

REIDIANISM IN CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH-SPEAKING RELIGIOUS EPISTEMOLOGY

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Abstract. This paper explores the main contours of recent work in English-speaking philosophy of religion on the justification of religious belief. It sets out the main characteristics of the religious epistemologies of such writers as Alston, Plantinga, and Swinburne. It poses and seeks to answer the question of how far any or all of these epistemologies are indebted or similar to the epistemology of the Scottish Enlightenment thinker Thomas Reid. It concludes that while there are some links to Reid in recent writing, contemporary approaches depart from Reid's views on the specific topic of the justification of religious belief.

INTRODUCTION

My aim in this paper is to present a survey of the contemporary debate as to 'positive epistemic status' and religious belief highlighting (as much as I can) the use of Reid and Scottish philosophy in contemporary philosophy of religion.

There is a great deal that can be done by way of fulfilling this aim, since Reid is referred to frequently by important protagonists in contemporary English-speaking religious epistemology – though *only* Reid: I have come across no mention in this literature to other Scottish philosophers (except of course for David Hume).

The most important figures in debates about the rationality and justification of religious belief in the last 20 years have been William Alston, Alvin Plantinga and Richard Swinburne. Nicholas Wolterstorff also deserves a mention here, but though he is not in any sense a follower of Plantinga, his work tends (unfairly) to be regarded as a supplement

to Plantinga's. Alston, Plantinga and Wolterstorff are regarded as representatives of so-called Reformed epistemology. This is misleading because Alston was not a Reformed thinker but an Episcopalian (i.e. US Anglican). All three evince an approach to justification, rationality or warrant in religious belief that is either anti-evidentialist or that plays down the importance of backing religious beliefs by evidence in granting them positive epistemic status.

Swinburne's contribution to religious epistemology is by contrast one that makes great play with finding evidence for religious beliefs. He has constructed a complex apologetic for the Christian creed. It commences with an inductive, evidential case for truth of the bare claim that there is a God and then proceeds to an evidential case for specifically Christian claims about God.

There is a relation between Swinburne and 18th century British philosophy but it is not with North Britain. Swinburne evidently stands in a tradition that includes Joseph Butler and his *Analogy of Religion*. His appeal to natural theology and to probability as the basis of religious assent is Butlerian. There are also notable links between his case for the rationality of assent to revelation and that which is contained in Locke's writings.

The differences between Plantinga and co., on the one hand, and Swinburne, on the other, might seem to be great. Swinburne is an evidentialist in epistemology and also an internalist. The Reformed epistemologists are anti-evidentialist and move towards the application of externalist epistemologies to religious belief. (This latter move is notable in Plantinga's three books on warrant and in Alston's appeal to doxastic practices as the locus of justified belief.) It must be said, however, that there are areas of agreement between these apparently divergent approaches to religious epistemology. It is notable that in *Perceiving God*¹ Alston can appeal to natural theology as a supplement to the justification of religious beliefs provided by the fact that they are generated by a doxastic practice whose reliability has not been refuted. There is also a significant fact about Swinburne's apologetic scheme that places him closer to the Reformed epistemologists. In Chapter 13 of *The Existence of*

¹ William Alston, *Perceiving God* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991)

God² he places great weight on religious experience as 'evidence' for the truth of his core theism. But his use of religious experience is in fact not evidential in the strict sense. He contends that claims to experience God are to be considered as analogous to ordinary sense-perceptual claims and these claims are non-inferentially justified in the circumstances that give rise to them. Sense-perceptual beliefs for Swinburne are not justified through being the product of good inferences from further data. They are basic beliefs, innocent until proved guilty. And in this he is close to Plantinga, the first phase of whose Reformed epistemology can be seen as based on an appeal to religious experience.

Thus our contrast between an anti-evidentialist movement in Reformed epistemology and an evidentialist rearguard action in Swinburne is too simple. The Reformed epistemologists may see some role for the evidences for God collected in traditional natural theology. Swinburne is one of many contemporary philosophers of religion who appeal to religious experience but do so in a non-evidentialist way, on the basis of a direct realist theory of perception. He thus takes a stance toward religious experience that puts him in the company of Alston and the others.

