George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984).

[38]See, for example, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); Kelly James Clark, *Return to Reason: A Critique of Enlightenment Evidentialism and a Defense of Reason and Belief in God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990); Ronald Nash, *Faith and Reason* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988).

[39]Recent examples include Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000); Stanley J. Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001); and Nancey Murphy *Beyond*

In light of the current epistemological discussion among evangelicals, this study will examine the epistemologies of two influential thinkers of the last half of the twentieth century: Carl F. H. Henry, an evangelical theologian, and Alvin Plantinga, an explicitly Christian philosopher. Both Henry and Plantinga have had a large impact upon evangelical theology and philosophy, drawing both criticism and praise for their attempts to set forth the truth of the gospel. In each of these authors' work is a clear and conscious rejection of the sort of evidentialism which arises with classical foundationalism as well as a rejection of the epistemologies influenced by Kant and Hume which tended to limit cognitive access to justified true belief about God's existence and nature. Instead, Henry and Plantinga set out an approach to human knowledge of God that has deep Augustinian and Reformed roots.[40]

Carl F. H. Henry

Background

Carl F. H. Henry was born in New York City on January 22, 1913,[41] the son of German immigrant parents. Like earlier generations of immigrant families, the Henry family was a working-class family attempting to make a better life for themselves in America. His father, Karl, was a baker of Lutheran heritage and his mother, Johanna, was raised Catholic. Although his family had Christian roots, young Carl was not brought up in church except for his participation in the yearly Christmas and Easter celebrations.[42] As

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Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996).

[40]In fact, Plantinga's approach has been dubbed Reformed Epistemology. Although Henry does not name his specific approach, he consciously attributes his approach to the Reformers. Both authors claim to be writing in the heritage of the Reformers, especially Calvin.

[41]Carl F. H. Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian: An Autobiography* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986), 15.

[42]Ibid., 17.

a young boy Henry remembers no meal-time prayers, no Bible readings and sparse prayer through the daily course of life in the Henry home.[43]

As the Henry family grew, his parents decided to move out of the city when the opportunity arose in 1920. The family moved to Islip, Long Island, to what Henry describes as a "one-acre Long Island farm."[44] As his high school days drew to a close, Henry sought employment as a news reporter for The Islip Press, and although he did not land a job as a full-fledged reporter, Henry eventually worked his way into the columns of the paper.[45] This job was an important step in the development of Carl Henry's career, as his experience as a reporter would not only lead him to the circumstances of his conversion, but would hone his skills as a writer and lay the foundation for his later career as editor of *Christianity Today* and author of numerous theological articles and books.

At the age of 19, Henry became the editor of *The Smithtown Star*, and his professional career brought him into contact with a variety of community leaders. It was one of these contacts which introduced him to Gene Bedford, an Episcopal minister. As the two discussed the direction of Henry's life and career, they had a lengthy conversation about Christian commitment. It was then that Carl Henry submitted his life to Christ. He described the experience as suddenly having an "inner assurance hitherto unknown of sins forgiven, that Jesus was my Savior, that I was on speaking terms with God as my Friend."[46]

Henry worked in the newspaper business for several years before deciding to attend Wheaton College, and then Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, in order to

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[43]Ibid.

[44]Ibid., 20.

[45]Ibid., 34.

[46]Ibid., 46.

prepare for the ministry.[47] It was during this period that Henry encountered three scholars who would dramatically impact his intellectual life. At Wheaton Henry majored in philosophy under the tutelage of Gordon H. Clark. It was Clark who challenged Henry to examine the arguments of the great philosophers and test their systems for truth.[48] In his recollection of this time, Henry quotes Clark's admonition, "A satisfactory religion must satisfy. But satisfy *what* and *why*? The Greek mysteries satisfied the emotions; brute force can satisfy the will; but Christianity satisfies the *intellect* because it is *true*, and truth is the only everlasting satisfaction."[49] Henry stayed at Wheaton for both his bachelor's and master's degrees, and went on to Northern Baptist Theological Seminary to earn both a master of divinity and doctorate of theology.[50]

It was during this intense period of concentrated study that Henry was exposed to two other important influences upon his intellectual development. In addition to continued contact and study with Gordon Clark, Henry encountered the teaching and writing of W. Harry Jellema and Cornelius Van Til.[51] In addition to his work as a faculty member at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, Henry enrolled as a doctoral student at Boston University and studied under Edgar Brightman. As part of his doctoral work, Henry had the opportunity to sit in on the lectures of W. Harry Jellema as well as to read the course syllabi of Cornelius Van Til.[52] Clark, Jellema, and Van Til had a tremendous impact on his thought and spurred him to write his first major work, *Remaking the Modern Mind*, published in 1946 and dedicated to these three "'Men of Athens' who

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[47]Ibid., 56.

[48]Ibid., 71.

[49]Ibid., 67.

[50]R. Albert Mohler, "Carl F. H. Henry," in *Baptist Theologians*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 520. During this time Henry also joined the faculty of Northern Baptist Theological Seminary.

[51]Henry, *Confessions,* 111.

[52]Ibid.

have sharpened my convictions, by action and reaction, in delightful philosophic interchange."[53] In *Remaking the Modern Mind*, Henry points out the general dissatisfaction with Modernity's solutions to the problems facing mankind and advocates a Christian engagement with the social, philosophical and theological problems of the day.[54] This work, together with his most influential work, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*[55] would lay out the philosophical, theological and neo-evangelical agenda of his life's work.

Throughout the next decade Henry continued in higher education, leaving Northern Baptist Seminary in 1947 for Fuller Theological Seminary where he served as academic dean and helped the fledgling seminary chart its prescribed course.[56] In 1955 Billy Graham asked Henry about the possibilities of an evangelical magazine that would be a direct and purposed rival to the more liberal *Christian Century*. The goal of the magazine would be to interact with the important theological and social issues of the day that would be seen as an independent arm of the evangelical movement. Henry's aim was to develop a tone for the magazine that was both irenic in spirit and infused with theological integrity. The magazine, named *Christianity Today*, flourished under Henry's direction. The timing for this type of work was ripe, for there seemed to be a growing dissatisfaction with liberal and fundamentalist theologies. The criticisms and constructive proposals within the new magazine's pages voiced a growing engagement of a Bible-based theology with the drifting western culture.

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[53]Carl F. H. Henry, *Remaking the Modern Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), dedication.

[54]Dallas M. Roark, "Carl F. H. Henry," in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, ed. Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 520.

[55]Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947; reprint, 2003).

[56]Henry, *Confessions*, 115.

As his tenure of editor of *Christianity Today* came to an end, Henry turned his attention to writing what would become his magnum opus, *God, Revelation, and Authority*.[57] This work would be the result of an intensive period of study at Cambridge. It is a six volume treatment of theological method and epistemology, and "it remains the most sustained theological epistemology produced by any evangelical theologian of the twentieth century."[58] Throughout the rest of his career Carl Henry served as a professor at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary and then, beginning in 1974, as lecturer at large for World Vision. This position enabled him to write and continue influencing generations of seminary students, graduate students, pastors and undergraduates around the world with the gospel and the Bible's truth claims.

The influence of Carl F. H. Henry upon evangelicalism has been enormous. As the magazine he helped get off the ground celebrated an important milestone and Henry's death seemed imminent, *Christianity Today* reflected upon the importance of Henry's contribution to evangelicalism in an essay by Timothy George entitled "Inventing Evangelicalism." In the article George makes the point that the successes of today's evangelical movement have their beginning in Carl Henry.[59] Upon Henry's death theologian J. I. Packer stated, "He pioneered the renewing of the evangelical mind and ended his life as the Grand Old Man of our theology, apologetics, and missions thinking."[60] Although evangelical theology continues to struggle in its relationship to contemporary expressions of theology and philosophy, all of its theologians, philosophers and practitioners would do well to heed Henry's admonition: "Evangelical theology is

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[57]Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 6 vols. (Waco, TX: Word Books 1976-1983; reprint, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999).

[58]Timothy George, "Inventing Evangelicalism," *Christianity Today* 48 (March 2004): 48.

[59]Ibid.

[60]Beth Spring, "Carl F. H. Henry Dies at 90," *Christianity Today* 48 (February 2004): 20.

heretical if it is only creative and unworthy if it is only repetitious...The Christian message is good news for the masses, and unless theologians are intelligible in the public mart and in the public press, both will ignore them."[61]

Throughout Henry's career he attempted to fulfill his own maxim and proved through his works that it was possible. One such work was his treatise on fundamentalism entitled *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. It questioned the necessity and wisdom of the fundamentalist withdrawal from culture, the result of the modernist-fundamentalist battles of the early twentieth century. This work had a tremendous impact upon the shape of evangelicalism's future in that it signaled a shift from cultural withdrawal to cultural engagement. Richard J. Mouw, in the foreword to the recent reprint of this work states, "[*The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* is] an invitation to an evangelical cultural involvement that was based solidly on the kind of profound theological reflection that could only be sustained by a social program that was closely linked to a systematic commitment to the nurturing of the life of the mind."[62]

Religious Epistemology

Carl F. H. Henry proved to be one of the most important evangelical theologians of the twentieth century because he was one of the architects of the rise of contemporary evangelicalism and because of his keen interest in expressing the truths of Christianity as revealed in Scripture. Henry envisioned an evangelicalism that boldly expressed the Christian worldview through the Scripture while developing an engagement with the popular culture in order to impact the world with the truths of the gospel. Henry's particular contribution comes in his work defending the inerrancy and full reliability of the Bible against the critical acids of modern philosophy and the

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[61]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 1:10.

[62]Richard J. Mouw, "Foreword," in Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947, reprint 2003), xiii.

unfriendly attacks of biblical criticism.[63] In *God, Revelation, and Authority*[64] Henry deals with what he believed to be the two vital components for evangelical theology to express in the wake of modernity: religious epistemology and the doctrine of God. *God, Revelation and Authority* spells out Henry's epistemology: all knowledge is the result of God's active revelation to humanity so that each person may come to salvation in Jesus Christ, who is God's special revelation of his nature and ways.

Carl Henry rejects the Enlightenment approach to knowledge as devoid of value because it limits human knowledge to what can be known by direct experience. This approach, according to Henry, fails to account for things that one claims to know, such as the law of non-contradiction and other laws of logic which are not known by empirical means. In a similar vein, Henry argues that natural theology attempts to base knowledge of God on the deliverances of reason, which do not provide a sure foundation. Henry cites as an example the theology of Thomas Aquinas, who seeks to establish the existence of God based on the natural ability of the human mind to deduce from nature that God exists. The problem with the Thomistic approach is that if the proofs are proven wrong, or are proven to be faulty in some way, then one is left with no starting point for theology or discussion about God. In fact, as the Enlightenment thinkers such as Hume argued against the Thomistic proofs for the existence of God, they concluded that human reason cannot establish anything more than the mere possibility that something like "god" exists, but his (or its) nature and ways cannot be known based on the effects observed in the world. In pointing this out Henry attempted to show that the evidentialist approach to

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[63]Mohler, "Carl F. H. Henry," 520; Peter Hicks, *Evangelicals and Truth: A Creative Proposal for a Postmodern Age* (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 1998), 85-94.

[64]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*. Henry also treats religious epistemology in a later work as a response to criticisms of his approach: Carl F. H. Henry, *Toward a Recovery of Christian Belief* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990).

religious knowledge does not provide the level of certainty that it claims and, in fact, does not provide a sufficient level of certainty at all.[65]

Instead, Henry opts for the view of both the Reformers and Augustine that faith informs all knowledge. Henry seeks to show that faith is a presupposition to all knowledge, and it is perfectly acceptable for the Christian to begin with the ontological axiom "God exists" and the epistemological axiom "God reveals himself in divine revelation." Henry makes the claim that knowledge of God's existence is *a priori* (though revealed by God's illumination of the human mind) and that the doctrine of creation and preservation provides the necessary framework to understand the Christian conception of knowledge. As Henry conceives it, knowledge is the result of God's grace, and faith is a virtue because, in order to know, one must submit and receive God's revelation. As an act of grace, knowledge of God has an end, the salvation of humanity through faith in Jesus Christ. In Henry's epistemology human knowledge is not for its own sake but is the divine gift of God given to every human through the *imago dei* so that every one will be able to know God as he reveals himself through general and special revelation, the climax of which was the revelation of the eternal Logos incarnated in Jesus Christ.[66]

Alvin Plantinga

Background

Alvin Plantinga was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan while his father was a graduate student in philosophy at the University of Michigan. His family background was in the Dutch Reformed church, a sect which broke from the Dutch state church, forming within the group a great tradition of knowing one's theology and knowing one's savior.[67]

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[65]Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:181-201.

[66]Ibid., 323-43.

[67]Alvin Plantinga, "A Christian Life Partly Lived," in *Philosophers Who Believe*, ed. Kelly James Clark (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 46; idem, "Self-profile," in *Alvin Plantinga*, ed. James E. Tomberlin and Peter Van Inwagen,

According to Plantinga, this instilled not only a great deal of resolve among the secessionists but also the notion that all of life is to be lived "in the light of Christianity."[68] His father was a full-time college professor as well as lay preacher, and Plantinga often accompanied his father to the churches where he preached. Plantinga describes this as especially memorable during his junior and senior high days when his father taught at Jamestown College, and the school where Plantinga first enrolled as a college freshman.[69] All of this changed however, when his father accepted a teaching post at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan during Plantinga's first semester at Jamestown, and the entire family moved to Michigan.[70]

In the spring of 1950, Plantinga applied to Harvard "for the fun of it" and was awarded a scholarship to the institution, where he enrolled in the fall.[71] Plantinga describes this time at Harvard as an important period in his formation as a philosopher and as a Christian. While at Harvard he encountered serious objections to Christianity for the first time in the flesh, and it created an attitude of ambivalence within him; on the one hand there were people whom he greatly admired who rejected the truth of Christianity, and on the other hand the substance of their objections to Christianity did not appear to be compelling, so why believe them?[72]

During this period, in the midst of his doubt and "bravado," two events greatly impacted his life. Plantinga describes the first as an overwhelming sense of God's nearness in an encounter he had while at Harvard: "One gloomy evening I was returning from dinner, walking past Widenar Library to my fifth-floor room in Thayer Middle. It

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Profiles: An International Series of Contemporary Philosophers and Logicians, vol. 5 (Dordrecht, Netherlands: D. Reidel, 1985).

[68]Ibid.

[69]Ibid., 50.

[70]Ibid.

[71]Ibid.

[72]Ibid., 51.

was dark, windy, raining, nasty. But suddenly it was as if the heavens opened: I heard, so it seemed, music of overwhelming power and grandeur and sweetness; there was light of unimaginable splendor and beauty; it seemed I could see into heaven itself; and I suddenly saw or perhaps felt with great clarity and persuasion and conviction that the Lord was really there and all I had thought."[73]

The second event occurred later in the spring.[74] He went home during spring break and sat in on an ethics class taught by William Harry Jellema. The week's lectures covered the interaction of Christianity with modernity, and Plantinga heard what he was feeling while at Harvard but could not exactly verbalize. He states,

> What especially struck me then in what he said (partly because it put into words something I felt at Harvard but couldn't articulate) was the thought that much of the intellectual opposition to Christianity and theism was really a sort of intellectual imperialism with little real basis. We are told that humankind come of age has got beyond such primitive ways of thinking, that they are outmode, or incompatible with a scientific mindset, or have been shown wanting by modern science, or made irrelevant by the march of history or maybe by something else lurking in the neighborhood. But why should a Christian believe any of these things? Are they more than mere claims?[75]

Plantinga describes the power of Jellema's arguments as consisting in their ability to delve into the very depths of the thinker's arguments and expose them as not being a serious threat to the Christian. This was the case because, at their most basic level, the arguments "are really intellectual or philosophical developments of what is a fundamentally religious or spiritual commitment or stance."[76] Jellema traced his intellectual and spiritual heritage through Dutch Calvinists such as Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, through the Franciscan tradition and on to Augustine.[77] Jellema understood the different aspects of the modern philosophers, especially paying attention

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[73]Ibid., 51.

[74]Ibid., 52.

[75]Ibid., 53.

[76]Ibid., 54.

[77]Ibid.

to the presuppositions of each outlook. His specialty was this kind of broad sweep of philosophy.[78] His insight was to see in philosophy, at its roots, an expression of the religious sentiments of man; he divided philosophy into four "minds:" the ancient, the medieval and Christian, the modern, and the contemporary which is dominated by naturalism.[79] After having sat under the tutelage of Jellema for a week's worth of lectures, Plantinga left Harvard for Calvin where he would major in philosophy under Jellema and Henry Stob.[80]

From Calvin Plantinga went on to complete a master's at Michigan and doctorate at Yale.[81] During this time Plantinga continued to examine arguments against theism, including the existence of evil, the critique of Freud that religion was the result of wish fulfillment and arguments like Bultmann's in which the miracles of Christianity must be de-mythologized.[82] As Plantinga examined these arguments he came to see them as deceptive in some way (with the exception of the argument of the existence of evil), in that they, according to Plantinga, begged the question of God's non-existence.[83]

Upon the completion of his education, Plantinga went to work in the philosophy department at Wayne State, where he felt like the lone Christian among his peers.[84] Despite that feeling, however, Plantinga sums his experience at Wayne State by stating, "I remain enormously grateful for those days at Wayne.... It was from them and

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[78]Ibid., 54.

[79]Ibid., 56.

[80]Ibid.

[81]Ibid., 62. Describing the atmosphere at Michigan in comparison to what he encountered as a student at Calvin, Plantinga was surprised by the "diffidence [William P. Alston] displayed toward the essential elements of the Christian faith" as well as "the extremely low profile" of the faith of William K. Frankena, under whom Plantinga studied.

[82]Ibid.

[83]Ibid.

[84]Ibid., 64; Plantinga, "Self-profile," 22-29.

in company with them that I learned how philosophy ought to be approached; it was in company with them that I learned the importance of genuine clarity and rigor in the subject, and something of how to achieve them."[85] One of the aspects of the work he enjoyed at Wayne were the stiff and penetrating critiques of Christianity he encountered which added strength to his own work. Secondly, he recognized the need for a Christian atmosphere in which to work out his ideas, as opposed to constantly being on the defensive.[86] In 1963 Plantinga was invited to replace his mentor Jellema at Calvin College.[87] The move from Wayne to Calvin was one that fit Plantinga in his Christian conviction and heritage and in the direction of his intellectual pursuit of Christian philosophy.[88] It was at Calvin that he wrote one of his signature works in religious epistemology, "Reason and Belief in God,"[89] as an extension of the line of thought from a previous work, *God and Other Minds*.[90]

In 1982 Plantinga left Calvin College for the philosophy department at Notre Dame where he was named the John A. O'Brien Professor of Philosophy and also directed the Center for Philosophy of Religion (1982-2002).[91] The move from Calvin to Notre Dame afforded Plantinga the opportunity to extend his influence to a concentration

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[85]Plantinga, "Self-profile," 28.

[86]Plantinga, "A Christian Life Partly Lived," 64-65.

[87]Ibid., 65.

[88]Ibid. Plantinga states, "I was and had been since childhood a Christian; I endorsed the Calvinist contention that neither scholarship nor education is religiously neutral; I was therefore convinced of the importance of Christian colleges and universities. I wanted to contribute to that enterprise, and Calvin seemed an excellent place to do so."

[89]Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1983), 16-93.

[90]Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967; reprint, 1990).

[91]Plantinga, "Self-profile," 33.

of Christian philosophy graduate students.[92] Additionally, the opportunity to teach graduate students from the wealth of knowledge and experience he gained at Calvin, as well as the opportunity to participate in building a graduate program in philosophy that would be "first rate and Christian," was a unique opportunity that Plantinga could not pass up.[93] In his time at Notre Dame he continued to develop the characteristic arguments at the core of his religious epistemology, culminating in a trilogy that examines the current trends within epistemology and proposes the concept of warrant as a way forward through the current epistemological debates.[94]

Religious Epistemology

With respect to religious epistemology, Plantinga's first major work concerning the question of belief in God was a work entitled *God and Other Minds* in which he argues that belief in God is much the same as one believing in other minds, or that belief in God and belief in other minds are in the "same epistemological boat."[95] This interest in epistemology and knowledge of God led to Plantinga's developing a project which concerns us the most: Reformed epistemology. This project is the work which occupied much of his time at Calvin College and makes the claim that one does not need propositional evidence for justification of one's belief in God; rather, belief in God is a basic belief in much the same way one's memories are basic beliefs.[96] With respect to belief in God, Plantinga describes three issues which have shaped his thinking over the course of his career: "Three sorts of considerations, however, with respect to

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[92]Ibid.

[93]Ibid.

[94]It should be noted that Plantinga has composed a number of works outside of the field of epistemology, many of which are highly regarded as major contributions to their respective fields.

[95]Plantinga, "A Christian Life Partly Lived," 66.

[96]Ibid., 67.

belief in God, have troubled me and have been a source of genuine perplexity: the existence of certain kinds of evil, the fact that many people for whom I have deep respect do not accept belief in God, and the fact that it is difficult to find much by way of noncircular argument or evidence for the existence of God."[97] Of these three the last seemed to him to be resolved after his work *God and Other Minds*, the second mitigated by the fact that many intelligent people disagree on a number of topics. The first continues to be "baffling" and remains an important part of his intellectual endeavors.[98]

Of his three interests the most important for this paper is his work on the rationality of theistic belief. The central theme of *God and Other Minds* is "the rational justification of belief in the existence of God as he is conceived in the Hebrew-Christian tradition."[99] The work examines the evidentialist objection to theistic belief, although this acknowledgement is in retrospect, as the realization that the evidentialist objection to theistic belief would be realized later in his career.[100] In this work, however, Plantinga seeks to show that belief in God is similar to belief in other minds, and the arguments against theistic belief are within the framework of arguments from the perspective of classical foundationalism.[101]

At this point in the development of the argument, the focus was not centered upon the question of the type of rationality or justification for belief in God as properly basic. That insight would be realized by Plantinga later and would lay the groundwork for his conception that belief in God is properly basic.[102] In "Reason and Belief in God" the

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[97]Ibid., 69.

[98]Ibid.

[99]Ibid., 74.

[100]Ibid.

[101]Ibid.

[102]Ibid. Plantinga notes that though this article laid the groundwork for his idea that belief in God is properly basic, the article was not concerned with the notion of rationality which has come to characterize his later work.

evidential objection to theistic belief came into focus, namely that the theist who believes in God without proper evidence is, in some way, violating some sort of intellectual obligation, an obligation of the sort arising from classical foundationalism.[103] Plantinga's insight here is to show that the sort of obligation is not really an obligation at all because it is not a good obligation; given the requirements of classical foundationalism there are too few propositions one would actually know to be true—the obligation evidentialists are requiring are really obligations for classical foundationalism and not for justification or knowledge.[104]

In these early works Plantinga describes his epistemology as a search for an alternate definition of justification, and the concept of warrant (which has come to be a major focus of his recent work) is just such a term.[105] Plantinga states, "I failed to distinguish rationality in the sense of justification—being within one's intellectual rights, flouting no intellectual duties or obligations—from rationality in the sense of warrant: that property, whatever precisely it is, that distinguishes knowledge from mere true belief."[106] Within the context of warrant instead of justification, Plantinga believes that the question of God's existence becomes an ontological or theological question.[107] Plantinga states, "In sum, on the Reformed or Calvinist way of looking at the matter, those who accept belief in God as basic may be entirely within their epistemic rights, may

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[103]Ibid., 75. In "Reason and Belief in God," 24-25, Plantinga cites the objection of W. K. Clifford as an example: "….It is wrong, always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence"; also see Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, pp. 186ff.

[104]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 186.

[105]His recent works concerned with the concept of warrant are: Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: the Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); idem, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); idem, *Warranted Christian Belief.*

[106]For a summary of Plantinga's concept of warrant, see the introduction to Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, v-x.

[107]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 186.

thereby display no defect or blemish in their noetic structure and, indeed, under those conditions *know* that God exists."[108]

Alvin Plantinga has been recognized as one of the most important philosophers of religion in the twentieth century.[109] This recognition is due in large to part to his writings which address the issues of religious epistemology. His project which concerns this work is his development of one of the options that emerged within Christian philosophy at the recognized demise of classical foundationalism; the option labeled Reformed epistemology.[110] Reformed epistemology recognized and rejected the position of classical foundationalism because the foundation was too narrow in that it limited knowledge about the world which people claimed to have.[111] Reformed epistemology opted for a version of foundationalism which allowed a broader range of beliefs to provide warrant for knowledge. One of these beliefs considered to be basic was a religious belief: belief that God exists is properly basic.[112] This position created a great stir among philosophers and theologians alike and continues to produce spirited of interest and interaction. Plantinga consciously understands his work as a defense of the

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[108]Ibid., 76.

[109]James F. Sennett, "Plantinga, Alvin," in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 709.

[110]Plantinga, "A Christian Life Partly Lived," 67. In regard to naming his project "Reformed Epistemology," Plantinga states, "I wish to remark parenthetically that I regret having referred to this project, half in jest, as 'Reformed Epistemology' or 'Calvinist Epistemology'; some didn't realize this was supposed to be just a clever title, not a gauntlet thrown at the feet of Catholic philosophers."

[111]Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 59-63. In short, the classical foundationalist runs into a major flaw in her conception of what is rationally acceptable, namely that there is no argument which shows that the fundamental principle of classical foundationalism adheres to its own standard. What the classical foundationalist is claiming is that a proposition is properly basic if it is self-evident, or incorrigible or evident to the senses for a person. Yet, that principle is not self-evident, or incorrigible or evident to the senses and so classical foundationalism does not meet it own conditions for rationality.

[112]Ibid., 82.

Christian faith, a defense of the historic doctrines of Christianity in the face of the acidic epistemologies of the Enlightenment.[113] Broadly Augustinian in his approach, Plantinga not only rejects classical foundationalism, but he also rejects evidential proofs as necessary for belief in God.[114] According to Plantinga, belief in God is properly basic and needs no arguments or evidential proof for the believer to be warranted in his or her belief.[115]

In assessing the evidentialist critique Plantinga shows that the evidentialist objection comes in three slightly different versions: that Christian belief is unjustified, that it is irrational, and that it is unwarranted.[116] Plantinga calls this the *de jure* objection to Christian belief and claims that this objection can be overcome by showing that there are no successful *de facto* objections to Christian belief. *De facto* objections are objections which are aimed at showing Christian faith to be false. Plantinga claims, then, that the attempts to prove Christian belief unwarranted will not succeed unless it is shown that Christian truth claims are false.[117] Plantinga's project is to show that one is within his or her epistemic rights to believe that God exists and that one actually knows apart from evidence that God exists.

This emphasis upon belief in God without evidence shows Plantinga's Augustinian approach to knowledge, as well as his indebtedness to the epistemology of the Reformer John Calvin. Specifically, Plantinga claims that one is warranted in his or her beliefs about God as long as those beliefs are "produced by cognitive processes or faculties that are functioning properly, in a cognitive environment that is propitious for that exercise of cognitive powers, according to a design plan that is successfully aimed at

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[113]Plantinga, Alvin, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[114]Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 63-73.

[115]Ibid., 29-30.

[116]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, x.

[117]Ibid., xii.

the production of true belief."[118] Plantinga's epistemology does not claim that his system is true but that it is epistemically possible that it is true, and if Christianity is true then there are no philosophical objections to the model and something like this model is likely true.[119]

Thesis

This study will compare the religious epistemologies of Henry and Plantinga and show that each provides an important dimension to the current discussion within evangelicalism. Each view demonstrates the ability of God to communicate with the human mind and the human mind's ability to understand what God reveals because God has designed the human mind to function in a way that obtains truth. Although this has long been the common understanding within the tradition of Christian theology and philosophy, this viewpoint is strongest within the Augustinian tradition of the church. The Augustinian tradition has argued that not all knowledge arises from sense experience, but that there exist some necessary truths which are known by reason alone. These necessary truths exist in the mind of God. These truths are revealed by God to the human mind through the structure of the mind, the mind being a part of God's image created in humanity. In this regard both of the authors are Augustinian in their approach to epistemology.

Through the examination of the writings of each author, this research will provide a comparison between the authors' works. The intention of the comparison is to reveal several parallels that are important to the contemporary discussions within theology and philosophy because they bridge some of the gaps that exist in the current debates. These parallels include the rejection of evidentialism and classical foundationalism, the role of design evident in the human mind, the role of reason and

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[118]Ibid., xi.

[119]J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 161.

experience in theological method, the way in which the existence of a priori knowledge ties the design plan evident within the cognitive faculties of the human mind to the revelation of God and the relationship between faith and reason grounded in innate knowledge of God. In addition it is important to show how both Henry and Plantinga rely heavily upon the Christian tradition of the Reformers in both their critiques of natural theology and in their assessments of human knowledge of God.

CHAPTER 2

CARL F. H. HENRY'S RELIGIOUS EPISTEMOLOGY

Introduction

Carl Henry states that his "ambition . . . was not . . . merely to note the enfeebling weaknesses and costly consequences of modernized theology. I aimed to exhibit the logical power of truth and the permanent relevance of the scriptural alternative."[1] These words come in the series preface to the republication of *God, Revelation, and Authority* twenty years after the publication of the first volume. It is in line with a statement from the original preface: "Evangelical theology is heretical if it is only creative and unworthy if it is only repetitious."[2] These statements show that Henry's primary concerns are theological. Because Henry's primary concerns are theological in nature, his views on epistemology are connected to the applications of that same epistemology to various theological issues. For instance, in *God, Revelation, and Authority,* one of Henry's theological goals is to state the doctrine of revelation in a way that will interact with contemporary philosophy and at the same time be faithful to the biblical statements about the origins and aims of revelation. Because his primary concern is to state the application of his epistemology to theological concerns, his epistemological framework is often at work in the background of his discussion of theology. Fortunately, Henry is keenly aware of the problems faced by modernity (and now postmodernity) and

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[1]Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 6 vols. (Waco, TX: Word Books 1976-1983; reprint, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999).

[2]Ibid., 1:9.

that those problems center around epistemology.[3]

As a result his epistemological constructions often emerge from the background and take center stage in his theological discussions. Henry argues for a particular metaphysics a particular epistemology and seeks an answer to the question of modernity: is it possible to have reliable knowledge, not just of the world and of ourselves, but more importantly, of God? Henry ultimately boils the question down to this essential element: is the human mind competent or incompetent to comprehend God?[4]

Henry's attempt to show that humanity is competent to know God, as God has revealed himself by placing an emphasis upon the capability of humanity to use reason, has led some to label Henry with such diverse descriptions as modernist,[5] rationalist,[6] fideist,[7] a proponent of Old Princeton theology[8] and evangelical.[9] No doubt Henry would

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[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid., 281.

[5]Hans Frei, *Types of Christian Theology* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 3, 24; idem, "Response to 'Narrative Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal," in *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 210-11; George Hunsinger, "What Can Evangelicals and Postliberals Learn from Each Other," in *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals in Conversation*, ed. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 146; also see Chad Owen Brand, "Is Carl Henry A Modernist? Rationalism and Foundationalism in Post-War Evangelical Theology," *Trinity Journal* 20 (1999): 3-21.

[6]Nicholas F. Gier, *God, Reason, and the Evangelicals: The Case against Evangelical Rationalism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987); Donald Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit*, vol. 5 of *Christian Foundations* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 35-37. Bloesch groups Henry with Ronald Nash, John Warwick Montgomery, and Norman Geisler. In a similar vein to Bloesch's criticisms is Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 169-72; idem, "Evangelical Theological Method: The State of the Art," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 33-34.

[7]R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 337-38; John Warwick Montgomery, *Faith Founded on Fact: Essays in Evidential Apologetics* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978), xxi-xxv.

prefer the latter, and no doubt he is recognized as one of evangelicalism's leading theologians. His critics, however, are not satisfied with Henry's evangelicalism, and each one's critique is centered on the role of reason in his epistemology. Hans Frei, for example, describes Henry's position as being very similar to that of liberal theologian David Tracy because, in his own way, each holds the position "that theology must have a foundation that is articulated in terms of basic philosophical principles."[10] By "basic philosophical principles" Frei means "formal, universal, and transcendental criteria for valid thinking."[11] Frei is certainly correct when he asserts that Henry appeals to universal criteria in setting forth his case; however, although the appeal to a universal is a hallmark of Western philosophy it does not (by itself) show that Henry is a modern foundationalist. Modern foundationalism is a thesis that limits the attribution of knowledge to propositions that are true, believed and justified by their ultimate relation to properly basic beliefs. If Henry were a foundationalist in this way, he would justify his belief in the existence of God on arguments or reason that ultimately trace back to the foundations of his noetic structure, the properly basic beliefs. Henry explicitly rejects this method and instead strives to state an epistemology that arises from the scriptures.

Clark Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze: Finding Our Way Through Modern Theology from an Evangelical Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 46 also labels Henry a fideist for his presuppositionalism and groups him with Karl Barth and Cornelius Van Til.

[8]Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 168. Clark Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze*, 46, describes Henry, Barth, and Van Til as opponents of the Old Princeton school because they reject establishing God's existence through the arguments of natural theology.

[9]Chad Owen Brand, "Is Carl Henry a Modernist? Rationalism and Foundationalism in Post-War Evangelical Theology," *Trinity Journal*, n.s. (1999): 3-21.

[10]Frei, *Types of Christian Philosophy*, 24.

[11]Ibid., 3.

Carl Henry's epistemology seeks to show that it is possible for one to have true knowledge of God's existence and nature.[12] Henry believes that the result of Kant, Hume and other Enlightenment philosopher's work is a lack of confidence in the competency of the human ability to make metaphysical claims.[13] According to Henry, the attempt by Neo-Orthodox theologians to turn back this tide of modernist attacks upon the acceptability of belief in God failed because it accepted its methods of inquiry and ultimately "accommodated the collapse of modernism into postmodernism, and its vengeful repudiation of any objective conception of deity, truth, and goodness."[14] For example, in his assessment of post-Enlightenment philosophy and theology, he sees a tendency among theologians to mythologize (or de-mythologize), spiritualize or moralize such biblical doctrines as creation and redemption because these mythologizing theologies deny the ability of the human mind to grasp the truth of God's revelation.[15] In contrast, Henry's approach is to show that the human mind is competent to make metaphysical claims (for example, that God exists) because it is designed by God to make

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[12]Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:44, "The most critical question in the history of thought is whether all the convictional frameworks through which different peoples arrive at the meaning and worth of human life are by nature mythical, or whether perhaps at least one of these perspectives stems from divine revelation and has objective cognitive validity . . . [intelligible divine revelation is] the view that God communicates to mankind the literal truth about his nature and purposes." See also, Bob E. Patterson, *Makers of the Modern Theological Mind: Carl F. H. Henry* (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 59, for a discussion of this point in Henry's *God, Revelation, and Authority*.

[13]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 1:281.

[14]Ibid., 1:7

[15]Ibid., 1:45, 57. Henry traces this mythological tendency back to the influence of Immanuel Kant upon the writing of Friedrich Schleiermacher who emphasized God in relation to us. Schleiermacher influenced Albrecht Ritschl who emphasized the value judgment of religious experience, who in turn influenced Karl Barth who emphasized the non-propositional nature of personal revelation. These theologians insisted that the doctrines of Christianity by "mythologized" in order to make Christianity acceptable to modern belief.

those kinds of claims, in that it is connected with the divine mind, the Logos, in its structure of rationality and in its continued sustenance.[16]

By competent, Henry means that when one forms a belief that God exists or perhaps a belief that God's nature is holy, then the beliefs formed by the human mind are instances of knowledge. Metaphysical claims are not mere intuitions or hunches; rather, they are knowledge. It is knowledge, according to Henry, because beliefs such as these are formed by cognitive processes and structures (possessed by each human being) by virtue of God's design of the human mind in his image.[17] As Creator, God has formed humanity in his image, and Henry understands this to be primarily reflected in humanity's ability to reason.[18] Not only is God the Creator, he is also the one who sustains all knowledge and preserves the structures and foundations of life.[19] The human mind, or logos, is connected to the mind of God (the Logos) and therefore connected to God's knowledge, which he graciously reveals.[20] Henry's epistemological project attempts to show how the human mind is competent in forming beliefs about God because forming beliefs about God's existence is a function of the mind operating in a manner in which it was designed by God to operate, and that those beliefs are formed as a result of God's revelation of himself to the mind of man. Henry states,

> The God of the Bible is a rational God; that the divine Logos is central to the Godhead and is the agent in creation and redemption; that man was made in the divine image for intelligible communion with God; that God communicates his purposes and truths about himself in the biblical revelation; that the Holy Spirit uses truth as a means of persuasion and conviction; and that Christian experience includes not simply a surrender of the will but a rational assent to the truth of God.[21]

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[16]Ibid., 5:335.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid., 1:76.

[19]Ibid., 2:97.

[20]Ibid., 5:335.

[21]Carl F. H. Henry, "Reply to the God-Is-Dead Mavericks," *Christianity Today* 10 (27 May 1966), 894.

Aspects of Henry's Epistemology

An Augustinian Approach

Henry approaches the question of religious belief within the Augustinian tradition. The Augustinian approach employs the maxim, "I believe in order to understand." Henry interprets that maxim as, "Faith is the mind's way of knowing."[22] In other words, knowledge begins with faith; faith leads one to knowledge. How does one speak of God? According to the Augustinian way one begins with the revelation of God. Faith is the presupposition to knowledge. Within the Christian context, faith is a presupposition that God exists, and in light of that "Faith is a certitude that probes and analyzes what is believed and stipulates its content."[23] What separates the Augustinian approach from fideism is that the Augustinian approach begins with faith and then examines that faith in order to better understand what it believes.[24]

In order to know, the human mind must come under the authority of God's revelation rather than having an evidential or intuitive axiom as its starting point.[25] An evidential axiom would be something to the effect of evidence or argument for the existence of a deity; an intuitive axiom would be coming to believe in God (or deity) on the basis of sensing or feeling this reality. Henry's position hopes to avoid what he sees as the errors of contemporary and modern philosophy and of neo-orthodox theology—an erosion of the competence in man's ability to know God in the face of the skeptical challenges of man's ability to unaided reason.[26] The Augustinian position is vital to

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[22]Henry, *Toward a Recovery of Christian Belief* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 49.

