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PLANTINGA'S BASICALISM: A TYPICAL CASE OF AMBIVALENCE BETWEEN FIDEISM AND EVIDENTIALISM

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Abstract. In this paper, I seek to elaborate and critically examine Alvin Plantinga's narrative on the basicity of religious beliefs. Plantinga is a contemporary American Philosopher who is famous for his sharp philosophical analysis and logical skills he employs to defend the epistemic warrant of theistic beliefs. Though his epistemology is based on Calvinist reformed theology (a grand narrative in itself), he paradoxically insists that his position is rationally justified on the basis of Chisholm's epistemic insight. He claims to be Postmodernist in the sense that he rejects the idea that there must be some shared criteria of rationality which could lay claim to hold a lock on truth. For him there is no neutral ground and in the same way there is no objective framework for adjudication of conflicting truth - claims. Each group is entitled to live according its own standards. There is no need to conform to the views of those who follow Bertrand Russell and Madelyn Murray O'Hare. But despite this, Plantinga strongly holds that religious beliefs are on a par with beliefs based on cognitive faculties such as perception, memory and reasoning. This ambivalence persisting in Plantinga's position forms the core of our discourse in this' article.

Key Words: Religious Belief, Basicity, Evidentialist, Calvinist Epistemology, Barthian Dictum, Foundationalism, Noetic Structure, Spatio-Temporal confirmation, Inductive Judgment, Fedeism

Alvin Plantinga has written some very erudite and thought provoking essays in support of his thesis, namely, 'Is Belief in God Rational?', 'The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology', 'Is Belief in God Properly Basic', 'Rationality and Religious Belief', etc. But I must point out that the 'essay I have mainly relied upon in this study is: 'On Taking Belief in God as Basic' (published in 'Religious experience and Religious Belief,'

Joseph Runzo and Craig K. Ihara.) His technique in dealing with questions about the epistemic warrant of theistic beliefs is to launch a frontal attack on the presumption of the sceptics;' to exploit their weaknesses and make use of their contradictions with great tactical skill in favour of his thesis. His criticism of the evidentialist position is a masterpiece of destructive philosophical analysis.

According to W. P. Alston, "Plantinga seems to suggest that each person or each group must simply proceed on the basis of what *seems* clear to it, and learn to live with the fact that many will disagree".¹ I am not suggesting that Plantinga, following the Barthian dictum that "belief cannot argue with unbelief", is refusing to enter into a debate with the sceptic. What I mean to suggest is that his response in defence of theism is too bold and hard-nosed. His devastating attack on classical foundationalism is a clear illustration of our claim. The other distinctive feature of the epistemic approach he adopts is that he cuts through rigorous logical analysis of the propositions which the sceptic would usually rely on. His criticism of the Cliffordian Position on the question of the acceptability of religious beliefs provides us with a typical example of sharp logical analysis

Plantinga's position on the justification of belief in *God* emerges as a kind of juxtaposition between what he calls "Reformed epistemology" (or Calvinist epistemology) and the weaker type of foundationalism. The main questions he has sought to answer in his defence of theism are: Might not one's belief in God itself be in the foundations of one's noetic structure? Might not belief in God - belief that God exists - be properly basic?

Plantinga presents his position on these questions as standing over against a position which he calls "evidentialism". His essay "On taking Belief in God as Properly Basic" begins with an attack on the evidentialist philosophers - Clifford, Blanshard, Russell, Scriven and Flew - who hold that "belief in God is irrational, or unreasonable, or not rationally acceptable, or intellectually irresponsible, or somehow noetically below par because, as they say, there is insufficient evidence for it".² This view can be summed up in Clifford's words as follows: "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything upon - insufficient evidence".³ Plantinga finds this view logically untenable. He starts his attack on the evidentialist objector by raising the questions:

What are those intellectual and epistemic obligations that we must fulfil in order to come up to the criteria of rationality? What does the evidential objector mean when he insists that it is at least a *prima facie* obligation not to accept belief in God without evidential support? In an answer to these questions, Plantinga argues that in the first instance belief is not for the most part a matter of voluntary control. Obviously enough, Plantinga's standpoint sounds solid. It would be wrong to think of believing as some kind of switch-on and switch-off system. One cannot start believing or disbelieving to order. Most often, it does not lie within one's power to accept or cease to accept beliefs instantly. If you order me now, for example, to cease believing that the earth is very old, there is no way I can comply with your orders. In the same way it is not within my power to cease believing in God now which implies that "this alleged *prima facie* duty is one such that it is not within my power to comply with it."⁴