Where does Reid come into the picture sketched thus far? There is a direct link to him. Alston, Plantinga and Wolterstorff³ all write about him and cite him as a source for their general epistemological strategies. There is also an indirect link. The views about the justification and character of sense-perceptual beliefs that have become an orthodoxy in so much contemporary religious epistemology are Reidian. They are strikingly similar to the relevant parts of Reid in *An Inquiry Into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* and the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*. But we shall see that the coincidence of these views on perception with Reid's does not demonstrate a real indebtedness to Reid. We shall also point out that Reid's own views on the justification of religious belief are not at all similar to those of the Reformed epistemologists.

² Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd edn 2004)

³ Wolterstorff has a monograph on Reid: *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

I. REFORMED EPISTEMOLOGY AND REID

'Reformed epistemology' is a label given to a loosely-connected group of thinkers who have challenged a long-established orthodoxy in religious epistemology. The orthodoxy states that if religious beliefs are to be rational, they must be based on evidence. Both Plantinga and Wolterstorff began to question this orthodoxy in articles and books in the 1970's (in fact in Wolterstorff's case as early as 1967 in *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*⁴). Plantinga's way of formulating the critique became the most famous⁵.

According to Plantinga, the orthodoxy rests upon the key premise that religious beliefs cannot be properly basic beliefs. A basic belief is construed by analogy with a basic action, where the latter is an action I perform without doing anything else in order to perform it. A basic belief is one I hold while not inferring it from any other beliefs. It is properly basic belief if I am justified, rational, warranted, etc., in so holding it. The orthodoxy about religious beliefs and evidence is held to flow from Locke and to have been established in religious epistemology since. The only reason to hold to the orthodoxy Plantinga can think of is 'classical foundationalism'. This epistemological stance maintains that the only properly basic beliefs are those which are self-evident in themselves ('All bachelors are unmarried') or self-evident to me ('I seem to see a desk before me'). Such propositions are indubitable and incorrigible. All other propositions that I believe with justification are deductive or inductive inferences therefrom. Propositions like 'God spoke to me in prayer' and 'God exists' are not thus self-evident, indubitable and incorrigible, are not properly basic and therefore need to be supported by deductive or inductive inferences from those that are. Thus is launched a familiar task of seeking the 'evidences' for theistic and Christian beliefs in modern philosophy of religion. The door for philosophical scepticism regarding

⁴ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmann, 1967)

⁵ Plantinga's early papers in religious epistemology include: 'Is Belief in God Rational?' in *Rationality and Religious Belief*, ed. C. Delaney (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1979); 'Is Belief in God Properly Basic?', *Nous*, vol. 15/1, 1981; 'The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology' in *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition* eds H. Hart, J. van der Hoeven, N. Wolterstorff (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983); 'Reason and Belief in God', in *Faith and Rationality* eds A. Plantinga and N. Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1983).

those beliefs is thereby opened. This scepticism is equally characteristic of modern philosophy of religion – since it is easy to pick holes in the arguments of natural theology and press the weight of counter-evidence provided by such things as the problem of evil.

Plantinga thinks that classical foundationalism is easily refuted. First it is self-referentially incoherent and second it faces innumerable counter examples in the shape of properly basic beliefs that do not fit its criteria.

The first point above can be stated quite briefly: the proposition ‘All properly basic beliefs are self-evident to in themselves or self-evident to me’ is not self-evident in itself or self-evident to me [Alvin Plantinga!]. It therefore needs to rest on an inferential proof and Plantinga thinks no one has come up with a deductive or inductive argument that remotely comes near to being such a proof.

The second point in the Plantingian critique consists in maintaining that all manner of kinds of belief are properly basic that do not conform to the criteria of self-evidence, indubitability and incorrigibility. Thus: ‘I had an egg for breakfast this morning’ and ‘There is a greenfinch in my garden’ can *in appropriate circumstances* be justifiably believed by the subject even though they are in no sense inferred from other beliefs. They can be, instead, the direct deliverances of memory and sight, respectively.