[23]Ibid., 49-50.

[24]Ibid., 50.

[25]Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:93. According to Henry there are two basic alternative sources for knowledge of God: human postulation or divine revelation. Henry believes that epistemologies which are dependent upon intuition or experiential considerations are inadequate.

[26]Ibid., 281.

theology because it rejects any starting point other than God. Henry states, "Christianity offers its own ontology, and any statement of the ultimately real world not based on divine revelation and relying instead merely on human reasoning will show itself less than adequate if not hostile."[27] The Scripture begins with the active and speaking creator God—why should theological and philosophical discussion of God begin elsewhere?[28] The Augustinian approach that Henry follows is one which presupposes God's existence (Henry calls this the ontological axiom) and divine revelation (this is termed the epistemological axiom). Knowledge, then, is a gift of God's grace; it is given in God's revelation of his existence and in the revelation of his will and plan in Jesus Christ.[29]

Within the revelation "God's self-disclosure is fully intelligible."[30] In explaining this statement Henry hopes to clarify his position in the face of an anti-revelational bent of contemporary philosophy. Henry reveals what he means by this in describing God's self-disclosure as coming to humanity in a form that is intelligible and trustworthy, and at its center is a confrontation of God's reality.[31] The concepts contained in God's revelation are not irrational or self-contradicting; rather, they are rational in the sense that they cohere with reality and are trustworthy, or true.[32] From the Christian perspective God's revelation is an appropriate place to begin or to gather information about God because it is the only reliable source of "human meaning and worth."[33]

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[27]Ibid., 198.

[28]Ibid., 199.

[29]Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 51.

[30]Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:193.

[31]Ibid., 2:36.

[32]Ibid., 1:194.

[33]Ibid., 152.

Henry understands this information as existing on two levels. First, information about God is factual, or informative.[34] For instance, it is possible to read the gospels and know the facts of the life of Jesus. Secondly, God's revelation is personal, in that it reveals God's call to repentance and salvation in Jesus Christ. It is one thing to think of God's salvation as mere consent to a set of facts; however, it is biblical to think of salvation as a response of faith to the reliable information conveyed about God's grace through God's revelation. It is precisely because God's grace extended in Christ Jesus is fully revealed in intelligible communication that God demands obedience and judges men by his standard.[35] Hence the capacity to know God and respond to his will is an essential feature to a Christian epistemology.[36] This reading of the information-personal nature of Scripture shows the need for an epistemology which supports the biblical aims.

For this reason Henry shows that philosophical language is essential to the theologian who must use logical structures and logical thinking patterns in order to communicate and explain the truths of Scripture.[37] This does not mean that theologians adopt philosophical structures to replace theological reflection, it simply means that the language of logic and philosophy is naturally used in theological reflection. Although this language is used in theology, it is not the case that theology and philosophy are one in the same thing. Henry maintains his Augustinian approach—faith seeking understanding.

For the theologian who follows this type of Augustinian approach, the language and the examination of philosophy will bring him into conflict with much of

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[34]Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 51.

[35]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 1:194.

[36]Ibid., 2:130, "By dependence upon and fidelity to divine revelation, the surviving imago assures the human intelligibility of divine disclosure, preserves the universal validity of human knowledge, and correlates God's inner revelation to man in the mind and conscience with God's external revelation in nature and history. It qualifies man not only as a carrier of objective metaphysical truth about God's nature and ways, but more particularly as a receiver of the special revelational truth of redemption."

[37]Ibid., 1:194.

contemporary philosophy. This is because the Augustinian theologian uses faith and revelation as a starting place, rather than reason.[38] Henry describes this position in greater detail, "While revelation in the biblical sense is a way of knowing to be sharply contrasted with philosophical reasoning, it is not anti-reason, but rather is a profound Logos-revelation or intelligible Word-revelation."[39] By this statement Henry intends to show the difference between mere philosophy and a theology which is derived from a different, super-natural source: the divinely revealed Logos, Jesus Christ. Henry states, "The Christian believer knows assuredly that his postulates and control beliefs are not conjecturally grounded, but are anchored in the triune God's self-existence and self-disclosure."[40]

For Henry, this is because Christian theism implies a certain metaphysics, a certain theory of truth, and a commitment to "certain and specific assertions about reality."[41] In other words, one's epistemology is tied to one's ontology. Henry shows that Christianity makes certain claims upon reality, such as, "God exists," or "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." In order for these statements to be descriptive of the way things actually are (to be that which God uses to judge the actions and thoughts of humanity), the theologian must address the metaphysical or philosophical question of the day from the perspective of truth and reality.[42] For Henry God is the ultimate authority because God holds the ultimate status—he is the Creator of all that is, and as such is the ultimate authority. The Scripture, therefore, as God's act of self-disclosure, is to be taken as authoritative. This is why Henry opts for the Augustinian approach rather than the Thomistic approach. By accepting the truth of the Scripture from

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[38]Ibid., 281.

[39]Ibid., 196.

[40]Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 50.

[41]Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:198.

[42]Ibid.

the outset the theologian/philosopher places himself under the authority of its structures and claims, rather than relying on human postulation. Henry sums up his position: "The decisive question concerning the interrelation between theology and philosophy is whether the governing content of one's philosophy is derived from revelation, or whether human reasoning is elevated as a secondary instrument of revelation—and hence considered another final authority alongside the Word of God."[43]

For these reasons faith and reason are not antithetical, and the Augustinian position is to be preferred.[44] Faith must operate with reason, and vice versa, or the approach will lead to a dead-end of skepticism or overly ambitious rationalism.[45] Because the Logos is at the beginning, center and climax of divine disclosure, "revelation lifts human reason beyond restrictions of intellect limited by finitude and clouded by sin through the knowledge it conveys of man's Maker and Redeemer."[46]

It is from this insight that Henry understands the position to hold the possibility of a relationship between theology and philosophy in which philosophical language and categories can be used but never imposed upon theology. Theology is derived from God's revelation, not from philosophical constructs created by human reason.[47] The Augustinian approach appeals to the structure of the human mind as created by God and the intelligibility of God's will and plan in the revelation of Jesus Christ. Henry states, "Reason still has its task, but on a new foundation and within a new climate. The revelation of the living God is the precondition and starting point for human

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[43]Ibid., 199.

[44]Ibid., 200.

[45]Ibid. Henry states, "Reason and faith are not antithetical. Faith without reason leads to skepticism and reason without faith does so also . . . . Empiricism and rationalism both go astray because they ignore revelation as the source of truth."

[46]Ibid., 201.

[47]Ibid.

understanding; it supplies the framework and corrective for natural reason."[48] Henry further explains that Augustine employs philosophy as an explanatory tool for theology; philosophy is not the dominant partner in the relationship but is rather a useful tool which explains and supports Christian doctrine.[49]

There are several values of this approach, the first of which is its emphasis upon faith as the starting point of knowledge, especially the starting point for knowledge of God. By placing faith as the starting point for all knowledge, Henry begins with God and places emphasis upon God's voluntary revelation of knowledge to humanity.[50] This places the human knower as the recipient of knowledge instead of making the human mind the creator of knowledge.[51] Ultimately, because knowledge is a gift of God, it can be considered an epistemology of grace, coupled with an attitude of gratefulness and humility on the part of the human knower.

Presuppositional Approach

By accepting the Augustinian way, Henry explicitly rejects the purely evidential and the fideistic approach to human knowledge of God.[52] Henry recognizes

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[48]Ibid., 183.

[49]Ibid.

[50]Ibid., 1:200-201.

[51]Henry does not suppose that the human mind is passive in the knowing process. Rather in agreement with Kant the mind is active in receiving and processing perception, for example. Contra Kant, though, Henry asserts that the structure of the human mind is a reflection of the structure of reality as God has created it and is therefore capable of knowledge. This capacity, however, does not mean that one is capable of grasping true knowledge of God on its own; rather, the human mind is wholly dependent upon God as a "receiver of the special revelation truth of redemption." See *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 2:130.

[52]Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 39. Henry associates Aquinas with the evidentialist approach. Henry asserts, "Aquinas claimed that proper and valid deductions from an empirical observation of man and nature demonstrably prove the existence of God. In developing the empirical case for theism Aquinas's larger aim was to prepare the natural man, once convinced of God's existence by his own reason and apart from divine revelation, to accept supernaturally revealed truth," Henry, *God, Revelation and*

that the Augustinian approach utilizes faith as a presupposition, and so Henry provides reasons for accepting presuppositionalism over evidentialism. To begin, Henry points out that presuppositions are not foreign in other fields of inquiry, including science.[53] Henry claims that even scientists must begin with presuppositions which are not provable, such as the unity and harmony of the universe, that the universe itself has an observable order.[54] Such presuppositions make science possible and enable the researcher to postulate conclusions based on the observed facts. It is within the theoretical assumptions of the scientist that he or she is able to prove the validity of a theory; in other words, the presuppositions allow a framework of reference and give explanatory power to scientific results.[55] Another example Henry gives is in the area of philosophy. The history of philosophy is a history of unproven first principles, such as Democritus' axiom that all substances consist of indivisible atoms, or Plato's assertion that there existed a world of eternal ideas independent of the physical world.[56] These philosophers, and others as well, did not seek to prove their first principles, but assumed them and developed a system

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Authority, 2:105. In his critique of Thomism, Henry states, "Thomism centers so crucially on the human reason's competence in metaphysics (unaided by special revelation) that it unwittingly lent new impetus to speculative rationalists who, with no recognition whatever of supernatural revelation, rested the whole case for theism on conceptual grounds . . . . Aquinas so limited human intellection concerning God that agnosticism seems to many of his critics almost inevitable: we know God not as he knows himself to be, but only by way of negation and analogy," Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 2:115. Henry identifies Søren Kierkegaard and Neo-orthodox theologians with fideism. Henry describes their views as those "who dismiss public reason and rational tests as irrelevant to religious truth claims . . . . Evangelical theists consider unacceptable any irrationalist claim that intellectual absurdity renders religious beliefs worthy or that spiritual obedience demands a 'leap of faith' indifferent to rational considerations."

[53]Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 43.

[54]Ibid., 43.

[55]Ibid., 46.

[56]Ibid., 45.

around their being true, which gave further support to the first principles.[57] Henry concludes from this that first principles, or axioms, are implicitly and explicitly a part of every worldview, and the contemporary deference to empirical, scientific inquiry does not preclude presuppositionalism.[58]

Henry drives his point home: "Whatever method of investigation is employed, we must of course abandon all claims to its absolute neutrality, since a presuppositionless methodology is an absurdity and, in fact, an impossibility...No method is without underlying axioms and assumptions or aims and goals."[59] For Henry, what justifies the use of presuppositions is the relevance of the presupposition to the particular subject under study.[60] By relevance Henry means whether or not one's presuppositions are applied with objectivity, consistency and with a recognition that the presuppositions themselves have limitations.[61]

Henry subjects his presuppositional approach to two tests, the test of logical consistency and the test of coherence.[62] He subjects his view in order to distinguish his use of presuppositions from fideism and to satisfy the demand for justification.[63] The

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[57]Ibid., 41. He notes, in reply to his critics, that "Thomas himself adopts a presuppositional or deductive approach in regard to such admittedly revealed doctrines as the Trinity and bodily resurrection."

[58]Ibid., 49. "The Christian's primary ontological axiom is the one living God, and his primary epistemological axiom is divine revelation. On these basic axioms depend all the core beliefs of Biblical theism, including divine creation, sin and the Fall, the promise and provision of redemption, the Incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth, the regenerate Church as a new society, and a comprehensive eschatology."

[59]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 4:388.

[60]Ibid.

[61]Ibid.

[62]Ibid., 1: 215; Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 64.

[63]This is a charge leveled at him by John Warwick Montgomery, *Faith Founded on Fact*, xxvi-xxv. Montgomery's own position, as evidenced in the title of his work, is that "Christian faith *is* founded on fact" (xiv) as opposed to presuppositions. An example for Montgomery's position would be that the fact the resurrection occurred provides justification for Christian belief. He believes Henry's presuppositionalism to be

reason for this is simple: the Christian worldview makes a claim upon reality, namely, that its explanation of reality is true and that it encompasses all areas of knowledge and life. With that in mind it is essential to show that the claims of Christianity are logical, coherent and comprehensive.[64] Furthermore, if Christianity is true and all encompassing, then it is the one comprehensive system of truth, of which there can only be one.[65]

Specifically, Henry hopes to show through the use of the law of non-contradiction (which is a negative test) that the presupposition of faith is a logical explanation of all of human experience. By subjecting the axioms of faith to the tests of logical consistency and coherence, the presuppositionalist is fulfilling his or her epistemic duties. Henry states, "The crucial question is not whether a scholar must begin with faith; the critical question, rather, is whether such faith is nonrational belief."[66] According to Henry, the test of logical consistency does not establish the truth of a claim, but is a negative test that establishes the plausibility of the truthfulness of a claim.[67] There are two dangers which Henry hopes to avoid. The first is a system which does not allow external tests to verify its consistency. The second is a system which is logically inconsistent. A system which is logically inconsistent could not possibly be true.[68] In Henry's assessment Christianity is the only truly consistent worldview, and as the only consistent worldview

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fideism because Henry does not rest his case for the truth of the Christian worldview on evidentialist supports. However, in regard to the charge of fideism, Henry explicitly rejects fideism because it is a system which "affirms its positions authoritatively: it adduces no rational supports and weighs no alternatives; neither does it evaluate the logical consistency of its claims" (*Toward a Recovery*, 86).

[64]Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 69.

[65]Ibid., 88.

[66]Ibid., 53.

[67]Ibid.

[68]Ibid.

Christianity passes the tests of coherence and logical consistency.[69] By subjecting his presuppositions to the tests of coherence and logical consistency, Henry hopes to avoid the skeptical conclusions of empiricism and the non-rational aspects of fideism.[70]

Henry addresses two criticisms of his presuppositionalist approach. The first criticism charges that presuppositionalism suffers from circularity of the sort which begins with what it should actually be seeking to prove, and that by presupposing that which is in question, the presuppositionalist is avoiding his or her epistemic duties.[71] At the root of this critique is the notion that presuppositions will become mere predispositions which, because they are beyond proof,[72] will lead to relativism.[73] To this first objection Henry answers by showing that "no system exists without basic axioms."[74] Specifically, Henry critiques Christian evidentialists such as R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner and Arthur Lindsley for not recognizing their own presuppositions, such as the law of non-contradiction, the validity of the law of causality and the basic reliability of sense perception.[75] Basic to Henry's critique is his belief that facts are never neutral.[76] For

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[69]Ibid., 90.

[70]Ibid., 55. Henry acknowledges the criticisms of evidentialists, such as John Warwick Montgomery, that evidence is not important to a presuppositionalist. In answering the charge, Henry states, "Presuppositionalists insist that relevant objective evidence exists externally to the basic Christian axioms and their implications. That evidence is not, to be sure, empirical data of the sort on which evidentialists rely in trying to demonstrate God's existence from the not-God. Rather, the decisive evidence is inspired Scripture; the Bible is Christian theology's authoritative verifying principle."

[71]Ibid., 90.

[72]Ibid., 64.

[73]Ibid., 86.

[74]Ibid., 90.

[75]Ibid., 83. Henry is critical of Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley for failing to recognize that their own reliance upon the law of non-contradiction is not evidentially supported but is presupposed. He then points out an example of the role presuppositions play in interpreting the same data: "Darwin recalled that in earlier days, when he believed in divine Creation rather than in natural selection, the grandeur of the Brazilian forest reinforced his 'firm conviction of the existence of God . . . . But now the grandest scenes would not cause any such convictions and feelings to rise in my mind. It may be truly

example, the facts of the naturalist are interpreted as support of his position while the same facts are used by the Christian in support of his claims.[77] However, presuppositionalism can avoid relativism by insisting that its worldview and axioms be tested; if presuppositionalism as a system fails these tests then it cannot make a claim to universal validity.[78]

Henry takes the circularity of Christianity's presuppositions as an asset because it shows that its propositions form a comprehensive unity.[79] If Christianity was a non-rational system of unrelated or contradictory propositions, then it could not be a logically consistent system, and its presuppositions would rightfully be rejected. However, according to Henry, it is a comprehensive unity and as such is "self-complete and self-contained," with "various aspects [that] interpenetrate each other to constitute a complex categorical scheme."[80]

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said that I am like a man who has become colour-blind . . . . There seems to be no more design to the variability of organic beings and in the action of natural selection, than in the course in which the wind blows'" (*Toward a Recovery*, 84). This is because, according to Henry, "The 'facts' to which evangelical empirical theists appeal are obviously not the 'facts' that an empirical naturalist or a process philosopher sees, since 'facts' are never neutral or uninterpreted. The premises underlying empirical explanation of the regularities of existence and life are less the product of induction than of creative postulation or of revelatory affirmation in search of confirmation or verification" (*Toward a Recovery*, 85). What evidentialist theories fail to provide is an objective standard, "a criterion not derived from experience but rather possessed already in the approach to experience—one can never eradicate the gap which exists between empirical probability and those ethical and religious conclusions for which one claims absoluteness or permanence. The empirical explanation of religious experience is unable to reach any universally obligatory conclusions about God" (Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 1:273).

[76]Ibid., 85.

[77]Ibid., 86.

[78]Ibid. For example, relativism, when tested for logical consistency, fails according to Henry "The dogmatic relativist is logically incongruent, moreover, when he tries to exclude his own premises from the net of relativism. If nothing is objectively true, then relativism can hardly propound its own prejudices as true."

[79]Ibid., 90.

[80]Ibid.

The second criticism Henry addresses is a result of the first criticism. Critics claim that if Christianity is a self-contained scheme with its own presuppositions, then it is a closed scheme, one in which its truth is available only to the insider.[81] Henry answers this critique by pointing out that the Christian system is, in very important aspects, evident to the outsider because God has given all of humanity the same noetic structure and therefore the same ability to know truth.[82] This noetic structure is part of the *imago Dei* given to man as part of God's creation. Henry describes the significance of the *imago* to be that "no two persons have globally divergent sets of beliefs. In other words, the Christian worldview involves not merely an optional theoretical exposition of the totality of things, but also a universally shared pre-scientific understanding of reality, and understanding that includes a cognitive awareness of God, of other selves, and of the world as an intellectually correlated unity."[83]

Based on these arguments for presuppositionalism, Henry is a presuppositionalist and proposes two axioms. The first axiom is the ontological axiom, which states that God exists.[84] The second axiom is the epistemological axiom which states that God reveals himself.[85] These two presuppositions meet Henry's requirements for presuppositions in that they are not, in themselves, what he is trying to prove; rather, they are the proper starting point for a Christian epistemology, in that they presuppose two crucial doctrines vital to Christian belief and therefore vital to Henry's approach to Christian epistemology. Henry's method rejects appeals to or from the not-God in order to provide a basis for belief in God.[86] Those who propose an evidentialist foundation or a

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[81]Ibid.

[82]Ibid.

[83]Ibid., 91.

[84]Ibid., 49; Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 1.274

[85]Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 49; Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 1.215.

[86]Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 101.

rationalistic foundation for Christian belief apart from these two axioms are heading in the wrong direction. Henry states,

> More perturbing is the view that since Christian faith has core beliefs that are neither derivable nor verifiable empirically, we ought not present such beliefs to others unless we first render them credible on the ground of a non-revelational epistemology. In short, we are told, the case for theism is not to be presented on its own merits by affirming God-in-His-revelation as the basis of experience but is to be legitimated rather by an appeal to the not-God. This approach, as I see it, needlessly postpones the appeal to God-in-His-revelation, forfeits an inspired Scripture as its verifying principle, and lacks logical validity.[87]

The ontological axiom. The first of the presuppositions of Henry's epistemology is what he terms the ontological axiom.[88] The ontological axiom is the position that each human possesses by virtue of being made in the image of God, a "God-relatedness which characterizes human existence from the outset."[89] Henry further describes this "God-relatedness" as "basic to [every] human noetic structure,"[90] explicitly claiming that the knowledge of God's existence, or having in some sense an awareness of God's existence, is a universal aspect of knowledge. This awareness of God's existence is not inferred from other beliefs but rather is a basic belief independent of experience and is therefore *a priori*.[91] Although the belief or awareness is a priori, it is not inherent or "hard-wired" into each human's noetic structure; rather, the awareness of God's existence is a response to the direct confrontation of God to the human mind and conscience, a confrontation which intelligibly engages humanity through the divine image.[92]

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[87]Ibid., 100-01.

[88]Ibid., 49.

[89]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 1:274.

[90]Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 50.

[91]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 1:274. By describing knowledge of God's existence as a priori, Henry is attempting to emphasize that it is received independent of argument, either through empirical evidences or through pure reason. The a priori knowledge of God he is describing is an awareness in response to God's self-disclosure.

[92]Ibid., 279.

The epistemological axiom. The epistemological axiom is that God reveals himself to humanity for the purpose of providing necessary information about himself so that humanity might know God.[93] Henry develops this axiom in the traditional pattern of voluntaristic general and special revelation that is common among evangelical theology and philosophy.[94] These components of his view are important in that they emphasize God's free choice to reveal what He wants to reveal about himself and his will, and it emphasizes that God has chosen to reveal himself in different ways, so that knowledge of God is limited to what God has revealed about himself, but sufficient for one to know God's salvation in Jesus Christ.[95] Henry's axiom seeks to show that Christian epistemology does not attempt to be creative but descriptive of the realities of God's design and purpose for creation; the theologian and philosopher must depend upon God for his information about God.[96] Thus, Christian philosophy and theology has a dependent character which begins with God and is developed as a result of his revealed grace, which grounds knowledge in a person (God) and not a creative human mind or a creative human argument.[97]

By proposing the ontological and the epistemological axioms, Henry clearly reveals his starting point for Christian philosophy. In these axioms he brings together several important ideas that shape his thought. The first is the distinctly Augustinian theological insight, that theology and philosophy and all knowledge begin with God, as "faith is the mind's way of knowing."[98] Secondly, as Henry emphasizes the dependent character of Christian philosophy he does so to show that Christian epistemology is an

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[93]Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 49.

[94]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 1:149.

[95]Ibid., 216.

[96]Ibid., 215.

[97]Ibid., 216.

[98]Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 49.

epistemology of grace. Henry writes that "[humanity's] every thought and act has general revelation as its background."[99] If every thought and act is the result of God's activity in the preservation and sustenance of the universe then human knowledge is the result of God's grace rather than the result of humanity's own capacity to reason under its own power. Lastly, these axioms ground knowledge in a person (God) and not creative human arguments.[100]

Because human knowledge of God is grounded in God's existence and revelation, the question of "how" this revelation is received and revealed becomes relevant. A major feature of Henry's epistemology is human knowledge of God, which he describes as mediated *a priori* knowledge of God's existence in the context of the ontological and epistemological axioms. For Henry, these axioms faithfully reflect mankind's "primal religious experience,"[101] the experience of a divine confrontation of the existence of God. This confrontation is described by Henry as an innate *a priori* knowledge of God's existence that God reveals to the mind of each human, created in God's image to know truth. These two axioms are tied together through the Logos doctrine in which revelation is mediated through the Logos.

The λόγος Doctrine

Preliminary Scriptural and Historical Considerations

Central to Henry's epistemology is his conception of the λόγος doctrine. In his use of the λόγος doctrine, he focuses on the way in which the New Testament authors, especially John, equate the person Jesus Christ ontologically with God and show Jesus to be the revelation of God's salvation and character. Thus, in the Logos doctrine the

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[99]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 1:149.

[100]Ibid., 215.

[101]Ibid., 273.

ontological and the epistemological axioms come together in the biblical λόγος.

The central text of this doctrine is John 1:1-18, the prologue to the Gospel of John:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
>
> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.
>
> The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.
>
> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") And from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

The ontological significance of the Logos doctrine is shown in this passage, as it assigns to the λόγος a role that only God could fulfill: creation. Secondly, Henry attempts to show that the Logos, because of his ontological status, is also responsible for upholding or preserving the creation. In light of his concern to explicate how it is that the λόγος reveals God's will and character, Henry develops a detailed doctrine of revelation in which it is a "divinely initiated activity, God's free communication by which he alone turns his personal privacy into a deliberate disclosure of his reality."[102] This revelation is both general (in nature) and specific (in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures). These Scriptures are the record of God's revelation to humanity, and they begin with God's disclosure to those to whom he chose to reveal himself as recorded in the Old Testament. Throughout both Old and New Testaments God freely chose to reveal himself to a

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[102]Ibid., 2:17.

particular people through a historical relationship which culminated in the revelation of Jesus Christ, the λόγος.[103]

Henry develops his view of the doctrine by following its course through several sources. The primary source are the texts where the λόγος is used to indicate the person Jesus Christ (in John 1:1-18, for example). Secondary sources which Henry examines include Hellenistic philosophy and the use of the λόγος doctrine by the early church. The aim of his survey of the historical and scriptural attestation of the doctrine is to examine the roots of John's use of the λόγος concept.[104]

Scriptural attestation. By seeking scriptural attestation of the doctrine, Henry attempts to show the distinctive Christian concept of the λόγος, and that this distinctive understanding of the Greek term throughout the New Testament is a deliberate departure from the way that Hellenistic philosophy had used the term. Henry begins his survey of the biblically attested λόγος by stating, "The central and unifying element in the biblical doctrine of the Logos of God is transcendent divine communication mediated by the eternal Christ."[105] As Henry interprets the use of the λόγος concept through both the Old and New Testaments, he asserts that the term is one of the unifying elements of both and that the New Testament usage is anticipated in the Old Testament.[106]

In examining the biblical data concerning the origin of the New Testament use of the Logos, Henry examines various uses of λόγος within the LXX. Henry shows that the LXX translates the Old Testament use of דָּבָר with both λόγος and ρημα.[107] In

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[103]Ibid., 18.

[104]Ibid., 3:203.

[105]Ibid., 173.

[106]Ibid.

[107]Ibid. Henry follows Otto Procksch, "λέγω: The Word of God in the Old Testament," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 4:91-100. See also Thomas H. Tobin, "Logos," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Double Day, 1992). Henry, Procksch, and Tobin state the

translating דָּבָר with these two words, the LXX use is with respect to an inner reality of the mind that is grasped by words, correlated with divine truth.[108] The Word in the Old Testament is an audible word, a spoken word which connotes rationality and activity and stands in contrast to the Greek philosophical conception of λόγος which is more akin to a static idea or deified aspect of nature.[109] The λόγος is not an idea that arises in the imagination of man; rather, it is a transcendent word that is "concretely spoken and intelligible."[110] In developing this point Henry appeals to the work of Otto Procksch who gives several Old Testament examples of דָּבָר being used as an expression of revelation.[111] In the prophets the picture that arises from the text is one of the prophet speaking the word of the Lord rather than devising his own message.[112] For example, Amos 3:7 states, "For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets." Here the implication is that what the prophet speaks is not from the prophet's imagination but is a secret revealed to Amos whom the Lord uses to declare his actions.[113] This concept is most evident in the writings of Jeremiah, where God's word is equated with

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following statistical usage of λόγος and ρημα for דָּבָר in the LXX: in the Pentateuch λόγος is used less than ρημα (56 to 147); in Joshua, Judges and Ruth the terms are used more evenly, though ρημα is used more often (26 to 30); in the historical and poetic books λόγος comes out ahead (historical books: 365 to 200; poetical books 159 to 72); in the prophetic books λόγος occurs eight times more often than ρημα (320 to 40). These statistics lead Tobin to conclude that this usage of λόγος more than ρημα suggests that Hellenistic philosophy and culture was heavily influencing Hellenistic Judaism (349). Henry takes a more assertive interpretation of these statistics, claiming that in the LXX connects "the term *logos* more directly than it does *rhēma* with the actual communication of revelation" (177).

[108]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 3:174.

[109]Ibid., 173.

[110]Ibid., 174

[111]Procksch, "λέγω: The Word of God in the Old Testament," 93, shows that the Hebrew conception of λόγος in the LXX for דָּבָר is not dependent for its meaning on Greek conceptions of either λόγος or ρημα; rather these Greek words can best be explained in the context of the Hebrew use of דָּבָר.

[112]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 3:174.

[113]Ibid., 3:174; Procksch, "λέγω: The Word of God in the Old Testament," 97.

the entire message (Jer1:1-3).[114] Other references in Jeremiah include Jeremiah 1:9, 11 and 12 in which the word of the Lord comes to the prophet and into his mouth, so that the prophets words are really the Lord's words.[115] Outside of the prophetic books, the other significant place where λόγος is used is in the poetic books. Henry does not discuss any texts from the poetic books in support of his position, but he mentions current interest in the use of σοφία in the wisdom literature as an "anticipation of the New Testament concept of wisdom in personal divine manifestation."[116] The conclusion Henry draws from these brief examples is that the word of the Lord is not a mere idea or concept but is "an intelligible Word audibly conveyed to chosen spokesmen as a means of blessing to mankind, visible insofar as the divine message is written and anticipating in God's fullness of time the enfleshed Word or visibly manifested Logos."[117]

The New Testament usage of λόγος goes beyond the usage of the term in the Old Testament.[118] The term is used in a variety of ways throughout the New Testament,

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[114]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 3:174.

[115]Ibid.

[116]Ibid., 175. Henry notes the work of C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1955), 128 for this view. Tobin shows that more could be said than Henry states concerning the use of λόγος in the wisdom literature. He refers to Psalm 33.6 as an example of a text which shows the λόγος involved in "God's act of creation and his maintenance of cosmic order," "Logos," 350. Procksch also brings more evidence of the importance of λόγος in the poetic literature. He reviews the extensive use of דָּבָר in Ps 119, especially crucial in its understanding of the entire Pentateuch as the דְּבַר־יְהוָה, 100.

[117]Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 3:175.

[118]Ibid., 176. In his discussion of the use of λόγος in the New Testament, Henry draws upon the work of several scholars: Henry Alford, *The New Testament for English Readers* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1872; reprint, Chicago: Moody Press, 1958); Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*; Oscar Cullman, *The Christology of the New Testament*, trans. Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1936); Gerhard Kittel, ""λέγω: Word and Speech in the New Testament," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 4:100-36; Ronald Nash, "Jesus as Mediator in the Book of Hebrews," paper presented at the meeting of the Tyndale Biblical Society Study Group, Cambridge, England, July 1977; A. E. J.

but its significance is in its theological continuance of דָּבָר and its new application to the message of the gospel.[119] In the New Testament λόγος is used as the spoken word, the living word, the enfleshed word and most importantly, is identified with the incarnate Jesus Christ.[120] According to Henry the λόγος is centered in Jesus Christ, and in the scope of the gospels, there is a close connection to the words and acts of Jesus.[121] For example, in the account of Jesus' healing a paralytic (Mark 2:1-12) Jesus states, "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." In this passage the words of Jesus are connected to the actual healing of the paralytic; this is the case throughout the gospels in which the words of Jesus precede and effect an action.[122] Henry interprets this connectedness as showing "Jesus Christ [to be] at once in his very own person the Word and Act of God, dramatically exhibiting the unity of God's revelation."[123]

In his examination of the use of λόγος in the Johannine Prologue, Henry recognizes the importance of the use of the definite article in its identification of the person Jesus Christ and that the usage in the Prologue sets the tone for the use of λόγος

Rawlinson, *The New Testament Doctrine of the Christ* (New York: Longmans Green, 1926; reprint 1949).

[119]Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 3:177. In surveying the variety of ways, Henry notes that the term is used in the common language of the text (for example, to describe speaking) as one would expect the term to be used. The point of his discussion, however, is that the significance of the term is found in its theological use.

[120]Ibid., 177.

[121]Ibid., 178.

[122]Ibid. Henry gives other examples in which the spoke words of Jesus are closely connected to acts of God: Mark 1:25, in with the spoken word controls demons; Luke 7.14, in which the spoken word raises the dead; and Mark 4.39, in which the spoken word controls the elements. For further examples of the connection of the word and acts of Jesus, see Kittel, "λέγω," 107.

[123]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 3:178.

throughout the rest of the gospel.[124] As an example of this, Henry cites John 10:35-36 in which Jesus, in dialogue with the Jews, answers their charge of blasphemy by equating himself, the Son of God with the word of God: "If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?" Henry places significance on this passage because he finds the name "Son of God" to always be in relation to the Father, as opposed to the development of the λόγος in Greek philosophy which relates the λόγος to the universe.[125] Though the rest of John does not use the name Logos to designate Jesus, because the Prologue equates the λόγος with the sent Son of God (John 1:14, 18), it is obvious throughout the gospel that Jesus is the λόγος.[126]

In summarizing his survey of λόγος in John, Henry states, "John does not concern himself with adducing a philosophically postulated Logos that must then be correlated with Jesus of Nazareth; everything that he asserts about the Logos stems from Old Testament anticipations and the historical manifestation of the eternal Logos…Yet John emphasizes also that the historical is derivative, for the enfleshed Logos is grounded in the preexistent Godhead."[127] Instead of John and the early Christians being dependent upon Greek speculations about the λόγος, the use of the term in the New Testament reveals an independent use of the concept.[128]

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[124]Ibid., 181.

[125]Ibid., 182. Henry cites John 1:1-14 and 1 John 1:1-3 as examples of the λόγος standing in relation to the Father, who sent the λόγος.

[126]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 3:184.

[127]Ibid., 184.

[128]Ibid., 185.

Historical considerations. The concept of the logos arises in Greek philosophy with the writings of Heraclitus.[129] Heraclitus defines the logos as a universal reason, a "universal law immanent in all things, binding all things into a unity and determining the constant change in the universe according to universal law."[130] Man's reason and consciousness are the most valuable element in himself and likens it to fire. This universal law or reason was not a personal God; rather, Heraclitus was a pantheist as were most of his Greek counterparts.[131] Man's participation in the immanent logos paved the way for the philosophy of the Stoics.[132]

The Stoics were inheritors of the cosmology of Heraclitus.[133] The philosophy of the Stoics had a greater influence on the people of the first century than did any other philosophical system.[134] There are four basic ideas associated with Stoicism. The first

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[129]C. H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). Kahn's work is the authoritative study of Heraclitus and provides texts, translations and commentary. For a complete work on the epistemology of Heraclitus, see Joel Wilcox, *The Origins of Epistemology in Early Greek Thought: A Study of Psyche and Logos in Heraclitus*, Studies in the History of Philosophy, vol. 34 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1994. In addition to these specific works are three history of philosophy texts of importance: Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 9 vols. (New York: Image Books, 1962; reprint, 1993); A. H. Armstrong, *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy* (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1949); A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). For a recent attempt to show how the message of the entire New Testament should be read against the background of Heraclitus' conception of the Logos, see James A. Ketzel, *Panta 1: The Philosophical Basis of the New Testament* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997). Ronald Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks: Did the New Testament Borrow from Pagan Thought* (Richardson, TX: Probe, 1992) shows that the Christian conception of the Logos is different in character from that conceived by Heraclitus.

[130]Frederick Copleston, *Greece and Rome*, vol. 1 of *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday, 1962; reprint, 1993), 43.

[131]Ibid.

[132]Ibid.

[133]Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 145.

[134]Armstrong, *Ancient Philosophy*, 129. See also, Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks*, 67.

idea is that everything which exists is composed of matter.[135] Secondly, the Stoics were pantheists.[136] Everything is God and God is everything. Thirdly, the Stoics borrowed from Heraclitus the element of fire which existed in every living thing.[137] The λόγος within their system is viewed as an impersonal cosmic reason. Lastly, the Stoics were fatalists.[138] As fatalists the Stoics believed the end was determined and that there is no escaping the predetermined end.

A third major contributor to the conception of the λόγος is Philo of Alexandria. Philo's use of the term has been promoted as John's source for the λόγος doctrine found in the Prologue of his Gospel. Because of its synthesis of Stoicism and Platonism, Philo's writings are the best example of the influence of Greek philosophy upon the Jews of the Diaspora.[139] In Philo's synthesis he developed Plato's conception of the forms by placing them in the mind of God as eternal divine thoughts.[140] The God in whose mind these thoughts existed, however, was for Philo a transcendent God who needed intermediaries to act in the created realm of particular things and beings. The λόγος was the most important of these intermediaries.[141] Philo describes the λόγος as being the first-born of God and inferior to God.[142] The logos has two functions according to Philo. In the first place, the λόγος is the faculty of reason itself; and secondly, the λόγος is the spoken word

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[135]Armstrong, *Ancient Philosophy*, 121.

[136]Ibid., 124.

[137]Ibid.

[138]Ibid., 125.

[139]Henry Chadwick, "Philo," in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 137. See also, A. H. Armstrong and R. A. Markus, eds., *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1960), and Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks*, 83.

[140]Chadwick, "Philo," 142.

[141]Ibid., 143.

[142]Copleston, *Greece and Rome*, 459.

which proceeds from the faculty of reason.[143] As the first-born of God the λόγος is "an incorporeal substance, the immaterial Word or Voice of God; but, in so far as it is conceived as distinct from God, it is conceived as subordinate to God, as God's instrument."[144] It is important to note that, though the conception of the λόγος is similar to the Christian conception of the λόγος doctrine in placing the λόγος as a mediator of divine revelation, the similarities basically end there. The λόγος of Philo is like the λόγος of the rest of Greek philosophy: impersonal and a part of the world or created order.