Here the evidentialist might suggest that the believer should take a series of steps, such as attending the Universalist Unitarian Church, joining the Rationalist Society of America, or reading a great deal of Voltaire and Bertrand Russell. If the believer takes these steps, he will stop believing without evidence. Plantinga seems to reject this proposal as ridiculous. Then he draws the attention of the objector to another option. Here he brings in the case of someone who believes that Venus is smaller than Mercury and maintains that he can hold this belief on the basis of some outrageously bad argument, but perhaps there is no reason to assert that he is violating his *ultima facie* intellectual obligation. Similarly, the theist may suffer from a sort of intellectual deficiency. But it would be a mistake on the part of the evidentialist objector to assert that the theist is flouting some intellectual duty, *prima facie* or *ultima facie* or otherwise. He may point to some structural flaw in theistic belief. There might be a noetic defect. We can agree with the objector in this regard. But, Plantinga insists, as far as the question of intellectual obligation is concerned, it is based on an implausible contention. He has two examples to put forward. One is that of a 14-year-old theist who has been brought up in a community where everyone believes in God. If you ask him why he believes in God, he will not argue that because everybody around talks of God as loving and caring, it is probably true. Rather he simply believes in what he has been taught. In this regard, Plantinga asks: Is he violating an all things considered intellectual duty? Surely not.⁵ The second example is that of a mature theist like Thomas

Aquinas, who is firmly convinced that what he believes is based on proper and adequate evidence. What will be our reaction towards him? Plantinga argues: Let us suppose he is wrong; let us suppose all of his arguments are failures. Nevertheless, he has reflected long, hard and conscientiously on the matter and thinks he does have adequate evidence. Shall we suppose he's violating an all things considered intellectual duty? I should think not.

So construed, the objector's contention is totally implausible.⁶

Then he starts looking into the matter as to what the evidentialist objection to religious belief is and how we can satisfactorily deal with this objection. As a first step of his analysis of the evidentialist claim, Plantinga finds it necessary to identify the nature of the objection. The objection, of course, is: It is irrational to believe in God without evidence, and this means that any rational belief should be either based on some properly basic propositions or should itself be a properly basic proposition. The evidential objection seemingly is then that since belief in God is not properly basic nor is it based on properly basic propositions, it is not rational. This thesis, it may be pointed out, plays a pivotal role in Plantinga's analysis of religious belief and also in developing and formulating his theory of the proper basicity of faith propositions.

According to Plantinga, the evidentialist objection is rooted in classical foundationalism - a total way of looking at faith, knowledge, justified belief, etc., which has been widely accepted and is arguably found in the works of philosophers such as Aquinas, Descartes, Locke, and others. It is the doctrine which insists that "all justified beliefs must either be properly basic by fulfilling certain criteria or based on other beliefs which eventually result in a tree-like construction with properly basic beliefs resting at the bottom, or at the foundation".⁷ For Plantinga, foundationalism being a normative thesis can be found in two forms. The one is called weak foundationalism and the other strong foundationalism. Weak foundationalism makes two claims. (1) Every rational noetic structure has a foundation, that is, there is a set of basic propositions on which all other propositions of a rational noetic structure are based. (2) In a rational noetic structure, non-basic belief is proportional in strength to support from the foundation (cf. *The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology*, p. 56). Weak foundationalism is very plausible and widely accepted; Plantinga himself seems to

endorse this view of foundationalism.⁸

If we add to weak foundationalism a set of criteria claimed to define the set of permissible basic propositions, we have strong foundationalism. It is necessary in the sense that without adding criteria of basicity one could take almost any absurd set of beliefs as rational. Historically, strong foundationalism' has been defined in terms of three specific criteria, that is, in, terms of self- evidence, incorrigibility and also that which is called 'evident to the senses'. According to these criteria prescribed by strong foundationalism, a proposition cannot be properly basic unless it fulfils the specific conditions. That to be properly basic, a propositions must be self-evident, incorrigible or evident to the senses. Plantinga has formulated the main tenet of classical foundationalism in the following logical format:

p is properly basic for S if and only if p is self-evident, incorrigible or evident to the senses for S.⁹