Both Plantinga and Wolterstorff cite Reid as a source of the insight that classical foundationalism is false. The *Inquiry* and *Essays* are appealed to as an early, but neglected, proof of its limitations. Crucial for them is the way in which Reid attacks the Way of Ideas and its associated notion that ‘I see a greenfinch’ must really be an inference from the immediate perception of an impression of a greenfinch. They also cite Reid’s plea for acceptance of irreducibly diverse ways in which beliefs may be justifiably sourced. His attack on the philosophical sceptic is held to be a paradigmatic demonstration of the falsity of classical foundationalism.

Plantinga’s early forays in Reformed epistemology distinguished between *reasons* for beliefs and *grounds*. A non-basic belief (such as ‘Australia is an island’) is justified if it rests on other justified beliefs that are themselves justified. Properly basic beliefs end the chain of justification because they get their justification from the circumstances in which they arise or are maintained. ‘I see a greenfinch’ is not based on reasons, but, granted that I have normal eyesight, the light is good and I know the names of common British birds, may rest on perfectly adequate grounds.

For Plantinga the belief that there is God for the ordinary believer can get its justification from being the straightforward entailment of beliefs such as ‘God spoke to me in prayer last night’, ‘I felt God forgiving my sins.’ Such beliefs may themselves be grounded in surrounding circumstances in a way analogous to a straightforward perceptual claim. This grounding is fleshed out via the postulation of a *sensus divinitatis*. This is a faculty for being directly aware of God’s presence that, when excited by the requisite stimuli from God, produces appropriate beliefs in the subject. No wonder, then, that some commentators took Plantinga’s case for religious beliefs being properly basic to be an appeal to religious experience as the ground of religious beliefs.

If Reid was one direct influence upon Plantinga and Wolterstorff, so was Calvin (in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*) and a number of 19th and 20th century thinkers in the Dutch Reformed Church. Plantinga traces the notion of the *sensus divinitatus* back to Calvin (though we should note that there is critical literature questioning his fidelity to Calvin on this point). The Dutch Reformers influencing our two authors plead for the autonomy of distinctively Christian modes of knowing and reasoning⁶.

Reformed epistemology in the hands of Plantinga is a thing that is subject to much change and development. The above gives the essence of his views in his early articles on the subject. Almost from the beginning he was pressed with an obvious objection to his plea for tolerance of many kinds of properly basic belief. The objection was that this introduces epistemic anarchy: anyone can claim that their foundational beliefs are properly basic once the criteria of classical foundationalism are abandoned. This came to be known as ‘the Great Pumpkin objection’ (a label which will make sense to all those familiar with the Peanuts cartoon series). Various strategies for dealing with this objection emerged from the keyboard of Plantinga. One was to the effect that we might use an inductive procedure to determine canons of proper basicity. Instead of laying down criteria for proper basicity *a priori*, we might look at those forms of belief we pre-theoretically agree are properly basic and then work out what set of properties (presumably a disjunctive set)

⁶ See for example: Cornelius van Til, *Common Grace* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1947)

they have in common. This suggestion rapidly proved worthless, since it struck the obstacle that there is no pre-theoretic agreement on what beliefs count as properly basic.

The introduction of the *sensus divinitatus* can be seen as another attempt to defeat the Great Pumpkinites. Properly basic beliefs need grounding in appropriate justificatory circumstances. So a claim that a given class of beliefs is properly basic needs to come with an account of the relevant circumstances. The *sensus divinitatis* story does just that. But note that we will only accept the story if we accept the truth of certain Christian beliefs. Great Pumpkin rears its ugly head again at this point: we can easily imagine other belief systems, world-views, coming equipped with their own anthropologies. These will in turn enable such a world-view to tell a story about how its foundational beliefs are properly basic beliefs. Rose Ann Christian's 1992 paper on Plantinga⁷ makes this point very clearly and shows that it is not just a notional one (being exemplified in certain Hindu and Buddhist philosophical systems – see p. 568 of Christian).