Although the Greek philosophical concept of λόγος is similar to the Christian conception, Henry rejects the idea that the Christian conception of the λόγος was heavily influenced by the Greek philosophical concept. Henry states, "It is important to understand and note that the Logos as it appears in John is and is not similar to the Logos as it is found in Hellenistic Jewish philosophy. The main contrast between the biblical and philosophical Logos is that the biblical Logos is always portrayed as personal and historical."[145] From the Scriptural attestation considered by Henry, he rejects the cosmology of the Greek philosophers in favor of the Christian understanding of God's creation through the λόγος. The Christian conception of the doctrine stands in stark contrast to all of these earlier conceptions of the idea. This is primarily because "the classic Greek logos-concept stands in characteristic antithesis to *ergon* or deed, and hence excludes in principle a creative Word or a revealed Word or an incarnate Word."[146] The biblical λόγος is transcendent, personal, and revelational. The λόγος doctrine as developed in the New Testament and in the early church was consciously an alternative theory than that of the philosophers.[147]

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[143]Ibid., 460.

[144]Ibid.

[145]Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 3:187.

[146]Ibid., 194.

[147]Ibid.

Early church use of the λόγος. In each pre-Christian use of the λόγος, it is an impersonal unifying force which offers little in the way of a personal relationship with God. Instead the λόγος is more akin to the universe, or something controlled by the human mind or other intermediate derived being. None of these conceptions of the λόγος resembles the λόγος revealed in Scripture. The only positive elements of the logos in Greek philosophy and Hellenist Judaism is the epistemological role which the λόγος assumes as it relates to the divine mind in which the ideas or forms exist. In the Greek and Hellenistic Judaist conception, however, the logos is an impersonal static being which does not act but is rather more like pure reason. However, in examining the manner in which the OT uses דָּבָר as a divine act of speaking things into existence or a divine word which performs a deed with the Greek and Philonic conception of the λόγος, it is possible to see how the Johannine λόγος begins to slightly resemble a combination of the two traditions.

The early church picked up the theme of the λόγος from the Gospel of John and from Greek philosophy and developed the λόγος doctrine within their apologetic to the pagan world. The doctrine is most readily used in the apologetics of Justin Martyr. In his *First Apology* he uses the λόγος as a seminal Reason in men which can be found even before the incarnation of Christ. This λόγος, or reason, for instance was in Socrates when he condemned the evil practices of the Greek gods. Justin goes so far as to assert that those who had this seed of the λόγος were Christians before the incarnation.[148] Justin held that certain philosophers had a seed of the λόγος, which enabled them to understand certain key features of reality which agree with the Christian conception of the world. Yet with the incarnation of Christ, the "whole of the Word"[149] has been revealed as the Son of

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[148]Justin *First Apology* 46, trans. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson under the title *First Apology*, in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, Ante-Nicene Fathers [ANF], American ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 1: 178.

[149]Justin *Second Apology* 9 ANF, 1:191

God born in a particular manner of a virgin,[150] the first begotten of God who became a man according to His will.[151] J. N. D. Kelly describes the function of the λόγος in Justin's writings as twofold: to be the Father's agent in creating and sustaining the creation and to reveal truth to men.[152] Justin emphasized the Son's essential unity with the Father, though numerically distinct from the Father.[153]

Irenaeus equated the λόγος with Jesus Christ and used Matthew 11:27 as a proof text for the mediatorial role the λόγος plays in revealing the Father: "All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."[154] The Son, who is the λόγος, reveals the Father because the Father is invisible and infinite and cannot be declared by anyone other than Himself; because the Father knows his own Word, he declares Himself through His Word (λόγος).[155]

Henry's Use of the λόγος Doctrine

Drawing from this tradition, Henry utilizes several key features of the biblical Logos doctrine: the doctrines of creation and preservation and the doctrine of divine personal revelation. These two features link the biblical λόγος to the ontological and epistemological axiom. The doctrines of creation and preservation form the framework for the discussion of the *a priori* explanation of religion.[156] The doctrine of creation expresses God's transcendence of the creation (Creator-creation distinction), and the

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[150]Justin, *1 Apol.* 22 ANF 1:170.

[151]Justin, *1 Apol.* 23 ANF 1:170.

[152]J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1978), 97.

[153]Ibid., 98.

[154]Irenaeus *Adversus haereses* 6.1 ANF, 1: 467.

[155]Iren. *Haer.* 6.3, ANF 1: 468.

[156]Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:322.

doctrine of preservation expresses God's immanence within creation by expressing his continuing governance and involvement in the world he has created.

The concept of revelation is important for Henry's epistemology because he holds the position that "there is no such thing as 'unaided' human knowledge, but that a divine initiative of some sort is involved in every act of human cognition."[157] The λόγος doctrine is an integral part of his development of the doctrine of divine revelation in that Henry appeals to divine revelation as the source of *a priori* knowledge.[158] The overlapping feature for both of these doctrines is the biblical λόγος, through whom and by whom God created all that exists, and by whom he continues to uphold all that exists for the express purpose of revealing God's salvation.

Creation. "The Bible begins with God the Creator."[159] Henry rejects theological and philosophical attempts to establish the existence of God based on arguments, traditions or conjecture.[160] The biblical account of creation necessitates that the Christian philosopher and theologian immediately recognize man's dependence upon God not only for knowledge but for his own very existence.[161] Henry seeks to show that

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[157]Carl F. H. Henry, *The Drift of Western Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 103.

[158]Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:.322.

[159]Ibid., 6:108.

[160]Ibid., 1:196.

[161]Ibid., 87. Henry disagrees with those who follow in the tradition of Thomas Aquinas and posit a natural capacity to the human mind to know independently of divine revelation. He states, "Aquinas, however, again put medieval philosophy on the side of greater confidence in the powers of independent human reasoning, and unwittingly prepared for a revival of an optimistic view of the intrinsic power of the human mind apart from revelational dependence . . . . Human reason now becomes the first court of appeal, and establishes all man's beliefs up to the desperation point where revelation becomes additionally necessary."

there is an important relation between the actual creation of man's mental capacity by God and the ability of the mind of man to know God truly as God reveals himself.[162]

Henry's account of creation is typical of someone wanting to follow closely to the biblical account. For Henry there is a good reason behind this: if humanity is the result of impersonal random evolution, then the reliability of man's rational capacity is called into question, and the case for Christianity is just as diminished if it were proven that the incarnation did not happen.[163] The doctrine of God who purposefully and volitionally creates is essential for Christian epistemology because the actual historical occurrence has implications for Christian doctrine and belief.[164]

In Henry's explication of creation, he emphasizes the uniqueness of the Genesis account as opposed to accounts of creation from other religions.[165] In the Genesis account God the creator is not a deity among other gods or a supreme being among lesser deities. Instead, God is the one who created all that is and the one who is worthy of worship because of that creation.[166] The Christian account does not begin with a primal darkness or pre-existent matter; it makes no mention of a primordial matter used to shape the world into being. Rather, the subject of the Christian account of creation is God: his will, his power and his person.[167] Henry notes, "More than forty times between the initial declaration that 'God created' [Genesis 1:1] and the statement that he 'rested' [Genesis

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[162]Ibid., 44.

[163]Ibid., 68.

[164]Ibid., 68; Ibid., 6:110-19. "What is crucially at stake in the creation account is a distinctive world-life view. It openly repudiates the metaphysical and moral outlook of a world that worships the physical forces of the universe and in so doing loses the sovereign Creator of the world, and man as God's special image . . . . Involved in the current crisis of evolutionary theory, therefore, is not only the role of God but the self-understanding of modern man as well," 118.

[165]Ibid., 6:119.

[166]Ibid., 110.

[167]Ibid.

2:2] Genesis names God as the subject of decision and deeds: Elohim 'created,' his Spirit 'hovers' over the waters, he 'says,' 'calls,' 'sees,' 'makes,' 'blesses,' 'gives,' and much else; not least of all he declares his creation to be good."[168] Henry acknowledges that the Genesis account is not meant as a scientific account of creation.[169] However, this does not diminish the scientific reality of the orderliness of creation as well as the reality that God is the source and originator of all that exists. The "how" of creation that is supposedly missing is summed up in the divine will to create out of nothing all that exists; the "how" is important in this sense: God did it by his Word, *ex nihilo*.[170]

The fact of creation by God's will and by his Word is accepted and promoted throughout the rest of Scripture.[171] Henry states, "If the Christian doctrine of creation contains one central emphasis on how God created, it is that God created by the instrumentality of his Word, and moreover, that he created *ex nihilo*."[172] The fact that God created by his Word means that the creation is not an inevitable emanation, nor is it a randomly occurring event; rather, Henry sees it as the work of a God acting volitionally, consciously and rationally through the Son of God, the λόγος.[173] The mystery of the creation finds its revelation of truth in the mystery of the incarnation, the revelation of Jesus Christ. "The eternal Christ, the mediator of divine creation, is openly manifested in the incarnation as the one through and for whom God made the universe and through whom God redeems rebellious mankind and the disordered cosmos."[174] For Henry, "The

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[168]Ibid., 110-11.

[169]Ibid., 113.

[170]Ibid.

[171]Ibid., 116.

[172]Ibid., 120.

[173]Henry states later, "Unlike Plato in the Timaeus, the Bible nowhere presents God merely as the artificer of an already existent world," ibid., 122.

[174]Ibid., 111.

'whence' and the 'whither' of the universe cannot be divorced; in Christ the whole creation has its basis (Revelation 3:14) as well as its final goal (Hebrews 1:11ff)."[175]

Preservation. The second piece of the framework for Henry is the doctrine of preservation. Not only are the forms and structures of the creation formed by the λόγος, but he continually upholds or preserves these same forms and structures.[176] The point of this doctrine for Henry is to point out that God has not merely started the world spinning, as a deist might believe, but that God is continually acting within the creation.[177] Secondly, the doctrine of preservation highlights the dependence of humanity upon God's providential action in the created universe for existence and knowledge.[178] According to Henry, there is no such thing as "unaided" human knowledge; in every instance of knowledge there is a divine initiative, a divine sustenance of the object of subject and the means of comprehending that knowledge.[179] Henry also asserts, therefore, that all knowledge may be viewed as revelational in that humanity is dependent upon the act of God in creating and sustaining the means of comprehending knowledge. Henry goes so far as to say that "revelation is the condition of all knowledge and to set it aside is to make epistemology impossible."[180] The doctrine of preservation is tied not only to the doctrine of creation, then, but also to the doctrine of revelation through the doctrines of the Logos and the divine image in humanity.

Revelation. The most fundamental component this concept is the contention that logical factors exist in the human mind prior to but not necessarily independent of

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[175]Ibid., 112.

[176]Ibid., 2:97.

[177]Ibid.

[178]Ibid., 6:120.

[179]Henry, *Drift*, 104.

[180]Ibid., 105.

experience.[181] What Henry argues for is a knowledge of God which arises "from a direct awareness" of God, much like an individual has a direct awareness of himself or a direct awareness of other selves.[182] This direct awareness of God is not an awareness of an analogy of God but an awareness of God as the result of his revelation of himself through his voluntary revelation.[183] This revelation of God is intelligible to humanity because God has created both the mind of humanity and the universe intelligibly, in order that God might reveal his own existence and that man would be capable of understanding his revelation.[184]

The climax of divine revelation is Jesus Christ, in whom the "source and content of revelation converge and coincide."[185] Jesus Christ is the "personal incarnation of God in the flesh," the "Eternal Logos—pre-existent, incarnate, and now glorified"[186] Son of God. This Word of God is not to be confused with the Greek philosophical conception of the λόγος. A description of the term within Christian theology should begin not with the ideas of Greek philosophy but with a discussion of the "revelational reality centering in the historical manifestation of Jesus Christ."[187] The biblically attested λόγος is both propositional (in that it conveys truth) and personal (in that it became flesh).[188] Henry understands the logos to be the "unique and sole mediator of the revelation of the Living God" who mediated the creation of everything which was not (the pre-incarnate Christ is the word by which God created), who mediated redemption as the incarnate Son of God and who is to be the mediator of divine judgment in the eschatological revelation

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[181]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 1:273.

[182]Ibid., 274.

[183]Ibid.

[184]Ibid., 279.

[185]Ibid., 3: 9.

[186]Ibid., 165.

[187]Ibid., 166.

[188]Ibid., 165.

of God's glory.[189] As the mediator of all true knowledge, the logos has importance for Christian theology as the personal epistemological ground of reality. It is in the λόγος doctrine that the ontological and epistemological axioms are found.

The special revelation of God is a freely chosen, divinely initiated disclosure of God to his creation.[190] In the center of God's revelation to his creation stands Jesus Christ[191] who was the divine mystery hidden within God's continuous revelation to His Old Testament prophets.[192] This divine revelation was given "for human benefit, offering us privileged communion with our Creator in the kingdom of God."[193] The primary benefit given to humanity is that salvation has been revealed in Jesus Christ and that this revelation of salvation from God requires a response in order to receive His salvation.[194] This benevolent characteristic of divine revelation has important consequences for humanity, in that through faith in Jesus Christ, humanity can come to know God's forgiveness and is brought into fellowship with its Creator.[195] Thus, the aim of revelation is that humanity might have knowledge of God that brings them to salvation. This salvation is found in Jesus Christ, the λόγος. The ability to have justified or warranted beliefs about God is important if salvation is the ultimate goal of the revelation of the λόγος. Revelation, then, is both rational (in that it can be understood) and personal (in that it calls for a response, or faith).

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[189]Ibid., 203.

[190]Ibid., 2:17.

[191]John 14:25-26: "All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."

[192]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 2:20.

[193]Ibid., 30.

[194]Ibid., 32.

[195]Ibid., 31.

Henry's conviction is that neither the revelation's rational elements nor its call for personal faith should be misconstrued in either direction to the detriment of the other.[196] A misconstrued doctrine of revelation can occur when the rational is emphasized over the experiential or the experiential is emphasized over the rational. Knowledge of the truth in Jesus Christ is not enough for salvation, neither is an experience devoid of content. Henry states, "The immediate correlate of divine revelation is not salvation but knowledge; the consequence of that knowledge is either salvation or judgment. The human response to God's disclosure is either acceptance or rejection, faith or unbelief."[197] There is, therefore, a combination of knowledge and experience, a call to know the God revealed in Jesus Christ and the call to experience his salvation because his call is true.

Henry continues, "Divine revelation does not completely erase God's transcendent mystery, inasmuch as God the Revealer transcends his own revelation."[198] Our knowledge of God is limited as human knowers precisely to what God has chosen to reveal about himself through special and general revelation. It is not impossible to believe, however, that God is more than He has chosen to reveal, and the Scriptures themselves speak as though "there is more to God's perfections and plans than we now know."[199] This understanding of God's revelation flows quite well with Henry's previous statements concerning the divinely initiated choice of God to reveal Himself to humanity. Because it was a free choice, God is in complete control of his revelation, and revelation, therefore, has its limits and basis in the will of God.[200]

It is at this point that Henry begins to distinguish the revelation of God as mediated through His Word from the typical Greek philosophical understandings of

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[196]Ibid., 38.

[197]Ibid., 44.

[198]Ibid., 47.

[199]Ibid.

[200]Ibid., 48.

λόγος.[201] The self-revealing and sovereign revelation of God is not the result of human insight or discovery, nor is man capable of grasping knowledge of God on his own. Mankind is part of the created order; God is the Creator, and as the Creator, He has spoken into existence all that was not and, through His Word, preserves and sustains creation.[202] God is not hidden to the mind of man because He has chosen to reveal himself. This does not mean that man has immediate knowledge of God but that man can have justified true belief about God as He has revealed himself to man through general and special revelation.[203]

This distinction between God as the Creator and Revealer, and man as the recipient of revelation (as created) is important because Henry is seeking to show that God's revelation is not of human origin, nor could it possibly be of human origin. Also, Henry is attempting to show that because God is the one who reveals himself freely and according to His will, what God reveals about Himself is true. "If there is no point of identity in what God and man know, then man has no truth about God."[204] The third concern Henry wishes to establish is the ability of the human mind to grasp God's revelation because the mind of man is the result of God's design.

In making this last statement Henry is well within the Reformed tradition. Calvin states, "To charge the intellect with perpetual blindness so as to leave it no intelligence of any description whatever, is repugnant not only to the Word of God, but to common experience."[205] Charles Hodge concurs in a discussion about the ability of man to speak of the divine nature. Hodge claims that it is essential to Christianity that language about certain distinctions between the attributes of God must in some way be

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[201]Ibid., 3:195.

[202]Ibid., 2:51.

[203]Ibid., 52.

[204]Ibid., 54.

[205]John Calvin *Institutio Christianae Religionis* 2.2.12, trans. Henry Beveridge, under the title *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 234.

true because this is the way in which God has revealed himself through Scripture.[206] Henry states, "In a theology of revelation, the existence of God known in his disclosure belongs to his essence. What can be said of God-in-himself, if we are privileged to say anything at all, can be confidently said only on the basis of his self-revelation."[207] Central to the revelation of God is the mediation of God's revelation through the Word, or λόγος, which provides a sure connection to the truth of God's nature.

Because it is God who has revealed Himself, His revelation is a "comprehensive unity."[208] Reformed theology understands God's revelation to be in two forms: general (Rom 1.18ff.) and special. Man's ability to reason is not an originating source of divine revelation but is an instrument created by God for understanding and knowing the truth of God.[209] It is evident in Scripture that God has chosen to reveal Himself in various ways. Henry states,

> Because God willed to make himself known thus, he provided a universal revelation in the cosmos and in history, a general anthropological revelation in the mind and conscience of man, and to the Hebrews as a chosen people a particular salvific revelation consummated in Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah and head of the church . . . disclosed in Jesus Christ the incarnate Logos.[210]

This variety of divine revelation controlled and initiated by God leads Henry to reject natural theology as a starting place for contemporary theology. His rejection of natural theology is based primarily upon man's epistemic nature.[211]

Drawing from Genesis 1:26 and traditional Christian theology, Henry argues that humans, both male and female, are created in the image of God.[212] As creatures in

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[206]Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1872-73; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), 1:370.

[207]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 2:55.

[208]Ibid., 69.

[209]Ibid., 73.

[210]Ibid., 87.

[211]Ibid., 123.

God's image, humanity is personal, volitional, self-conscious and able to know truth. This is evident in the Garden of Eden when the Scriptures show the relationship Adam had with his Creator. While in the garden, Adam was in fellowship with God and had the mental capacity to understand the truth so that he might do what the Lord told him to do (Gen 1:28-30). Adam and Eve also had the mental capacity to distinguish between right and wrong, in that they were able to know truth from falsehood (Gen 2:17). "If man made any sense of his own experience, the laws of logic must intrinsically have qualified the *imago Dei*. From the first, man as man possessed reasoning capacities and rational discernment on the basis of creation."[213]

The ability of humanity to distinguish between good and evil, truth and falsehood, leads Henry to the conclusion that there are basic universal laws which govern man's reasoning. One of these laws is the law of non-contradiction. The law of non-contradiction, simply stated, is that "*A* cannot be both *B* and non-*B* at the same time and in the same sense." This law of reasoning is universal, in that it cannot be denied because to refute the law, the law itself must be presupposed in order to make an argument against it. It is fundamental in Henry's theological conception that "man cannot repudiate these logical presuppositions without sacrificing the intelligibility of what he says and does and his own mental coherence."[214] Reason functions with divine revelation in providing the means by which it is received by the human mind.[215] In making this claim Henry appeals to John 1:10-12, "He (the Word, Logos) was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 8:54-55 states, "Jesus answered, 'If I glorify

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[212]Ibid., 124.

[213]Ibid., 126.

[214]Ibid.

[215]Ibid., 165.

myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.' But you have not known him. I know him . . . and I keep his word." In these passages Henry notes that the ability of man to receive or to know the truth is not denigrated but is rather assumed, both in his rational capacity to understand and in his experience to believe.[216] Yet this ability to understand and respond to God does not mean that human reason can grasp true knowledge of God on its own; rather, the human mind is wholly dependent upon God as a "receiver of the special revelational truth of redemption."[217]

Henry does not conceive of the human receiving divine revelation in a passive manner. He preserves the mind's capacity to judge between alternatives because God has given it the ability to apply judgments to the perceived world.[218] The major advantage he wishes to sustain over alternative epistemologies is that of maintaining a critical mind able to perceive and know what is real as opposed to the merely phenomenal.[219] Henry's conception of the human mind provides an alternative to the Kantian conception. As the centerpiece between nature and morality, man's role, according to Kant's philosophy, is to make judgments, synthesizing impressions received by the senses through the *a priori* forms of human experience.[220] Man is a rational being because he does not passively receive sense information but actively judges sense perception through *a priori* categories which take the percepts of human experience and categorize them, resulting in concepts of knowledge.[221] Both of these conditions (percepts and concepts) are necessary in

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[216]Ibid., 129.

[217]Ibid., 130.

[218]Ibid., 132.

[219]Ibid., 133.

[220]Frederick Copleston, *Modern Philosophy from Descartes to Leibniz*, vol. 4 of *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Image, 1994), 58.

[221]Ronald H. Nash, *Life's Ultimate Questions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 263.

acquiring human knowledge. This provides a uniformity to nature, in that nature operates according to physical laws as we perceive them. The organization of these perceptions into universal laws is the work of synthesis, or judgment.[222] The major deficiency with the Kantian view is that there is a bifurcation between what is real (the noumenal) and what is perceived (the phenomenal). This bifurcation in Kantian epistemology has led to the skepticism found in modern theology, and it is exactly the target at which Henry takes aim in his conception of the λόγος doctrine.

The λόγος doctrine maintains an active role for the human mind in making judgments of the real world according to the forms of reason and morality existing in the mind of God, and it is accessible by the human mind because it has been created in the image of God.[223] In Henry's view the fall affected the image in different ways. In respect to morality, man is always immoral; in respect to his ability to think, man can know certain things such as necessary truth. The fall may hinder his ability to think rightly, but it does not hinder his ability to grasp and use the laws of logic.[224] Theologies and philosophies which limit the ability of man to know truth or to be certain about truth do so at the risk of descending into anti-realism. "Only the superimposing of arbitrary views concerning the externally real world is what restricts God's self-revelation merely to internal confrontation. Only alien views concerning the nature and limits of human knowledge are what confine revelation to the inner non-intellective existential surd championed by recent neo-Protestant religious theory."[225]

The only path out of this "non-intellective existential" dead end is the path of the Scripture, which attributes to the divine λόγος the mediation of divine revelation; the

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[222]Sharon Anderson-Gold, *Unnecessary Evil* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2001), 16.

[223]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 2:133.

[224]Ibid., 135.

[225]Ibid., 166.

climax of this divine revelation is Jesus Christ, in whom the "source and content of revelation converge and coincide."[226] Jesus Christ is the "personal incarnation of God in the flesh," the "Eternal Logos—pre-existent, incarnate, and now glorified"[227] Son of God. In Jesus Christ the biblical doctrine of the logos comes to full expression as a personal, rational incarnation sent from God as a revelation of God.[228]

"Jesus, the true Logos and Sophia, is the cosmological Logos as creator and sustainer; he is the epistemological Logos as the ground of all human knowledge; he is the soteriological Logos who as both priest and sacrifice effects the salvation of penitent sinners."[229] It is important to note that the λόγος as it appears in John is and is not similar to the λόγος as it is found in Hellenistic and Jewish philosophy. The main contrast between the biblical and philosophical Logos is that the biblical λόγος is always portrayed as personal and historical. This is so because the role of the logos in Christian theology is not based on the Greek philosophical conception but upon the Scriptural attestation of the Logos as the mediator of creation, salvation and eschatological judgment.[230]

Summary Statements of λόγος Doctrine

In Henry's view, "Christianity affirms that this world is a rational universe, that it is God's world; knowability of the universe is grounded in God's creation of man as a rational creature whose forms of thought correspond to the laws of logic subsisting in the mind of God as well as to the rational character of the world as God's creation."[231] Because the logic of God is not different than the logical patterns of man's mind, reality

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[226]Ibid., 3:9.

[227]Ibid., 165.

[228]Ibid., 173.

[229]Ibid., 185.

[230]Ibid., 203.

[231]Ibid., 192.

is knowable through the creative and sustaining power of the Logos. The Logos was God's agent in creation (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14-15, 24, 29-30 with John 1:3, 4), the agent of redemption, and the eschatological judge (Rev 19:13). This λόγος continues to reveal God by continually upholding reality throughout the created universe.

In attempting to summarize the Logos doctrine, it is best done by Henry:

> "The living Logos is not the universe (nature), is not controlled by man's reasoning powers or identical with them (*nous*), is not a second-rank divinity or a function or principle operating independently between God and the World, is not a cyclical process at work in the cosmos or history. Nor, as in neo-Platonic speculation, is this Logos subdivided into numerous partial, creative and even warring individual logoi. The Logos of the Bible is personal and self-revealed, transcendent to man and the world, eternal and essentially divine, intrinsically intelligible, and incarnate in Jesus Christ. The Logos of Scripture has a mediatorial role—creative, epistemic, salvific and judgmental—and is the rational and moral ground both of what is cosmically and historically unique and of what is constant.
>
> The crowning philosophical achievement of historic Christianity was its intellectual enthronement of the revealed personal Logos of biblical religion in displacement of the many pagan logos-aspirants and shadow logoi of ancient speculative philosophy and religious theory. This achievement of Christian theology and apologetics was sustained by the convictions that a revelational basis exists for affirming the ultimate meaning and coherence of the universe, and that the inspired Scriptures authoritatively set forth the identity and content of the Word of God. Supernatural revelation, reliably expressed in the Bible, and not philosophical reasoning or inquiry, was heralded as the absolute basis not only for valid theological statements about God's nature and Word, but also for assertions concerning the ultimate meaning, coherence and value of earthly existence and life. The Logos of the Bible is not simply the exclusive vehicle of divine self-revelation through whose agency man has any and all contact with the supernatural; he is also the divine Critic of all human inquiry, reflection and wisdom, as attested in the authoritative Scriptures that confront man's wayward mind with the truth and wisdom of God, and beyond this, with Christ's mediation of divine salvation conditioned on belief in certain past events and on experience of the present efficacy of the Logos. In brief, the eternal and self-revealed Logos, incarnate in Jesus Christ, is the foundation of all meaning, and the transcendent personal source and support of the rational, moral and purposive order of created reality."[232]

Assessment of Henry's Logos Doctrine

There is no doubt that Carl Henry has provided contemporary evangelical theology with an important theological treatise on divine revelation. *God, Revelation, and Authority* provides evangelical theology with a description of revelational authority that

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[232]Ibid., 194-95.

is grounded in the God who has revealed himself through the eternal λόγος in creation and specifically in the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ.

Early on in his work Henry makes the comment, "A theology is only laudable for its conformity to the written Word of God."[233] I think that Henry's theology of the λόγος conforms nicely to the Scriptures in several ways. First of all, his comparison of λόγος in the New Testament with דָּבָר in the Old Testament appears to be biblically sound, especially in bringing in the evidence from the LXX that λόγος translates דָּבָר. Secondly, Henry picks up one of the great components of the New Testament: Jesus Christ is the mystery of God that has now been revealed (Rom 1:18; Rom 3:21; Rom 16:25; Eph 1:9; Eph 3:5, 9; Col 1:26; 1 Pt 1:12). This shows the unity of God's will and work within creation because the pre-incarnate revelation of God to Israel and the nations "attested" (Rom 3:21) to Jesus Christ who is the incarnate revelation of God unto salvation. The New Testament does not speak of a new λόγος, but a revealed λόγος who "In the beginning was . . . and was with God . . . and was God" (John 1:1).

With respect to the philosophical implications of the λόγος doctrine, Henry has provided an epistemological principle which enables the human mind to form justified true beliefs about perceived and revealed reality. The Christology presented by Henry does not break new ground in understanding how Jesus is both God and man. His Christology is in assumed agreement with traditional Chalcedonian orthodoxy. Yet the implications of this Christology are corrective to a postmodern culture in which truth is, at best, relative. Because Jesus Christ is the Word, the eternally-existent rational and personal revealed truth of God, Christianity can claim to be the only true way to God. What the λόγος doctrine offers is not a theology based on man's ability to reason and know what is true and what is real. Rather, the logos doctrine emphasizes that the Creator and Sustainer of the cosmos, the Eternal, Incarnate λόγος who is Jesus Christ, is

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[233]Ibid., 2:52

mediating not only religious truth but all truth. In placing the emphasis of revelation on God, Christianity is forced to assign a humble role to human reason because man's reason is derivative of his Creator's as well as being wholly dependent upon God for true knowledge.

Henry is often criticized for being a rationalist. By rationalist his critics have in mind a strong sort of rationalism which places little to no emphasis upon the role of experience within man's truth-gathering capacities. Yet Henry himself criticizes this sort of "strong rationalism" as an error which led to the contemporary embrace of "scientific" empiricism, or the view that all knowledge is the result of sense experience. Henry's view, however, is not the strong rationalistic view.[234] His view is what could be called weak rationalism, the belief "that some human knowledge does not arise from sense experience."[235] This type of rationalism holds that man was created in the image of God as a "divinely intended knower"[236] who knows things like the necessary truths of logic and other features of reality only because the logos is actively sustaining the creation. For Henry God's revelation is transcendent, not man's mind or ability to know.

Two Approaches to Religious Knowledge

Henry examines different approaches to religious epistemology in order to lay out the various options which scholars have used to demonstrate the sources and justification of religious belief.[237] He examines three broad approaches which philosophers and theologians have employed over the centuries: intuition, experience and reason. From these broad descriptions Henry further classifies the options into two categories: *a priori* and *a posteriori* approaches to religious knowledge. In his

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[234]The strong rationalist view is basically, "No human knowledge arises from sense experience." See Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man*, 71.

[235]Ibid., 71.

[236]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 3:168.

[237]Ibid., 1:70.

examination of these approaches, Henry hopes to set out the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, winnowing the options to the best features within the different approaches and testing each approach's compatibility with Henry's particularly Christian epistemology.

A Posteriori

Experience. One option employed by philosophers and theologians in their attempt to ground religious truth is the experiential approach. This approach is characterized by an attempt to relate all knowledge to sense experience.[238] Henry describes this position as placing reason in a subordinate role to sense-experience, in that reason is employed in ordering and relating sense perception.[239] In this sense reason is a *posteriori* to sense perception. Although the empiricist employs reason, it is not a source of knowledge but rather a tool to sort and explain perceptions.

Empiricism, according to Henry, is the dominant theory of knowledge in contemporary philosophy, which has arisen out of the Enlightenment. Henry attributes the influence of the Enlightenment's characteristic drive for certainty unrestrained from authority as the source of the current acceptance of empiricism as the dominant outlook.[240] Henry cites David Hume as the ideal empiricist who most embodies the Enlightenment spirit and whose philosophy has influenced contemporary philosophy.[241] Concerning Hume Henry writes, "It was David Hume who first among the moderns formulated empiricism as the all-inclusive criterion of truth and applied it to theological assertions with an agnostic outcome."[242] This is best captured in his refutation of

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[238]Ibid., 78.

[239]Ibid., 79.

[240]Ibid.

[241]Ibid.

[242]Ibid.

empirical proofs of God's existence and his insistence upon irrefutable empirical evidence as the most natural explanation for all perceived knowledge, rendering the possibility of miracles highly unlikely. Hume held that in the absence of demonstrative proof, one should reserve belief in God.[243] Although Kant attempted to rehabilitate the mind's ability to apply causation and other categories of thought, Kant's system provided access only to phenomena and not things-in-themselves.[244]

In the face of Hume's criticism and Kant's failed attempt to provide room for faith, Christianity's claim to divine miracles such as divine creation were in doubt, especially as scientific discovery pushed the boundaries of knowledge.[245] As knowledge increased apart from the authority of the church and revelation, it seemed to be increasing due to the method of science: an empirical study of the observed data. In order to maintain the relevance of theology, theologians such as Friedrich Schleiermacher capitulated to the new scientific method and placed a separation between the knowledge of faith (an encounter with God) and the knowledge of science.[246] The result was that objective divine revelation was obscured to make room for the critical and scientific study of the Scriptures, and objective knowledge of God was denied based on the inability of the human mind to establish empirical evidence or proof of God's nature.[247] Of Schleirmacher's proposals Henry writes, "Schleirmacher concedes that we cannot have cognitive knowledge of God as he objectively is, but he insists that the religious consciousness gives us knowledge of God-in-relation to us . . . . The finality of any religion is left in doubt and the Christian religion is shorn of its historic claim for God's transcendent cognitive revelation and of external miraculous attestation."[248] Ethical ideals

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[243]Ibid., 80.

[244]Ibid., 88.

[245]Ibid., 80.

[246]Ibid.

[247]Ibid.

[248]Ibid., 81.

were placed at the center of religious duty, and the once confident appeal to universal divine truth was placed on the shelf as an old idea whose time has passed.

Henry laments the shift in contemporary theology and philosophy to the predominance of empiricism.[249] He is dissatisfied with the empirical theories because they cannot establish either the universality or the necessity of religious experience, nor do they refer to an objective standard which can distinguish the religious from the nonreligious.[250] What lies underneath Henry's critique of the empirical theories is the long-standing critique of empiricism. That critique questions the legitimacy of empiricism's appeal to an objective standard outside itself for universal and value judgments. Henry emphasizes that unless there is an objective standard possessed by the human mind apart from experience (but which is used by the human mind in sense perception), the ability of the knower to move from probability to certainty is reduced.[251] With respect to the knowledge of God, Henry states, "The empirical explanation of religious experience is unable to reach any universally obligatory conclusions about God."[252] While empiricism is certainly an excellent method for compiling information about the world around us, when applied to the question of knowledge of God it falls short because God is the wholly other, the one who is not a perceptible body.[253]

Thomism. Henry sums up the Thomistic approach by describing its position as holding that one conceives the basic knowledge of God's existence and the existence and immortality of the soul from sense experience unaided by God's special activity of

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[249]Ibid., 273.

[250]Ibid., 273.

[251]Ibid., 85.

[252]Ibid., 273.

[253]Ibid., 85. Henry states, "If there be a God, he could scarcely desire from human beings a commitment only to empirical tentativeness about his reality."

revelation.[254] The Thomistic system, accordingly, emphasized the deliverances of reason over that of divine revelation in that the human mind was capable of grasping the existence of God by making an appeal to proofs, such as the teleological or ontological proofs for the existence of God. This line of reasoning from natural revelation to the existence of God without reliance upon divine revelation eventually led to the rejection of belief in God based upon a rejection or refutation of Aquinas' proofs for God's existence. According to Henry, the importance of this for theology and philosophy is that it brought the ability of the human mind to know God on his own rather than as being dependent upon God's revelation of himself in either general or special revelation.[255] Although Henry criticizes Aquinas' view, he does show that Aquinas taught that the way to specific and saving knowledge of God was only attained by reading and studying the Scriptures.[256]

Given this fundamental shift in the understanding of how humanity comes to know God, any refutation of the Thomistic system would spell doom for theology. Henry states, "A breakdown of the five-fold proof could only leave revealed theology floating nebulously in mid-air and without a launch pad."[257] The first attack came from philosophical rationalists who suppressed theology into philosophy. Henry cites Spinoza and Hegel as the two main culprits. He describes their attack: "[They] submerged theology in philosophy, compressed divine revelation into human reflection, considered philosophical reasoning the superlative manifestation of divine disclosure, and dissolved the interest of modern Jews and Christians in once for all divine manifestation."[258] Henry claims that Hegel and Spinoza subordinate revelation under reason and at the same time claim that they are expounding the faith in a more pure and faithful manner.[259] In this

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[254]Ibid., 184.

[255]Ibid., 185.

[256]Ibid., 184.

[257]Ibid., 185.

[258]Ibid., 186.

[259]Ibid.

subordination philosophy overtakes theology so that philosophy becomes the highest form of religious expression—metaphysical conjecture becomes the religion of the day.

Two other major thinkers of the day took a much different approach, an approach which rejected the rationalism of Spinoza and Hegel. David Hume and Immanuel Kant sought, through their epistemology, to limit the role of reason in the deliberations of faith and/or revelation. While Hume takes a skeptical approach to faith and knowledge of God, Kant begins his discussion with a sense of moral obligation. Henry describes Kant's sense of moral obligation as proposing "faith in the divine lawgiver that every person must experience for himself as implicit in the sense of moral duty."[260] Kant's position became the fountainhead of liberal theology, heavily influencing Schleiermacher, the father of liberal theology. Henry describes Schleiermacher's theological modernism regarding "scientific empiricism as the reliable way of knowing and consequently demeaned the miraculous as unscientific and prescientific."[261]

A Priori

Intuition. Henry describes the approach characterized by intuition as an one that denies the ability of the knower to use either reasoned arguments or sense experience to grasp religious reality.[262] Instead of a reasoned approach, the intuitionist holds that religious reality is an immediate apprehension of the religious ultimate in one's own inner experience.[263] This is the approach of religious mystics who assert that comprehension of God is beyond the logical categories of thought and everyday

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[260]Ibid., 187.

[261]Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 48.

[262]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 1:70.