Criticising this foundationalist standard of rationality, Plantinga first argues that since this principle itself does not come up to the standard it has itself fixed for proper basicity, it must be considered as self-referentially incoherent and inconsistent. From this, Plantinga finds it reasonable to conclude that the classical foundationalist's central claim is, by his own standard of rationality, irrational. The natural implication in his view is: How can we apply such a self-referentially incoherent standard of rationality to religious beliefs? He goes on to examine the classical foundationalist standpoint that religious beliefs do not come up to any of the criteria of proper basicity and hence belief in God is gratuitous, groundless, or arbitrary. Plantinga does not agree with this proposal; he has a strong case to oppose it. He makes a thorough scrutiny of what he calls one's noetic structure and the concept of proper basicity in order to refute the thesis classical foundationalists hold so dear. Before going on to consider the question of proper basicity, which is the main thrust of Plantinga's argument, it seems important to point out that by accepting a weak kind of foundationalism in his effort to establish the view that religious propositions are as properly basic as paradigmatic beliefs are, he himself falls prey to a fundamental problem that, either any belief at all can count a basic, or if he extends the class of basic beliefs to include those defensible by argument, all the old problems about the validity of arguments for God which he was trying to

by-pass return in full force, and thus he has accomplished little. We shall elaborate this point in due course, but it is worthwhile at this stage looking into Plantinga's notion of noetic structure and the doctrine of the basicity of belief in God

To use W. P. Alston's term, Plantinga's "basicalism" in religious epistemology is based on Calvinist reformed theology and thereby is a part and parcel of the long-standing controversy between those who, like Aquinas and Paley, believed that religious faith should be founded on a sound rational footing and those who like Calvin; Kierkegaard and Barth insisted that faith has no need of such foundations.¹⁰ His commitment, especially to the Calvinist 'natural tendency' doctrine formulates the anchor-point of his thesis. Calvin is of the view that God has planted in us a tendency or nisus to accept belief in God under certain conditions - " a sure deity (is) inscribed in the hearts of all" (Institutes , tr. Ford Lewis Battles, Book 1, Chapter iii, 4344). Accordingly, Calvinist epistemology insists that just as we have natural tendency to form perceptual beliefs under certain conditions, we have a natural tendency to form such beliefs as 'God is speaking to me', 'God has created all things', and 'God disapproves of what I have done' under widely-realised conditions.¹¹

Plantinga has defended the Calvinist position against the foundationalist attack which amounts to the thesis that it is irrational to believe in God as it does not fulfill the required conditions for a justified rational belief. Theistic' belief is neither self-evident, nor incorrigible, or evident to the senses, hence it is not to be included in one's noetic structure. Plantinga makes a well-argued case against this standard foundationalist objection to religious belief. He says that it is wrong to insist that only those propositions are legitimate and valid which come up to the foundationalist measure. His stand in this regard is based on the view that a belief can be evident with respect to a person's foundational set of beliefs in two ways: (a) either it can be supported by the beliefs in the foundational set, or (b) the beliefs in question can themselves be a proper part of the foundation, a properly basic belief. For example, Plantinga points out that the belief that $72 \times 71 = 5112$, which is based on other beliefs, including the beliefs that $1 \times 72 = 72$ and $7 \times 2 = 14$ is not basic; while the belief that $2 + 1 = 3$ which we do not accept on the basis of any other beliefs, is basic and properly basic. In his essays we find Plantinga capitalising on the second form of proposition and maintaining that if a common(public) belief can be

considered on the basis of proper basicity why should not then the believer's belief in God be taken as rational and properly basic. The other examples he gives are that the world existed five minutes ago, that there are other minds or that there are enduring physical objects which we accept without measuring them against the criteria of classical foundationalism. Moreover, there are many other propositions which we accept as entirely rational but which are not justified on the basis of other propositions. Thus, he would say, my belief that my wife is not at home, based on my belief that the car is gone, is a belief based on some other reason. But conversely my belief that I am tired cannot be regarded as being based on any other belief. Plantinga terms this sort of belief along with many other basic ones. One accepts these beliefs without basing them on others and in doing so one is rationally justified. Plantinga calls such beliefs properly basic.¹² Next he gives us an example of three propositions which are based on perceptual beliefs, memory beliefs, and beliefs ascribing mental states to, other persons. Let us consider these propositions. They are:

1. I see a tree,
2. I had a breakfast in the morning;
3. That person is angry.

Although these propositions are typically and properly taken as basic, it would be a mistake, according to Plantinga, to describe them as groundless (RE & RB, p. 10). He argues that when I have a certain sort of experience, I believe that I am perceiving a tree. Of course, this belief of mine is not based on any other beliefs. But we cannot say it is groundless. The experience together with other circumstances is the ground of my justification, and by extension the ground of the belief that 'I see a tree'. The same argument applies to the other two propositions. When someone displays untypical behaviour, we take it that he is angry. Clearly enough, we do not take his behaviour as evidence of his being angry. Our belief that he is angry is also not taken on the basis of some other propositions, nor have we inferred it from another belief. The justification of my holding the belief that A is angry is grounded in his behavior which I perceive and that is all. His behaviour forms the justificatory ground of my belief. The same holds for memory belief. I seem to remember that I took my breakfast this morning. That I have an inclination to believe the proposition that I had my breakfast along with a certain past-tinged experience that is familiar to all but hard to

describe.¹³ There is some circumstance or condition which justifies my belief that I had my breakfast, but the main thing is that I accept the verdict of my memory and that is enough ground for believing that my belief is justified.