This is the charge then that Plantinga's appeal to a Reidian pluralism over sources of properly basic belief faces: it gives rise to relativism and subjectivism in epistemology. Much of the critical literature on Plantinga's early articles in Reformed epistemology can be seen as, in effect, trying to circumvent his refutation of classical foundationalism. He affirms that only classical foundationalism will justify the insistence that rational religious beliefs must be based on evidence. His critics were charging that other reasons can be given for denying proper basicity to religious beliefs. Notably, what was being pressed was that religious belief is not the direct, unmediated outcome of 'the standard package' of cognitive faculties: memory, sense-perception, rational intuition and the like. What is distinctive about items in the standard package? – They are all faculties that we expect *any* compos mentis, adult human being to have. Once we allow a *sensus divinitatis* to play the same role as memory, sense-perception and the like, what is indeed to stop us allowing a *sensus pumpkinitatis* to do a corresponding job for followers of Snoopy? Here is a question about the direction in which a Reidian, moderate, pluralist

⁷ Rose Ann Christian, 'Plantinga, Epistemic Permissivism and Metaphysical Pluralism', *Religious Studies* vol. 28/4, 1992

foundationalism leads. Some would answer: To a defence of items in the standard package against the scepticism implicit in the Way of Ideas but not to Plantinga's religious epistemology. (We will see below that Alston addresses this same issue about the universality of approved belief-forming mechanisms.)

Plantinga's work in religious epistemology soon moved in a direction that in essence meant he could leave behind many facets of the debate on proper basicity he found himself embroiled in. He moved to an externalist stance on epistemology and upon the epistemology of religious belief in *Warrant: the Current Debate*⁸, *Warrant and Proper Function*⁹ and *Warranted Christian Belief*¹⁰. A number of features of this later stance distinguish it from the earlier attack on classical foundationalism and the defence of the properly basic status of religious belief. They include:

- Removal of notions of justification and rationality from centre stage.
- Their replacement by the notion of warrant, warrant being whatever must be added to a true belief that will make into knowledge.
- An externalist view of the property of warrant. Warrant is essentially that property of a belief which ensures that it has been produced by a truth-tracking mechanism in the environment in which the subject finds him/herself. The subject need not be aware of the nature of this mechanism or that his/her beliefs have warrant in order for them to have warrant.
- An account of warrant in terms of 'proper function': a belief has warrant if and only if it is the product of cognitive faculties that are functioning properly in an environment that enables them to deliver true beliefs (or: more true beliefs than false). In addition, the relevant faculties have to be the product of a design plan that means that they do produce true beliefs in the environment in question. The design plan has to be a good one, ensuring that there is a high statistical probability that true beliefs will be produced by these faculties in this environment.

⁸ Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1993)

⁹ Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1993)

¹⁰ Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2000)

The account of warrant in terms of proper function seems to me to be at root a refinement on reliabilism: true beliefs are knowledge if they are produced by reliable cognitive faculties.

The reasons why the warrant epistemology of late Plantinga leaves behind the earlier debates we have documented can now be spelled out. Notice that he now has an overwhelming reason to reject classical foundationalism. That view was part of an attempt to seek some internal (i.e. open to conscious reflection) property of beliefs that would enable us to tell when our beliefs are rationally held. Externalism sweeps this attempt aside. Plantinga's warrant approach entails straight off that we cannot do epistemology independent of some anthropology or other. We need an account of what cognitive faculties there are, how they function and who or what designed them. This means, as he is fond of stressing, that we cannot tell whether Christian beliefs are warranted without telling whether they are true. If Christian beliefs are true, then they can be warranted for Plantinga. If Christianity is true it will provide an account of human nature and associated matters that will yield the result that we have cognitive faculties enabling us to reliably form beliefs about God. The *sensus divinitatis* is wheeled out again and supplemented by other 'Christian' cognitive faculties (in particular, our receptivity to the instigations of the Holy Spirit). These faculties, if real, would enable us to form Christian beliefs in response to appropriate stimuli. Faculties of inference then enable us to deduce further Christian truths from those produced by stimulation of the distinctively Christian epistemic suite that we possess. In a way, these parts of Plantinga's theory tell us that our epistemology simply cannot be neutral as between our religious beliefs, so that the aim of seeking agreed criteria of proper basicity is now seen as deluded.