[263]Ibid.

experience and emphasize a religious encounter which is completely emotive and non-rational.[264]

Henry rejects intuition as a legitimate option because he recognizes several of its features as contradictory to the Scriptures. First, Henry sees in intuitionism an over-confidence in the ability of the human mind to be conscious of God based on its own latent God-consciousness.[265] In its acceptance of an immediate awareness of God-consciousness, the reliance upon a mediated revelation of God's existence and attributes is downplayed and deemed unnecessary.[266] This denial of revelation is what enables the intuitive approach to reject the role of logical principles and categories as descriptions of God's nature.[267] The intuitionist can readily endorse contradictory statements about God because in this view God is above and beyond logical comprehension, and the mystical or intuitive encounter is primary. According to Henry, however, the Bible portrays no such relationship between a mystical union with God and knowledge of God. Instead, the Scripture "proclaims the intelligible comprehensibility of divine revelation" and encourages the believer to be restored, not in a mystical encounter with God, but in a submission of the human will to God's revealed salvation in and through acceptance of Jesus Christ as one's Lord and Savior.[268] These weaknesses are compounded by the observation that, given the mystical intuitionist position that the nature of God is ineffable, how does one's religious experience rise to personal significance or avoid self-inflicted hypocrisy by describing what cannot be described?[269]

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[264]Ibid., 72.

[265]Ibid., 73.

[266]Ibid., 73.

[267]Ibid.

[268]Ibid., 74.

[269]Ibid., 76.

Mystical intuition is not the only type of intuitional approach to religious knowledge. Within the Western tradition there is a strong rational intuitionism which spans the centuries of religious thought, evidenced in the work of Plato, Augustine and Kant.[270] These philosophers believed knowledge of God is an immediate apprehension, one which is not based on an ineffable religious encounter but on a rational encounter with the universal.[271] Although Henry sympathizes with the rational-intuitive approach of Augustine and Calvin, he rejects the projects of Plato, Descartes, Spinoza and Hegel as either "predicate[ing] human intuition on divergent metaphysical presuppositions, or articulate[ing] no persuasive basis for intuitive certainty; moreover, they disagreed widely over which propositions are intuitive, and over the extent of intuitive knowledge."[272]

Reason. This method places emphasis on the powers of the human mind to be the source of all knowledge.[273] Rationalism is perhaps the mainstream of the Western philosophical tradition, although its powers have come under suspicion in the last 100 years. The fountainhead of this tradition is Plato, who held that all knowledge arises from man's rational knowledge of the forms. In this philosophical system man is capable of rising to knowledge of the forms on his own. Plato's philosophy would prepare the way for various Greek philosophical constructions, but none of them came close to the biblical assertions of a God who was revealing himself for the sake of humanity.[274] Henry makes a point to say that the Greek philosophers were not direct precursors to Christian thought, in that Greek philosophy made no mention of transcendent divine revelation.[275] Divine

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[270]Ibid., 74.

[271]Ibid.

[272]Ibid., 76.

[273]Ibid., 85.

[274]Ibid., 86.

[275]Ibid., 87.

revelation was a Judeo-Christian idea, and as Augustine, for example, examined Platonism and Neo-Platonism, he critiqued these systems of philosophy based on their compatibility with God's self-disclosure in the Scripture. Hence, the Christian form of rationalism differed greatly from that of the Greek philosophers because it was dependent upon God's revelation and not man's ability to grasp the divine on its own.[276]

The rationalist tradition was carried on throughout the centuries within the Christian church, but in most cases it had more in common with Augustine than with Platonism. In the wake of the Enlightenment, Henry asserts that eighteenth century rationalists Spinoza and Hegel emptied revelation of its ability to communicate divine truth by postulating human reason in pantheistic terms.[277] Revelation was no longer needed as a source of truth because man's mind had the capacity to attain truth on its own. Hegel's philosophy of the Absolute is a prime example of this sentiment. Hegel, attempting to bring together the opposing philosophies of Kant and Hume, explains reality as a developing process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. According to Henry, Hegel's philosophy demoted theology from describing reality to interpreting religious symbols, while elevating philosophy as the discipline which discussed and defined transcendent realities.[278] This confidence in human reason coupled with the influence of the modern scientific method are hallmarks of the Enlightenment, and they led to the attempted search for scientific laws to explain all of reality.

As Hegelianism gained influence throughout Europe and into America, it would soon be challenged by the thought of such men as Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx.[279] These thinkers offered a different account of humanity's reasoning, claiming that humanity thinks and acts as the result of underlying conscious or

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[276]Ibid.

[277]Ibid., 89.

[278]Ibid.

[279]Ibid.

unconscious inner drives, or class struggle.[280] Henry notes that these thinkers, influence widened with the onset of World War I and the utter human devastation it wrought within the world.[281]

Henry's Summary Critique

After examining each of the general options available, Henry draws a sharp distinction between the goals of Christian philosophy and theology and the goals of the philosophers who emphasize human reason and experience as the only sources of human knowledge.[282] The problem with these approaches to religious knowledge is their dependence upon the human mind as the sole source for knowledge about ultimate reality.[283] The problem is not man's incompetence to know truth, nor is the problem with the forms of logic; rather, the problem with purely intuitive, or empirical or rational approaches to religious knowledge is their rejection or avoidance of divine revelation as a source of truth.[284] Henry states, "Christianity depicts itself—essentially theological though it be—not as a supremely constructed metaphysical theory, but as a revelation, differing in kind from secular philosophies grounded in rational reflection."[285] A truly Christian epistemology is not a scientific endeavor that seeks empirical verifiability; a Christian epistemology simply seeks to show that "true knowledge [is] nothing more or less than truth as God knows and reveals it."[286] Christian epistemology simply wants to show that God can and does speak for himself and "to define the abiding role of reason

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[280]Ibid.

[281]Ibid., 90.

[282]Ibid., 91.

[283]Ibid.

[284]Ibid.

[285]Ibid., 95.

[286]Ibid., 93.

and the meaning of revelation."[287] The alternate theories of intuition, empiricism and rationalism each deny God's revelation in one way or another and therefore show that the only true way to have confidence in an approach to religious knowledge is through divine revelation.[288]

Theological Transcendent *A Priori*

Henry's conception of religious knowledge along the foregoing lines has shown his commitment to the school of theological and philosophical thought which advocates an external objective world which can be known by the human mind. A major component of his religious epistemology is his position that knowledge of God is *a priori*. Henry describes his position as the theological transcendent *a priori*, and he distinguishes his view from the views of more radical rationalists such as Plato, Descartes, Leibniz and Kant with the additional component of divine revelation as the foundation for knowledge.[289] In contrast to these rationalists, who place too much confidence in the ability of the human mind to know on its own, Henry consciously places himself within the tradition of Augustine, Luther and Calvin.[290] The *a priori* tradition also rejects the *a posteriori* tradition of Thomism which seeks to demonstrate the existence of God through the use of rational proofs or evidence which are available to the human mind independently of divine revelation.[291] "The *apriorists*," Henry states, "contend that religion cannot be explained in terms of God as an object merely inferred from the world and man; rather, the ethicoreligious world order is said to confront us directly as a supracosmical reality to which humanity is related over and above the

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[287]Ibid., 95.

[288]Ibid.

[289]Ibid., 324.

[290]Ibid.

[291]Ibid., 273.

universe."[292] What the a priori interpretation of religious knowledge insists is that God is the source of knowledge and that "man does not rise to God from the not-God," but that religious experience is the "direct apprehension of God in the inner human spirit."[293]

Although Henry objects to the position that it is possible for unaided rationalizing to arrive at truth, he believes that humanity does have a created capacity for knowledge of absolute truth, despite humanity's condition as fallen.[294] Although this suggests some innate capability on the part of humanity, Henry makes the point that this knowledge "is a witness stamped upon man antecedent to philosophical establishment."[295] This "stamped witness" is a capacity or a structure of the human mind to receive God's revelation. Humanity has been created in the image of God, and because God actively preserves his creation (humanity being a part of that creation, even the mind), humanity stands in "direct knowledge relation" to God, who constantly reveals his existence and attributes through general and special revelation.[296]

"Knowledge of God is no mere induction from the finite and nondivine, but is directly and intuitively given in human experience."[297] What Henry means by this is that knowledge of God does not arise from experience; rather, though one might have an experience which triggers a belief in God, the mind has innate knowledge of God's existence, of which the experience is just an instance. Henry likens this awareness of God in much the same way as one is aware of his or her own existence and the existence of others. For example, we are aware of God in much the same way we are of ourselves.

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[292]Ibid.

[293]Ibid., 274.

[294]Henry, *Drift*, 96.

[295]Ibid.

[296]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 1:324

[297]Ibid., 325.

Henry describes this direct "noesis" as the mind functioning according to its design plan.[298]

Henry finds this idea in the work of Augustine. Henry describes Augustine's theory of knowledge as the operation of the mind judging sense perceptions according to a universal standard of truth which the human mind has as "universal possession."[299] These include universals such as the law of non-contradiction and the principles of mathematics.[300] Henry claims that humanity knows these types of universals as necessarily true, and that these criterion or standards are innate and objective.[301] The image of God in humanity is linked to the natural world and the mind of God. Henry describes Augustine's position: "Augustine regards the human soul as uniquely fashioned by creation and divinely maintained for an existence in a dual environment. The senses link man to an objective world of sense perception, while the intellect links him to the objective world of intellection."[302]

For Augustine, man has innately in his mind the forms of thought by which he judges sense experience, and this judgment is in the context of the human mind operating in conjunction with God's activity of divine illumination.[303] The idea of divine illumination is not to be confused with an identification of the mind of humanity with God's mind, or of some pantheistic or deistic notion of revelation; rather, divine illumination is the act of God illuminating the mind of humanity so that the human mind might function according to its own design plan.[304] According to Augustine, and

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[298]Ibid.

[299]Ibid.

[300]Ibid.

[301]Ibid.

[302]Ibid.

[303]Ibid., 326.

[304]Ibid.

subsequently Henry, what lies beneath this conception of illumination is the biblical idea of the utter distinctiveness between Creator and creature; man's mind is the image of the divine mind, not a piece or part of the divine mind.[305] This is an important point for Henry in that it avoids the identification of man's thoughts with God's thoughts. What man conceives is derivative and the result of God's revelation. Humanity stands in a receptive stance, and therefore a humble stance, in the process of religious knowledge.

Henry acknowledges that Augustine's understanding of innate ideas is, in some ways, similar to the Platonic and Neo-Platonic understanding of innate ideas, yet in its most important aspects the Augustinian conception of the spiritual realm is wholly dependent upon the Christian understanding of the cosmos.[306] This Christian ontology is rooted in the biblical idea of *creatio ex nihilo* and God's continuing preservation. Man, formed in the image of God, has legitimate and individual capabilities because he is made in the image of God, yet at the same time is dependent upon the activity of God's preservation of all things. God illumines man's knowledge, so that "whatever light is sees, it illumined by divine light."[307] Although humanity has certain ideas innately, Henry views Augustine as holding that these innate ideas are not simply planted in the human mind in such a way that they operate apart from divine revelation; rather that they are "an immediate product of a divine activity of illumination going on constantly in the mind."[308] In the doctrine of divine illumination, the concept of God sustaining all knowledge comes through. The idea is that God is the Creator of man's rational faculties and is the ultimate ground of knowledge because God, through illumination, reveals truth to the mind of man.[309]

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[305]Ibid., 327.

[306]Ibid.

[307]Ibid.

[308]Ibid., 328.

[309]Ibid.

Although the mind of humanity is illumined by the divine light, it does not passively accept God's truth. Rather, the mind of man is finite and contingent; it is darkened by its own sinfulness, and the light of illumination is dimmed by the mind's own state.[310] Henry states, "Knowledge is a function of the whole man. The soul must prepare for reception of the truth, and also embrace it."[311] Though man has a link with the divine mind through the Logos and divine illumination, because of man's sinfulness a priori knowledge of God is nothing but a prolegomena to the full knowledge of God.[312] In this fallen state man can know that God exists (the ontological axiom), and he can know God as Creator and Judge and therefore stands under God's judgment for his own sinfulness.[313] It is in this insight that the purpose of knowledge comes into focus. Henry appears to be asking, "Why is it that man wants to know anything with certainty?" Why would man ask the question, "Can I know God truly?" if the question and answer is irrelevant? Henry answers his question: "Knowledge, in all its ramifications is a divine gift for the sake of spiritual fellowship and moral obedience…Christian apriorism therefore leads on indispensable to the exposition of special redemptive revelation."[314]

One of the issues with which Martin Luther dealt was that of the natural ability of man, apart from special revelation, to know God and do God's will. According to Henry, this is one of the ironic episodes of theology, in that Luther's handling of the issues was the result of Augustine's misinterpretation of Genesis 1:26 in which Augustine wrongly separated the similar ideas of image and likeness. The Scholastic theologians continued this disjunction, equating image with the soul's natural attributes (retained after the fall), and likeness with man's moral conformity to God (lost after the fall); in both

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[310]Ibid.

[311]Ibid.

[312]Ibid., 329.

[313]Ibid.

[314]Ibid., 330.

cases image and likeness were separated from innate knowledge.[315] The implication for theology was that, since the natural abilities of man were unimpaired after the fall, man could grasp God on his own through his God-given (yet not necessarily God-sustained) natural abilities.[316] Luther's theology corrected this mistake; he interpreted the terms synonymously and indicated that the fall had corrupted all of man's natural abilities so that none were left to function without God's gracious help.[317] According to Henry, in this move by Luther, one finds the rehabilitation of the link between the image of God and innate knowledge of God.[318] Although he rejects the Scholastic view of the natural ability of man to know God on his own, Luther nonetheless adopts the view that man retains a broken vestige of an innate awareness of God's existence despite the fall; this vestige is not a natural ability on the part of man but a remnant of a relation with the λόγος in response to God's revelation.[319]

Although Henry credits Luther with getting epistemology back on the right track, theologically speaking, it is with Calvin that Henry finds the greatest affinity not only with Augustine but with the Scriptures as well. Henry understands Calvin to stand in the tradition of Augustine and Luther in holding that all knowledge is revealed by God, and that man innately possesses knowledge of God and knowledge of himself.[320] Henry sums up Calvin by saying, "To posit man as a knower is therefore to posit God as a revealer."[321] Henry states that Calvin follows Augustine in positing the λόγος as the illuminator of human knowledge in God's stooping or accommodating his revelation, so

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[315]Ibid., 332.

[316]Ibid.

[317]Ibid.

[318]Ibid.

[319]Ibid., 334.

[320]Ibid.

[321]Ibid.

that man might be able to know what God reveals.[322] Because of this accommodation, man's knowledge is dependent upon God's revelation and is finite because he is God's creation; man's accidental sinful condition is also brought into the equation, as it must depend upon God for illumination.[323]

For Calvin, the purpose of divine accommodation is so that finite man may have knowledge of God's existence and his own moral finitude in light of God's revelation.[324] Thus, knowledge of God is given for man's obedience, both spiritually and morally, described by Calvin as the good life and not just knowledge of God's existence in a mere matter of fact way.[325] This emphasis upon knowledge is more than just a formulaic way of acquiring knowledge; in this way knowledge has a goal and a virtue about it, and it includes the will and the affections as part of the knowing process.[326]

Calvin's position can be found in the early chapter of his *Institutes*. There Calvin describes knowledge of God as "innate"[327] and naturally engraved on men's hearts[328] as part of their very "constitution,"[329] instinctive[330] and hence "self-taught" from birth.[331] Calvin uses such phrases as "natural instinct," "sense of divinity," "sense of deity" and "light of the intellect" to characterize this innate, intuitive knowledge of God.[332] Simply on the basis of creation, man possesses knowledge not only of God's

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[322]Ibid., 335.

[323]Ibid.

[324]Ibid.

[325]Ibid.

[326]Ibid., 337.

[327]Calvin, *Inst.* 1.3.3.

[328]Calvin, *Inst.* 1.4.4.

[329]Calvin , *Inst.*1.3.1.

[330]Calvin, *Inst.* 1.4.2.

[331]Calvin, *Inst.* 1.3.3

[332]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 1:337.

power, but of his divinity, and Calvin significantly points out that "all the attributes of God . . . are . . . included in that idea.[333] Henry describes Calvin's position as humanity, being in the image of God, directly perceives (within the larger context of God's general revelation) God's revelation of knowledge through the sense of divinity and through humanity's own conscience.[334]

These two aspects represent different actions in which humanity engages. Because man has this sense of divinity based on creation, he is a worshipping being, and the result apart from special revelation is idolatry.[335] The consequence of man's conscience is his ability to choose right from wrong, which is also clouded due to his own sinfulness.[336] For Calvin innate knowledge of God is true knowledge of God and humanity knows that God exists. Henry cites Dowey's remarks on Calvin: "This is already *notitia*, knowledge, and indeed religious knowledge . . . . We must insist...that the noetic element does exists. This is the knowledge of God. It is not a mere notion, or presentiment . . . . This knowledge issues in a proposition: 'God exists,' or 'some God exists.' And 'God' means the one God himself, for this revelation is not so vague as to allow polytheistic interpretation . . . . The intellectual element, formulable in the necessary proposition one God exists, is part of the primitive *sensus*."[337]

This sense of divinity is a "seed of religion" that accounts for man developing a variety of religious options, all idolatrous in the vacuum of special revelation, and helps answer the question, "If God confronts man everywhere, all the time, why don't all believe in God?"[338] It is because universal sinfulness brings with it idolatry outside of a

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[333]Ibid., 339.

[334]Ibid.

[335]Ibid., 340.

[336]Ibid., 340.

[337]Ibid.

[338]Ibid.

response to special revelation.[339] The sense of divinity is suppressed by man because this sense of divinity reveals his own sinfulness. Henry describes Calvin's position: "The total personality is in sin—man as a knower, willer, and feeler—seeks to suppress the *sensus divinitatis* with devastating consequences for all of life; man's thoughts, volitions, and affections come under divine judgment, and his open idolatry is accompanied by secret dread amid an ineradicable sense of God."[340] Thus for Calvin, and for Henry who follows him, innate knowledge is also moral knowledge. This is the area of conscience, of man being able to know the difference between right and wrong, truth and falsehood.[341]

For Henry, the knowledge of God is discussed in the framework of universal revelation, which presupposes both his ontological axiom (that God exists) and the epistemological axiom (that God reveals himself). Within this framework he asks the question, "Is the mind of man competent or incompetent to know God?" He answers that the mind of man is capable of knowing God as God reveals himself through his specific and general revelation. Man bears the image of God and was created for fellowship with God. God's revelation is both internal (man's awareness of a God-relatedness) and external (in history, creation, etc.). These characteristics distinguish his view from the competing *a priori* conceptions of Plato, Hegel, Descartes, Kant, Spinoza and others. Specifically, in opposition to Plato and Hegel, the image of God is distinct from the mind of God; in opposition to Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza, God reveals himself both internally and externally to the mind of man. In opposition to the positions of Aquinas and Kant, experience is not overemphasized in Henry's conception because it is limited by the innate categories in the structure of the mind illumined by the λόγος.

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[339]Ibid.

[340]Ibid., 341.

[341]Ibid.

The consequences of Henry's view is that the knowledge of God, knowledge of the self and knowledge of the external world are connected, in that they are similar processes in the human mind.[342] With regard to knowledge of God, humanity does not know God through a special process or by different means than he has knowledge of himself.[343] Henry states, "It would therefore be accurate to say that the knowledge of nature, like the knowledge of the self, is dependent upon the knowledge of God. The Calvinistic view, like the Augustinian, is that man knows only in and through divine revelation; apart from God's revealing activity, man has no knowledge whatever. The various strata of general revelation are given together, but the knowledge of God has a logical priority, even if easily obscured by a concentration upon the other interests. There is no knowledge of the self without God-knowledge, no knowledge of nature without God-knowledge."[344]

For Henry, religious experience is not a derived knowledge, either from rational insight or from evidences; rather, religious experience "is a normal activity and essential element of human nature."[345] What this means is that, given the *a priori* conception of knowledge of God described in the Augustine-Calvin model, it is basic for man to have an awareness of God's existence because God constantly reveals himself through general revelation.[346] Man's knowledge of God's existence, therefore, is justified because his belief is formed through the rational structures of his mind as a proper response to God's confrontation of mankind.[347] Thus, the *a priori* knowledge of God explains the centrality of religious experience in the life of each person. This intuitive

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[342]Ibid., 342.

[343]Ibid.

[344]Ibid., 343.

[345]Ibid., 381.

[346]Ibid.

[347]Ibid.

knowledge awareness of God's existence is not discredited by the possibility that people may not be aware of it, any more than the fact that people are not always aware of the laws of logic they employ in everyday communication.[348] Henry states, "Even the larger contention that some cognitive knowledge of God is innate would not of itself imply that such knowledge may not be supplemented by inference, or even clarified or purified of distortion through supplemental sources, but it does of course exclude every theory which rests the knowledge of God wholly upon analogy or inference."[349] The value of religious *a priorism*, as argued for by Henry, is its ability to connect what the human mind knows with universals, through the capacity of the human mind given in his noetic structure, and given his connection to the divine mind through the λόγος.

Henry is careful to admit that the primary goal of Scripture is not epistemology, nor does "it supply us with a full-formed religious epistemology."[350] However, there are key aspects of the biblical view which reveal "many representations of the secular philosophers and its didactic statement about the role of the λόγος in relation to man and the world and provide extremely helpful clues in expounding a Christian view maneuvering through the alternatives."[351] Henry admits, further, that the Christian view does not stand or fall with his view of innate and *a priori* knowledge; rather, Christianity stands or falls with special revelation. In his opinion, his view clears the way for the move from the questions surrounding epistemology to the questions concerning special revelation and its demand for a decision.[352] One way that this view grounds special revelation is through its use of the *imago* doctrine to show how the rational nature of man is engaged in the knowledge process. In Henry's view, "Faith is

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[348]Ibid., 382.

[349]Ibid., 381.

[350]Ibid., 385.

[351]Ibid.

[352]Ibid.

locked into a priori constituents of human nature; man's nature on the basis of creation serves to explain his religious disposition."[353]

In Henry's estimation, the *a priori* is an essential element to the theory of knowledge because it is uniquely suited to explain important features of religious experience. Henry states, "If philosophy asks how experience gains its validity, if philosophy of religion asks how the universality of necessity of religious experience are best explained…we are led back sooner or later to the *a priori*."[354] In this way, then, Henry uses the *a priori* as a support for Christian theism, in that it explains how religious experience is a vital and necessary aspect of existence for all of humanity, and in this way the religious *a priori* used by Henry is somewhat like a transcendental argument for the superiority of the Christian view over other religions.[355]

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[353]Ibid., 386.

[354]Ibid., 387.

[355]Ibid., 386.

CHAPTER 3

CRITIQUES OF HENRY'S RELIGIOUS EPISTEMOLOGY

Is Henry a Modernist?

The Critiques of Hans Frei and Alister McGrath

Carl Henry's theology has faced a number of critiques. In recent years Henry's theology has been described as having been influenced by modernism in much the same way that liberal theology was thought to have been influenced by the modern spirit.[1] What Frei has in mind in his critique of Henry is that Henry is "like many a fellow liberal in regard to the basic affirmation that theology must have a foundation that is articulated in terms of basic philosophical principles."[2] These philosophical principles Frei is referring to are evident in Henry's appeal to logical coherence and the law of non-contradiction, which are universal principles that apply everywhere, to all people at all times.[3] In a similar vein Alister McGrath sees a flaw in Henry's work and lumps Henry

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[1]Hans Frei, *Types of Christian Theology: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 3. For an assessment of how conservative and liberal theology had similar concerns, see George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984; Nancey Murphey, *Beyond Liberalism & Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda*, in *The Rockwell Lecture Series*, ed. Werner H. Kelber (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996).

[2]Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 24.

[3]Ibid.; see also Hans Frei, "Response to 'Narrative Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal,'" in *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, ed. George C. Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 210-11 in which Frei states, "But may also be that I am looking for a way that looks for a relation between Christian theology and philosophy that disagrees with a view of certainty and knowledge which liberals and evangelicals hold in common." George Hunsinger agrees with Frei's

together with Charles Hodge, B.B. Warfield, John Warwick Montgomery, Norman Geisler and Francis Schaeffer as examples of the Old Princeton School tradition.[4] McGrath notices that, in Henry's appeal to logical consistency and the law of non-contradiction, "Henry risks making an implicit appeal to a more fundamental epistemological foundation in his affirmation of the authority of Scripture itself is derived from this more fundamental authority."[5] What McGrath sees as dangerous in Henry's appeal to logic is an over-confidence in the ability of one's noetic faculties to correspond with reality.[6] In this over-confidence McGrath sees an enthronement of reason over revelation. He states, "What logic is to be allowed this central role? Whose rationality provides the basis of scriptural authority?"[7] He goes on to note three dangers: first, the scripture is reduced to a code book; second, the truth of divine revelation becomes dependent upon the judgment of fallen reason; and third, extra-biblical norms will be used to validate the Scriptures.[8] In essence, what McGrath and Frei see in Henry is a position which allows human reason to become the ultimate foundation for God's revelation which tends to prefer the "extraction of logical propositional statements from an essentially narrative piece of writing," which is characteristic of the Enlightenment assumption that truth is objective and can be found by employing human reason to the

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coupling of Henry with liberal theologians in their concern for universal truth. Hunsinger believes Henry ultimately has the concerns of modernism at heart because he holds that the terms fact and truth have universal application. George Hunsinger, "What Can Evangelicals & Postliberals Learn from Each Other? The Carl Henry-Hans Frei Exchange Reconsidered," in *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals in Conversation*, ed. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 146.

[4]Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 169-70.

[5]Ibid., 170.

[6]Ibid., 169.

[7]Ibid., 170

[8]Ibid.

task.[9]

McGrath's criticism of Henry goes further in claiming that Henry's conception of propositional revelation is a reflection of his foundationalist epistemology.[10] Specifically, in his discussion of the current state of evangelical theology, he mentions the postmodern turn away from "one rationality," and that some theologians "working on the assumption that these ideas were obviously true, appear to have hitched their theological wagon to the Enlightenment myth of a universal rationality and raced off into the sunset—the sunset, as it turned out, of the Enlightenment itself."[11] McGrath sees Henry's theology as "strongly modernist or rationalist" in its "making the truth of divine revelation dependent on the judgments of fallen human reason."[12] In this critique McGrath is stating a similar criticism of Henry made by Donald Bloesch.[13] Bloesch has interacted with Henry's theology since the publication of *The Ground of Certainty* in 1971 and has consistently critiqued Henry's use of the role of human reason in its relation to revelation. Bloesch describes Henry as affirming evangelical theology's use of the categories and even the language (when necessary) of philosophy in the task of theology.[14]

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[9]Ibid., 172. See also Alister McGrath, "Evangelical Theological Method: The State of the Art," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 33.

[10]McGrath, "Evangelical Theological Method," 33.

[11]Ibid., 33.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Donald Bloesch, *The Ground of Certainty* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 18; idem, *God, Authority and Salvation*, vol. 1 of *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 267-68; idem, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, vol. 1 of *Christian Foundations* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 57-58; 68; 118; 252; idem, *Holy Scripture*, vol. 2 of *Christian Foundations* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 46-53; idem, *The Holy Spirit*, vol. 5 of *Christian Foundations* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 22, 35-37.

[14]Bloesch, *The Ground of Certainty*, 18.

The Critique of Donald Bloesch

Although in his early critiques of Henry dissatisfaction with Henry's position is evident, in his later works Bloesch has narrowed his critique. Although Bloesch commends Henry for his insistence and emphasis upon the utter transcendence of God, in the end he finds Henry to be too heavily influenced by the Enlightenment desire to ground or base human knowledge in universal principles before moving on to particulars.[15] Bloesch critiques Henry because his emphasis upon God's transcendence does not carry over to his epistemology: "for [Henry is] confident that human reason can lay hold of the truth of divine revelation apart from special grace . . . . Henry basically calls for a return to the rationalistic idealism of the Enlightenment. His indebtedness to Gordon Clark is obvious. I also see in his theology the pervasive influence of Descartes and Leibniz, both of whom placed supreme confidence in human reason and logic."[16] It seems that Bloesch criticizes Henry for his position that all revelation is propositional, and that this position builds upon the tradition of both Catholic and Protestant scholasticism which held "revelation [to be] a higher form of knowledge that builds on and completes the natural knowledge of God . . . . It is both rational and propositional and thereby stands in direct continuity with ordinary knowledge."[17]

Because Henry holds that knowledge of God is both known rationally and propositionally, Bloesch labels Henry a rationalist whose ultimate aim to ground revelation and knowledge in God in deduced conclusions is in contrast to biblical Christianity.[18] Bloesch lumps Henry in with those who "are intent on reclaiming a logocentric theology—one that is centered in the logos or reason of God as opposed to a

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[15]Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 252.

[16]Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 252.

[17]Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 46.

[18]Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit*, 35.

Spirit theology that aspires to get beyond rational concepts to communion with a transformative reality that impinges on the whole of both history and nature."[19] In Bloesch's reading, Henry's emphasis upon the role of reason to confirm the truth of revelation leaves a very limited role for the Holy Spirit, who is not involved in the discovery of truth through the biblical revelation because the human mind is capable of the discovery of the truth on its own.[20] According to Bloesch, rationalists such as Henry, use univocal language to describe God in his revelation and treat the Scriptures "like Aristotelian first principles . . . [which] cuts off God's revelation in the Bible from the living, dynamic being of God himself and his continual self-giving through Christ and in the Spirit."[21]

Is Henry a Fideist?

Is Carl Henry a modernist?[22] The critiques of Henry's epistemological position center around the role he assigns to human reason. In addition to the critiques previously described that accuse Henry of being a modernist because he assigns too great a role to human reason are those who complain that Henry eschews reason and is instead fideistic, in that Henry relies on presuppositions rather than fact. For example, John Warwick Montgomery replies to Henry's epistemological positions in the first volume of *God, Revelation, and Authority* that his own theological method is not like Henry's "nineteenth

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[19]Ibid.

[20]Ibid., 36.

[21]Ibid., 36-37.

[22]Chad Owen Brand, "Is Carl Henry a Modernist? Rationalism and Foundationalism in Post-War Evangelical Theology," *Trinity Journal*, n.s. (1999): 3-21. In his assessment of the accusations against Henry, Brand focuses on an unpublished paper by James W. McClendon Jr., "Christian Knowledge in the Sunset of Modernity." According to Brand, McClendon views Henry's epistemology as modernist because it contains elements common to classical foundationalism. Because McClendon's views are similar in their accusation to those of Donald Bloesch, Alister McGrath, and Hans Frei, and are contained in an unpublished work, they are only noted here.

century aprioristic religious metaphysic," but instead "confidently [relies] on fact to support faith."[23] For Montgomery, "facts determine interpretive constructs in Christian theology no less than in secular science," and Henry's presuppositional approach relies too heavily on the ability of the individual to interpret events in light of his or her theoretical commitments.[24] A second but similar critique of Henry's presuppositionalism comes from R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner and Arthur Lindsley.[25] These authors attempt to show that circular reasoning leads Henry and other presuppositionalists into fideism and anti-intellectualism, in that presuppositionalism underestimates the ability of human reason.[26] They critique Henry for not explicitly stating that the role of reason is indispensable, even though he does show that reason is the "instrument which recognizes, organizes, and elucidates . . . . [Yet] Even the honoring of the indispensability of the law of contradiction is not maintained where '*revelation is the source of all truth.*'"[27] In their conception of the relationship between evidence and faith, they are like Montgomery in their desire to ground faith in historical, observable fact. What is interesting about this critique is that it directly contradicts the critique of Henry as a modernist who employs reason over and above its competency. Instead Henry is critiqued for not using reason enough.

The critique of Henry's presuppositionalism by those who employ a more evidentialist apologetic reveals something important about the nature of his work. Clark Pinnock links Henry with both Cornelius Van Til and Karl Barth in their rejection of the

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[23]John Warwick Montgomery, *Faith Founded on Fact: Essays in Evidential Apologetics* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978), xxv.

[24]Ibid., xxiii.

[25]R.C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 337-38.

[26]Ibid., 337.

[27]Ibid., 338 (italics original).

attempt of those who "argue evidentially to the authority of the Bible as an empirical conclusion."[28] In examining Henry's central aims, he states that for Henry, "the task of such a philosopher-theologian is to display the inherent logical consistency of the Christian system, that is, its capacity to supply the most plausible solutions to the problems of humankind, thus demonstrating its superiority and validity."[29] Central to this goal of demonstrating the truth of the Christian worldview is Henry's desire to show that the Bible is the ultimate authority, based not on empirical data (as would an evidentialist or natural theologian), but instead based upon the assumption of certain axioms which can not be deductively proven true but can be shown to be logically consistent.[30] Pinnock continues, "Thus, if on the basis of the Bible, Christian thought can show itself to be the most logically consistent system of truth, more so than any rival system, then it will have proven itself and been vindicated along with its axiom."[31] What Pinnock rightly highlights as Henry's chief concern, the apologetic thrust of theology, shows that those who critique Henry as a version of evidentialist miss the mark. Henry, in fact, has a lengthy and sustained rejection of the kind of evidentialist approach of Montgomery, Sproul and others.[32] Specifically, Henry states, "Only by careful attention to the role of presuppositions will the disaster of suspending Christian truth upon empirical considerations be avoided. Every effort to talk authoritatively about God simply on the

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[28]Clark Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze: Finding Our Way through Modern Theology from an Evangelical Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), 47.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Ibid.

[31]Ibid. Pinnock believes that Henry's apologetic theology sets too high a standard for the theologian, for he must "show the inconsistency of every system humankind has known to eliminate the possibility of a rival," 47.

[32]Henry, Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Waco, TX: Word Books 1976-1983; reprint, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 1:181-01; 245-72; idem, *Toward a Recovery of Christian Belief* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 37-60.

ground of sense perception or of human experience is vulnerable and doomed."[33] The rejection of evidentialism is rooted in Henry's appeal to the ontological and epistemological axioms which state that God exists and that God reveals himself through general and special revelation: "The Christian faith is a rational faith that rests on revelational fact and truth, a faith grounded in the self-disclosure of God in Christ as the ultimate reality and the ultimate reason."[34]

Analyzing the Critiques

Although those who include Henry with evidentialists are off the mark, the critique of McGrath, Bloesch, Frei and others that Henry is a modernist is not centered in that particular critique. Rather, they are concerned with Henry's statements like the one above, in which he describes Christianity as a "rational faith," or in his description of his theology as "deductive theology."[35] As is evident in their critique of Henry, they are concerned that he allows prior philosophical commitments to sit in judgment over the nature of Scripture. This is the first of three related criticisms of Henry's theology. According to the first critique, Henry's prior commitments center on his conception of showing the rationality of Christian belief through the application of two universal tests: the law of non-contradiction and logical coherence. Because Henry uses these tests to demonstrate the rationality of Christianity, it is evident that he holds the characteristic view of the Enlightenment that truth is objective and universal. This leads to the second

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[33]Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 50.

[34]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 1:272-73. Henry sets his view against empirical views: "In contrast with all viewpoints which lodge religious experience only in empirical factors, and profess to derive the God-idea from a posteriori proofs or evidences, a distinctive view grounds religion instead in a priori factors which are logically antecedent to man's experience of the cosmos. The apriorists contend that religion cannot be explained in terms of God as an object merely inferred from the world and man; rather the ethicoreligious world order is said to confront us directly as a supracosmical reality to which humanity is related over and above the universe," (273).

[35]Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 37.

criticism of Henry: because he holds a view of truth that it is objective and universal, Henry places too much confidence in the ability of the human mind to know truth, and so divine truth becomes dependent on human reason. Because Henry places such confidence in unaided reason, his approach leaves a very limited role for the Holy Spirit and places too great an emphasis on the intellectual rational assent to the truth of Christianity apart from the inspiration and illumination of the Holy Spirit. Thus this third critique, which follows from critiques one and two is why Donald Bloesch links Henry's theology with the thought of both Descartes and Leibniz.

These criticisms, however, do not appear completely justified when examining what Henry has to say about the relationship between philosophy and theology, the nature of divine revelation and the ability of the human mind to comprehend it, and the role that truth plays in relation to the Holy Spirit in bringing someone to faith in Christ. In order to see how Henry answers these critiques, it will be helpful to take the first two criticisms together, as the questions and answers are closely related to Henry's conception of the human rationality and its connection to God. The third criticism will be taken by itself, although it is also related to the others, but Henry explicitly addresses and refutes this criticism, and this will be addressed first.

Donald Bloesch has critiqued Henry's use of reason, describing Henry as being in the "I believe because I understand camp" and claims that Henry sets out the position that belief is "assent of the will to what reason has already shown to be true."[36] Bloesch in his critique accuses Henry's position of being a version of idealistic

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[36]Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 58. Bloesch sets his position against Henry's: "In the theological method I advocate, we do not adduce true insights from Scripture (Finger), or do we deduce true propositions from Scripture (Henry) . . . . Instead, we discover the truth within Scripture after being confronted by the One who is the Truth—Jesus Christ. We begin not with Scripture as a historical text but with the living Word of God—Jesus Christ—and then try to ascertain how Scripture bears witness to him" (118).

philosophy and not biblical Christianity.[37] Henry, however, has a different opinion concerning his attempt at Christian theology. In one of the last articles published by Henry, he specifically addresses the relationship between the truth of the Christian worldview and how that is used by the Holy Spirit:

> No person can be "argued into becoming a Christian." Yet without meeting rational criteria one's religious experience is less than biblical and evangelical. One can and ought to be persuaded intellectually of the logical consistency and truth of evangelical postulates concerning God and the world. One need not be a believer, however, to understand the truths affirmed by divine revelation. A person persuaded intellectually of the truth of the gospel but seeking to escape or seeking to postpone personal salvific trust invites divine condemnation. But personal faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit uses truth as a means of conviction and persuasion . . . Logical inconsistency and speculative instability are hallmarks of the momentarily aggressive alternatives. While the Holy Spirit of God ongoingly uses truth as an instrument of spiritual conviction and persuasion, the cardinal emphases of revealed religion comprise an enduring world view stretching suasively from origins to the end of all ends.[38]

In Henry's own words he shows a commitment not to a rationalist philosophy but to the work of God in the Holy Spirit to bring people to personal faith in the true, living God who offers salvation to those who believe. In his insistence on the rationality of Christian belief, and in the demonstration of its truth as the work of the Holy Spirit, Henry explicitly rejects the position Bloesch attributes to him. No doubt Bloesch would still be uncomfortable with Henry's use of the terms "rational criteria" and "logical consistency," but those terms seen in the larger context of Henry's work are never understood by Henry independent of the two Christian axioms: that God exists and that God reveals himself.