In-each of these three examples a belief is taken as basic, that is, no further justificatory ground or evidence is needed to certify its truth-claim. Rather these and many other properly basic propositions play a pivotal role in one's noetic structure by serving as the ground and evidence of all other beliefs. Does' it mean that properly basic propositions are groundless propositions? Plantinga would say, not. The ground of their justification and by extension the ground of these basic beliefs are the circumstances or conditions. So one might say that the justification of properly basic beliefs is rooted in the conditions and circumstances in which they are held

Bearing these points in mind, we can now come to main concern of Plantinga's argument, that is, the case that belief in God is as properly basic as other basic beliefs in one's noetic structure. The main thrust of his argument is: one's belief in God is analogous to one's memory beliefs, perceptual beliefs and beliefs ascribing mental states to other persons. Similar things may be said about belief in God which are said of other basic beliefs.' When a Calvinist claims that belief in God is properly basic, he also points at the justifying circumstances and conditions which show that his belief is not groundless or gratuitous. These conditions and circumstances, Plantinga argues, may trigger the believer's disposition to see God's hand in the whole workmanship of the universe. Elaborating his point of view further, Plantinga says: Upon reading the Bible, one may be impressed with a deep sense that God is speaking to him. Upon having done what I know is cheap, or wrong, or wicked I may feel guilty in God's sight and form the belief that God disapproves of what I have done. Upon confession and repentance, I may feel forgiven, forming the belief that God forgives me for what I have done".¹⁴

There are many conditions and circumstances that call forth belief in God, different states like gratitude, guilt, fear, and the sense of God's presence. The crux of the claim is that these conditions and circumstances evoke a sort of experience in which the believer may claim:

(4) God is speaking to me.

- (5) God has created all this.
- (6) God disapproves of what I have done (7) God forgives me
- (8) God is to be thanked and praised.

According to Plantinga's thesis these propositions are analogous to perceptual beliefs, memory beliefs and beliefs ascribing mental states to other persons. Therefore they must be considered as properly basic. But as far as the belief in God is concerned, it is not properly basic. Nor is it taken as properly basic by those who believe in God. What they take as properly basic are experiential beliefs such as those we have mentioned above which speak of God's relations to the world. They in turn self-evidently entail that God exists. In this way, the believer is justified in believing that God exists since experiential beliefs like(4)-(7) constitute adequate reason for his conviction. The formula statement around which his theory of proper basicity revolves is:

In condition C, S is justified in taking P as basic. Of course, C will vary with P.

Here one should hasten to negate the impression that Plantinga is after some formula or principle of rationality. His standpoint is quite clear. In the Thomist-Calvinist controversy, he sides with Calvinism; his bias toward fideism is obviously rooted in his unconditional commitment to reformed theology. He emphasizes a weaker version of a criterion of basicity. Not because he wants to offer some obiter dicta for justification of religious belief, but because he thinks the criteria of proper basicity explain more conveniently and adequately how the theist face up the sceptic/atheistic challenge.

To sum up, his version of the theory of proper basicity relies on the epistemic insight of Chisholm who says that my being appeared to truly play a crucial role in the justification of my believing that I am perceiving a tree. To put this thesis in another way, when I say I have a kind of perceptual experience such as seeing a tree, then in the absence of sufficient positive reasons to the contrary I am justified in supposing that I am perceiving a tree.