The warrant books have one further trick up their sleeve. In *Warrant and Proper Function* Plantinga has an extended argument that, in effect, can be seen as a final attempt to defeat the Great Pumpkinites. He contends across chapters 11 and 12 that only a theistic account of human nature can provide an account of proper function. Only if our cognitive faculties are the product of a design plan, and one that is good, can they yield warranted beliefs. So there is no proper basicity (to use the old terminology), and thus no basis for inferred beliefs, unless some version of theism is true.

Plantinga claims that Reid is one of the sources of the warrant epistemology. There are references throughout *Warrant: the Current Debate* to Reid. He is cited as one source of externalism in epistemology (p. v) and Plantinga refers to 'the debt my views owe to Thomas Reid' (p. vii). Similar references can be found in *Warrant and Proper Function*. I take it that the source for this attribution of externalism to Reid includes such passages as the famous one about the 'mint of Nature' in *IHM* VI, XX. Reid is asked by the sceptic 'Why do you believe the existence of the external object which you perceive?' He replies

The belief, sir, is none of my manufacture; it came from the mint of Nature; it bears her image and superscription; and, if it is not right, the fault is not mine: I even took it upon trust, and without suspicion.

Reid is taken by externalists such as Plantinga to be sharing in their basic assumption that a belief may be warranted even though the subject cannot articulate the ground on which it rests. It is warranted in virtue of being the product of cognitive faculties that are functioning well. The answer to the sceptic does not appeal to reasons or evidence in favour of our belief in the external object but to the fact that we are constructed in such a way that this belief arises in us. Moreover, we must have confidence that the faculties that give rise to such a belief are well-designed and thus are to be trusted¹¹.

II. ALSTON

William Alston is another writer on religious epistemology who claims descent from Reid. In *Perceiving God* he offers an account of the epistemic force of religious experience. The account is structured around the notion of a doxastic practice. According to Alston's general epistemology, our beliefs across a broad range of subject matters are formed within doxastic practices. These are shared and socially established practices in which are enshrined distinctive ways human beings have of moving from various kinds of 'inputs' (stimuli) to beliefs. Examples of such doxastic practices include: sense-perception, rational intuition, introspection and memory.

¹¹ An interpretation of Reid along these lines is defended in Falkenstein 'Nativism and the Nature of Thought in Reid's Account of Our Knowledge of the External World' in the *Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, eds T. Cuneo and R. van Woudenburg, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 156-79.

These practices are irreducibly various and they have to be taken on trust for the most part. That is to say, it is difficult, if not impossible, to give them a cogent external justification. Much of *Perceiving God* is devoted to showing that ‘sense-perceptual practice’ (the doxastic practice of forming beliefs about the material world on the basis of sensory experience) cannot be externally justified (see chapter 3 of Alston). Sense-perceptual practice cannot be shown to be reliable on external grounds. This doxastic practice exhibits what is styled ‘significant self-support’ (roughly: beliefs generated by sense perception strongly support each other). However, there is no way in which it can be proved to be reliable when faced with external rivals such as Cartesian scepticism or Berkeleyan idealism. We take it to be reliable and we are entitled so to do – because it is a socially established practice and no one has come up with a refutation of its reliability. Well-established doxastic practices are innocent until proved guilty. Alston contends that the practice, within Christianity, of forming beliefs about God on the basis of apparent perceptions of him, is just such another socially established doxastic practice. It is like others insofar as its reliability cannot be proved on external grounds. It is like others insofar as that reliability has to be conceded unless there is proof positive that it is not reliable.

There are clear links between Alston and Plantinga. Plantinga’s early papers on proper basicity share Alston’s emphasis on religious experience as an immediate ground for religious beliefs. Alston states that many of the beliefs generated by Christian mystical practice will be properly basic: the subject will be entitled to hold them in the absence of inference from other justified beliefs. Alston also rejects classical foundationalism as an exhaustive account of the criteria for properly basic beliefs. (Alston makes these links on pp. 173-75 of *Perceiving God*.)