It would be a little more than ironic if Henry's epistemology were shown to be influenced by modernity in much the same way that David Tracy's theology is purportedly influenced by modernity. In fact, Henry goes to great lengths to separate his approach from the modernist approach. Specifically, Henry argues that Christianity employs a particular metaphysics, a particular epistemology to show how it answers the

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[37]Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit*, 35.

[38]Carl F. H. Henry, "Fortunes of the Christian World View," *Trinity Journal*, n.s. 19 (1998): 163-76 [online], accessed 27 August 2006, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3803_ 199810/ ai_n8814753,

question raised by modernity: Is the human mind competent to comprehend God?[39] In seeking an answer to the question, Henry proposes two choices for theology or philosophy: either one will find an answer by human postulation or by divine revelation. Along these lines Henry states, "Barth is of course right in emphasizing, as every theologian ought, that no one-and-one identity exists between theology as a theoretical discipline and the revealed Word which it expounds. But for evangelical orthodoxy the conceptual formulation of revelation does not begin with human theologizing but is integral to God's infallible revelation. While our theological systems are assuredly not infallible, the inspired Scriptures convey the very Word of God in the form of divinely given truths."[40] The sources of knowledge in human postulation include intuition, experience and reason, all of which are considered inadequate by Henry.[41] The only true source of knowledge about God is revelation because "Christianity depicts itself—essentially theological though it be—not as a supremely constructed metaphysical theory, but as a revelation, differing in kind from secular philosophies grounded in rational reflection."[42]

In direct contradiction of Frei's critique of his epistemological proposal,[43] Henry grounds his position in the general and special revelation of God, organized around what he terms the ontological and epistemological axioms.[44] These axioms serve as organizational principles that help Henry develop the view that "biblical theology insists on a self-named God"[45] who reveals his existence as a "God-relatedness which

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[39]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 1:281.

[40]Ibid., 191.

[41]Ibid., 93.

[42]Ibid., 95.

[43]Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 24 states that Henry is "like many a fellow liberal in regard to the basic affirmation that theology must have a foundation that is articulated in terms of basic philosophical principles."

[44]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 1:213-244; 274-279.

[45]Ibid., 2:166.

characterizes human existence."[46] These axioms are not the basic philosophical principles that Frei and others accuse Henry of imposing upon the biblical text. Instead the axioms are basic to the biblical text. For instance, what Henry terms the ontological axiom is the very biblical belief that God exists.[47] The epistemological axiom, that God voluntarily chooses to reveal what he wills about himself, is another very biblical idea.[48] With respect to the ability of human reason to have knowledge of God, Henry explicitly places limits on its ability because of its derivative nature: "Human reason is a divinely fashioned instrument for recognizing truth; it is not a creative source of truth."[49]

Henry bases this claim on the nature of humanity as image-bearers of God who were created by God for personal, intelligible relationships.[50] In this reading of the biblical text, the ability of the human mind to know truth is a result of its functioning according to its design plan.[51] "The fact that the human mind does not create truth but receives it informs us that the mind has its limits, namely that it is finite and clouded by sinfulness.[52] Henry distinguishes between "conjectural metaphysics" or "rationalism in its eighteenth-century deistic emphasis" and the "indispensable" role of reason in Christianity by stating, "What is objectionable about rationalism is not reason, however, but human reasoning deployed into the service of premises that flow from arbitrary and mistaken postulations about reality and truth. Christian theology unreservedly champions reason as an instrument for organizing data and drawing inferences from it, and as a logical discriminating faculty competent to test religious claims."[53] The distinction

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[46]Ibid., 1:274.

[47]Ibid., 273.

[48]Ibid., 216.

[49]Ibid., 225.

[50]Ibid., 225.

[51]Ibid.

[52]Ibid., 226.

[53]Ibid.

between rationalism and the Christian use of reason lies in the difference each view places on the ability of man's reason to operate on its own. In Henry's view, "Knowledge of God is indeed wholly dependent upon divine revelation, but man was divinely made with rational and moral aptitudes for intelligible communion with his Maker and for the joyous service of God."[54] The ability of humanity to test religious claims and to "intellectually [analyze] rational evidence for the truth-value of assertions about God" is basic to the composition of humanity in that they "fulfill a divine intention and purpose for man in relation to the whole realm of knowledge."[55] What Henry is asserting is that human reason cannot exist apart from its dependence upon divine revelation and its divinely intended purpose, to know God as he reveals himself.

Based on Henry's comments, it appears that he rejects the notion that theology should play according to the rules of philosophy if they are not in some way connected to the truth of divine revelation. This, however, does not fully answer the critiques leveled at Henry. Kevin J. Vanhoozer places Henry's theology next to Charles Hodge's theology and finds a similar concern "to see Scripture in terms of revelation, revelation in terms of conveying information, and theology in terms of divine information-processing."[56] What Vanhoozer critiques in the "Hodge-Henry (H-H) hypothesis" is a view of language and truth that "is primarily concerned with stating truth, which in turn is a function of describing reality, representing the world, or recording a series of events."[57] The result of this view is that truth "is a correspondence relation in which language (and thought) accurately reflects, mirrors, or pictures reality."[58] Vanhoozer appears to accept the criticism of the H-H hypothesis by postmodern theologians that the view's commitment

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[54]Ibid., 227.

[55]Ibid.

[56]Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics," *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48 (2005): 95.

[57]Ibid.

[58]Ibid.

to a correspondence theory of truth is a capitulation to "a metaphysical theory of truth that is neither biblical in its origin nor plausible in the contemporary context."[59] This leads us back to the critique of Frei and McGrath that Henry's commitment to the concept of universal truth makes him a modernist, even if Henry may not be aware of his commitment to modernist principles.[60]

In returning to the original critique, are we back to square one? No. What we can see in Henry's rejection of axioms other than those which are central to the Scripture, is a concern to follow the biblical story that begins with God revealing himself to humanity through the account of creation, of which the creation of man and woman is the climax. In opposition to speculative philosophy, Christian theology does not begin with proofs or intricate explications in its attempt to define God's existence. Rather, theology begins with creation—the story of God speaking the creation into being and actively creating all that is. As such, man is under the authority of God and is commanded to live in obedience to him, through the self-revelation of God, who confronts man as a sinner and offers redemption in the λόγος, Jesus Christ.[61]

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[59]Ibid., 95-96. Vanhoozer attributes this view to Carl Rashke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 2004), 212

[60]Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation," 99. He mentions that Frei is concerned that Henry is "a closet *modernist* because of his commitment to truth as historical factuality."

[61]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 1:199. Vanhoozer similarly asserts that it is not philosophical constructions that reveals God but "it is Scripture that reveals God, not a set of detached propositions. Revealed truths are not abstract but canonically concrete . . . . Don't confuse my position with that of Marcus Borg who defines taking the Bible seriously but not literally in terms of the ability to hear the biblical stories once again as true stories, even as one knows that they can not be factually true and that their truth does not depend on their factuality. By Contrast, I believe that taking the Bible seriously requires us to take the Bible literally, that is, in its *literary* sense." Vanhoozer includes propositional truth in his model but wants to avoid limiting the Scripture to propositionalism. For a full-length discussion of Vanhoozer's proposal, see his *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 265-305.

Rather than attempting to fit his theological views into a philosophical framework, Henry's epistemology is a proposal that applies the ontological reality of the Logos. While it may be true that in the end Henry's propositionalism is not a completely adequate account of divine revelation, the reason behind his position is not an intellectual slavery to the tenets of modernism or classical foundationalism. Rather, "Henry stresses the intelligibility of the word for fear that the failure to equate revelation with the verbal meaning of the Bible would compromise God's truth."[62] Henry's propositionalism is best seen as a reaction to the influence of Neo-orthodoxy which de-emphasized the cognitive aspect of divine revelation. For instance, Henry criticized the Barthian position by stating, "Although Barth considers theology the exposition of revelation, he denies that theology is the systematization of biblical data. He depicts revelation as a direct sporadic confrontation, rather than as scripturally objectified. His notion of revelation as personal but nonpropositional inevitably erodes the validity of revelational content."[63] What concerned Henry about the Neo-orthodox emphasis of the personal over the propositional was its likely outcome: the emptying of the cognitive truth of the Scriptures which truly revealed God.[64]

In his insistence on the competence of the human mind to know God in his revelation, Henry heavily relies upon the biblical notion of humanity being created in the image of God. Henry describes the significance of the *imago* to be that "no two persons have globally divergent sets of beliefs. In other words, the Christian worldview involves not merely an optional theoretical exposition of the totality of things, but also a universally shared prescientific understanding of reality, an understanding that includes a cognitive awareness of God, of other selves, and of the world as an intellectually

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[62]Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 45.

[63]Henry, "The Fortunes of the Christian Worldview."

[64]Ibid.," idem, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:399.

correlated unity."[65] Henry's epistemology simply seeks to affirm that God can and does speak for himself in ways that the mind of men and women can cognitively comprehend and respond to under the direction of the Holy Spirit.[66] According to Henry, the biblical account of creation necessitates the Christian philosopher and theologian to immediately recognize man's dependence upon God not only for knowledge, but for his very existence.[67]

Henry disagrees with those who follow in the tradition of Thomas Aquinas and attempts to posit a natural capacity of the human mind to know independently of divine revelation. This type of approach ultimately puts human rationality in place as the foundation for all of man's beliefs about God.[68] The problem with purely intuitive, empirical and rational approaches to religious knowledge is their rejection or avoidance of divine revelation as a source of truth.[69] God is not hidden to the mind of man because

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[65]Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 91. Surprisingly, Alister McGrath agrees with Henry concerning this implication of the *imago* doctrine even though he criticizes Henry's appeal to a universal reason in earlier works (see above). He states, "On my reading of natural theology—and I suggest, on Augustine's—there will be continuities, however weak they may be; commonalities, however attenuated they may be; and correspondences, however oblique they may be, between Christianity and other attempts to make sense of the world, precisely because both that world and those who attempt to make sense of it have been created by the same God." Later he adds, "The Christian belief that God, in creating the world, signed it with the divine likeness and created humanity with the capacity to discern its vestiges and attenuations, clearly points to a native human ability to make some hesitant autonomous guesses as to the nature and purpose of the world, including humanity, which have the potential to resonate with the great themes of the Christian tradition. The basic idea can be seen in the concept of the λογος προφοριχος, the externalized λογος of creation, which was developed by Theophilus and other early Christian writers both as a means of encouraging dialogue with the Platonic tradition, and also as a way of accommodating its valid insights with a Christian framework." Alister McGrath, *Reality*, vol. 2 of *A Scientific Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 112-13.

[66]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 1:95.

[67]Ibid., 87.

[68]Ibid.

[69]Ibid., 91.

He has chosen to reveal himself. This does not mean that man has immediate knowledge of God, but that man can have knowledge about God as he has revealed himself to man through general and special revelation.[70] Henry states, "Because God willed to make himself known thus, he provided a universal revelation in the cosmos and in history, a general anthropological revelation in the mind and conscience of man, and to the Hebrews as a chosen people a particular salvific revelation consummated in Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah and head of the church . . . disclosed in Jesus Christ the incarnate Logos."[71]

As creatures in God's image, humanity is personal, volitional, self-conscious and able to know truth. In the narrative of the fall, Adam was in fellowship with God and had the mental capacity to understand the truth so that he might do what the Lord told him to do. Adam and Eve had the mental capacity to distinguish between right and wrong, in that they were able to know truth from falsehood (Gen 2:17). "If man made any sense of his own experience, the laws of logic must intrinsically have qualified the *imago Dei*. From the first, man as man possessed reasoning capacities and rational discernment on the basis of creation."[72] The ability of humanity to distinguish between good and evil, truth and falsehood leads Henry to the conclusion that there are basic universal laws which govern man's reasoning, such as the law of non-contradiction.[73] Among the many examples Henry cites are two passages, John 1:10-12 ("He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.") and John 8:54-55 ("Jesus replied, 'If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one

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[70]Ibid., 2:252.

[71]Ibid., 87.

[72]Ibid., 126.

[73]Ibid.

who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word."), which show that the assumption of Scripture is the human capacity to understand and believe truth both rationally and experientially. Yet this ability to understand and respond to God does not mean that human reason can grasp true knowledge of God on its own; rather, the human mind is wholly dependent upon God as a "receiver of the special revelation truth of redemption."[74]

As a receiver of divine revelation, Henry eschews any misunderstanding that the human mind is passive in its reception. Rather, he preserves the mind's capacity to judge between alternatives because God has given it the ability to apply judgments to the perceived world. The image of God in humanity is linked to the natural world and the mind of God.[75] The awareness of God's existence is not inferred from other beliefs but nistead is a belief independent of experience and is *a priori*.[76] Although the belief or awareness is *a priori*, it is not inherent or "hard-wired" into each human's noetic structure; rather, the awareness of God's existence is a response to the direct confrontation of God to the human mind and conscience, a confrontation which intelligibly engages humanity through the divine image.[77]

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[74]Ibid., 130.

[75]Ibid., 1:325; Henry, "The Foundations of the Christian Worldview.'

[76]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 1:274.

[77]Ibid., 279.

CHAPTER 4

ALVIN PLANTINGA'S RELIGIOUS EPISTEMOLOGY

Introduction

By his own account, the justification of religious belief has been one of the central concerns of Alvin Plantinga's philosophical career.[1] The topic first surfaces in his publication of *God and Other Minds* and finds a more developed treatment in his article "Reason and Belief in God," and most recently in his third volume on the nature of warrant, *Warranted Christian Belief*.[2] In broad terms, his work in this area has remained focused on the rationality of theistic belief and the complex interplay between the role of evidence and the formation of religious beliefs. In his latest work on religious epistemology, *Warranted Christian Belief*, Plantinga proposes an extension of his epistemology[3] that demonstrates that Christian belief can have warrant enough for knowledge, overcoming common objections to theistic belief.

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[1]Alvin Plantinga, "A Christian Life Partly Lived," in *Philosophers Who Believe: The Spiritual Journeys of 11 Leading Thinkers*, ed. Kelly James Clark (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 66-67; idem, "Self-profile," in *Alvin Plantinga*, ed. James E. Tomberlin and Peter Van Inwagen, Profiles: An International Series of Contemporary Philosophers and Logicians, vol. 5 (Dordrecht, Netherlands: D. Reidel, 1985).

[2]Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967; reprint 1990); idem, "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1983), 16-93; idem, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[3]Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Aspects of Plantinga's Epistemology

An Augustinian Approach

Alvin Plantinga's philosophy cannot be separated from his commitment to the Christian worldview.[4] He explicitly states this conviction: "The Christian philosopher does indeed have a responsibility to the philosophical world at large; but his fundamental responsibility is to the Christian community, and finally to God."[5] Specifically, Plantinga conceives his work as a philosopher in broadly Augustinian terms, which appeals to an inclusion of faith in developing a broader definition of knowledge and evidence.[6] For instance, Plantinga believes that the Christian's knowledge of the existence of God (typically recognized as something one knows by "faith") has implications upon one's reasoned conclusions of metaphysical and epistemological concerns (typically recognized as the deliverances of pure reason). This understanding of the role of the Christian philosopher to consider a wider scope of knowledge sets the stage for Plantinga's religious epistemology.

For the Christian philosopher, "belief in the existence of God is then in the same boat as belief in truths of logic, other minds, the past, and perceptual objects; in each case God has so constructed us that in the right circumstances we acquire the belief in question. But then the belief that there is such a person as God is as much among the

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[4]Alvin Plantinga, "Self-Profile;"; idem, "A Christian Life Partly Lived;" idem, "Advice to Christian Philosophers," *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984): 253-71; idem, "The Twin Pillars of Christian Scholarship," in *Seeking Understanding: The Stob Lectures 1986-1998* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); idem, "Augustinian Christian Philosophy," in *The Augustinian Tradition*, ed. Gareth B. Matthews (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). For discussion of this feature of Plantinga's philosophical work, see Kelly James Clark, "Introduction: The Literature of Confession," in *Philosophers Who Believe*, ed. Kelly James Clark (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993),10; and James Beilby, *Epistemology as Theology: An Evaluation of Alvin Plantinga's Religious Epistemology* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 9.

[5]Plantinga, "Advice to Christian Philosophers," 262.

[6]Plantinga, "Augustinian Christian Philosophy," 22-23.

deliverances of our natural noetic faculties as are those other beliefs."[7] The Christian, then, knows that God exists and this knowledge is not by faith alone, but is also by reason, "and this whether or not any of the classical theistic arguments is successful."[8]

In following Augustine (and John Calvin and the subsequent Dutch tradition through the work of Abraham Kuyper), Plantinga believes that there are four categories of Augustine's thought which remain relevant for today's intellectual and cultural climate. They are: philosophical theology, apologetics (both negative apologetics and positive apologetics), "Christian philosophical criticism" and "positive Christian philosophy."[9] Although Plantinga sees both philosophical theology and traditional apologetics flourishing and rather uncontroversial among the Christian community, he feels this is in large part because they are projects with which Christian scholars have traditionally been engaged.[10] Christian philosophical criticism and positive Christian philosophy, however, have not fared as well, according to Plantinga, and he offers his own explanation of these two vital and distinctively Augustinian themes to his philosophy.

Christian philosophical criticism. Christian philosophical criticism is an approach which examines the presuppositions and axioms of opposing worldviews to reveal their underlying structures of thought and intellectual commitments.[11] Plantinga mentions that this insight is a large part of the Kuyperian tradition, an insight that Kuyper

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[7]Plantinga, "Advice to Christian Philosophers," 262.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Plantinga, "Augustinian Christian Philosophy," 3.

[10]Ibid., 4. Plantinga describes philosophical theology as "a matter of thinking about the central doctrines of the Christian faith from a philosophical perspective and employing the resources of philosophy." Christian apologetics is the two-fold task of defending Christianity from attack and the positive task of setting forth the case for Christian belief. See also, Plantinga, "Advice to Christian Philosophers," 253.

[11]Plantinga, "Augustinian Christian Philosophy," 5.

picked up from Augustine and with which Plantinga completely agrees: "Augustine and Kuyper are right; and the contemporary Western intellectual world, like the worlds of their times, is a battleground or arena in which rages a battle for people's souls."[12] Christian philosophical criticism in this tradition holds that there are no neutral stances in this battle for men's souls, and criticism of competing worldviews is a vitally important work.[13]

In the contemporary Western world there are three major worldviews which compete: Christianity, "perennial naturalism" and "creative antirealism."[14] Of the first, Christianity, Plantinga understands the Christian worldview to encompass the historic doctrines of Christian theism, by this he means the great truths of the gospel and the deliverances of the great confessions of the faith.[15] The other two positions, however, are of great importance in understanding the current culture, especially in respect to the questions which surround religious epistemology.[16] Both perennial naturalism and creative antirealism have vastly divergent conceptions from that of traditional Christianity concerning the nature of human beings and the world which they inhabit, and this in turn means that they arrive at vastly different conclusions concerning the central matters of religious epistemology.

Perennial naturalism, or naturalism for short, is characterized as the assumption that everything in this world is the result of natural forces operating to produce not just the physical world but also language, humor, philosophy, love and so on.[17] Philosophers who operate under the commitments of this view attempt to account

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[12]Ibid.

[13]Plantinga, "A Christian Life Partly Lived," 47; idem, "Augustinian Christian Philosophy," 5.

[14]Plantinga, "Augustinian Christian Philosophy," 6.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Ibid.

for human knowledge along these lines. On this view humanity is a part of nature; it is best described as the apparent winner of the process of natural selection and that all we are as humans can be explained in terms of evolutionary forces acting upon us.[18] This view has a wide acceptance among those scientists who insist that it is the only way to explain all phenomena, and Plantinga is persuaded that it even "corrupts Christian thinking."[19] Although there are those who view naturalism as the most influential of the three views, Plantinga believes that the third worldview, "creative antirealism," is just as prevalent, and perhaps more influential than naturalism.[20]

The fundamental idea of creative antirealism is that the world is given meaning by the cognitive activity of humanity, that we "are responsible for the structure and nature of the world."[21] This idea is forcefully put forward by Immanuel Kant and is the concept that whatever is perceived in the world is given its structure, its form, by the activity of the human mind; this idea has become the cornerstone of the major intellectual movements within the West, and it too has negatively influenced Christian theology and has infected other disciplines, such as physics.[22]

With respect to the influence creative antirealism has upon Christianity, Plantinga notes that some theologians embrace this notion that humanity is responsible for the basic structure of the world with respect to God—they believe that the concept of

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[18]Ibid., 7.

[19]Ibid., 8. For a collection of essays which negatively interact with Christian attempts to question the acceptance of naturalism in the sciences, see Robert T. Pennock, ed., *Intelligent Design Creationsim and Its Critics: Philosophical, Theological, and Scientific Perspectives* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001). An example of a theologian who accepts naturalism, Plantinga cites Gordon Kaufman, *Theology for a Nuclear Age* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985).

[20]Plantinga, "Augustinian Christian Philosophy," 9.

[21]Ibid. For a complete essay on Plantinga's conception of Kant's epistemology which Plantinga calls creative antirealism, see Alvin Plantinga, "How to be an Anti-Realist," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association*. 56: 1 (1982): 47-70.

[22]Plantinga, "Augustinian Christian Philosophy," 9.

God is a construct that we have created.[23] This idea is creative anti-realist in nature because truth is what we construct, God depends for its existence on the noetic activity of human minds. Plantinga wishes to refute the creative anti-realist claim that "truth is provability, or verifiability, or perhaps warranted assertability."[24] In refuting this position Plantinga shows how the idea is related to Kant's epistemology. Plantinga describes Kant's epistemological insight as a "counterfactual claim: there is a sort of intellectual or conceptual or noetic activity we engage in, such that if we didn't engage in that activity (and no other creatures leapt into the breach) the things would not display the sorts of structure in question."[25]

As examples of this claim, Plantinga reviews the work of Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam.[26] These two philosophers have similar points to make about truth. Rorty thinks that truth is "what our peers will let us get away with saying;" the implication being that truth is not dependent upon the noetic structure of the real world—"it depends upon the noetic activity of our peers."[27] Putnam's view asserts that truth is verifiability, or assertibility-verifiability or assertibility, according to the standards we do in fact adopt.[28] Truth, then, depends on our standards or our limits. In his presidential address to the American Philosophical Association, Putnam states, "What I am saying is that, in a certain 'contextual' sense, it is an *a priori* truth that 'cow' refers to a determinate class of things . . . . Adopting 'cow talk' is adopting a 'version,' in Nelson Goodman's phrase,

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[23]Plantinga, "How to Be An Anti-Realist," 49.

[24]Ibid., 50.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Plantinga references the following works in developing this example; Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980); Hilary Putnam, "Realism and Reason," in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 50, no. 6 (1977): 483-98; also see Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

[27]Plantinga, "How to be an Anti-Realist," 50.

[28]Ibid., 51.

from within which it is *a priori* that the word 'cow' refers (and, indeed, that it refers to cows)."[29] Plantinga interprets Putnam to mean that what makes "cow talk" (or God talk for that matter) *a priori* is that a community adopts it—it is *a priori* because they do it. "So whether or not there are cows depends upon us—upon the categories, rules and strategies we adopt for verification, upon the linguistic practices and procedures we employ."[30] Plantinga boils Putnam's argument down to this question, asked by Putnam to the realist: "How could it be that what is certified, even ideally certified, by our best methods—is nonetheless false? . . . . At a fundamental level a cardinal anti-realist intuition is that truth, whatever it is, is something that can be known; if the best efforts of mind can't settle the question whether a proposition is true, then there's no truth to be known."[31]

Richard Rorty's approach to truth is similar to that of Putnam. Rorty "excoriates the entire program" of contemporary epistemology, which seeks a proper method for arriving at the universal truth of a subject.[32] Because there is no such method for arriving at the realist notion of truth, then the realist is mistaken. Rorty, in his acknowledgement of serious disagreement over serious matters, concludes that there is no truth, or that truth is what we make it or what "our peers will let us get away with." Plantinga, however, notices Rorty's basic agreement to the perspective that if "there were such a thing as truth in the realist sense, then there would be a sure method for arriving at it."[33] Plantinga concludes that at a more fundamental level Rorty agrees with the realist that "truth is what our methods obtain."[34] Yet this is what Rorty excoriates, and his

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[29]Putnam, "Realism and Reason," 495.

[30]Plantinga, "How to be an Anti-Realist," 53.

[31]Ibid., 62.

[32]Ibid., 63.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid. Plantinga disagrees with Rorty that truth does not exist because there is no agreed upon method to arrive at it.

conclusion that there is no truth because there is no method that settles these serious disagreements is too great a leap.[35]

Plantinga sums up the convergence of the worldviews of perennial naturalism and creative antirealism: "According to the first, human beings are essentially no more than complicated machines, with no real creativity . . . . According to the second, by contrast, human beings insofar as we confer the world's basic structure upon it, really take the place of God. What there is and what it is like is really up to us and a result of our activity."[36] Plantinga notes that often the result of this convergence is relativism, the idea that there is no way the world is, and relativism is often accompanied by the lack of intellectual commitment to things such as truth or other moral commitments.[37]

The task of Christian philosophical criticism, as Plantinga envisions it, is to take a close look at the fundamental ideas of these intellectual movements, show their own internal inconsistencies and critique them according to the basic positions of Christian philosophy and theology.[38] Plantinga describes the task of those who engage in Christian philosophical criticism: "Christian philosophers must discern the spiritual connections of the various philosophical and quasi-philosophical currents that swirl around us and make their perceptions known to the rest of the Christian community."[39] For example, in opposition to the "man is the measure of all things" philosophy of

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[35]Ibid., 63.

[36]Plantinga, "Augustinian Christian Philosophy," 11.

[37]Ibid., 13. Plantinga also notes that there is a third group of intellectuals who are committed to neither naturalism or anti-realism but are those who have been to the end of truth and have found it to be perspectival—"what there is is a proposition's being true in a version or from a perspective." These intellectuals, therefore, do not commit themselves to a version of what they believe to be true, because that would be to violate their realization that there is no truth. Plantinga says, "This lack of commitment, this seeing through the pitiful self-delusion of commitment, is rampant in academia; it is, I think, close to the beating heart (or perhaps the central mushy core) of contemporary deconstruction and its heirs."

[38]Ibid.

[39]Ibid., 15.

Richard Rorty, Christian theism describes man not as the one who creates meaning, but the one who is a creature of the Creator, who has made male and female in his image.[40] For example, "In setting out to create human beings in his image, then, God set out to create them in such a way that they could reflect something of his capacity to grasp concepts and hold beliefs. Furthermore, as the whole Christian tradition suggests, his aim was to create them in such a way that they could reflect something of his capacity for holding *true* beliefs, for attaining *knowledge*."[41]

The conclusion of Christian philosophical criticism is that the Christian perspective is more than a mere difference of opinion between naturalism and creative anti-realism; it is a completely different project with different assumptions and different results, results that profoundly impact the way in which one views the world.[42] Belief in a Creator would definitely influence the way in which one examined scientific data, or other such subjects for instance. This is because, as Augustine and those who have followed in his footsteps have maintained, the *civitas dei* is at war with the *civitas mundo*, because at their root is a wholly different way to look at and understand the world.[43]

Positive Christian philosophy. If Christian philosophical criticism exposes the foundations and inconsistencies of its rivals, how does one explain the Christian position? This is the task of positive Christian philosophy. Positive Christian philosophy thinks "about the sorts of questions philosophers ask and answer from an explicitly Christian point of view."[44] Plantinga, in light of the sway which naturalism and creative anti-realism have in contemporary philosophy, stresses that the simple belief that God exists, or a simple version of theism, is the really crucial element in stating the Christian

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[40]Ibid., 8, 9.

[41]Plantinga, "The Twin Pillars of Christian Scholarship," 151; italics original.

[42]Plantinga, "Augustinian Christian Philosophy," 13.

[43]Ibid., 14.

[44]Ibid., 16.

position.[45] In other words, the philosopher begins his task from an explicitly Christian perspective and addresses the issues of contemporary philosophy from that vantage point.[46]

For example, how would a Christian philosopher approach the question of the existence of propositions, sets, states of affairs and possible worlds? One possibility is the Augustinian idea that objects such as propositions, sets, states of affairs and possible worlds are really ideas in the mind of God, and as such are necessary objects which are causally dependent upon the divine mind and knowable to the human mind because our mind is like God's mind, in that he has created it in a certain manner to have knowledge of some of the things he thinks.[47] Certainly the Christian response will be drastically different from that of thorough-going naturalists. The reason is simple: naturalists and Christians have opposing views of the nature of reality and the ontological status of humanity, let alone the ontological existence of God.

A second relevant example Plantinga gives is the way in which the Christian should think of the theory of knowledge. Here Plantinga has in mind the impact that the Creator has upon his creation, that the creation bears a certain stamp, or evidence of a design plan.[48] A Christian approach to knowledge, then, will be vastly different from a naturalistic epistemology, in that the Christian approach will have a certain notion of warrant that includes a teleological element to knowledge.[49] For example, what Plantinga agrees with in the anti-realist's position is that the intuition that truth is dependent upon a mind or minds is essentially correct.[50] Plantinga takes the position that truth is not

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[45]Ibid., 16.

[46]Ibid., 17.

[47]Ibid.

[48]Ibid., 18.

[49]Ibid.

[50]Plantinga, "How to be an Anti-Realist," 68.

independent of mind, although its existence does not rely upon the noetic activity of human minds alone, but rather the existence of propositions and other necessary constructs is due to the noetic activity of God.[51] This is the manner in which Augustine, and most of the Christian tradition following him, solved the riddle of necessary truths existing independently of human construction yet still dependently upon mind; Plantinga states, "The thesis, then, is that truth cannot be independent of noetic activity on the part of persons. The antithesis is that it must be independent of *our* noetic activity. And the synthesis is that truth is independent of our intellectual activity but not of God's."[52] For any proposition *p*, *p* is true if believed by God; and for any proposition that exists, it exists only "if it is conceived or thought of or the object of some other propositional attitude, for it is necessary that every proposition is conceived of by God."[53] Plantinga does not mean to suggest that a proposition's being true is a result of, or on the grounds of, God believing it; rather, a proposition exists because God conceives it and God believes a proposition because it is true.[54]

In rounding out his view on the Augustinian approach to philosophy, Plantinga attempts a rapprochement between the traditional Thomistic and Augustinian approaches to knowledge.[55] The impulse behind this is the common ground that Plantinga sees between the Thomistic and Augustinian approaches, as well as his desire to see his suggestion as offering a range of options of specific application, yet all within the same range of Christian belief.[56] Plantinga notes the distinction between the two views, largely

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[51]Ibid.

[52]Ibid., italics original.

[53]Ibid., 69.

[54]Ibid., 70.

[55]Plantinga, "Augustinian Christian Philosophy," 21.

[56]Alvin Plantinga, "Reply," *Philosophical Books* 43:2 (2002), 128. Plantinga states, "What I claimed for the A/C model is that if Christian belief is true, this model is probably close to the truth. Of course it's hard to know how to measure closeness, but I'd be inclined to say that if Wykstra's model is true, then mine is close to the truth." This

that the Thomist sees two realms of knowledge: that which can be known by empirical investigation and that which can be known by faith. In contrast, the Augustinian view of knowledge stresses the role of faith in all aspects of knowledge; there is no realm of knowledge that is independent of faith. Although Plantinga sides with the Augustinian view in this centuries-old debate, he does so on the supposition that the Augustinian position brings "the best total understanding" to a topic, in that what may be known by faith is not precluded from the study.[57] Yet, this Augustinian concern to bring all of one's knowledge to a subject is not really that different from the Thomistic goal, in that both the Thomist and Augustinian, indeed the Christian community, want to know how faith impacts subject areas such as philosophy, psychology, economics and the like.[58]

Plantinga, in accepting and engaging in the Augustinian approach, conceives his task as standing in the context of competing worldviews and offering an alternative account of the theory of knowledge which takes into full consideration the possibilities which Christian theism affords. His work on epistemology is an example of his own definition of Christian philosophical criticism, in that he critically examines the root axioms and presuppositions of those theories of knowledge that limit theistic belief to the realm of opinion or faith rather than fact. This is evident in his refutation of the deontological character of classical foundationalism and the evidential objection to theistic belief in the existence of God, as well as in his examination of the objections to theism by Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx. It is the similar objection by Freud and Marx which Plantinga ultimately takes to be the most serious epistemological objection to Christian theism. Accordingly, in his most recent and comprehensive work on

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appears to show that Plantinga's proposal is intended to include not just "Reformed" theologians and philosophers but the larger Christian community as well.

[57]Plantinga, "Augustinian Christian Philosophy," 21.

[58]Ibid., 23.

specifically Christian epistemology, *Warranted Christian Belief*,[59] Plantinga narrows the options of various objections to the justification or warrant of Christian belief to the complaint of both Freud and Marx: Christian belief is unjustified or lacks warrant because it is the product of cognitive faculties either malfunctioning or being aimed at something other than the truth. The epistemological proposal Plantinga develops is in response to this objection that is both critical of Freud and Marx's presuppositions, and at the same time his epistemological proposal sets out a positive case for warranted belief in God. The positive statement shows how, if one's cognitive faculties are functioning properly in the right cognitive environment and aimed at the truth, belief in God is warranted, in much the same way that memory, sense perception and *a priori* beliefs are warranted.[60] Set within the Augustinian tradition, his epistemology sets out to show the fruits of the central Augustinian claim, that knowledge is the result of the convergence of faith and reason.

Religious Epistemology

Plantinga's religious epistemology is best seen within this Augustinian apologetic concept of Christian philosophical criticism and positive Christian philosophy. Specifically, his epistemology is located within the context of the move away from modernist epistemological concerns (marked most distinctively by classical foundationalism) to various alternative conceptual systems seeking justification for knowledge.[61] His desire to show that belief in God need not be based on propositional evidence or evidential proofs in order for belief in God to have warrant is his answer to

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[59]Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[60]This conception of warranted Christian belief arises through his broader conception of warrant, found in his work *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[61]Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

the demise of classical foundationalism and the inadequacy of the various alternative approaches to provide warrant or justification, enough of which accounts for knowledge.[62]

Plantinga's conception of warrant is the result of an interest in religious epistemology, held since his days as an undergraduate at Harvard University. Plantinga describes his interest in religious epistemology as the result of several issues which he pondered in relation to one's belief in God: "the existence of certain kinds of evil, the fact that many people for whom I have deep respect do not accept belief in God, and the fact that it is difficult to find much by way of noncircular argument or evidence for the existence of God."[63] The rationality of belief in God first appeared in Plantinga's *God and Other Minds*.[64] This work examines traditional evidential arguments for the existence of God and finds them to be wanting; however, the arguments for the existence of God fail in similar ways that the best arguments for the existence of other minds fail, yet almost no one withheld belief in other minds despite the incomplete evidence.[65] Plantinga concludes that if belief in other minds is rational, then so is belief in God.[66]

Plantinga took several things away from that work. The first is the importance of the question of rationality of belief in God. This question would be reformulated several times in his subsequent work, until he finally hit upon the notion that the question is not about the rationality of belief in God in the sense of is it rational or irrational to believe in God; rather, the question being asked was whether or not belief in God has

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[62]Beilby, *Epistemology as Theology*, 38.

[63]Plantinga, "A Christian Life Partly Lived," 69.

[64]Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), xv, 111.

[65]Plantinga describes these two beliefs as being in the "same epistemological boat," primarily because each of these beliefs have similar weaknesses and suffer from the same objections. Belief in other minds, though, despite its weaknesses, is rational; therefore, if belief in other minds is rational so is belief in God.

[66]Plantinga, *God and Other Minds*, 271.

warrant. Does belief in God have that quality (or quantity), "enough of which distinguishes knowledge from mere true belief?"[67] The maturation of this idea would take some time to formulate, as Plantinga admits that at the time he wrote *God and Other Minds* he was assuming the classical epistemological picture, that knowledge was justified true belief, conceived in the manner of what would later come to be named classical and modern foundationalism.[68] At this point in the development of his argument, the question was not centered upon the type of rationality or justification for belief in God as properly basic; rather, the argument showed that belief in God was not irrational within the commonly accepted epistemological framework.[69]

The characteristic insight of Plantinga's religious epistemology, that belief in God is properly basic, was to come in later works, finding a full treatment in his article, "Reason and Belief in God."[70] Plantinga describes his comprehensive *Warranted Christian Belief*[71] as a sequel, not just to his previous two works on warrant[72] in which he spells out his move to an externalist conception of warrant,[73] but also to his much longer project which began with the publication of *God and Other Minds* and several themes of

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[67]Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, v.

[68]Plantinga, "A Christian Life Partly Lived," 74.

[69]Ibid.

[70]Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 16-93. The following are earlier articles which show the development of his thought: idem, "Is Belief in God Rational?" in *Rationality and Religious Belief*, ed. C. Delaney (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 7-27; idem, "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?" *Nous* 15 (1981): 47-70.