Plantinga has sought to argue throughout his epistemology that if I am justified in holding the belief that I am perceiving a tree without

basing this claim on other justified beliefs, then I am also justified in holding a belief in God without having adequate reasons. The crux of Plantinga's argument is that if my beliefs like (1)-(3) are properly basic and if our grounds for accepting them consist in circumstances (including experience) within which it is rational to accept them without reason, then my beliefs like (4)-(7) being analogously on the same grounds (circumstances and conditions) must also be accepted as rational. Plantinga insists that beliefs (4)-(7) are noetically on a par with beliefs (1)-(3). They are grounded in proper conditions and circumstances which justifiably call forth belief in God

Now after considering his views about the question as to whether there are any proper conditions and circumstances which justifiably call forth belief in God one faces some genuine difficulties which need to be addressed at this stage. Our appraisal must start with a somewhat neutral examination of the fundamental Calvinist claims which stress that we have a natural tendency to form beliefs such as God is speaking to me or God disapproves of what I have done under widely realised conditions Reason and Belief in God). As this natural tendency doctrine occupies a central place in Plantinga's epistemic structure, it must be scrutinised. In this regard, the main question we are to address is: What does the claim of theistic tendency entail? No doubt the theistic tendency hypothesis, because of its phenomenological standpoint and inbuilt certification from human nature, is very attractive and satisfying for the theistic believer. But even though the believer may try to ignore the negative aspect and import of this hypothesis by asking why he should follow what the objector says, the fact remains that, the counter-example (which we are to discuss below) is too strong to be set aside. Fideistic protectionism in religion will not help serve the cause which the believer seeks to promote. What I mean to suggest for the present is that we must also give due attention to the psycho anthropological explanation of such tendencies. Here Freud's explanation - though not the whole truth - needs a proper focus.

According to the Freudian world-view, the theistic tendency. was born out of insecurity, fear, and helplessness against the hostile natural forces during the immense journey which started in the darkness of unknown time and resulted in the evolution of religious civilisation some four or five thousand years before. Man, in order to satisfy his infantile desires, made a god for himself. On the semitic landscape, the Hebrew mind, working more imaginatively, evolved the concepts of a beloved child and chosen people. Then the Hebrew folklore of a chosen

people, wedded with romance and fantasy, developed into a structural web of ideas such as a predesigned world, fate, life after death and divine justice and man-God covenant and the sacred history - God was shown as presiding over everything. What Freud means to imply is that there are solid grounds to believe that the theistic tendency is a glorified product of psycho-anthropological evolution.

The other argument is that according to the historical evidence available to researchers, the concept of the Hebrew God, i.e., 'Jahweh', emerged as a tribal deity on a par and along with other national deities during the same time span in other lands such as Egypt, Mesopotamia and India. The Hebrew literature paints him the lord of hosts, the most vengeful and jealous: He was the husband and Jerusalem was his wife which he used to punish often. It was perhaps in the post Babylonian Bondage period that Hebrew prophets became conscious of the concept of a universal God - the creator and sustainer of the whole world whose mercy and love was thought to be equally present for all people irrespective of race. Next we are required to pay attention to the term 'God' in order to know how and in what ways it has been used in history. Antony Flew tells us that "God is a term which is used in many ways, some of them highly idiosyncratic."¹⁵ A momentary glance at the history of religion would affirm this view. If we occasion to take a short journey through history, specially of the western part of the ancient world, we shall encounter different, sometimes mutually contradictory meanings of this most cherished notion. We shall find a set of varied and divergent deity pictures in the gallery of world religions. The following deity pictures may be treated as sufficient. In the old Canaanite religion the deity was thought to embody agricultural fertility; the philosophic Hindu mind conceived it as a cosmic unity; the Greek mythology painted gods as personifications of natural forces; and the Zoroastrian mind arrived at the dualistic picture of reality, that is, darkness and light.

The pictures we encounter are so multifarious and divergent that one might be forgiven for feeling bewildered. The dilemma centred on the question of which god? can better be explained, if we quote Albert Einstein's answer to a similar question. The question was: Did he believe in God? Einstein replied that he believed in Spinoza's God.¹⁶

Indeed, the answer Einstein gave must have proved reassuring and comforting for many theistic believers to think that the great physicist

was at one with them. But the dilemma, according to Antony Flew is that Spinoza and consequently Einstein did not mean the same as the theistic picture affirms. In Spinoza's usage God and Nature were synonymous. It was because of this view that he was expelled from the synagogue of Amsterdam. He was accused of believing in a God who was not the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Therefore it would not be wrong to conclude that the picture of God varies quite evidently in different religious and philosophical structural webs. Sometimes its meaning differs from person to person as we have seen in the case of Einstein and Spinoza. Thus it would be a mistake to assert that mankind throughout its known history has believed and worshipped the same God.