There is another clear connection between the two authors. Alston’s doxastic practice approach to epistemology is, broadly, an externalist one. On p. 75 he rejects the key requirement of internalism on justified belief that “the justificational status of a belief is, at last typically, open to the reflective grasp of the subject”. In particular, Alston denies the condition that a subject who has an adequate ground for his/her belief must be justified in supposing that the ground is adequate. This particular condition generates a vicious infinite regress. Alston does make some concessions to internalism, but it will be seen that epistemic subjects can

have justified beliefs for him if those subjects form them within socially established, and presumed reliable, doxastic practices while simply taking those practices on trust in an unreflective way. So, he too has a general and a religious epistemology that is removed from evidentialism.

As with Plantinga, so with Alston: Reid is cited as a prime source for the doxastic practice approach to epistemology. Alston in fact links Reid with Wittgenstein (the Wittgenstein of *On Certainty*). These are the two authors from whose writings he has derived the doxastic practice approach. Alston thinks he has support in Reid for the notion that doxastic practices are irreducibly plural. Where Reid speaks of a variety of evidences for beliefs, Alston speaks of a variety of doxastic practices (p. 164). Reid is one with Alston in protesting against the likes of Plato and Descartes and their insistence that nothing counts as knowledge unless it meets the highest conceivable standards and in the counter-insistence that the sources of knowledge are irreducibly plural (pp. 234-35). Alston quotes the Reid passage given above appealing to Nature, and another passage from *IHM* V, VII, in reply to the sceptic as indicating that Reid thinks with Alston that our established doxastic practices have to be relied on because

they are firmly established doxastic practices, so firmly established that 'we cannot help it'; and we have exactly the same basis for trusting sense-perception, memory, nondeductive reasoning, and other sources of belief for which Descartes and Hume were demanding an external validation. (p. 151).

What impresses Alston in Reid, and what he wishes to endorse in his own epistemology, is what he sees as Reid's insistence on: the *givenness* of our routine modes of forming beliefs on the basis of external and internal stimuli; the variety of these modes; the impossibility of trying to get behind these modes and provide them with an external justification; the manner in which the sceptic must rely on these modes even as s/he seeks to question them; and thus the futility of the traditional epistemological debates between sceptic and defender of common sense beliefs.

Alston does note differences between his doxastic approach and Reid's. For example, he remarks on the fact that Reid does not stress the context of belief formation in our practices: 'Reid's perspective is that of a purely cognitive, mentalistic psychology' (p. 165) – and thus contains

little emphasis on the social dimension of epistemology. Alston further remarks on the way in which Reid only endorses ways of forming beliefs from stimuli that are universal to the human race, such as memory and sense-perception (p. 169). It is crucial to Alston's defence of Christian mystical practice as a *prima facie* reliable doxastic practice that we accept as reliable practices that, though well established, are only engaged in by a percentage of the population. His apologetic on behalf of Christian religious experience is peppered with references to other non-universal sensitivities to features of the world – such as the refined palate of the wine connoisseur or the refined ear of the musicologist.

III. SWINBURNE

In Swinburne will be found a more old fashioned religious epistemology. As indicated at the start of this paper, Swinburne assembles a body of evidence for a core theism, and then proceeds to marshal further evidence for specifically Christian claims about God, God's providence and human destiny. He also gives an account of, and defends, the canons of right reason that must be used to show that this body of evidence shows Christian claims to be more probable than not. Great reliance is placed on Bayes's theorem as giving an account of the correct way of assessing the interplay between evidence for an hypothesis, our background knowledge and the prior probability of that hypothesis. There is a rich interplay between inductive and *a priori* considerations in Swinburne's apologetic. In *The Existence of God* the traditional starting points of natural theological arguments (such as: that there is a universe, that it is ordered) are treated as so many pieces of inductive evidence for the claim that there is a God. But these are combined with wholly *a priori* epistemological principles, notably the principle that 'the simple is more likely to be true than the complex' (a synthetic *a priori* truth according to Swinburne¹²).