[71]Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief.*

[72]Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*; idem, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[73] In these two works Plantinga seeks to show that the contemporary problems associated with the justified true belief definition of knowledge are the result of a historical disposition to three factors: internalism, evidentialism and deontologism. Plantinga's solution is to conceive of justification as warrant and move from internalism to externalism. His externalism is conceived of as proper function.

his "Reason and Belief in God."[74] The basic idea of his religious epistemology with respect to whether one can have knowledge of the existence of God is that belief in God is properly basic; it is not the result of proofs or positive assent to the evidence, nor is it the result of having no evidence which defeats it. Belief in God is warranted, according to Plantinga, because it is the result of properly functioning cognitive faculties operating in an environment conducive to their operation in accord with a design plan aimed at "the production of true belief."[75]

Because *Warranted Christian Belief* is a sequel to several of Plantinga's epistemological projects throughout various points in his career, it is his most important work on the subject of religious epistemology. This work narrows the questions of Plantinga's earlier works on religious epistemology and belief to this question: Is the sort of historical, traditional Christian belief intellectually acceptable in light of the explosion of knowledge since the Enlightenment and on through the modern and now postmodern periods?[76] More specifically, Plantinga has in mind to answer two different types of objections to theistic belief: *de facto* and *de jure* objections.[77] The first objections deal with questions of the truth of Christian belief; the second deal with whether or not Christian belief is justified.[78]

A *de facto* objection would be to claim that Christianity is not true or is improbable based on some other fact which one claims to know.[79] Plantinga cites the

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[74]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 67-70.

[75]Ibid., xi; idem, "Afterword," in *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader*, ed. James F. Sennett (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 353-58. Plantinga notes there that in *God and Other Minds* he was attempting to defend a basic notion of theism against atheistic arguments. *Warranted Christian Belief* has a slightly different aim, in that he is attempting to defend and state a specifically Christian epistemology that encompasses more than just the simple claim, "God exists."

[76]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, vii.

[77]Ibid., viii.

[78]Ibid., ix.

[79]Ibid.

argument from suffering and evil as the most prominent *de facto* objection. The argument roughly states that, given what is known about suffering and evil that exists in the world to the extent at which it does, makes it unlikely that an omnipotent, omniscient creator exists.[80] These objections are aimed at the truth of Christianity in that they want to show that Christianity is not true. *De jure* objections to Christian belief focus on the irrationality of Christian belief, that in some way Christian belief is unjustifiable because it is "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."[81] In *Warranted Christian Belief* it is this objection which sets the stage for answering what Plantinga calls the "metaquestion," which is whether or not Christian belief is acceptable.[82] In fact, what becomes evident throughout several key chapters in this work is that it was the two aspects of the metaquestion which led Plantinga to question the standard definition of justification and rationality and to re-examine the notions of justification and parse the *de jure* question down to its root concerns.[83]

Plantinga must first address the prior issue, an issue raised by Kant and his followers as to whether it is possible to know anything of God in the first place. Not only

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[80]Ibid., viii.

[81]Ibid., ix.

[82]It is this question that lies at the heart of the debate between Plantinga and Phillip Quinn. See Phillip Quinn, "Religious Epistemology," in *The Oxford Companion to Epistemology*, ed. Paul Moser (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). Quinn agrees with Plantinga that many intellectuals find Christian belief to be unacceptable in the contemporary context due to the presence of three "maximally strong" potential defeaters for Christian belief: the existence of non-moral evil, projective theories of religious belief formation and the fact of the plurality of religions. Quinn does not believe that Plantinga's account of the warrant for theistic belief is enough to provide the amount of warrant for the adult, educated theists within our culture: "For them, belief in God will be justified or rational only if it is based in part on such arguments or testimony about them and is therefore not basic," (ibid., 531).

[83]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, chaps. 3, 4, and 5.

does Plantinga reject Kant's version of creative anti-realism, he also rejects Kant's notion that it is impossible for the human mind to refer to God. The *de jure* question to Christian belief asks whether or not it is rational to believe that Christianity is true. Plantinga uses Kant's epistemology as an introduction to the question because it is largely accepted and recognized that Kant's epistemology has rendered knowledge of God unattainable, and so many think that referring to God is impossible or, at the very least, problematic.[84] In discussing Kant's epistemological project Plantinga hopes to discover the aim of Kant's epistemology and discover if the *de jure* objection to Christian belief has its roots in Kant's anti-realism or if the *de jure* question comes from another quarter.

Kant's epistemology is commonly understood as dividing knowledge into two realms, one of phenomena and one of noumena. The human mind is capable of having knowledge of the phenomenal, or things as they appear for us; it is not capable of knowing the noumena, or things as they are in themselves, because the categories by which we know the phenomenal world do not apply to the noumena.[85] The problem for Christianity arises in Kant's epistemology because God is not a phenomenal appearance but is rather a member of the noumena and therefore unknowable because human categories cannot be applied to God. Plantinga readily recognizes that this position puts Kant in a contradiction, in that at least one category does apply to the noumena, namely the concept being such that our concepts do not apply to it.[86] This objection, however obvious as it is, does not stop the discussion as to the interpretation of Kant's statements which have led many to believe that it is impossible for human categories of thought to refer to God, and Kant continues to be read by many as holding that position, and even

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[84]Ibid., 5. See also discussion of Kant's epistemology in chapter one of this dissertation.

[85]Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), B314.

[86]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 6.

decisively proving that position. Plantinga hopes to show that Kant need not be taken to suggest that it is impossible to apply human categories of thought to God.[87] In the process of showing this, Plantinga examines the two main interpretations of Kant's epistemology and concludes that the *de jure* question lies elsewhere.

Plantinga briefly outlines the traditional understanding of Kant's epistemology, that it is impossible for human categories of thought to refer to objects in the noumenal world, of which God is a part.[88] This two-world interpretation is the interpretation of Kant's immediate successors. This, however, is not the only interpretation of Kant's epistemology. The (more) contemporary interpretation of Kant is that his epistemology does not divide the world into two realms, noumenal and phenomenal, but that there is one world, and it is the world of the *Dinge*, or noumena. The categories of thought are not a different world (phenomenal), but rather are our way of talking about the noumena as they appear to us, and that everything that exists is really noumena.[89] Thus, if God exists, then God is noumena, as are trees, rocks and everything else.

According to this one-world interpretation of Kant, if our categories do not apply to the noumena, it would mean that our positive concepts or properties do not apply to the noumena, but that their negation or complement would apply.[90] For example, the negation of being red is being un-red. The latter is the complement of the former. If Kant's categories do not apply to the noumena, then their complements do apply.[91] If this is the case, then the categories which do not apply to God (a noumenal object) then the complements of those categories do apply to God (and any other noumenal object).[92] If

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[87]Ibid.

[88]Ibid., 10.

[89]Ibid., 12.

[90]Ibid., 13.

[91]Ibid., 16.

[92]Ibid.

this is the case, then it is possible to talk about God, but would be impossible to predicate any positive properties to God, as it would be impossible to predicate any positive properties to any and all noumena.[93] This, however, does not make the case that there is some special problem in relation to predicating properties to God, and this seems to be what theologians have claimed and are claiming that surfaced in Kant's work. Plantinga states, "But those theologians who suggest that Kant showed we cannot refer to and think about God presumably that Kant showed there was a *special* problem about God; they don't think that what Kant really showed is that we can't talk or think about *anything*."[94]

The more traditional manner of understanding Kant is to take his writings about phenomena and noumena in a "two-world" approach: there is the world of phenomena and the world of noumena; our categories only apply to the phenomena and not the noumena, or *Dinge an sich*. Plantinga divides this interpretation into two further categories, or sub pictures: the moderate and the radical. The moderate sub picture is the description Plantinga gives to the view that some of our concepts do apply to the noumena, but that does not mean we have any knowledge of the noumena. Instead, what we have is speculation, or an educated guess, as to what the noumena are or are like. This picture, however "doesn't even suggest that we cannot think about and predicate properties of God. What it suggests, instead, is that when we do, we are not on the sure path of knowledge but on some much more hazardous climber's trail of mere opinion."[95]

In the radical sub picture one gets the view that our concepts do not apply to God or any other part of the noumenal world.[96] On this view there are phenomena and noumena, both of which exist, and of which the human mind only can experience the

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[93]Ibid.

[94]Ibid.

[95]Ibid., 17.

[96]Ibid.

phenomenal world, which it orders by imposing categories of thought upon experience in order to construct the world as we know it.[97] What we have is what is given to our minds by experience, and through concepts or rules we construct phenomena accordingly, and because the noumena are not perceived, then it is impossible to know them because they can not be experienced. Plantinga summarizes this view: "a concept could no more apply to the *Dinge* than a horse could be a number."[98] Knowing God as he is in himself as a noumena is impossible, as it is impossible to know any noumena.

Plantinga, as has been noted, recognizes several inconsistencies with Kant's creative anti-realism. In the radical sub picture, the noumena are superfluous if they cannot be known and should not even be part of the epistemological landscape.[99] By including the noumena and describing them as he does, Kant begs the question: If the noumena are unknowable, how does Kant know they exist? Wouldn't it be better to just not include the noumenal world if it can't be known? Secondly, Plantinga notes that Kant does not provide strong arguments for his conclusion that the world is divided into this radical sub picture.[100] What Kant does provide as evidence is the theory of antinomies which supposedly prove that there are two sides to every important question.[101]

Kant terms his view of antinomies, transcendental idealism. Plantinga defines this view as "the doctrine that the things we deal with are transcendentally ideal (depend upon us for their reality and structure), even if empirically real."[102] The reason for the antinomies, according to Kant, is that we take ourselves to be talking about the noumena,

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[97]Ibid., 18.

[98]Ibid., 20.

[99]Ibid.

[100]Ibid., 21.

[101]Ibid.

[102]Ibid., 22.

when we are really talking about the phenomena; what we should really do instead is realize our limitations, that our thinking does not include the things in themselves.[103]

Plantinga makes two major objections to Kant's doctrine of the antinomies. First, if one claims to not know the noumena based on the argument that the antinomies show contradictory statements to be both true, or to at least have overwhelming intuitive support, and that it is wrong to believe *p* and *not-p*, then the same would apply to the phenomena as well.[104] This is because, in Kant's view, there is no doubt he supports the view that the phenomena can be known; if we also can know or have a great deal of intuitive support for the following premises, each of which is true not only for the noumena but also for the phenomena: Plantinga argues,

(2*) If we can refer to and think about the *Dinge*, then each of the premises of the antinomical arguments will be about the *Dinge* and have overwhelming intuitive support.

(3*) If each of the premises has overwhelming intuitive support, we will have overwhelming reason to accept each of the theses and antitheses, and we see that each thesis is contradicted by its antithesis.

(4*) It couldn't be that we should have overwhelming reason to accept a proposition *p* and also its contradictory not-*p*.

(5) We cannot think about or refer to the *Dinge*[105]

If it is true of the noumena, it is true of the phenomena (which we can surely know on Kant's view); yet this would mean that we can't know anything at all because all there is to know is either noumena or phenomena.[106]

According to Plantinga, however, the fatal objection for Kant's doctrine of the antinomies is the fact that he does not show that there actually are compelling arguments for and against his thesis; the examples he gives are not conclusive, and Plantinga exploits the weaknesses in each of Kant's thesis/antithesis examples: "Most certainly, it

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[103]Ibid.

[104]Ibid., 23.

[105]Ibid.

[106]Ibid.

is not the case that both these propositions *and* their denials are demonstrable, so that each is both demonstrably true and, furthermore, demonstrably false."[107]What Plantinga is getting at here is that Kant does not really offer arguments which put one on the horns of a dilemma; surely there are arguments which seem equally strong and conclusive, but Kant does not offer them, or at least what he offers does not now seem to be equal, opposing sides of an argument.

These objections, coupled with the first obvious objection that Kant knows a lot about the things in themselves that he should not somehow know, make it highly unlikely that the objection to theistic belief really lies in the Kantian neighborhood; this is because Kant's claim that it is impossible to know the things in themselves is an unsound claim that should be rejected (although it has been supported and taken as true by many).[108] Plantinga sums up, "Contemporary theologians and others sometimes complain that contemporary philosophers of religion often write as if they have never read their Kant. Perhaps the reason they write that way, however, is not that they have never read their Kant but rather that they *have* read him and remain unconvinced."[109]

Changing Conceptions of Rationality

Plantinga lays out the meta-question or meta-objection to Christian belief: Why is it that contemporary critics of Christianity believe that it is not rationally justifiable? In order to answer this question, Plantinga draws in three streams of thought: classical foundationalism, deontologism and evidentialism. Plantinga calls these three theses the "classical package."[110] The purpose of examining the meta-question is to show how these three theses have shaped the contemporary debates within epistemology and have specifically influenced the *de jure* question.

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[107]Ibid., 29.

[108]Ibid., 30.

[109]Ibid., italics original.

[110]Ibid., 88.

The influence of John Locke. Plantinga believes that the epistemology of John Locke is a pivotal development in the history of thought which brought together several streams of thought from the Enlightenment ideal of following reason over opinion and/or tradition.[111] Specifically, Locke sees two errors in forming beliefs about God. First, many rely on faith in opposition to reason, accepting the deliverances of faith alone.[112] According to Locke, this fideism should be rejected. The second epistemological error is that of accepting something as true based on tradition, or "believing a proposition just because you have been taught it or because those around you believe it."[113] Fideism and tradition are epistemological errors because they base knowledge on opinion rather than reason. Plantinga reads Locke as saying, "What we need to find out is how we may and ought to govern and regulate our opinion, or assent. And his answer, in prototypical Enlightenment fashion, is that we ought to govern our opinion by following reason."[114]

Locke contrasts opinion with knowledge and claims that opinion is what makes up most of one's beliefs.[115] According to Locke, knowledge consists of self-evident and incorrigible propositions, as well as knowledge which is of things perceived, and knowledge that is deduced from self-evident or incorrigible propositions and/or something which is evident to the senses.[116] In opposition to opinion stands reason, and reason must guide the formation of knowledge.[117]

For Locke, reason is a unique faculty which humanity has that animals do not have, or at least do not have in as large a quantity and quality as humans.[118] Secondly,

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[111]Ibid., 75.

[112]Ibid., 73.

[113]Ibid.

[114]Ibid., 75.

[115]Ibid., 77.

[116]Ibid., 76.

[117]Ibid., 77.

[118]Ibid., 77.

reason is the means by which one distinguishes between propositions, which can be either deductive or probabilistic.[119] Deductive propositions are those which are deduced from other propositions and are their logical conclusion. Probable propositions, however, come in degrees and are probable with respect to what "occurs for the most part" in daily existence.[120] Plantinga further describes Locke's probabilistic propositions: "A proposition has a certain degree of probability 'for me' (i.e., relative to those propositions that are certain for me); what counts with respect to the formation of my opinion is the probability of the candidate in question with respect to what is certain for me."[121] Plantinga interprets Locke as holding that one must regulate opinion

> in such a way that I opine only that which is probable with respect to that which is certain for me . . . . And the rule here is that I must not assent to a proposition unless it is probable with respect to what is certain for me. Assent, furthermore, comes in degrees. More exactly, then, the rule is that I should proportion my degree of assent to the probability to the proposition in question…I should believe a proposition *p* with a firmness that is proportional to the degree to which *p* is probable with respect to what is certain for me. This is what it is to regulate or govern opinion according to reason.[122]

This element in Locke, that a belief is acceptable because it is certain for me or because it is probable with respect to what is certain for me, is the "proximate origin" of the evidentialist tradition in contemporary epistemology.[123] With respect to belief in God, this evidentialist tradition holds that belief is justified if it is supported by the evidence, and this essentially means if it is connected to a proposition which is certain for the believer.[124] This poses a problem for Christian belief in that it is neither self-evident,

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[119]Ibid., 77-78.

[120]Ibid., 78.

[121]Ibid.

[122]Ibid., 79.

[123]Ibid., 81.

[124]Ibid.

incorrigible nor a deliverance of the senses; in order for Christian belief to be justified, then, it must be probable with respect to one of these types of propositions.[125]

However, before examining some of the contemporary outcomes of Locke's way of avoiding error and opinion, Plantinga explores the work and influence of Locke because one of the major features of his philosophical project was his emphasis on the duty or obligation which one must fulfill with respect to knowledge.[126] According to Locke, there is an obligation that each person has with respect to belief so that one may avoid opinion. This deontological obligation in fulfilling one's epistemic duties involves being "within one's rights; it is to do only what is permissible; it is to be subject to no blame or disapprobation; it is to have flouted no duties; it is to be deontologically approvable; it is in a word, to be *justified*."[127] Plantinga notes several important implications of Locke's view of justification which have influenced religious epistemology. According to Locke, one has a duty to regulate the beliefs one forms to those which one has good reasons to believe (i.e., propositions which are self-evident, incorrigible or evident to the senses). Beliefs must be regulated by reason in this way, and knowledge is strictly limited to those beliefs for which you have good reasons to believe.[128] Secondly, if one goes against fulfilling one's epistemic belief to regulate belief with reason, there is an important "epistemic quality" which is lost, and if truth is discovered through this process, it is merely by chance or accident, and the result is not knowledge but simply mere true belief.[129]

Understanding duty as the first step in justification places justification within the control of the believer, who is doing his or her duty.[130] Justification does not just

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[125]Ibid.

[126]Plantinga, *Warrant*, 13.

[127]Ibid., 13-14.

[128]Ibid., 14.

[129]Ibid.

[130]Ibid.

happen; it is the result of the knower fulfilling her duty to avoid opinion.[131] According to Plantinga, this understanding of justification leads to internalism, and is perhaps the key characteristic to understanding epistemic internalism.[132] He believes there are three motifs which capture the essence of the deontological nature of justification.

Plantinga labels the ability of the individual to determine whether or not his or her beliefs are justified as the first motif of deontological internalism. How is duty construed? Is it merely duty in general, or are there distinctions in the various types of duty which one must fulfill in the knowing process? Subjective duty is doing what one must to attain to the level of doing what one must do in order to be justified; it is fulfilling all one knows must be fulfilled in order to be justified. One is subject to guilt or blame if one knowingly fails to do one's duty with respect to belief.[133] What is important with respect to fulfilling one's subjective duty is that you fulfill duty; "justification is entirely within my power; whether or not my beliefs are justified is up to me."[134]

The second internalist motif comes from the combination of subjective duty and objective duty in the believer.[135] Objective duty, with respect to justification, is paying attention to the evidence and believing those things which are supported by the evidence and only those beliefs which are supported by the evidence.[136] The importance of this for contemporary epistemological internalism is that, according to Locke, one's subjective and objective duty coincide; this coincidence of duty, according to Plantinga, provides the context for contemporary internalism.[137] For instance, Locke[138] places one's

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[131]Ibid., 15.

[132]Ibid..

[133]Ibid., 17.

[134]Ibid., 19.

[135]Ibid., 20.

[136]Ibid..

[137]Ibid., 19.

[138]Ibid., 20. Plantinga also describes Descartes as following the same strategy.

subjective and objective duties together; what this means is that it is one's duty to regulate belief in this objective way; if one does not regulate belief according to the evidence, then one is derelict in fulfilling one's epistemic duties.[139] What this means, according to Plantinga, is that in "a large and important set of cases, a properly functioning human being can simply see (cannot make a nonculpable mistake about) what objective epistemic duty requires," or "whether a proposition has the property by of which she tells whether a proposition is justified for her," or "whether a proposition has the property that confers justification upon it for her."[140]

The third internalist motif Plantinga finds in Locke is best described as the believer being unable to make a nonculpable mistake as to whether or not a belief is justified.[141] This characteristic is an internal quality to whatever the belief might be.[142] Plantinga describes this motif as difficult to state, but gives examples such as the belief "that Albuquerque is in New Mexico, whether you are now being appeared to redly, whether you are tying to get to Boston on time, or whether you are trying to bring it about that, for every proposition you consider, you believe it if and only if it is true."[143] The point of this motif is that there is an internal character to knowing that beliefs of this sort are within one's rights to hold.[144]

Plantinga begins his trilogy on warrant by looking at the historical conception of deontological internalism because the central idea that one must fulfill one's epistemic duties in order to achieve justification ties together the various aspects of internalism.[145]

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[139]Ibid.

[140]Ibid., 21-22. These are three corollaries regarding the second internalist deontological motif.

[141]Ibid., 22.

[142]Ibid., 23.

[143]Ibid., 22.

[144]Ibid., 23.

[145]Ibid., 24.

In accepting Locke's claim that justification comes only by being guided by reason in the formation of opinion, contemporary religious epistemology has a decidedly deontological slant to it.[146] This deontologism in religious epistemology is tied to classical foundationalism and evidentialism, and was the assumption of Plantinga's earlier work, *God and Other Minds*. That work assumed "that belief in God is rationally justifiable only if there are good arguments for it, and only if the arguments in favor of it are stronger than the arguments against it."[147] This assumption is the fruit of Locke's way of looking at justification, an idea he bequeathed to the Western world.[148]

Features of classical foundationalism. Classical foundationalism has an ought or a normative way of looking at rationality—there is a manner of belief formation that one ought to follow, and if not followed then one is not being rational.[149] Plantinga describes this characteristic of foundationalism as a "normative thesis," or a the thesis that all rational systems of beliefs have a "rightly structured system of beliefs."[150] For the foundationalist, a "rightly structured system of beliefs" has certain characteristics, the primary one being that there is a distinct difference between beliefs that you hold because they are based on other beliefs, and beliefs you hold in the basic way, or beliefs you accept—but not on the basis of other beliefs.[151]

In describing classical foundationalism Plantinga notes that the concept of basicality, degree of belief and ingression are related in complementary yet complicated

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[146]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 77.

[147]Ibid., 81. See also Plantinga, *God and Other Minds*, 268-71.

[148]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 81.

[149]Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 48.

[150]Ibid.

[151]Plantinga, *Warrant*, 68.

ways in one's noetic structure.[152] Plantinga uses the term noetic structure to describe the relationships a person has with the propositions he believes.[153] An account of the propositions one takes as basic, and the propositions built on those basic beliefs would be an account of a person's noetic structure.[154] As described above, a basic belief is a belief which is believed or accepted, but not on the basis of other beliefs. Not only is there a relationship between basic and non-basic beliefs in one's noetic structure, a noetic structure also includes an "index of *degree* of belief," a phrase Plantinga uses to describe the firmness of belief which one does or does not hold.[155] Thirdly, Planting notes that beliefs in one's noetic structure differ in regard to the depth of ingression, or the degree to which a belief has penetrated one's noetic structure.[156] For example, there are some beliefs which are on the edge of one's noetic structure which could quite easily be given up, just as there are those which have penetrated deeply into the noetic structure which could not be easily given up.[157]

These three characteristics (basic or non-basic, degree of belief and ingression) are complexly related concepts within classical foundationalism. There are some beliefs that one takes as basic that are not held as firmly as some beliefs that are not taken as basic.[158] Further, a belief's status can change going from basic to non-basic or vice-versa. Thus, it is difficult to determine the types of beliefs which are basic for different people, nor is it easy to determine when a belief is basic for someone; however, "we can say at

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[152]Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 50. In *Warrant* Plantinga notes several other features of one's noetic structure: the epistemic history of a belief, the deontological history of a belief and the coherence index of a belief.

[153]Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 49.

[154]Ibid., 48-49.

[155]Ibid., 49.

[156]Ibid., 50.

[157]Ibid.

[158]Ibid., 50.

least this much; a *necessary* condition for S's believing A on the basis of B is S's believing both A and B, and a sufficient condition is S's believing A, believing B, believing that B is good evidence for A, and believing that he believes A on the basis of B."[159] The key to understanding classical foundationalism is that these notions are related to the basic idea that what one believes is believed on the evidential basis of other beliefs, and so on to the foundational belief, or basic belief.[160]

Plantinga construes classical foundationalism as a normative thesis in which a rational person's beliefs hold to a standard, or rather a rational person has performed one's epistemic duty in forming beliefs, and so his or her beliefs are rational. In describing classical foundationalism as a normative thesis, Plantinga lists six theses about basic beliefs that are characteristic of classical foundationalism. First, a noetic structure will have a set of beliefs not founded on other beliefs.[161] This is simply the first distinguishing characteristic of classical foundationalism. Second, the support relation of basic beliefs is irreflexive; A is not believed on the basis of A; if A is believed on the basis of B, then B is in some way prior to A, and no proposition is prior to itself, hence A cannot be based on A.[162] Third, "the basis relation is irreflexive in a proper noetic structure."[163] Fourth, basic beliefs, in their supports relations are not asymmetric.[164] If A is believed on B, then B cannot be believed on A.[165] Lastly, Plantinga states that "the basis relation, in a proper noetic structure, is noncircular."[166]

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[159]Ibid., 51-52.

[160]Plantinga, *Warrant*, 67-77.

[161]Ibid., 73.

[162]Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 53; idem, *Warrant*, 73.

[163]Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 53; idem, *Warrant*, 73.

[164]Plantinga, *Warrant*, 73.

[165]Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 53. Plantinga gives an example: "If I am rational and my belief that the Bible is authoritative is based upon my belief that God is its author and whatever God says is true, then my belief that God is the author of the

In a rational noetic structure, A supports B only if A truly supports B, or is a member of a set of beliefs which support B.[167] Plantinga describes this basing relation as A being evidence for B, or that it makes B probable; non-basic belief is proportional to the strength of its basing relation to the foundations.[168]

Plantinga's description of foundationalism includes a brief discussion of the conditions that different philosophers have placed upon the idea of proper basicality. The first such condition Plantinga describes is the notion of a basic belief being one which is self-evident.[169] A self-evident belief is a proposition such as, "No man is both married and unmarried," or "2 + 2 = 4."[170] These types of self-evident propositions are ones that are simply seen to be true once they are understood; "understanding a self-evident proposition is sufficient for apprehending its truth."[171] Plantinga further describes this "seeing that they are true" by explaining this phrase as an epistemological knowing, and as a phenomenological experience in which one is struck by the "clarity and distinctness" of the proposition.[172] The epistemic component of a proposition being self-evident is the proposition's being known immediately.[173] Plantinga notes a distinct difference between seeing that 2 + 1 = 3, and 24 x 24 = 576; the first is known immediately, the second is known through a process and is not known in the same, basic way that the former is known.[174] The difference between these propositions is also explained by the

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Bible will not be based upon the beliefs that the Bible is authoritative and says that God is its author," 53. Idem, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, 73.

[166]Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, 74.

[167]Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 54.

[168]Ibid.

[169]Ibid., 55.

[170]Ibid.

[171]Ibid., 56.

[172]Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 57.

[173]Ibid.

[174]Ibid.

phenomenological component to basic beliefs. Plantinga describes this experience using the words of Locke, who called it an "evident luster," and Descartes, who described it with the terms "clarity and distinctness."[175] This luster or clarity is experienced when one grasps the former proposition and has an inclination to accept the proposition immediately; this is not so with the second.[176]

The difference between the two types of knowledge is the difference between what one knows immediately, or just sees that it is true, and what one knows by reasoning, say through following a line of argumentation.[177]

Evidentialist objection to theistic belief. One of the major challenges to theism throughout the modern period has been what Plantinga has called the "evidentialist objection to theistic belief."[178] The evidentialist objection to theistic belief is an objection to theism based upon the framework of the epistemology of classical foundationalism. The key components of classical foundationalism previously discussed (that basic propositions are self-evident, evident to the senses or incorrigible) are the only types of basic beliefs which fit the standard definition of knowledge, justified true belief.

What the evidentialist is claiming, based on classical foundationalism, is that the proposition, "God exists," is not properly basic; it is not self-evident, incorrigible or evident to the sense, and so no rational noetic structure should contain the proposition "God exists" in its foundation.[179] In his work *Warranted Christian Belief* Plantinga describes the evidentialist objection to Christian belief as an unstated argument against theism, to the effect that an effective argument for theism must have good propositional

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[175]Ibid.

[176]Ibid.

[177]Ibid., 41.

[178]Ibid., 59.

[179]Ibid., 59.

evidence to support the claim, and in the absence of such propositional evidence, theistic belief in God is not justified.[180]

Plantinga credits W. K. Clifford with stating the evidentialist objection to theistic belief most forcefully and succinctly. Plantinga quotes Clifford: "Whoso would deserve well of his fellows in this matter will guard the purity of his belief with a very fanaticism of jealous care, lest at any time it should rest on an unworthy object, and catch a stain which can never be wiped away . . ." and "[if a] belief has been accepted on insufficient evidence, the pleasure is a stolen one. Not only does it deceive ourselves by giving us a sense of power which we do not really possess, but it is sinful, because it is stolen in defiance of our duty to mankind. That duty is to guard ourselves from such beliefs as from a pestilence, which may shortly master our body and spread to the rest of the town…" and most forcefully, "To sum up: it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence."[181] The first level of this objection stated by the evidentialist is that there is insufficient evidence for theistic belief, and that to believe in God when there is not enough evidence is rationally unacceptable.[182] The secondary levels of this objection seem to focus on the "oughtness" of believing things which do not have enough evidence, and that one who believes things based on insufficient evidence ought not to because one has a duty to believe only what can be evidenced as true.

Plantinga is, naturally enough, curious as to just what this objection is all about. Further, Plantinga's project is to show that theistic belief is rational, or justified. He attempts to show this by developing a specific project which seeks to describe belief in the existence of God as an "existential assertion" that is claiming there is such a person

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[180]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 79.

[181]Ibid., 24-25; W. K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief," in *Lectures and Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1879).

[182]Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 19.

as God (and "He is a being who acts, holds beliefs and has aims and purposes."),[183] and that God "is perfect in goodness, knowledge, and power, and is such that the world depends on him for its existence."[184] Plantinga makes these distinctions in order to sidestep the conjectures of modern philosophical theology in which talk of God can become identified with a mental construct or abstract entity rather than what could be called the traditional Judeo-Christian concept of deity.[185] What the evidentialist (like Clifford) is claiming is that evidence for such a deity is lacking, or is insufficient. The obvious conclusion, to be drawn thanks to the evidentialist's pointing it out, is that, due to the lack of evidence for his existence one should not believe in such a God.

In the description of this objection, Plantinga explains that there are, historically, at least two species of evidentialist arguments against the existence of God. The first species is called "The Presumption of Atheism" and is typified by proponents such as Anthony Flew.[186] Flew argues that the burden of proof is upon the theist to defend his or her concept of God by providing evidence that this type of God exists.[187] Flew appears to be asking the question of beginning. Where is the proper place to begin debate about the existence of God, and once this is settled, one is to believe in God's existence only if there is evidence which supports that belief, and if no evidence is available to support that belief, then it is irrational to believe in God in the absence of the evidence.[188]

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[183]Ibid., 20.

[184]Ibid.

[185]Ibid.

[186]Ibid., 14-15. Plantinga draws this objection from Anthony Flew, *The Presumption of Atheism* (London: Pemberton, 1976).

[187]Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 14.

[188]Ibid., 26-27. The second The second species of evidentialist objection to theistic belief is typified by Michael Scriven, and is described by Plantinga as "Atheism is Obligatory in the Absence of Evidence." Scriven's basic claim is that, in the absence of evidence, the appropriate action is not to believe, but rather to not believe; in the case of God, there is no evidence and hence one need not believe that God exists. See Michael Scriven, *Primary Philosophy* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966), 103.

Ultimately, Plantinga wants to answer the evidentialist's objection to theistic belief. Notice that the evidentialist, in his use of the term rational, assumes that the manner in which he uses it is a standard or normative use of the term, so that one who attempts to deviate from that conception of rationality is headed in the wrong direction from the beginning.[189] Secondly, the evidentialist believes that everyone has a duty or obligation to perform in the formation of their beliefs, and to go against that duty is to be irrational.[190] If the evidentialist is claiming that the theist, in accepting belief in God without evidence or upon his own construction of the evidence, is in some way derelict in his intellectual duty, Plantinga does not see how the theist has not fulfilled his intellectual obligations.[191] For example, Plantinga examines the belief of a fourteen-year-old theist who has simply believed what was taught about God, and has formed the belief that God exists based on this evidence, not based on any of the theistic arguments, such as the ontological argument. Plantinga asks, how has he violated any intellectual duty?[192]

However, if the evidentialist is claiming that the theist has a *prima facie* intellectual duty to accept belief in God (or beliefs similar to this) only on the basis of evidence, then the argument faces several different problems. First of all, the theist may not know how to gather the proper type of evidence which would satisfy the objector.[193] Secondly, Plantinga claims that what one believes is not really within one's control.[194]

Although it is the case that what one believes is not directly within one's control, Plantinga identifies a distinction which the theist and evidentialist seem to be making between the terms belief and acceptance.[195] While what one believes may not be

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[189]Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 30.

[190]Ibid.

[191]Ibid., 33.

[192]Ibid.

[193]Ibid., 34.

[194]Ibid.

[195]Ibid., 37.

within one's immediate control, what one accepts is within one's control.[196] Plantinga claims that what the evidentialist seems to be arguing is that one ought not to accept the proposition "God exists" unless there is sufficient evidence to support acceptance of such a claim, even if one finds it natural to believe that God exists.[197] Acceptance and belief also influence one another. Plantinga describes that what one accepts tends to influence what one believes in the long run; for example, if one does not accept the proposition "God exists" or evidence to support that proposition, perhaps because it is one's duty to accept only that evidence which will help or cause unbelief.[198]

There is a third possible interpretation of the evidentialist objection to theistic belief: that the theist does not have a *prima facie* obligation to not believe the proposition "God exists," but that those who do believe such propositions have some sort of cognitive malfunction.[199]

Evidentialism and Natural Theology. According to many theists, both Protestant and Catholic, one needs to approach belief in God in a similar fashion to the evidentialist, or at least it is necessary to begin with evidences to establish belief in God. According to Thomas Aquinas, it is possible for humanity to have *scientia*, which Plantinga describes as knowledge which is "seen" to be true. Plantinga quotes Aquinas, "Any science is possessed by virtue of principles known immediately and therefore seen. Whatever, then, is an object of science is in some sense seen."[200] Science, upon this view inherited from Aristotle, appears to say that *scientia* is a body of propositions deduced

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[196]Ibid., 38.

[197]Ibid.

[198]Ibid., 38.

[199]Ibid., 39. Plantinga states, "And perhaps the evidentialist objection is to be understood, not as the claim that the theist, without evidence, has failed to meet some obligation, but that he suffers from a certain sort of intellectual deficiency" 39.

[200]Ibid., 40. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIa, IIae, I, 5.

from first principles, of which logic and mathematics are the most obvious examples.[201] The first principles are known through what Aquinas and Aristotle calls "understanding" and are different from *scientia*, in that the latter is mediate knowledge, or derived from what is self-evident.[202] The difference between the two types of knowledge is the difference between what one knows immediately, or just "sees" is true, and what one knows by reasoning, or by following a line of argumentation.[203] The conclusion to be drawn from this theory of knowledge is that humanity has knowledge of what is self-evident and the conclusions or deductions from these principles. Plantinga states, "if we take this picture seriously, it looks as if knowledge is restricted to what is necessarily true in the broadly logical sense."[204]

Aquinas, then, holds two views about propositional knowledge. There are self-evident propositions, the object of the *intellectus*, or understanding, which one simply "sees" as true.[205] Secondly, there are propositions which are evident to the senses by which Plantinga describes as being a proposition, "if we human beings have the power to determine its truth by looking at, listening to, tasting, touching, or smelling some physical object."[206] Plantinga states, "So the basic picture of knowledge is this: we know what we see to be true together with what we can infer from what we see to be true by arguments we can see to be valid."[207]

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[201]Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 40.

[202]Ibid., 41. Aquinas states, "Now a truth can come into the mind in two ways, namely, as known in itself, and as known through another. What is known in itself is like a principle, and is perceived immediately by the mind…A truth, however, which is known through another is understood by the intellect, not immediately, but through an inquiry of reason of which it is the terminus," *Summa Theologiae* Ia, q. 84, a. 2.

[203]Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 41.

[204]Ibid., 42.

[205]Ibid.

[206]Ibid., 43.

[207]Ibid., 44.

Aquinas believes that one can have natural knowledge of God, and this is the point of the five proofs for God's existence. However, Plantinga points out Aquinas' qualification that, even though scientific knowledge of God is possible, most people do not base their belief in God on such knowledge but take it as a matter of faith.[208] Aquinas explains this as rational in that one who accepts belief in God by faith is rational and wise because one is basing his or her belief on God's authority; it is not foolish to take God at his word, Plantinga interprets Aquinas, because we have evidence for what we believe about the Christian faith.[209] According to Plantinga, on Aquinas' view, the evidence supports God's claims, and because Christians have this evidence, they are rational in accepting the claims.[210] Thus, for Aquinas, belief in God does not appear to be properly basic; rather, belief in God is a belief that is supported and reasoned to based on the evidence.[211]

The similarities between the evidentialist objection and natural theology make both, according to Plantinga, a similar project.[212] What underlies each of them is the picture of knowledge which asserts that one should accept a proposition based on its relation to either self-evident propositions, or those propositions which are evident to the senses. Thus, natural theology is similar to classical foundationalism.[213]

The Convergence of Deontologism, Classical Foundationalism and Evidentialism

Locke's idea that it is irrational to believe something that you do not have good enough evidence for is the root of classical deontologism and initiates the classical

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[208]Ibid. See also Aquinas, ST 1a, I, 1.

[209]Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 46.

[210]Ibid.

[211]Ibid.

[212]Ibid. 46-47.