Further, we face another problem if we claim that belief in God is a natural tendency. We are then required to prove that this tendency to believe in God is a universal phenomenon. But, of course, this is not the case. A notable exception is Buddhism we may explain this position by quoting Ninian Smart:¹⁷

Suppose a person is training to be missionary and is going to Ceylon. It might then be very vital for him to find out in a rounded way what Ceylonese Buddhism is really like. But when he does so it makes a big difference to him. For instance, he may have been brought up to believe that in all religions men somehow worship God. It may be a shock to discover that the highest value in Ceylonese Buddhism is not God.¹⁸

What the example of Ceylonese Buddhism must imply is that it would be a mistake to presume, out of missionary zeal, that since people all over the world somehow or other manifest religious attitude, all of them must have a natural theistic tendency. What one can safely say is that this naturalist religious tendency in its proper form is only limited to the Abrahamic tradition. Beyond the frontiers of Abrahamism, we walk on slippery ground, using explanations involving a lot of reductionist activity which might distort the whole picture.

Now let us examine the question of analogy between beliefs like (1) perceptual beliefs such as "I see a tree", memory beliefs such as "I had a breakfast this morning", and beliefs ascribing mental states to other persons such as "That person is angry" and beliefs such as (4) God is

speaking to me and (5) God disapproves of what I have done. Plantinga forcefully claims that propositions from (1) to (5) are noetically on a par, because they share the same experiential identity and are equally properly basic. Though our epistemic practices seem to support his argument and though it is consistent to accept some practices as justified without having adequate reasons to regard them as reliable, how could it be rational to draw an analogy between that which can have an outside source of confirmation and reliability and that which lacks spatio-temporal experiential confirmation and support.

Obviously one can check and verify the accuracy of any of the (1)-(3) beliefs. One can discover the regularities in the behaviour of objects putatively observed and on the basis of observation one can make predictions about the course of events and things, whereas theistic beliefs certainly lack such features and are not externally verifiable. Therefore one wonders how theistic beliefs can be considered noetically on a par with perceptual beliefs (1)- (3).

Richard Crigg in his essay "Proper Basicity of Theism" has taken issue with Plantinga's controversial claim, He argues that, according to Plantinga, if beliefs such as(1),(2) and (3) can be taken as properly basic as long as we have no reason to suppose that our experiential equipment is defective, then the question before us is: How do we know that our experiential equipment is in order? Of course, the answer is that we can easily confirm whether our beliefs generated by our experiential equipment cohere with external reality. For example, the belief that I had a breakfast this morning is a memory belief which is not based on evidence; yet to know that my belief is in order, and my memory is not playing tricks on me I can have recourse to outside sources, When I return home this evening, dirty dishes sitting in my sink, one less egg in my refrigerator, etc., will confirm my belief. Craig claims:

“One of the reasons that I can take my memory beliefs as properly basic is that, if any questions arise the belief can almost always be subsequently confirmed by empirical evidence. The same cannot be said for belief about God”.¹⁹

Then there is the question of bias in favour of belief in God. People want to believe in God but, Grigg argues, the paradigmatic beliefs(1)-(3)

are not held on the basis of wish or want, No bias can be involved in holding that 'I see a tree' or 'I had a breakfast this morning'. One does not ordinarily say that "I want to believe that I see a tree or believe that I had a breakfast this morning, or believe that someone is angry" (Ibid. ,p. 391). Further, the desire to hold a belief implies lack of immediate possession which in turn means that in such cases there is always room for doubt. Indeed this is the case with belief in God. Grigg's view is that "partly due to the presence of doubt, desire enters theistic beliefs in a way that it does not enter the paradigmatic instances of properly basic beliefs".²⁰ This issue seriously undermines Plantinga's argument for an analogy between paradigmatic beliefs and belief in God.

Then comes the problem of universality. In Crigg's view, the paradigmatic beliefs show a kind of universality in their character, that is, the grounding of experience in each case guarantees the formation of that belief. It is quite clear that when a person whose noetic equipment is in order undergoes experience X, he will be quite sure that he is seeing a tree. The people will accept his claim that he is seeing a tree. The same is true of the generation of beliefs (2) and (3). But, contrarily, when a theist claims that he is experiencing Y, his claim will not carry the same kind of universality. For example" the theist and the agnostic both see the world. This experience may cause the theist to believe that God created all this. But the agnostic will not be able to form such a belief from his experience of the world. Hence theistic beliefs cannot be said to have universality which is guaranteed in the case of-beliefs (1) - (3) . (5)

In sum, the crux of Crigg's argument is that in each of the paradigmatic cases, we have no reason to distrust our belief forming equipment. We can confirm or disconfirm them. Further, they involve no bias which is specific to mechanism. Moreover, paradigmatic beliefs character; that is to say, if A perceives a tree in certain conditions X, then generally all people with noetic equipment in working order will confirm that they see a tree. Against this, the theistic belief can neither be checked nor shown to provide a general guarantee. Hence it is wrong to claim that theistic and perceptual beliefs are on a par and analogous as far as the question of proper basicity is concerned.