In contrast to Plantinga in particular, Swinburne maintains that, though there are many notions of justification, the important form of justification we need for religious beliefs is of an internalist kind.

¹² See his *Simplicity as Evidence for Truth* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1997)

In his critical notice of *Warranted Christian Belief* in *Religious Studies*¹³ Swinburne does not so much deny the truth of Plantinga's account of warrant as declare that it dodges the key question that the religious sceptic asks and the religious believer must answer. This question is: 'Are religious beliefs justified given our evidence and in the light of reflection on that evidence and the inductive standards we use to appraise it?' Only internalism asks the right questions and can thus provide the right answers. Swinburne writes:

Despite what Planting seems to say, there is a clear and all-important question about whether a belief is rational (or justified) which has nothing to do with whether it is justified by the believer's own lights or with whether it is produced by 'properly functioning' processes. In a strong internalist sense, a belief of a person S is rational if it is rendered (evidentially) probable by S's evidence. Evidently – scientists, historians, judges and juries ask this question about their hypotheses. (p. 207)

Swinburne has many specific criticisms of Plantinga's warrant epistemology (see his *Epistemic Justification*¹⁴ for these), but his main criticism of its use in the religious sphere is that it simply ignores the main problem. I would put that problem this way: warrant epistemology (and its predecessor's appeal to proper basicity) opts for a defensive strategy rather than offensive one. The offensive strategy of showing the truth of theistic/Christian claims to those not antecedently convinced is required. Only this will suit a world in which there is much religious diversity. Warrant epistemology only serves to show at best that the believer is entitled to his/her beliefs and that Christian belief is warranted *if it is true*. Exactly the same point can be, and has been, made in critique of Alston¹⁵. Swinburne states the importance of internalist justification for belief quite clearly on p. 7 of *Epistemic Justification*: 'it is only in so far as the justification of a belief is internally accessible that it can guide a person in deciding what to do'.

¹³ 'Plantinga on Warrant', *Religious Studies*, vol. 37/2, 2001, pp. 202-214. Plantinga responds in the same number, 'Rationality and Public Evidence: A Reply to Richard Swinburne', *Religious Studies* vol. 37/2, 2001, pp. 215-222.

¹⁴ Richard Swinburne, *Epistemic Justification* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001)

¹⁵ See the brilliant paper by N. Kretzman: 'Mystical Perception', in ed. A. Padgett, *Reason and the Christian Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994)

For all Swinburne's defence of internalism as the only *relevant* stance in religious epistemology, there are strong affinities between Swinburne, on the one hand, and Alston and the early Plantinga, on the other. These lie, as indicated at the start of this paper, in the area of religious experience. A crucial portion of the evidence for God's existence in Swinburne's *The Existence of God* is provided by purported experiences of God. It is a striking feature of Swinburne's use of 'the argument from religious experience' that he does not present it as an inference to best explanation. The bulk of chapter 13 presents the argument as an analogical one. The use of sense experience to ground beliefs about the material world is non-inferential for Swinburne. He employs a direct realist theory of sense perception. Statements such as 'I see a tree' do not rest on tacit inferences from facts about sense data. Such a statement is innocent until proved guilty. It is to be treated as justified in the typical circumstances of appearing to see something – unless specific reasons can be found to doubt it. It is justified in a non-inferential way, but it is defeasible. Swinburne appeals to a 'principle of credulity': we are to trust the deliverances of our senses unless facts indicate otherwise. (NB this is not Reid's principle of credulity. That relates to our right to trust the testimony of others. Swinburne has a very Reid-like view of the independent and original warrant to be found in reliance on human testimony, but his phraseology is different.) Swinburne then proceeds to argue that there is good reason to treat experiences of God as analogous to sense-perceptual experiences. They too are innocent until proved guilty. They too provide good non-inferential grounds for believing in their apparent object, provided only that specific reasons for discounting them are not established. They too are governed by the principle of credulity.