[213]Ibid., 47.

package of classical foundationalism, deontologism and evidentialism.[214] The deliverances of deontologism and evidentialism require evidence for the Christian believer to be justified in his or her belief in God; it is one's duty to believe if the evidence calls for belief, and it is irrational to believe in God without good evidence.[215] The evidence in question, however, must trace back to what is basic to one's noetic structure; that which is self-evident, incorrigible or evident to the senses.[216] As Plantinga reads the Western philosophical tradition, Locke's concerns have been carried forward and are found not just in contemporary epistemological theory but, more importantly, influence the *de jure* objection to Christian belief.[217] Plantinga states,

> According to this tradition, the *de jure* question is really the question whether Christian belief is rationally justified—that is, whether believers are justified in holding these beliefs, and whether they are conforming to intellectual duty in holding them . . . . Hence the first part of the *de jure* question gets transformed into a second: do believers have sufficient evidence for their beliefs? We now see the connection between these two forms of the *de jure* question: the first is the basic question, but if we add (with Locke and the classical tradition) that the main duty here is that of proportioning belief to evidence, then we get the second question.[218]

The application of this for Christian theism is that the evidentialist objection ties both components of the *de jure* question to Christian belief and finds Christian belief to come up short on evidence and hence irrational to believe, or at the very least unjustified in an epistemic sense.

Plantinga, however, questions these objections to Christian belief and the classical package in general. First, he calls into question whether or not classical foundationalism can continue to be maintained despite its inherent weaknesses, chief of which is its self-referential incoherence.[219] The claim of the classical foundationalist that a

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[214]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 87.

[215]Ibid., 88.

[216]Ibid.

[217]Ibid.

[218]Ibid.

[219]Ibid., 93.

proposition is properly basic only if it is self-evident or incorrigible or evident to the senses is, in fact, none of the above, and further it is not the conclusion or the deliverance of propositions of that sort.[220] By its own standard, then, it is either false, or by accepting it one is flouting his or her epistemic duty—exactly the opposite and completely unintended result.[221] Secondly, most of our beliefs are unjustified on classical foundationalism because most do not meet the conditions for being properly basic.[222] If that is the case, then either classical foundationalism is false or, in accepting those beliefs according to classical foundationalism, one is going against epistemic duty.[223] Plantinga asks that if it is the case that in accepting beliefs that are not formed on the conditions of classical foundationalism one is flouting epistemic duty, why? "I reflect on the matter as carefully as I can; I simply see no duty here—and not because I doubt the existence of duties generally, or of epistemic duties specifically . . . but is there a duty to conform belief to (CP)?"[224] Plantinga's answer is no, and this leads him to ask the same questions of the evidentialist objections to Christian belief, with respect to justification according to the classical package.

Plantinga has been seeking the answer as to whether or not the classical package is the *de jure* objection to Christian belief. The classical package, if it were the *de jure* question, would raise the question as to whether a believer is justified in his or her belief and would base justification in fulfilling one's epistemic duty with respect to the evidence. Yet, according to Plantinga's interpretation of the justification within the classical package, it is not so much that there is a strong connection between evidence

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[220]Ibid. See also, Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 61ff.

[221]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 95.

[222]Ibid., 97.

[223]Ibid., 98.

[224]Ibid.

and belief as much as there is a strong connection between justification and the fulfillment of one's epistemic duties.[225] Plantinga gives the following example:

> But it isn't at all difficult for a Christian—even a sophisticated and knowledgeable contemporary believer aware of all the criticisms and contrary currents of opinion—to be justified, in this sense, in her belief; and this whether or not she believes in God or in more specific Christian doctrines on the basis of propositional evidence. Consider such a believer: as far as we can see, her cognitive faculties are functioning properly; she displays no noticeable dysfunction. She is aware of the objection people have made to Christian belief; she has read and reflected on Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche (not to mention Flew, Mackie, and Nielsen) and the other critics of Christian or theistic belief; she knows that the world contains many who do not believe as she does. She doesn't believe on the basis of propositional evidence; she therefore believes in the basic way. Can she be justified (in this broadly deontological sense) in believing in God in this way?[226]

Plantinga goes on to show that, yes, she is justified, not because she has come to the right conclusions based on the evidence. In fact, Plantinga states, "She could be *mistaken*, a victim of illusion or wishful thinking, despite her best efforts. She could be wrong, desperately wrong, pitiably wrong, in thinking these things; nevertheless, she isn't flouting any discernible duty . . . she is doing her level best; she is justified."[227] She is justified because what is at stake in the deontological conception of justification is not a close connection to the evidence but rather a commitment to duty.[228] Given the objections Plantinga raises concerning the coherence of the demands of the classical package, Plantinga shows that the classical package does not prohibit justified Christian belief, and the *de jure* question must reside elsewhere.[229]

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[225]Ibid.

[226]Ibid., 100.

[227]Ibid., 101.

[228]Ibid.

[229]Ibid., 102. Plantinga states, "Then the question is: can the Christian believer be within her epistemic rights and epistemically responsible in forming belief as she does? Can she be justified even if she doesn't believe on the basis of propositional evidence and even if there is no good propositional evidence? The answer to *this* question is obvious—*too* obvious, in fact, for it to be the *de jure* question, at least if that question is to be worthy of serious disagreement and discussion. *Of course* she can be justified, and my guess would be that many or most contemporary Christians *are* justified in holding their characteristically Christian beliefs."

The crucial turn of Plantinga's *Warranted Christian Belief* is in his examination of the concept of warrant and the concepts which form what he describes as the Freud and Marx complaint (F&M complaint).[230] According to Plantinga, Freud and Marx represent the greatest challenge to Christian belief because they criticize religious belief in general as the result of either wish fulfillment (Freud) or a "lack of mental and emotional health" (Marx).[231] The complaints by Freud and Marx are described by Plantinga as naturalistic explanations of religion which aim to show that Christian belief in the existence of God and the "great things of the gospel" are somehow unjustified or lack warrant of a necessary sort.[232] Belief in God lacks warrant or justification for Freud and Marx as a result of some sort of dysfunction, and so beliefs formed as a result of a dysfunction are not justified. Plantinga describes the complaints of Freud and Marx as naturalistic explanations of religion.[233] By using the phrase naturalistic explanation, Plantinga is describing a method of discovery which ignores the truth of religious propositions and, instead, seeks to explain religious belief as a natural result.[234] He notes that, on the surface, a naturalistic explanation need not be a critique of religious belief but could instead be an explanation of how these beliefs are formed.[235] The Freud and Marx complaint, however, is more than a simple explanation of how belief is formed; Freud and Marx, according to Plantinga, seem to be claiming that Christian belief is irrational.[236]

Plantinga reads Freud and Marx (and those that follow) as assuming a certain notion of rationality such that one's cognitive faculties are like instruments by which one

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[230]Ibid., 135.

[231]Ibid., 140-41.

[232]Ibid., 145.

[233]Ibid.

[234]Ibid.

[235]Ibid.

[236]Ibid.

comes to have knowledge.[237] This notion of rationality also presumes that one's cognitive faculties are reliable, in that when functioning properly, "their deliverances are true, or at any rate close to the truth."[238] According to both Freud and Marx, a belief is unjustified if it is formed improperly, either by a malfunction of one's cognitive faculties, or by misdirected cognitive faculties, or "by faculties whose function has been impeded and overridden by lust, ambition, greed, selfishness, grief, fear, low self-esteem, and other emotional conditions."[239] The heart of the Freud and Marx complaint, according to Plantinga, is that religious belief, and Christian belief in particular, is not a proper deliverance of reason because it is formed by a cognitive process aimed at something other than the truth.[240] For Freud and Marx, the formation of religious belief is for something other than knowledge; perhaps religious beliefs are the result of wish-fulfillment (Freud) or that they arise as a negative result of socialization (Marx).[241] Whatever the source of belief, the source is not one which produces true beliefs associated with knowledge, and therefore, for Freud and Marx, Christian belief in general lacks warrant.[242]

A New Model: Warrant

Throughout the development of his epistemological project, Plantinga has changed his conception of rationality, shifting from a classical foundationalist model in which justification was heavily deontological and justification was an internal process, to now conceiving of rationality as warranted true belief in an externalist mode.[243] Although

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[237]Ibid., 146.

[238]Ibid., 149.

[239]Ibid., 151.

[240]Ibid.

[241]Ibid.

[242]Ibid., 153.

[243]Plantinga, *Warrant,* 5-6.

internalism has been the dominant view within the Western intellectual tradition (especially since the Enlightenment), Plantinga sees several major problems with the position which leave it untenable as an explanation of the properties which confer justification or warrant to true belief.[244]

There are several reasons why internalism is untenable. The first reason is that internalism is often connected with the notion of "ought" or "duty," which ties one's performance of his or her epistemological duties with the ethical sense of fulfilling one's responsibility or moral commitment in the formation of justified true beliefs.[245] Plantinga makes the case that this deontological conception of rationality is especially evident in the fountainheads of contemporary Western epistemology, Descartes and Locke.[246] For Descartes, one was to abstain from beliefs that are not "clear and distinct;"[247] in the case of Locke, one must proportion belief according to the degree of available evidence.[248] Justification, then, is the result of one having done one's duty according to the available evidence and "doing no more than is permitted, going contrary to no duty or obligation."[249] The importance of Descartes and Locke to the conception of internalism is that their essential insights have been carried forward in the work of contemporary internalists. Thus the contemporary concern with epistemic justification in terms of duty and the emphasis upon proportioning the degree of belief to the available evidence helps build the case for the third concern of contemporary epistemology, which is the stress upon evidence for justification.[250]

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[244]Ibid., 5.

[245]Ibid., 6.

[246]Ibid., 11-25.

[247]Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, vi.

[248]Ibid.

[249]Ibid.

[250]Ibid., v.

In opposition to internalism is externalism, the position that "warrant depends or supervenes upon properties to some of which the cognizer may have no special access, or even no epistemic access at all."[251] The important thing to see here is that the warrant conferring properties are not accessible to the knower. Plantinga gives several examples such that warrant-conferring properties "are such (of a belief) as being produced by a reliable belief-producing mechanism, or standing in a causal chain appropriately involving the subject of belief."[252] The important thing to remember about externalism is that one does not have special internal access to that which confers warrant or justification for a belief.

What Plantinga proposes instead of internalism is an externalist conception of epistemology that confers warrant to true beliefs through a reliable cognitive process. What Plantinga is attempting to state is a theory of knowledge formation which explains the role of one's cognitive faculties "functioning properly, in a cognitive environment that is propitious for that exercise of cognitive powers, according to a design plan that is successfully aimed at the production of true belief."[253] The main portions of that formula for Plantinga are the following: proper function, cognitive environment and a design plan aimed or purposed toward producing true belief and not error.

The first component to Plantinga's "proper functionalism"[254] is the concept of proper function.[255] By proper function Plantinga means that one's cognitive faculties or

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[251]Plantinga, *Warrant*, 6.

[252]Ibid.

[253]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, xi. This formula is developed and explained in *Warrant and Proper Function*, being the subject of that work, and is also developed in *Warranted Christian Belief*, chap. 5, with explicit application to warranted Christian belief being chap. 6 of that work.

[254]Plantinga, *Warrant*, viii. Plantinga mentions that his approach has been difficult to title, and William Hasker has suggested proper functionalism.

[255]Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 4.

the processes by which one produces beliefs, function the way they are supposed to.[256] The idea of proper function is common to our understanding and experience; the notion is one which is connected with the terms "dysfunction, design, function (simpliciter), normality (in the normative nonstatistical sense), damage, and purpose."[257] Closely connected to the concept of proper function is that of the cognitive environment within which one's faculties operate. According to Plantinga's model, proper function by itself is not enough; one's cognitive faculties must be operating in a cognitive environment for which they are "designed."[258] The notion of warrant Plantinga is describing is of an indexical nature, in that when a belief is formed by properly functioning cognitive faculties in an appropriate environment, the belief has warrant to the degree to which it is accepted.[259] Some propositions are believed more strongly than others. An example Plantinga uses: "Although I believe both 7 + 5 = 12 and *40 years ago I owned a secondhand 16-guage shotgun and a red bicycle with balloon tires*, I believe the former more strongly than the latter; this is correlated with the fact that the former has more by way of warrant for me than the latter."[260]

There are several qualifications to the concept of proper function that Plantinga is proposing. First of all, proper function is not the same as normal function, or functioning within the norm; even if one's faculties operate above the norm, it may still be functioning properly.[261] What matters is that one's cognitive faculties are functioning properly, or in the manner they were intended to operate. The second qualification is that

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[256]Ibid.

[257]Ibid.

[258]Ibid. Plantinga, in *Warrant*, argues that one's cognitive faculties are the result of God's design; however, as he makes clear in *Warrant and Proper Function*, 45-46, that need not be the case.

[259]Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 9.

[260]Ibid., italics original.

[261]Ibid. "Carl Lewis is not defective with respect to jumping by virtue of the fact that he can jump much further than the average person."

in order for a belief to have warrant, it is not necessary that all of one's cognitive faculties be functioning properly, just the ones that are involved in producing that particular belief.[262] Lastly, Plantinga shows that cognitive function comes in degrees.[263] One's "faculties can function *properly* even if they do not function *ideally*, even if they do not function as well as those of some other actual or possible species."[264]

Although proper function in an appropriate environment is a good start, Plantinga claims that it is not enough for warrant. One's faculties may be functioning properly but aimed at the production of something other than true beliefs. For example, Freud and Marx each regard religious belief as the apparent result of cognitive dysfunction. While Marx is content to do away with religion as a result of malfunctioning cognitive faculties, Freud sees value in their malfunction in that they provide some sort of coping mechanism in a harsh world.[265] Although in the case of Freud's analysis one's cognitive faculties rightly form religious beliefs, the beliefs formed by these faculties do not enjoy warrant because they are not aimed at producing true beliefs.[266] In either case, what is important is that the metaphor of design leads one to see that there is a way that cognitive faculties work; they can work properly or improperly, but they function in a certain way.[267] Proper function, however, is not nearly enough to produce warrant, even if those cognitive faculties are operating in a congenial cognitive environment.[268] There are other elements needed for a belief to have warrant.

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[262]Ibid., 10.

[263]Ibid.

[264]Ibid., 10-11, italics original.

[265]Ibid., 13.

[266]Ibid., 14.

[267]Ibid.

[268]Ibid., 13.

Plantinga adds the concept of a design plan to proper function. Initially, Plantinga does not intend to make the claim that a design plan must entail a designer;[269] what is important is the metaphor of design, such that one's cognitive faculties are operating in a certain way, much like other human organs.[270] Part of the design plan for human knowledge is one's responsiveness to forming certain kinds of beliefs, such as the believing the corresponding conditional of an instance of modus ponens.[271] Further, Plantinga states that experience plays an important role in belief formation in that, according to our design plan, a certain experience accompanies warranted beliefs, such that one has a certain experience when affirming an *a priori* belief and a different experience when one accepts a belief on the basis of, say, testimony.[272] Plantinga places one's forming beliefs on the evidential basis of other beliefs as a feature of our design plan.[273] What is important about the design plan is that it is part of the process of producing warrant when its specific plan is aimed at the truth; warrant is approached when one's cognitive faculties are functioning properly in a congenial epistemic environment and are aimed at the production of true beliefs.[274]

Yet, even at this point, Plantinga adds another condition to his formula for warrant: that the design plan is a good design plan.[275] What Plantinga is hoping to show is that the portion of the design plan aimed at the production of true beliefs be highly likely to produce such beliefs: "Even more exactly, the module of the design plan governing its production must be such that it is objectively highly probable that a belief produced by

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[269]Ibid., 14.

[270]Ibid.

[271]Ibid., 15.

[272]Ibid.

[273]Ibid.

[274]Ibid., 16-17.

[275]Ibid., 17.

cognitive faculties functioning properly according to that module (in a congenial environment) will be true or verisimilitudinous."[276] This factor of warrant, that the likeliness of objective probability that a belief produced by properly functioning cognitive faculties is high, is an often overlooked aspect of warrant but is important for an obvious reason: it would not be a good design plan if it was unlikely to produce true beliefs, or if it were aimed at wish fulfillment or an end other than the production of true belief.[277] Plantinga acknowledges that there are some beliefs which are held to be more probable with respect to warrant than others, such as *a priori* or memory beliefs which are held with "the maximum degree of firmness, and the ones such that we associate a very high degree of reliability with the modules of the design plan governing their production."[278]

Warranted Christian Belief

Plantinga's model is called the Aquinas/Calvin (A/C) model. It is intended to show that belief in God can have warrant, enough of which is sufficient for knowledge. Drawing off of his earlier definition of warrant and proper function, the central aspect of the A/C model is that humanity is created by God "with a belief-producing process or source of belief, the *sensus divinitas*; this source works under various conditions to produce beliefs about God, including, of course, beliefs that immediately entail his existence."[279] In the development of this epistemological claim, Plantinga has been developing different ways of stating the *de jure* objection to Christina belief. Although the specific objection is hard to describe, despite the abundance of good candidates, Plantinga does manage to locate the locus of the irrationality claim in the thought of both

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[276]Ibid.

[277]Ibid., 18.

[278]Ibid.

[279]Plantigna, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 199.

Freud and Marx.[280] Both Freud and Marx believe that Christian belief is irrational because it is the result of cognitive faculties either malfunctioning (in the case of Marx) or because it is the result of cognitive faculties which are aimed at something other than the truth (even though they are functioning properly).[281]

The A/C model Plantinga proposes seeks to show the probability of theistic belief based on the possibility of the model being true. The result of the model being probable and even true would be that the "target proposition," i.e., that theistic belief is warranted, is also true.[282] Specifically, Plantinga makes four claims regarding the A/C model. First, the model seeks to show that theistic belief is epistemically possible.[283] By epistemically possible Plantinga has in mind more than mere logical possibility. An epistemically possible model is one which is consistent with "what we know…what all (or most) of the participants agree on."[284] Secondly, the model attempts to show that there are no cogent objections to the truth of the model which are not also objections to the truth of Christina belief.[285] In other words, he wants to show that the *de jure* objection is tied to the *de facto* question, so that "if Christian belief is indeed true, than the model in question or one very like it is also true."[286] Third, although he believes his model to be true, he does not seek to show that it is true, because that would depend on his showing Christianity to be true.[287] Demonstrating or showing that something is true is a tall order (and Plantinga claims that very little that we believe can be shown to be true); however, even though the model may not be able to be demonstrated as true it does not mean that it

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[280]Ibid., chap 5.

[281]Ibid., 167.

[282]Ibid., 168.

[283]Ibid.

[284]Ibid., 169.

[285]Ibid.

[286]Ibid.

[287]Ibid.. 170.

lacks warrant but is, rather, a lot like other things that we believe and which we claim to know.[288] Finally, the fourth goal of Plantinga's model is to explain that if Christian belief is true, the A/C model or something very similar to it is true.[289]

Plantinga builds the A/C model based on the agreement between Calvin and Aquinas that humanity has a natural knowledge of God.[290] Plantinga draws from both Aquinas and Calvin several statements within their works which suggest their agreement that there is some created tendency or inclination to believe that God exists.[291] Plantinga pays particular attention to Calvin's comments on the apostle Paul's statement in Romans 1:18-20, in which men are said to be aware of God's existence, even though they suppress the truth of God's existence, so that they are accountable for their actions because God has revealed himself to them. Calvin, for example states in the *Institutes*: "There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity . . . [that] God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty . . . there lacks in this a tacit confession of a sense of deity inscribed in the hearts of all"[292]

Plantinga attributes this belief in God to a cognitive mechanism, what Calvin terms the *sensus divinitatis*, or the sense of divinity.[293] The sense of divinity produces belief in the existence of God under certain circumstances; more exactly, Plantinga describes these circumstances as "triggers" for belief in God.[294] These circumstances

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[288]Ibid.

[289]Ibid.

[290]Ibid. " . . . and anything on which Calvin and Aquinas are in accord is something to which we had better pay careful attention."

[291]Ibid., 170-71.

[292]Ibid., 171. John Calvin *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.3.1, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 44.

[293]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 172.

[294]Ibid.

trigger belief in God so that one does not infer the existence of God from arguments; instead, belief in God arises under certain circumstances and finds one's self believing.[295] Plantinga correlates this sort of believing with the kind of experience one has when having *a priori*, memory or perceptual beliefs: one does not follow an argument but rather believes them immediately.[296] With respect to belief in God, the "awareness of God is natural, widespread, and not easy to forget, ignore, or destroy."[297]

This awareness of God is described by Plantinga as a capacity for knowledge of God's existence, which all humanity is born with, rather than an innate knowledge.[298] This capacity is similar to how one comes to know mathematical knowledge or to understand syllogisms, for instance. One does not know simple mathematical operations as an infant; what one has is a capacity to see the truth of mathematical and logical operations.[299] If the sense of divinity is a capacity given by God through his design plan in order to know the truth about God, then what sort of circumstance gives rise to belief?

Plantinga follows Calvin in suggesting that there are many different types of circumstance which give rise to belief in the existence of God.[300] Plantinga notes that the grandeurs of nature such as the starry sky or the view from atop the mountains, as are examples of circumstances that give rise to theistic belief.[301] Plantinga again quotes Calvin: "Lest anyone, then be excluded from access to happiness, he not only sowed in men's minds that seed of religion of which we have spoken, but revealed himself and

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[295]Ibid., 172-73. In "Reason and Belief in God," Plantinga has a lengthy section on how it is that we find ourselves with beliefs rather than working to form them on our own.

[296]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 173.

[297]Ibid.

[298]Ibid.

[299]Ibid.

[300]Ibid.

[301]Ibid.

daily discloses himself in the whole workmanship of the universe."[302] These are not the only types of circumstances, there are many others. What is important about each of the circumstances is that the *sensus divinitatis* is a belief-producing mechanism that produces belief in the existence of God under certain circumstances.[303] In addition to the *sensus divinitatis* being a belief producing mechanism, the A/C model has several other important features.

The beliefs which arise through the operation of the *sensus divinitatis* are not formed within through a process of drawing conclusions based on arguments of even a simple nature; rather, belief is immediate and arises on the occasion of one or more of many different kinds of circumstances.[304] In this way the *sensus divinitatis* is similar to sense perception, memory and a priori beliefs. The beliefs produced by the *sensus* are basic in the same way those other beliefs are basic; one does not argue or accept sense perception on the basis of evidence but rather accepts those beliefs when appeared to in any number of ways—the belief is basic in that it is not accepted on the basis of other propositions.[305] What Plantinga is arguing for by saying that belief in God is properly basic is that, when one believes in God's existence as a result of a trigger, that belief is formed not on the basis of drawing conclusions from the available evidence but rather through the operation of the *sensus divinitatis*.[306] Rather, just as one forms perceptual beliefs when one's cognitive faculties involved in sense perception are functioning properly to produce true beliefs, so it is with the beliefs formed by the *sensus divinitatis*. In this sense, it is a basic belief like perception, memory and a priori beliefs and it also joins them in that it is a "starting point for thought."[307]

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[302]Ibid., 174, Institutes I, v, 1, p. 52.

[303]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 174.

[304]Ibid., 175.

[305]Ibid.

[306]Ibid.

[307]Ibid., 176.

What Plantinga has in mind here is twofold. First, belief in God is basic for someone who accepts belief in the way just described: as having been formed by the operation of the *sensus divinitatis*. Secondly, one who forms beliefs in this manner is warranted—he or she forgoes no duties, epistemic or otherwise, in holding to belief in God formed in the basic way.[308] Plantinga details the reasons for this in his article "Reason and Belief in God"[309] and in chapter three of *Warranted Christian Belief.* Briefly, a person who comes to believe in God in the basic way is justified in that belief because he or she is doing his or her duty with respect to the evidence, and the evidence against theism does not dissuade the belief that God exists; and so in that regard, one has done his or her duty with respect to the common conception of justification.[310]

According to the A/C model, theistic belief is the result of the *sensus divinitatis* operating according to its design plan and is aimed at the truth. That it is such and is similar in its operations to perceptual, memory and a priori beliefs, the beliefs produced according to this process are not only basic and justified, but they also have warrant.[311] On the A/C model, the *sensus divinitatis* is a belief forming cognitive faculty or mechanism which has been designed and created by God. Because this is the case with respect to these faculties, "When it functions properly, it ordinarily *does* produce true beliefs about God."[312] This is because the purpose of the *sensus divinitatis* is to produce true beliefs about God; when it does, "These beliefs therefore meet the conditions for warrant; if the beliefs produced are strong enough, then they constitute knowledge."[313]

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[308]Ibid., 178.

[309]See previous section for details as to why belief in God can be taken as properly basic.

[310]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 178.

[311]Ibid.

[312]Ibid., 179.

[313]Ibid. Further, Plantinga explains that one does not accept beliefs by way of the *sensus divinitatis* because one knows the source or origin of the belief in the same way that one accepts a priori knowledge without knowledge of the source of its origin;

Plantinga makes an important statement concerning the origin of the capacity for knowledge of God: "This capacity for knowledge of God is part of our original cognitive equipment, part of the fundamental epistemic establishment with which we have been created by God."[314] The capacity for knowledge of God would have been part of humanity's original noetic equipment, and though it may have been damaged by the fall of humanity into sin, it was not rendered dysfunctional.[315] As such, it is not like the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit (IIHS), which God uses to speak to humanity through the Scripture and other means, which is a response of God to the condition of humanity after the consequences of the fall.[316]

The *sensus divinitatis* has been weakened by sin and its consequences, yet it continues to function properly in the right environment and is at least partially restored by faith; however, it is possible to observe dysfunction of the *sensus divinitatis* when one refuses or fails to believe in God.[317] This is a sort of turn about according to what one might expect after considering the F&M complaint against theistic belief. That complaint states that theism is the result of either cognitive faculties functioning properly but aimed at something other than the truth (wish fulfillment, perhaps) or that theistic belief is the result of cognitive malfunction. According to the model, however, theistic belief is the result of cognitive faculties having been designed by God to trigger theistic belief under the right circumstances, and that the cognitive faculties that produce belief in God are aimed at the truth. When one fails to believe under the circumstances which trigger belief in God, "It is really the *unbeliever* who displays epistemic malfunction; failing to believe

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the point is that one accepts beliefs by way of the *sensus divinitatis* in the basic way, and the belief can have warrant "even if the believer has no second-level beliefs at all about the belief in question."

[314]Ibid., 180.

[315]Ibid.

[316]Ibid.

[317]Ibid., 184.

in God is a result of some kind of dysfunction of the *sensus divinitatis*."[318] In other words, one's failure to believe is a sign of cognitive malfunction rather than shrewd rationality which sometimes takes the posture that it is better to withhold belief in things like theism because it is the intellectually mature thing to do.[319]

Having summed up his model, Plantinga asks this question: "Is belief in God warrant-basic?"[320] By way of answering this question, he proposes two different answers which have a similar point, and which ultimately undermine the *de jure* question identified in the Freud and Marx complaint. The two answers are simple: if theistic belief is false, then the theistic belief is not warrant-basic on the A/C model; on the other hand, if theistic belief is true, then theism is probably warrant-basic and something similar to the A/C model, or one very close to it, accurately describes how theism is warrant-basic.[321] Though both of these answers to the question propose antagonistic results to the query, they have one very important aspect which is the same: theistic belief being warrant-basic depends upon whether or not theism is true, or to be more precise, it depends upon the status of the *de facto* question.[322] The reason for this is tied to the portion of the A/C model that describes the *sensus divinitatis* as being reliable, because it was designed and created by God to produce true beliefs about God, and it is a part of the original noetic equipment of humanity and retains this vestige, even though sin has diminished its capacity.[323] In light of this, according to Plantinga, "There aren't any *de jure* criticisms that are sensible when conjoined with the truth of theistic belief; all of

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[318]Ibid.

[319]Ibid., 185-86. This sentiment is often expressed by those enlightened intellectuals who insist on agnosticism or withholding belief in God because they are relativists with respect to religion due to the convergence of anti-realism and naturalism.

[320]Ibid., 186.

[321]Ibid., 186-88.

[322]Ibid., 189.

[323]Ibid.

them either fail right from the start (as with the claim that it is unjustified to accept theistic belief) or else really presuppose that theism is false."[324]

In light of this insight, Plantinga re-examines the Freud and Marx complaint:

> It [religious belief] finds its origin in wish fulfillment, which, although it is a cognitive process with an important role to play in the total economy of our total intellectual life, is nevertheless not aimed at the production of true beliefs. On Freud's view, then, theistic belief, given that it is produced by wish fulfillment, does not have warrant; it fails to satisfy the condition of being produced by cognitive faculties whose purpose it is to produce true belief. He goes on to characterize religious belief as 'neurosis,' 'illusion,' 'poison,' 'intoxicant,' and 'childishness to be overcome,' all on one page of *The Future of an Illusion*.[325]

What Plantinga sees in these objections is the spirit of the Enlightenment, which has often predicted the death of religion at the hands of the new "scientific" way of looking at things.[326] Yet these objections come and go, and religious belief continues throughout the world, especially the Western world, where Christian theism in particular continues to thrive.[327]

What Freud actually offers for his case does not engender one to accept it as either true or call into question theistic belief. Freud does not offer any evidence or arguments which show that theistic belief arises from wish fulfillment nor does he offer an argument to the effect that he demonstrates theistic belief is the "operation of that mechanism which is not aimed at the production of true beliefs."[328] As Plantinga reads him, Freud seems to be taking it for granted that God does not exist and that belief in the existence of God is false, and his explanation of religious belief as being the result of wish fulfillment is his casting "about for some kind of explanation of this widespread phenomenon of mistaken belief."[329] It is at this point where Plantinga pulls the rug out

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[324]Ibid., 191.

[325]Ibid., 192.

[326]Ibid., 193.

[327]Ibid.

[328]Ibid., 195.

[329]Ibid.

from under Freud and the *de jure* criticism: "But then Freud's version of the *de jure* criticism really depends on his atheism: it isn't an independent criticism at all, and it won't (or shouldn't) have any force for anyone who doesn't share that atheism."[330]

[330]Ibid., 198.

CHAPTER 5

CRITIQUES OF PLANTINGA'S RELIGIOUS EPISTEMOLOGY

Alvin Plantinga's religious epistemology has stimulated a great deal of interest among both philosophers[1] and theologians alike.[2] No doubt this is due in part to the scope of his work which includes strands of thought from the major figures of both philosophy and theology ranging from René Descartes, John Locke, Immanuel Kant, David Hume, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards to a host of contemporary philosophers and theologians. Secondly, Plantinga's attempt to show that theistic belief is

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[1]Book-length examples include James Beilby, *Epistemology as Theology: An Evaluation of Alvin Plantinga's Religious Epistemology* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2006); R. Douglas Geivett and Brendan Sweetman, eds., *Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Jonothan L. Kvanvig, ed., *Warrant in Contemporary Epistemology: Essays in Honor of Plantigna's Theory of Knowledge* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996); James F. Sennett, ed. *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Linda Zagzebski, ed., *Rational Faith: Catholic Responses to Reformed Epistemology*, vol. 10 of *Library of Religious Philosophy*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993). Journal symposia include *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 55 (1995): 393-464; *Philosophia Christi*, n.s. 3 (2001): 323-402.

[2]Examples include Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor, *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004); Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 230-31; Paul Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 241-42, 265-70; Alister McGrath, "Evangelical Theological Method: The State of the Art," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 33-34; Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 302; idem, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

rational and warranted carries the moniker Reformed Epistemology which has served to both highlight the tradition from which his project originates and at the same time provoke (unintentionally) responses that challenge both his conception of "reformed" and his rejection of natural theology as the project of justification of religious belief that lies at the heart of his religious epistemology. Accordingly, his project to give an account of warranted Christian belief has motivated many responses that challenge the central claims of his account.[3]

Because of the large number of critiques of Plantinga's work, this chapter will attempt to offer specific examples of some of the most common critiques of his religious epistemology.[4] In addition, because his work on the topic of religious epistemology has spanned the entirety of his career, climaxing in *Warranted Christian Belief*,[5] the focus of this chapter will be on critiques of this work, as it represents the maturation of his thought, which has developed through several stages before arriving at its present form. These common objections to Plantinga's religious epistemology collect around Plantinga's primary claim, that it is possible for one to have warranted beliefs about God, sufficient enough for knowledge, that are not based on propositional evidence. Like memory or *a priori* beliefs, belief in the existence of God is the result of properly functioning cognitive faculties aimed at the production of true beliefs at work in the environment for which they were designed. When such beliefs are formed, they are properly basic beliefs. The one condition Plantinga puts on his religious epistemology is whether or not theism is true. If theism is true, then theistic beliefs have warrant

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[3]See, for example, Zagzebski, ed., *Rational Faith: Catholic Responses to Reformed Epistemology*; D. S. Jeffreys, "How Reformed is Reformed Epistemology? Alvin Plantinga and Calvin's 'sensus divinitatis'," *Religious Studies* 33 (1997): 419-31.

[4]A similar approach is also taken by Deane-Peter Baker, "Plantinga's Reformed Epistemology: What's the Question," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 57 (2005): 77-103; Beilby, *Epistemology as Theology*.

[5]Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

sufficient for knowledge. In examining the critiques leveled against Plantinga's position I will examine critiques which focus on Plantinga's claim that belief in God can be properly basic and on his claim that theistic belief need not be based on propositional evidence for it to be warranted.

Quinn and Plantinga

Philip Quinn has interacted with Plantinga's religious epistemology in several articles and levels several critiques at Plantinga's thesis that belief in God is properly basic.[6] In his most recent discussion of Plantinga's views, Quinn examines the issues that he believes have survived his earlier debate with Plantinga. In his original critique of Plantinga's argument that belief in God can be properly basic,[7] Quinn questions Plantinga's conclusion that classical foundationalism is self-referentially incoherent. Plantinga concludes that, because classical foundationalism is taken as a properly basic belief yet does not meet its own conditions for proper basicality, then it is self-referentially incoherent. Quinn, in his original article, responded that classical foundationalism need not be taken as a properly basic belief but could be one of the deliverances of a properly basic belief and therefore supported by that belief, thus protecting classical foundationalism from Plantinga's coherence critique.[8]

Specifically, Quinn argues that it would be possible for the classical

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[6]Philip L. Quinn, "In Search of the Foundations of Theism," *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985): 469-86; idem, "The Foundations of Theism Again: A Rejoinder to Plantinga," in *Rational Faith: Catholic Responses to Reformed Epistemology*, ed. Linda Zagzebski (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 193); idem, "Epistemology in Philosophy of Religion," in *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology*, ed. Paul K. Moser (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). See also, William Hasker, "The Foundations of Theism: Scoring the Quinn-Plantinga Debate," *Faith and Philosophy* 15 (1998): 52-67; Alvin Plantinga, "The Foundations of Theism: A Reply," *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986): 298-313.

[7]Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Philosophy: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 16-93.

[8]Quinn, "In Search of the Foundations of Theism," 471.

foundationalist to argue for his position in the manner that Plantinga himself suggests, namely, inductively from clear-cut examples and counter examples that test a hypothesized criterion.[9] While Quinn agrees with Plantinga that no criterion has thus far been offered in support of basing classical foundationalism, Quinn notes that it does remain a possibility to establish a criterion even though Plantinga believes the prospects to be quite dim.[10] Quinn further notes that Plantinga himself does not state a criterion for the theist that delineates the "necessary and sufficient conditions for proper basicality against the examples from initial data sets that include belief in God as properly basic in certain conditions."[11] Plantinga suggests that the theist will work out a criterion from clear examples in which belief in God is properly basic.[12] These may initially enjoy *prima facie* justification that is open to defeat, yet could obtain *ultima facie* justification by showing that the belief was formed by properly functioning cognitive faculties.[13] Quinn, however, does not accept this as a sufficient procedure to justify properly basic beliefs and therefore thinks Plantinga has not shown that theistic belief is justified in certain conditions.[14] The main reason behind this for Quinn is that the *prima facie* justification for most intellectually sophisticated adults in contemporary Western culture has been eroded by the objections to theism that they have encountered, and so belief in God will

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[9]Ibid., 472-73. For Plantinga's discussion of this criterion, see Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Properly Basic," *Nous* 15 (1981): 50; Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 76.

[10]Quinn, "Epistemology in Philosophy of Religion," 530; Plantinga, "Reply," 302-03. Quinn believes that one of the main obstacles for the classical foundationalist in finding such a criterion is that there are many beliefs which one holds in the basic way that cannot be believed based on classical foundationalism alone.

[11]Quinn, "Epistemology in Philosophy of Religion," 530.

[12]Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 77.

[13]Ibid., 78.

[14]Quinn, "Epistemology in Philosophy of Religion," 530. See also Hasker, "Scoring the Quinn-Plantinga Debate," 54.

not remain properly basic in light of these objections.[15]

This is Quinn's second major critique of Plantinga's position. He states, "A maximally strong potential defeater for properly basic theistic belief is the following proposition: (14) God does not exist."[16] Because of the serious objections to theistic belief, Quinn thinks it unlikely that belief in the existence of God is a properly basic belief for "most educated adult theists in our culture."[17] Quinn cites three primary objections to theistic belief: the existence of non-moral evil, the power of projective theories to explain religious belief, and the existence and prevalence of religious diversity.[18] According to Quinn, the existence of non-moral evil in the world, while not definitively showing (14) to be, true nevertheless counts as evidence or support for (14).[19] Secondly, Quinn wants to show that projective theories at the very least undercut non-inferentially justified religious beliefs in that they provide an alternative explanation for a religious experience, such that it is no longer possible to hold the belief in the properly basic way.[20] According to Quinn, the ability of projective theories to explain even some religious experiences shows that their success is nontrivial and provides support for (14).[21] His last objection to theistic belief that lends support to (14) is the existence of religious diversity, examples of which "seem to be no less well supported than theistic religions by experiential grounds and philosophical arguments…their core nontheistic

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[15]Quinn, "Epistemology in Philosophy of Religion," 531.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid., 531-38.