Let us now turn to Plantinga claim that belief in God can be rational and yet not be based on the evidence of any other belief. Of course, this claim is assertive in character and thereby the sceptic has quite a genuine reason to reject it as an irrational approach. This claim, if taken as an

epistemic norm, may throw open the flood-gates of irrationalism and superstition. Many people in this world believe in a number of superstitious beliefs. They can also say that since their beliefs are based on their natural tendency to believe and also since having a natural tendency to believe is the criterion of proper basicity, their beliefs are equally epistemically valid beliefs and are on a par with belief in God. Robert Audi.²¹ and others strongly criticize Plantinga's position on this issue. They are of the opinion that since Plantinga has not made it clear, why cannot almost anything be allowed into the foundation of one's noetic structure? If for Plantinga, belief in God is properly basic as the paradigmatic cases of belief, then his argument seems to admit any belief based on one's natural tendency to believe. For example, the belief that the Great Pumpkin returns every Halloween.

Plantinga's answer seems to be that there is no reason to worry about fiction such as a Great Pumpkin. But what if the sceptic replying in the same tone declares that Belief in God is also the biggest fiction the human mind has ever created? Let us put aside the case of the Great Pumpkin on the basis of the argument that no one believes in it. There are other cases, such as voodoo and astrology, which Plantinga has not taken account of and which are different from the belief in the Great Pumpkin.

Finally, attention must be given to the tension which lies at the heart of Plantinga's defence of belief in God. In this regard, we see that his strategy against the foundationalist challenge seems to operate on two levels which clearly lead to mutually contradictory positions. On the first level, Plantinga, remaining within the protective walls of a kind of fideism, declares that the theist has his own criteria of rationality which quite obviously must not conform to that of the atheist. Blatantly refusing to accede to what his foundationalist opponents propose as the touchstone of rationality he says: Followers of Bertrand Russell and Madelyn Murray O'Hare disagree; but how is it relevant? Must my criteria, or those of the Christian community, conform to their examples? Surely not. The Christian community is responsible to its set of examples, not to theirs.²²

On the second level, while rejecting a normative thesis held by classical foundationalism about the nature of rational noetic structure, Plantinga advances his own view about the foundations of noetic

structure which to intellectually justify allow him the required logical space religious faith-claims, and to proclaim that the propositions "I see a tree" and "God is talking to me" are noetically *ona par*. One is as justified in believing that God is talking to him as the one who believes that he sees a tree down in the valley. Since both the propositions are properly basic to one's noetic structure, neither requires any further justificatory ground or evidence. The religious experience together with certain circumstances - Plantinga does not elaborate what these circumstances are - is the ground of their justification. Now, despite the fact that Plantinga's paradoxical claim that belief in God can rationally be accepted even though it is supported by no argument or evidence is meant to link these two conflicting positions, the gap between them is so big that this link does not properly serve the desired purpose. The reason is simple. How one could relate two contradictory approaches to each other? The first position summarily rejects the idea that there can be a shared criterion of rationality or some common framework of debate between atheists and theists. Accordingly, when there is no neutral framework for the adjudication of conflicting views, each person or each group must live according to its own standards. If this view is taken to its logical conclusion, the concept of 'objective' truth does not hold ground. It means, no one will be within his epistemic rights to make a categorical claim that I am right and you are wrong. This also means that any type of beliefs including those held by flat earthers, Moonies, Scientologists, astrologers, the great Pumpkin theologians and New Agers can lay claim to truth in their own right, without agreeing on any universal litmus test of rationality. Each claim would have to be considered rational within its own context. The second position, grounded in Plantinga's 'basicalism' seems to take a stance that we can argue about the rationality of our belief in God; we can try to evolve a criterion for proper basicity. Even in the absence of criterion of proper basicity we can adjudicate in certain cases what is properly basic and what is not. For example, Plantinga asserts that we can justifiably judge that $1+1=2$ is properly basic, but that the belief that "the Great Pumpkin will return next Halloween" is not. But what are the criteria which would decide between what is properly basic and what is not? To answer this question Plantinga says that it would be a good and useful thing to develop criteria for proper basicity. Following an inductive procedure, Plantinga suggests, will be helpful in an attempt to evolve the required criteria. He states, the proper way to arrive at such criteria is, broadly speaking, inductive. We must assemble examples of beliefs and conditions such that the former are obviously not properly basic in the