All the above is very similar to Alston on religious experience and early Plantinga on properly basic belief. The similarity is marked by Alston (p. 195 of *Perceiving God*). There is no appeal to doxastic practices by Swinburne in his support of the principle of credulity. Rather, like his principle of simplicity, he contends that we have no alternative but to take our sense experiences on initial trust. If we did not do so, we would never get started in the construction of belief systems and would have to surrender ourselves to extreme scepticism. The principle of credulity is another *a priori* epistemic truth. Swinburne's use of religious experience in his apologetics is also bound up from the start with his cumulative,

natural theological argument for God's existence. One reason for doubting an experiential report is a knowledge that it is highly improbable that the thing apparently experienced actually exists. Thus we need to establish that 'God exists' has some minimal probability (meaning: it is not too close to 0.0) in order for the principle of credulity to apply in this case. It is important that the appeal to religious experience in *The Existence of God* comes after such arguments as the cosmological and teleological arguments have added to the probability of 'God exists'. But notice here that there is no complete contrast with Alston. For he too has a role for natural theology in adding to the justification for religious belief provided by Christian mystical practice (see *Perceiving God* p. 295).

Swinburne's use of religious experience within the context of a direct realist, non-inferential theory of perception is typical of many writers in contemporary religious epistemology. This approach to the argument from religious experience has wholly changed the character of debates about its cogency. The general approach to perception and perceptual belief at work here is, of course, very similar to that of Reid's. The approach is fully in line with Reid's attack on the Way of Ideas. We find, however, no references to Reid in Swinburne. This is for the good reason that he is not indebted to him. The philosophy of perception and perceptual belief that Swinburne is working with is derived not from Reid but from post-War philosophers such as David Armstrong and Roderick Chisholm. Their ideas are in turn part of a discussion independent of Reid that grows out of a reaction to the sense-datum and phenomenalist theories of logical positivists and of other 20th century epistemologists such as Russell. I don't believe knowledge of Reid is a significant factor in that reaction. (I would hazard that the work of Armstrong, Chisholm and others – consider here John Austin's *Sense and Sensibilia* – predates by a long way the 'rediscovery' of Reid in recent English-speaking philosophy.)

Swinburne's appeal to religious experience shows, then, that there is a strain of anti-evidentialism in his religious epistemology, one that softens the contrast between him and the Reformed epistemologists. There is still a significant divide between the main actors in our story. That is the divide between internalism and externalism in general epistemology and in religious epistemology.

IV. REID'S RELIGIOUS EPISTEMOLOGY

We have seen that both Plantinga and Alston advance religious epistemologies that they claim have a provenance in Reid. In their opinion, not only does Reid provide objections to the Cartesian/Lockean foundationalism that favours the demand that religious beliefs be based on evidence anyone could recognise, he also supports the externalist approaches to epistemology that allow Alston to claim there is a distinctive doxastic practice of religious forming beliefs and Plantinga to claim that there is a distinctive set of mechanisms that generate them. We have had occasion to note above Alston's lament that Reid only allows universal practices/processes in non-inferential belief formation. We can take this point of difference further. Reid is no Reformed epistemologist. In the *Inquiry* and the *Essays* there is not so much as a mention of distinctive religious epistemic practices or mechanisms. Nor does Reid appeal to religious experience, in the manner of either Alston or Swinburne. If Dale Tuggy's account of Reid's lectures on religion is correct¹⁶, Reid answered the religious sceptic not by appealing to Nature and its dictates to us, but rather by good old-fashioned appeals to natural theology. He endorses the Samuel Clarke version of the cosmological proof and, in particular, the argument from design. Tuggy (p. 295) quotes Reid as stating

there is as much reason to believe that there is a supreme being, as that there are minds besides our own. From the actions of a human being conducted with wisdom and design we conclude that this being has an intelligent mind, and that this is all the evidence we have of it ... even in the formation of a human body, there is much more design displayed than in any human action. In both cases we see not the cause, but trace it out by its effects.

What the above remarks of Reid show is not a parallel to the Plantinga of *Warranted Christian Beliefs*, but to Plantinga's first foray into religious epistemology: *God and Other Minds*¹⁷.

¹⁶ In 'Reid's Philosophy of Religion', *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, T. Cuneo and R. van Woudenberg eds (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp. 289-213.

¹⁷ Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1969)