[19]Ibid., 532; see also Quinn, "The Foundations of Theism," 481; and Plantinga, "Reply," 309.

[20]Quinn, "Epistemology in Philosophy of Religion," 533; see also Quinn, "The Foundations of Theism Again," 42; and Hasker, "Scoring the Quinn-Plantinga Debate," 62.

[21]Quinn, "Epistemology in Philosophy of Religion," 533.

beliefs are therefore potential defeaters for theistic beliefs."[22]

The sum total of these arguments for Quinn provide something of a cumulative case against accepting the proposition, "God exists," as a properly basic belief.[23] This leads Quinn to another objection of Plantinga's religious epistemology, namely that Plantinga does not seem to give enough credence to the notion that objections such as the ones he mentions "combine to defeat properly basic belief in God."[24] Quinn states, "I think the most promising critical enterprise would be to argue, without presupposing the falsity of theism, that several of the potential defeaters have some warrant individually and enough warrant collectively to defeat in many cases theistic belief that is properly basic with respect to warrant."[25] Instead of a properly basic account of warrant, Quinn suggests that theists use a cumulative case approach that includes arguments for the existence of God and arguments of other types, "in which case it [belief in God] will be based in part on their premises and so will not be basic and a fortiori will not be properly basic."[26]

In these critiques of Plantinga's positions on whether or not belief in God can be properly basic, Quinn focuses much of his attention on Plantinga's earlier works, as well as Plantinga's response to his criticisms. Although he was aware of *Warranted Christian Belief*, Quinn did not have the space or time to adequately address the arguments that Plantinga develops in that work.[27] In that work Plantinga deals with each of the three objections that Quinn raises and corrects his dismissive attitude toward

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[22]Ibid., 534.

[23]Ibid.

[24]Ibid., 535.

[25]Ibid., 537.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Ibid. Evidently *Warranted Christian Belief* had only just been published when his essay had been composed, although he was somewhat familiar with the general progression of the argument of Plantinga's work.

projective theories, focusing instead on their existence as the statement of the *de jure* objection to theistic belief.[28] In his assessment of the projective theories of Freud and Marx, Plantinga shows that they are built on the assumption that theism is false and notes that the projective theories themselves do not offer any arguments in support of their own theories.[29] This rightly constitutes a problem for projective theories such as the Freud and Marx theories because these theories are supposedly grounded by evidence. By pointing out that they do not offer any evidence or arguments for their position, Plantinga draws attention to the role that the *de facto* objection plays in the F&M complaint as an assumption that they do not prove.

The validity of the projective theories offered by Freud and Marx depend on the assumption that theistic belief is false, and so their attempt to explain belief in the existence of God needs an explanation such as wish-fulfillment because theistic belief lacks warrant.[30] The projective theories explain theistic belief as the result of cognitive faculties aimed at something other than the production of true beliefs, and in order to show that theistic belief is irrational, the projective theories need to show that the cognitive faculties involved in producing theistic belief are not aimed at producing true beliefs.[31] According to Plantinga, the projective theories do not accomplish this, and in fact, "Freud offers no arguments or reasons here at all…he simply takes it for granted that there is no God and that theistic belief is false; he then casts about for some kind of

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[28]Plantinga, in responding to Quinn's claim that projective theories are pervasive in our culture and provide support for (14), takes a dismissive attitude toward the objections to theistic belief of the projective theories. See Plantinga, "Reply," 308 and Quinn, "The Foundations of Theism Again," 42; idem, "Epistemology in Philosophy of Religion," 533 for his reply to Plantinga. In *Warranted Christian Belief*, Plantinga locates the *de jure* objection to theistic belief in the work of Freud and Marx's claim that theistic belief is the result of one's cognitive faculties aimed at something other than the truth.

[29]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 198.

[30]Ibid.

[31]Ibid.

explanation of this widespread phenomenon of mistaken belief."[32] What Freud settles on is wish-fulfillment, which he claims is not aimed at the production of true beliefs, and religious belief therefore does not have warrant.[33] But in his conception of the *de jure* criticism, Freud depends on his assumption that theistic belief is false, and so his attack on religious belief "really depends on his atheism."[34]

Although Plantinga shows the efficacy of the projective theories' argument against the rationality of theistic belief to be tied to the truth of theistic belief and that the *de jure* objection of Freud and Marx fail because it is dependent upon their assumption that theistic belief is false, the suggestion of its force by Quinn points beyond the projective theories to the nature of warranted theistic belief needing evidence or reasons in the face of such objections. Thus Quinn, for example, opts for a cumulative-case approach to justify theistic belief because he feels that, given the objections to theistic belief, arguing for theism goes a long way toward providing what is necessary for warrant or justification. This sense that there needs to be evidence or reasons to believe that God exists is one of the significant criticisms of Plantinga's project and comes in several different forms.[35]

Swinburne and Plantinga

Richard Swinburne's critique of Plantinga's religious epistemology raises several important issues related to the role of evidence and the status of warranted theistic belief.[36] After complimenting Plantinga's project in *Warranted Christian Belief* as

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[32]Ibid.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Baker, "Plantinga's Reformed Epistemology," 77.

[36]Richard Swinburne, "Plantinga on Warrant," *Religious Studies* 37 (2001): 203-14; Richard Swinburne and Alvin Plantinga, "Swinburne and Plantinga on Internal Rationality," *Religious Studies* 37 (2001): 357-58.

"almost impossible to rebut" in most of its chapters, Swinburne manages to raise several difficulties for Plantinga.[37] First, Swinburne suggests that on Plantinga's conception of warranted theistic belief, "we cannot in any interesting sense ask whether it is rational to believe that Christian belief has warrant."[38] The reason for this, according to Swinburne, is that Plantinga does not offer an account for the truth of Christianity in his assessment of its status with respect to warrant.[39] Plantinga shows how it is that Christian belief has warrant if it is true, but he does not offer any discussion for the truth of Christianity.[40] Swinburne believes that Plantinga's account of warranted Christian belief will be great for those who share his non-inferential belief in God; however, "Plantinga seems not [to] have much to say to those Christian believers whose beliefs are not of Plantinga's kind, and nothing to say to the adherents of other religions and of none."[41]

Specifically, Swinburne faults Plantinga for not answering whether "various sets of evidence (some public, some private) make it probable that Christian beliefs are true."[42] Swinburne finds fault in Plantinga's appeal to the role of private evidence in the formation of theistic beliefs and its role in conferring warrant to those beliefs because private evidence does not convey the same degree of confidence which public evidence conveys.[43] Swinburne holds that "Basic beliefs come to us with different degrees of prior probability varying with our degree of confidence in them, but a belief with a high prior probability can in the light of other beliefs of our current set have a lower posterior probability."[44] In this view a person's basic beliefs can be called into question or even

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[37]Swinburne, "Plantinga on Warrant," 206.

[38]Ibid., 206-07.

[39]Ibid., 206.

[40]Ibid., 207.

[41]Ibid.

[42]Ibid., 208.

[43]Ibid., 207.

[44]Swinburne, "Swinburne and Plantinga," 357.

overturned upon the discovery of other evidence, even if the basic belief was initially held with a high degree of confidence.[45] By focusing on the question of warrant from one's private evidence, Plantinga does not take into consideration different evidence sets which include both public and private evidence.[46] For Swinburne it is the public evidence such as the problem of evil or the plurality of religions which "worries the atheist and many a theist" as to the rationality of theistic belief.[47] Along these lines Swinburne writes, "I will not be convincing if I seek to tell you that there is a God, but that all the evidence (public and private) shows that probably there isn't; or that there is no God, although all the evidence shows that probably there is."[48]

Swinburne is also critical of Plantinga's handling of two public defeaters of Christian belief: the problem of evil and the questions raised by Historical Biblical Criticism.[49] Although these criticisms are aimed at the extended A/C model, they illustrate Swinburne's concern that one demonstrate the truth of theism in general and Christianity in particular. The critiques from Historical Biblical Criticism illustrate the relationship between public and private beliefs within evidence sets.[50] For example, the biblical critic believes that the account of the resurrection ought to be taken in a metaphorical way rather than literally, as most Christians have typically taken it. What is one to say about his use of public evidence, such as the text of Scripture and other historical documents? According to Swinburne, based on Plantinga's approach the theist's response to the critique is to rely on internal evidence to overcome the critiques of Historical Biblical Criticism.[51] Yet, "Many of us have different internal convictions"

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[45]Swinburne, "Plantinga on Warrant," 208.

[46]Ibid.

[47]Ibid., 207.

[48]Ibid., 209.

[49]Ibid., 212.

[50]Ibid.

[51]Ibid.

that would preclude the help of the Holy Spirit to aid the "Christian community in sorting out its differences of conflicting convictions."[52] What Swinburne finds so unappealing in Plantinga's account of warranted Christian belief is that the Christian would not need to refute the biblical critic using public evidence, but one would need to weigh one's internal convictions, and "No objection should be entertained which goes against those."[53]

With respect to the problem of evil, Swinburne protests that Plantinga's view does not take its status as a potential defeater seriously enough.[54] Although Swinburne agrees that there is not a successfully stated deductive problem of evil, there is a possible argument that needs to be taken seriously.[55] This is the case, even though a probabilistic defeater will not be enough to defeat a strong belief, because it will reduce the warrant a belief enjoys and defeat a weak belief.[56] What Swinburne feels is necessary in both of these cases are counter-arguments to this evidence that count against theistic belief, arguments that are not only private or internal, but arguments which seemingly apply to the nature of the evidential critique.[57] It is the latter that Plantinga's position does not take seriously, according to Swinburne, and because of that his conception of warranted Christian belief does not provide any basis to answer the question of the truth of Christian belief.[58]

In his response to Swinburne's concerns, Plantinga develops several arguments in order to show how his conception of warranted Christian belief does possess the ability

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[52]Ibid., 213.

[53]Ibid., 212.

[54]Ibid., 213.

[55]Ibid., 207.

[56]Ibid., 214.

[57]Ibid., 213.

[58]Ibid., 206-07.

to speak to the truth of Christian belief.[59] Plantinga makes several brief remarks about how he did in fact handle some of Swinburne's main concerns. He first restates the goal of his project in *Warranted Christian Belief*, which was to show how Christian belief can have warrant in the basic way.[60] These warranted beliefs are beliefs that will separate themselves from mere true belief; they are "the sort of belief accorded to the great things of the Gospel by those who actually believe them."[61] As such, Christian belief has warrant when held in the basic way if the belief is the result of properly functioning cognitive faculties operating in the environment for which they were created and in the manner they were created to function, presumably aimed at the production of true beliefs and not for some other purpose such as wish-fulfillment. He also notes that, contrary to Swinburne's claims, there is ample room in his position to defend Christian belief against arguments which attempt to defeat it; this is the task of what he terms "Christian philosophical criticism."[62] Further, these responses to the serious critiques of Christian belief can have great effect: "They can confirm and support belief reached in other ways; they may move fence-sitters closer to Christian belief; they can function as defeater-defeaters; and they can reveal interesting and important connections."[63] What is central to his project, however, is to show that arguments such as Swinburne and others find necessary and essential to justify Christian belief are in reality "not necessary for justified, rational and warranted Christian belief."[64] It is here that the real disagreement lies.

Plantinga's overall project attempts to show how one can have warrant for her

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[59]Plantinga, "Reply to Swinburne," 216-17.

[60]Ibid., 217.

[61]Ibid., 221.

[62]Ibid., 217.

[63]Ibid.

[64]Ibid.

Christian beliefs even if those beliefs are taken in the basic way, when formed according to his model of proper function.[65] For his specific project this type of warrant does not depend on public evidence to have warrant sufficient for knowledge.[66] What Plantinga sees as the problem for Swinburne's conception of the rationality of belief based on the probability of the public evidence is that beliefs based on public evidence, even if its being true is highly probable with respect to the public evidence, is still not sufficient "for its being warrantedly believed with *any* degree of firmness."[67] Plantinga states, "If it's to be the case that at least some people actually *know* some of the claims of Christianity, or even are rational in actually *believing* them, there will have to be a separate source of warrant for such belief, something like, following Calvin and Aquinas, the internal testimony (Calvin) or instigation (Aquinas) of the Holy Spirit."[68] This type of belief that Plantinga is seeking to show is warranted is what he terms "full belief, the sort of belief accorded to the great things of the Gospel by those who actually believe them."[69]

Plantinga uses an illustration to show that a belief can have warrant based on private evidence, even if the public evidence for the belief suggests otherwise. Plantinga states,

> I am a suspect in a crime committed yesterday afternoon; I have means, motive, opportunity. I am known to have committed this kind of crime before, and a credible eyewitness claims to have seen me at the crime scene. Nevertheless, I clearly remember spending yesterday afternoon on a solitary hike miles from the scene of the crime. Then I know that I didn't commit the crime, despite the fact that my committing it is more probable than not with respect to public evidence.[70]

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[65]Ibid., 220.

[66]Ibid. Plantinga also states, "But secondly, this question [whether or not Christian belief is likely with respect to public evidence] is not of great importance for my project. I don't say it isn't of great importance *uberhaupt*; I say only that it is not of great importance for my project." ibid.

[67]Ibid., italics original.

[68]Ibid., 221, italics original.

[69]Ibid.

[70]Ibid., 220.

Similarly, suppose

> a person may think that Christian belief can be justified, rational or warranted only if it can be shown to be probable with respect to public evidence. She may also have serious doubts as to whether it can be shown to be thus probable. As a result, she may feel that to accept Christian belief is to violate an intellectual duty of some kind; she may therefore reject it, or hold it in a half-hearted, apologetic and unintegral way. It can be useful for such people to see that there is little or no reason to accept the sort of evidentialsim that provokes these qualms, and that Christian belief can be rational, justified and warranted even if it is not probable with respect to public evidence."[71]

In these examples Plantinga describes the importance of the roles that the internal testimony or instigation of the Holy Spirit play as sources of warrant for theistic belief.[72] In one's conception of warranted Christian belief, one must account for the high degree of warrant often associated with Christian belief; probability with respect to public evidence is not the issue.[73] Commenting on the goal of Swinburne's arguments in his work *Faith and Reason*, Plantinga states, "As far as I can see, he may be right in holding that there are good arguments for the conclusion that the probability of Christian belief with respect to public evidence is sufficient to warrant a sort of Pascalian wager . . . [however] I was claiming only that these arguments are not sufficient to support full belief, the sort of belief accorded to the great things of the Gospel by those who actually believe them."[74] According to Plantinga's model, the full belief typically associated with Christian theism is the result of one's cognitive faculties functioning properly, according to a design plan aimed at the production of true beliefs in the cognitive environment for which they were designed to function. So, for Plantinga, when one forms the belief "God exists," he does so upon the operation of the *sensus divinitatis* which is like a belief-forming mechanism that each human has as a part of his or her cognitive faculties.[75]

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[71]Ibid., 222.

[72]Ibid., 221.

[73]Ibid.

[74]Ibid.

[75]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 174.

When appeared to in a certain way, theistic belief is triggered by the *sensus divinitatis*; one simply believes in a non-inferential way as a result of the operation of the *sensus divnitatis* functioning in the way it was designed to function.[76] Hence, one finds oneself believing the proposition "God exists," not as a conclusion or inference from other propositions, but in the basic way.[77] Thus, the proposition is not believed or accepted on the basis of other propositions, even if those propositions indicate that the probability of the truth of theistic belief with respect to them is indeed high. The belief "God exists" has warrant if it was formed by the proper function of one's cognitive faculties and if God does in fact exist.[78] Plantinga states, "If theistic belief is true, then it seems likely that it does have warrant . . . if these things are so, then [God] would of course intend that we be able to be aware of his presence and to know something about him . . . the natural thing to think is that he created us in such a way that we would come to hold such true beliefs as that there is such a person as God, that he is our creator, that we owe him obedience and worship, that he is worthy of worship, that he loves us, and so on."[79]

In answering the question as to whether or not theistic belief can have warrant, Plantinga answers the complaint of Freud and Marx, that Christian belief is irrational or defective because it is the product of cognitive faculties aimed at something other than the truth. The F&M complaint that theistic belief is the result of some sort of projection theory or a cognitive process aimed at something other than the truth presupposes that theistic belief is not true. In that type of environment theism will certainly be required to meet a level of evidence that neither it nor any other philosophical theory can meet. That is why natural theology, so conceived, can not meet the requirements to justify belief in

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[76]Ibid., 175.

[77]Ibid., 180.

[78]Ibid., 190.

[79]Ibid., 189.

God according to the dictates of those who already believe that God does not exist. The reason for this, according to Plantinga, is that epistemological questions are not "ontologically neutral." Plantinga states, "Your view as to what sort of creature a human being is will determine or at any rate heavily influence your views as to what sorts of beliefs will be produced in the basic way by properly functioning human cognitive faculties . . . the dispute as to whether theistic belief needs argument, i.e. natural theology, to be warranted can't be settled just by attending to epistemological considerations; it is at bottom not merely an epistemological dispute, but an anthropological and thus ontological dispute."[80]

Plantinga is making several claims. First, against the objection that theistic belief is irrational or unjustified (because it is produced by cognitive faculties either aimed at something other than the truth or because those cognitive faculties are malfunctioning) Plantinga shows that belief in God, if it is true that God exists, is the result of properly functioning cognitive faculties. In this conception of the proper function of one's cognitive faculties and the formation of religious belief, belief in God can be properly basic because the belief is the result of proper function in the same way that memory or a priori beliefs are properly basic. Secondly, in his discussion of the role and difference of *de facto* and *de jure* objections to theistic belief, he shows that the *de jure* objections as to the justification of Christian belief are tied inextricably to the *de facto* question of the truth of Christianity. The presuppositions one brings to the project make a difference as to the outcome of the project. A successful objection to Christian belief will have to be a successful de facto question.[81] The problem with the F&M complaint is that neither Freud nor Marx provides any arguments against the truth of theism or for their claim that theism is false. In other words they presuppose its falsehood, based on aspects of their own ontological assumptions.

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[80]Ibid., 190.

[81]Ibid., 191.

Ultimately, Plantinga's project is not attempting to establish the truth of Christianity but rather seeks to show that, if true, it has warrant enough for knowledge. In his attempt to pose the right form of the *de jure* objection to Christian belief, he is essentially calling into question the trajectory of the thinking about religious belief that arises out of the Enlightenment. By demonstrating the inconsistencies concerning the human ability to have knowledge of God in the thinking of Kant, and in showing how someone can be deontologically justified in forming theistic beliefs, Plantinga shows how the *de jure* question is inseparably linked to ontological beliefs about the nature of reality, especially beliefs about the nature of humanity. This is why in answering both Quinn and Swinburne, Plantinga leads the discussion back to the specific goal of his project, which is to show how Christian belief can have warrant if it is true. Christian belief has warrant because God has designed the structure of the human rationality in such a way that the proper function of one's cognitive faculties includes the formation of beliefs about the existence of God under certain circumstances, and thus, the beliefs formed in this way are properly basic and do not depend upon propositional evidence to be warranted.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Carl Henry and Alvin Plantinga share a common intellectual heritage that extends beyond courses taken under Harry Jellema, to the relationship between faith and knowledge that grows out of the Augustinian tradition. Both Plantinga and Henry conceive of their projects as part of the Augustinian tradition in both their conception of the relationship between faith and reason and in their conception of how belief in God arises in the human mind. For Henry and Plantinga, knowledge of God is possible because of the reality of God's existence and the sorts of beings humans are. Both Henry and Plantinga appeal to the human mind's ability to know that God exists because it has been designed by God to form the belief in response to the proper trigger (Plantinga) or to have the belief arise as a response to God's revelation of his existence (Henry). In the end I think it is this insight that carries with it the potential to help evangelical theology establish a foothold on some of the realities reflected in the biblical account of God's interaction with humanity. Specifically, the connection that is evident in Henry and Plantinga's work between the ability of humanity to know God and the special status of humanity as bearing the image of God could be the core idea which serves as the epistemological application of the ontological reality of God's existence.

One of the ways that the comparison of Henry and Plantinga can help speak into the collapse of classical foundationalism is to take into serious consideration their view on where theological and epistemological reflection should begin. Both Henry and Plantinga offer a robust rejection of the commonly accepted capitulation to the Enlightenment enthronement of a certain kind of religious epistemology which separates knowledge into the spheres of faith and reason. They also reject the attempts of

postmodern thinkers who offer constructivist or coherence models as a replacement of modernist approaches. Henry, for example, in rejecting the separation between faith and reason interprets Augustine's maxim, "I believe in order to understand," as, "Faith is the mind's way of knowing."[1] In other words, knowledge begins with faith; faith leads one to knowledge. How does one speak of God? For Henry, one begins with the revelation of God. Faith is the presupposition to knowledge. Within the Christian context, faith is a presupposition that God exists, and in light of that, "Faith is a certitude that probes and analyzes what is believed and stipulates its content."[2] In a similar fashion, Plantinga points out in his critique of Rorty and Putnam that his own view stands in direct confrontation with the "man is the measure of all things" epistemology of modernism and postmodernism precisely because it rejects its starting point that humanity is responsible for the structures of reality.[3]

At its core, the project of Christianity is more than a mere difference of opinion with its main competitors in the marketplace of ideas; it is a completely different project with different assumptions and different results, results that profoundly impact the way in which one views the world.[4] To begin with, the presupposition that God exists or that faith is actually knowledge is a completely different way to look at and understand the world and influences the way in which the Christian approaches any subject, especially the area of religious knowledge.[5] In applying this insight, Plantinga appeals to an inclusion of faith in developing a broader definition of knowledge and evidence, offering

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[1]Carl F. H. Henry, *Toward a Recovery of Christian Belief* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 49.

[2]Ibid., 49-50.

[3]Alvin Plantinga, "The Twin Pillars of Christian Scholarship," in *Seeking Understanding: The Stob Lectures 1986-1998* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 151.

[4]Alvin Plantinga, "Augustinian Christian Philosophy," in *The Augustinian Tradition*, ed. Gareth B. Matthews (Berkeley,: University of California Press, 1999), 13.

[5]Ibid., 14.

the Christian a wider scope of knowledge from which to draw when seeking truth.[6] This line of thinking is also evident in Henry's work, and it is an insight which underscores the connection between epistemology and ontology.

Ontology and Epistemology

Similar Concerns

It is this connection between ontology and epistemology that is an important similarity between the religious epistemology of Plantinga and Henry. This link expresses the emphasis within the Christian worldview, namely that God exists and is responsible for the contours of reality. Both authors seem to propose that if God exists then it is probable that knowledge of God is possible because God has created humanity with a capacity for knowledge of God's existence. According to Henry, this commitment to begin with God is because Christian theism implies a certain metaphysics, a certain theory of truth, and a commitment to "certain and specific assertions about reality."[7] In other words, one's epistemology is tied to one's ontology. Plantinga agrees that epistemology and ontology are connected in this regard: "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*."[8]

For example, the link between ontology and epistemology is worked out by Henry in his presuppositional axioms, the ontological axiom (God exists) and the epistemological axiom (God reveals himself to humanity).[9] The ontological axiom is the

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[6]Ibid., 22-23.

[7]Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Waco, TX: Word Books 1976-1983; reprint, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999).1:198.

[8]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 191.

[9]Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 49.

position that each human possesses, by virtue of being made in the image of God, a "God-relatedness which characterizes human existence from the outset."[10] Henry further describes this "God-relatedness" as "basic to [every] human noetic structure,"[11] explicitly claiming that the knowledge of God's existence is a universal aspect of knowledge that every human experiences. Henry's epistemological axiom is that God reveals himself to humanity for the purpose of providing necessary information about himself so that humanity might know God.[12]

Similarly, in Plantinga's application of the relationship between faith and reason, the reality of the existence of God stands paramount to the work of the Christian philosopher and extends to the background of his religious epistemology. Plantinga states that for the Christian philosopher, "Belief in the existence of God is in the same boat as belief in truths of logic, other minds, the past, and perceptual objects; in each case God has so constructed us that in the right circumstances we acquire the belief in question. But then the belief that there is such a person as God is as much among the deliverances of our natural noetic faculties as are those other beliefs."[13] The Christian knows that God exists, and this knowledge is not by faith alone but is also by reason, "and this whether or not any of the classical theistic arguments is successful."[14]

The reality of the existence of God ultimately provides the foundation for Plantinga's epistemology of religious belief in that it explains why it is possible to believe that knowledge of the existence of God is the result of one's cognitive faculties properly functioning to produce true belief.[15] In his assessment of the criticisms of Freud

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[10]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 1:274.

[11]Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 50.

[12]Ibid., 49.

[13]Plantinga, "Advice to Christian Philosophers," *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984): 262.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 186.

and Marx, Plantinga shows that theistic belief being warrant-basic depends upon whether or not theism is true, or to be more precise, it depends upon the status of the *de facto* (is Christianity true?) question.[16] The reason for this is tied to the portion of the A/C model that describes the *sensus divinitatis* as being reliable because it was designed and created by God to produce true beliefs about God. As a part of the original noetic equipment of humanity, it retains this vestige even though sin has diminished its capacity.[17]

Another example in the work of Henry and Plantinga that highlights this connection between ontology and epistemology is the rejection of natural theology as a way to demonstrate or prove the existence of God. Beginning with God is crucial to both Plantinga and Henry because it provides the precondition to the reliability of one's knowledge of God. If God exists and humanity is created in such a way to know that God exists, then the knowledge of God's existence does not depend on anything other than God's existence. The natural corollary to this is that natural theology, typically conceived as providing arguments for the existence of God, are superfluous to that task because humanity, created in the image of God, can know of God's existence through the proper function of their cognitive faculties.[18]

Differences in Thought

Although Plantinga and Henry find fundamental agreement in the importance of the link between ontology and epistemology, there are differences in their approaches that are worth noting. As has been shown, a major aspect of Plantinga's project is to argue for the warrant of Christian belief if theism is indeed true. In his assessment of

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[16]Ibid., 189.

[17]Ibid.

[18]This is not to say that one does not accept arguments or reasons for other Christian beliefs which are typically accepted on the basis of the testimony of others or the testimony of Scripture. Nor does this preclude the arguments of natural theology which often provide support and can increase the degree to which one believes.

Plantinga's work, Richard Swinburne critiques Plantinga's argument because it does not offer an account for the truth of Christianity.[19] Plantinga, in his response, makes it clear that arguing for the truth of Christianity is not a concern in *Warranted Christian Belief*; rather he is attempting to show that Christian belief will be warranted if God does indeed exist. The result of this is that Plantinga leaves the question as to the truth of Christianity open for discussion. In his own assessment of objections to his project, Plantinga brings up the possibility that other religions can have warranted belief. This argument has been articulated in several forms revolving around the question of whether or not just any belief, once it has been declared to be properly basic, can be rationally held, no matter how bizarre or strange.[20] Although Plantinga answers the objection by showing that it is not true that just any set of beliefs has warrant if they are true, he makes the following statement: "Couldn't we find a model under which the beliefs in question have warrant, and such that, given the truth of those beliefs there are no philosophical objections to the truth of the model? Well, probably something like that *is* true for the other theistic religions: Judaism, Islam, some forms of Hinduism, some forms of Buddhism, some forms of American Indian religion. Perhaps these religions are like Christianity in that they are subject to no *de jure* objections that are independent of *de facto* objections."[21]

In this statement Plantinga reveals that in his conception of things, settling the truth of the question of Christianity is beyond the scope of settling whether or not the

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[19]Richard Swinburne, "Plantinga on Warrant," *Religious Studies* 37 (2001): 206.

[20]This argument is given the name "The Great Pumpkin Objection" in Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1983), 74ff; Plantinga notes some changes to the argument in a section entitled "Son of Great Pumpkin?" in *Warranted Christian Belief*, 342-351, where he discusses the work of Michael Martin, *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

[21]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 350.

beliefs which arise as the result of the *sensus divinitatis* are warranted. Here one is left wondering how Plantinga would settle the question as to the truthfulness of Christianity *vis-à-vis* another major religion's claim to truth. More than likely, Plantinga would expect the adherent of Islam or another competing religion to show how the *de jure* and *de facto* questions are related in their conception of reality to examine whether or not one is warranted in believing them to be true. This is precisely the course Plantinga followed in dismantling any attempt of warranted belief through the basis of naturalism, which is what he takes to be the major alternative to Christian belief in the "Western academic world."[22] The result of such an investigation for naturalism was that it could not provide a high degree of probability that, given its own description of reality, it had enough warrant to constitute knowledge. Thus, Plantinga concluded, naturalism should be rejected due to its own incapability to provide an account of warrant based on proper function.

In contrast to Plantinga's reluctance to judge the truth of Christianity and other religions, Henry makes an explicit appeal to special revelation as the locus of truth on these matters. In stating the ontological and epistemological axioms Henry is not attempting to demonstrate a deductively valid argument for the truth of Christianity but rather wants to demonstrate the logical coherence and consistency of Christianity over against other systems of thought.[23] Ultimately Henry appeals to the divinely inspired revelation of the Scripture as the locus of truth. He makes this appeal because of his belief that humanity is ultimately dependent upon God due to the noetic effects of sin upon man's ability to have unaided knowledge of God.[24] For Henry, it is the role of special revelation to correct man's understanding of God, enabling one not merely to

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[22]Ibid., 351; idem, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 216-237.

[23]Clark Pinnock *Tracking the Maze: Finding Our Way through Modern Theology from an Evangelical Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), 46.

[24]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 5: 383.

know that God exists, but to love, serve, and enjoy God.[25]

Despite the differences between Henry and Plantinga with respect to the truth of Christianity, the examples above demonstrate the link between ontology and epistemology and highlight the ontological reality of God's existence as a precondition for religious knowledge. This insight is valuable for Christian theology and philosophy because it emphasizes the dependent character of Christian epistemology. Both Henry and Plantinga are not out to show that the human mind is capable on its own to create or discover God. Rather, both are interested in explaining how it is possible that one can have warranted knowledge of God's existence. If knowledge of God's existence is a universal capacity that is either triggered by certain circumstances or such that it arises due to God's revelation, then knowledge of God is a natural operation of one's cognitive faculties as a result of the way in which God has designed human beings.

In this conception, knowledge of God can be understood to be an epistemology of grace. If the proposition "God exists" arises in response to God's activity in the world, then human knowledge of God's existence is the result of God's grace rather than the result of humanity's own capacity to reason under its own power. If God exists and is the sort of God Christians believe him to be, then knowledge of God's existence should be considered a natural belief that in the right circumstances is warranted.

Teleological in Character

A Christian approach to knowledge, then, will be vastly different from a purely naturalistic epistemology in that the Christian approach will have a certain notion of warrant that includes a teleological element to knowledge. If it is part of the nature of humanity to have a capacity for knowledge of God's existence, that knowledge must serve some purpose. Here Henry and Plantinga are in basic agreement that the noetic structure of humanity has been designed by God in such a way that enables humanity to

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[25]Ibid.

have knowledge of God, and that the capacity is part of their being created in the image of God, for a purpose.

The goal of Henry's epistemology is to show that the human mind is competent to make metaphysical claims because it is designed by God to have knowledge of his existence.[26] As Creator, God has formed humanity in his image, and Henry understands this to be primarily reflected in humanity's ability to reason.[27] Not only is God the Creator, but he is also the one who sustains all knowledge and preserves the structures and foundations of life.[28] The human mind, or logos, is connected to the mind of God (the Logos) and is therefore connected to God's knowledge which he graciously reveals.[29] Henry's epistemological project attempts to show how the human mind is competent in forming beliefs about God because forming beliefs about God's existence is a function of the mind operating in a manner in which it was designed by God to operate, and that those beliefs are formed as a result of God's revelation of himself to the mind of man.[30]

This ability is not to be taken as an innate ability that humanity has apart from its relation to God. Rather, the mind of man is finite and contingent; it is darkened by its own sinfulness, and the light of illumination is dimmed by the mind's own state.[31] Though man has a link with the divine mind through the Logos and divine illumination, because of man's sinfulness *a priori* knowledge of God is nothing but a prolegomena to the full knowledge of God.[32] In this fallen state man can know that God exists (the

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[26]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 5:335.

[27]Ibid., 1:76.

[28]Ibid., 2:97.

[29]ibid., 5:335.

[30]Ibid., 336.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Ibid., 329.

ontological axiom), and he can know God as Creator and Judge and therefore stands under God's judgment for his own sinfulness because God is constantly confronting man with His existence.[33] It is in this insight that the purpose of knowledge comes into focus. Henry is asking, "Why is it that man wants to know anything with certainty?" Why would man ask the question, 'Can I know God truly?' if the question and answer is irrelevant? Henry answers his question: "Knowledge, in all its ramifications is a divine gift for the sake of spiritual fellowship and moral obedience . . . Christian apriorism therefore leads indispensably to the exposition of special redemptive revelation."[34]

Because knowledge of God's existence has a purpose behind it, Henry makes a point to show how general revelation mediates knowledge of God's existence to fallen man. Henry states, "No one anywhere at any time can escape the inner, secret, guilty knowledge of the true God and of his demand for spiritual submission and moral obedience. The Logos of god 'enlightens every man' (John 1:9, RSV); no one can pull the curtains on the God of revelation."[35] God's general revelation confronts man with the revelation of God's existence; and man as being the image of God, is and is not capable of grasping the knowledge of God's existence. Man is only capable of knowing God through God's revelation of his own existence, and only by God's revelation (which highlights man's incapability of knowing that God exists apart from God's revelation).[36] Henry states, "If man bears the image of a rational God, and by creation is made for the knowledge and obedience of his Maker, then the scriptural representations of God, however tapered they may be to man's finite faculties, nonetheless provide human consciousness with truths that adequately depict the Creator."[37]

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[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid., 330.

[35]Ibid., 2: 85.

[36]Ibid., 5: 380.

[37]Ibid.

According to Plantinga, both Aquinas and Calvin appeal to a capacity or disposition to believe that God exists.[38] Plantinga attributes this belief in God to a cognitive mechanism, what Calvin terms the *sensus divinitatis*, or the sense of divinity.[39] The sense of divinity produces belief in the existence of God under certain circumstances; more exactly, Plantinga describes these circumstances as "triggers" for belief in God.[40] These circumstances trigger belief in God so that one does not infer the existence of God from arguments; instead, belief in God arises under certain circumstances, and one simply finds oneself believing.[41] Belief that God exists arises through this capacity for theistic knowledge that is part of the design plan of humanity. With respect to belief in God, the "awareness of God is natural, widespread, and not easy to forget, ignore, or destroy."[42]

What Plantinga has in mind here is twofold. First, belief in God is basic for someone who accepts belief in the way just described: as having been formed by the operation of the *sensus divinitatis*. Secondly, one who forms beliefs in this manner is justified—he or she forgoes no duties, epistemic or otherwise, in holding to belief in God formed in the basic way.[43] According to the A/C model, theistic belief is the result of the *sensus divinitatis* operating according to its design plan and is aimed at the truth. Thus, it is similar in its operations to perceptual, memory and *a priori* beliefs. The beliefs produced according to this process are not only basic and justified, but they also have warrant.[44] On the A/C model, the *sensus divinitatis* is a belief-forming cognitive faculty

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[38]Ibid., 170.

[39]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 172.

[40]Ibid.

[41]Ibid., 172-73. In "Reason and Belief in God" Plantinga has a lengthy section on how it is that we find ourselves with beliefs rather than working to form them on our own.

[42]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 172-73.

[43]Ibid., 178.

[44]Ibid.

or mechanism which has been designed and created by God. Because this is the case with respect to these faculties, "When it functions properly, it ordinarily *does* produce true beliefs about God."[45] This is because the purpose of the *sensus divinitatis* is to produce true beliefs about God; when it does, "These beliefs therefore meet the conditions for warrant; if the beliefs produced are strong enough, then they constitute knowledge."[46] According to Plantinga, "This capacity for knowledge of God is part of our original cognitive equipment, part of the fundamental epistemic establishment with which we have been created by God."[47] The capacity for knowledge of God would have been part of humanity's original noetic equipment, and though it may have been damaged by the fall of humanity into sin, it was not rendered dysfunctional.[48]

Taken together, these insights that Henry and Plantinga develop point evangelical philosophy and theology to the position that human knowledge of God's existence has a purpose. The application of this for evangelical theology is to speak into the brokenness of post-foundationalist, postmodern thought with the bold assertion that God exists and that knowledge is possible because God has created humanity in such a way that individuals can know that God exists by the proper functioning of their cognitive faculties.

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[45]Ibid., 179.

[46]Ibid.

[47]Ibid., 180.

[48]Ibid.

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ABSTRACT

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE RELIGIOUS EPISTEMOLOGY OF CARL F. H. HENRY AND ALVIN PLANTINGA

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This dissertation compares the religious epistemology of Carl F. H. Henry and of Alvin Plantinga. Chapter 1 briefly examines the impact of the Enlightenment and its subsequent developments upon religious epistemology and provides an overview of the thought of Carl F. H. Henry and of Alvin Plantinga.

Chapter 2 examines the religious epistemology of Carl F. H. Henry with specific attention to the development of his religious epistemology within the Augustinian tradition and his conception of the Logos doctrine as an essential component of religious epistemology. Chapter 3 examines the important critiques of Henry's religious epistemology.

Chapter 4 examines the religious epistemology of Alvin Plantinga, with specific attention to the development of his religious epistemology within the Augustinian tradition and the development of the concept of warranted Christian belief. Chapter 5 examines several important critiques of Plantinga's religious epistemology.

This dissertation concludes that the works of Henry and Plantinga are important for contemporary discussions of theological method and religious epistemology within evangelical theology. Specifically, the connection that is evident in Henry and Plantinga's work between the ability of humanity to know God and the special status of humanity as bearing the image of God could be the core idea which serves as the epistemological application of the ontological reality of God's existence.

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