latter. We must then frame hypotheses as to the necessary and sufficient conditions of proper basicity and test these hypotheses by reference to those examples.²³ What kind of criteria of meaning will eventually emerge from this inductive procedure is not known at the present moment. But Plantinga is of the opinion that the search for criteria must continue. Indeed, we are required to have some criteria in order to discriminate between what is rational and non-rational, what is properly basic and not properly basic. This means that Plantinga's anti-classical foundationalist stance must not be construed as believing that belief in God is groundless or does not involve any kind of justificatory debate. This means that it would be wrong to think that he is in favour of closing the debate on the topic of some shared criteria of rationality, a view which has been expressed in some circles. With his destructive philosophical analysis, Plantinga has certainly successfully staged an all-out attack on the classical foundationalist criteria for proper which include: (a) it is self evident, (b) it is evident to the senses, and (c) it is incorrigible - and has proved itself defeating. But it would be wrong to claim that Plantinga has rejected foundationalism as a whole. If we go rather deeper into the proper basicity concept that has been used in Plantinga's scheme of things, we will discover that it is derived from his foundationalist opponents. The foundational theorists begin with the observation that all knowledge comes to us through sense perception. The only contact we can have with the external world is made possible through the senses. As a result of this sensory contact we form our simplest beliefs about the world. Then on the basis of these simple beliefs we formulate more complex beliefs (e.g. inductive generalisations) - beliefs which cannot be acquired from a single instance of sense perception. This psychological mechanism of belief formation suggests a parallel philosophical account of justification of how our epistemic judgements are formed. According to this scheme, simple beliefs, which are a response to our sensory input, form the epistemic foundation. All other beliefs must ultimately be justified by appeal to these basic or foundational beliefs. Obviously, the basic beliefs are not supposed to stand in need of justification as they all are self justifying. But it should be noted that there is a limited class of such beliefs which can be considered to have the epistemic. Following this line, Plantinga has used the foundationalist claim that basic beliefs are self justifying as the foundation stone in the construction of his doctrine of proper basicity. And he draws validating strength from Professor Chisholm's theory of belief acquisition. Which my being appeared to

freely or being appeared to redly. What we wish to suggest is that his 'basicalism' stands closest to the foundationalist tradition; though it rejects the latter's undue justificatory restrictions. Now, bearing all this in mind, one wonders how these two incompatible positions (fideism and weak foundationalism) along with their contradictory overtones could be reconciled. How can one maintain (however great one's logical skill might be) that these positions lead to some coherent picture? If he broadens his second position (which is a weaker version of foundationalism) to make it compatible with, the first (fideism), it will open the floodgates of irrationalism and superstition. Someone who believes that belief in God is properly basic without making appeal to any general criteria should also concede that a person who believes in the Great Pumpkin theory is equally within his epistemic rights to hold this belief. Even he will have to accept that the atheist is within his epistemic rights when he claims that it is properly basic for him to believe that God does not exist. In the absence of some common standard, truth will become a market commodity with every shopkeeper selling his own brand of truth.

End Notes

- 1 Epistemology of Religious Belief, Profile, Plantinga, p. 300.
- 2 Religious Experience and Religious Belief, p. 1.
- 3 Lectures and Essays, p. 186.
- 4 Ibid., p.8.
- 5 Ibid, p. 7.
- 6 RE&Rb,p. 7
- 7 Religious Belief and Will, p. 130.
- 8 See W. P. Alston, Two Types of Foundationalism, *Journal of Philosophy*, 1979.
- 9 RE & RB, p. 9.
- 10 Alvin Plantinga, ed., James E. Tomberlin and Peter Van Inwagen, p. 293.
- 11 Plantinga, Alvin, Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Reason and Belief in God*. University of Notre Dame Press, 1983: pp. 65-68,78-82
- 12 Is belief in God Properly basic ?, p. 42
- 13 RE & RB,p. 11.
- 14 Is Belief in God Properly Basic, *Nous*,15,pp. 41-50.
- 15 Flew,A.*God and Philosophy*.London:Hutchinson,1966: p.15.
- 16 Cf. Sommerfeld, Albert Einstein -Philosopher, Scientist, p.103.
- 17 Smart,Ninian.*The Science of Religion and the Sociology of knowledge*. New Jersey:Princeton University Press.
- 18 Ibid, P. 38.
- 19 *Religious Studies*, vol.26, p. 390,
- 20 Ibid, p. 391.
- 21 See his "Direct Justification, Evidential Dependence and Theistic Belief"
- 22 Is Belief in God Properly Basic?, p. 50.
- 23 *Reason and Belief in God*. p. 76.