

## OVERVIEW

### **The Rationality of Theistic Belief: Classical Evidentialism and Reformed Epistemology**

The revival of philosophy of religion in Anglo-American philosophy during the last 15 to 20 years has brought with it a renewed interest in the epistemology of religious belief, broadly understood as a consideration of the justificatory and epistemic conditions for beliefs the content of which entails the existence of God. What is required to have a *rational* or *justified* belief in God? And what constitutes religious *knowledge*? This renewed and vital interest in re-examining the rationality of belief in God has developed within the larger context of general epistemology, the nature of rationality and knowledge itself. Seen in this way the topic of the justification of theistic belief particularizes a broader interest among many philosophers to analyze and clarify such concepts as justification, rationality, and knowledge, as well as the relations between them.

#### **I. Two Views on the Rationality of Religious Belief**

##### ***A. Evidentialism and Reformed Epistemology***

For much of the history of Western philosophy since the 17th century, the

“rational” status of theistic belief has been closely tied to the possession (or availability) of rational evidence in the form of (theologically neutral) reasons or arguments which provide some degree of support for religious and theological propositions. This tradition of *classical evidentialism* has, up through the first half of the 20th century, presented a basic challenge to theists, or more precisely, a challenge to those theists who believe or claim that their belief in God is a rational or justified belief. This challenge, roughly put, states: [1] a person is rational or justified in believing in God only if the person has adequate evidence for his belief in God, where this evidence consists of other rational beliefs or knowledge of the person and is religiously neutral evidence (or at least is traceable to evidence which is). This challenge, the so-called *evidentialist challenge to theistic belief*, has been the cognitive staple of most modern Western intellectuals since the Enlightenment. They have taken it, as nearly axiomatic, that the satisfaction of the evidentialist requirement embodied in the evidentialist challenge is essential to the rational justification of belief in God. Furthermore, some have argued the additional thesis: [2] there is no adequate evidence for belief in God. The conjunction of [1] and [2] constitutes the *evidentialist objection to theistic belief*.

Traditionally, philosophical theologians and Christian apologists have responded to the evidentialist objection to theistic belief by trying to argue that [2] is false on the grounds that there *is* adequate evidence for the existence of God. Theistic philosophers have presented a host of theistic arguments: from the existence of a contingent, complex physical system (the Universe), temporal and spatial regularities within such a system, consciousness, morality, and religious experience. These arguments have ranged from strictly deductive arguments (generally proceeding from self-evident or otherwise evident-to-the-senses principles or ordinary observation) to inductive or probabilistic arguments (often times with more liberal premises) to show that the evidentialist

challenge can be met head-on by presenting an evidentialist apologetic. For such philosophers natural theology has been the primary source for answering the evidentialist challenge (and objection) to theistic belief.

One important approach in contemporary religious epistemology, and indeed one that has often dominated discussions in the philosophy of religion for nearly two decades, is *Reformed epistemology*. The movement receives its name - even if an infelicitous one - because of its affinity with claims about the nature and status of theistic belief and religious knowledge in the Reformed theological tradition originating with John Calvin. The key philosophers in this movement - William Alston, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and Alvin Plantinga - have in their own way each developed the claim, usually taken as the central thesis of Reformed epistemology, that belief in God can be rational without being based on or otherwise supported by propositional evidence or argument. More precisely put, there are some people, at some times and under certain conditions, for whom belief in God is rational even though their belief in God is not based on evidence in the form of reasons (i.e., other beliefs or knowledge) which provide adequate support for the belief. For some people theistic belief is a *properly basic* or *immediately justified* belief. Reformed epistemologists have challenged the epistemological assumptions of Enlightenment evidentialism and have presented an alternative way of thinking about the rationality of religious belief.

As for the *conditions* under which theistic belief is rational without propositional evidence, different answers have been given depending on the particular epistemological framework. Some accounts hold that individuals are *prima facie* justified in holding theistic belief just if they do not have or should not have adequate reasons for not holding the belief (Wolterstorff 1983a). This is sometimes based on a principle of rationality that if it seems (epistemically) to a person that *X* is the case, then (barring special

considerations) it is probably the case that  $X$  (Swinburne 1991, pp. 254-76). This principle of credulity embodies the idea that our beliefs are innocent until proven guilty. The contention that belief in God may be immediately justified, though, has received special impetus from and developed in close connection with the rise of externalist theories of justification and knowledge. According to the externalist it is possible for something to confer justification or positive epistemic status without the subject being aware upon reflection (or even being capable of becoming aware upon reflection) that it possesses this justificatory or epistemic efficacy. (Internalism by contrast requires cognitive accessibility to the justifier or justifier's efficacy). If a belief's being the output of a reliable process of belief formation is sufficient for its being justified or known, a person may justifiably believe or know theistic propositions if that reliability condition is satisfied. This will be the case even if the person has no cognitive access to the faculty responsible for the belief or the reliability of such a faculty (Alston 1991b,e, 1993c; C. Stephen Evans 1995). Sometimes, though, theistic belief has been viewed in a way analogous to sensory perceptual experience, as having a cognitively accessible ground in the form of an experiential awareness of God (i.e., God's being directly presented to a person's consciousness), even though the epistemic adequacy of such a ground is not cognitively accessible (Alston 1991c). Other accounts, while not denying the grounding of belief in God in religious experience, suggest that belief in God may be immediately rational in the sense that memory or *a priori* beliefs are, perhaps as the result of the proper functioning of one's cognitive faculties. (Plantinga 1987, 1991).

### ***B. The Religious Epistemology of Alvin Plantinga***

In "Reason and Belief in God" (1983a) and subsequent articles Alvin Plantinga

has presented a systematic exposition and critique of the epistemological foundations of classical evidentialism, and he has articulated an alternative conception of the rationality of belief in God - the so-called thesis of proper basicity. As he sees it, evidentialism is rooted in *classical foundationalism*, a normative view about the structure of belief according to which one's rational beliefs divide into those which are based on other beliefs and those which are properly basic. The latter are beliefs not based on other beliefs but nonetheless rational by virtue of being self-evident, about one's immediate introspective experience, or evident to the senses. Since belief that God exists satisfies none of these criteria for proper basicity, its rationality requires that it be based on beliefs which (i) provide adequate (deductive or probabilistic) evidential support for it and (ii) where these supporting beliefs are either themselves properly basic or ultimately based on beliefs which are properly basic. Moreover, according to Plantinga evidentialism is also rooted in *deontologism*. Historically (from John Locke onwards) the normativity involved in the evidentialist's concept of rationality has typically been the normativity of duty and obligation. A person who believes in God without propositional evidence is somehow violating an epistemic duty or intellectual obligation. Alternatively, the normativity involved in the evidentialist position could be (and has been on occasions) thought of as the normativity associated with the proper functioning of one's cognitive faculties, rationality in the sense of freedom from epistemic defect or cognitive malfunction. On this construal, basic theistic belief turns out to be epistemically defective and so lacks a kind of epistemic excellence.

Plantinga argues that propositional evidence for theistic belief is not needed for either epistemic dutifulness or epistemic nondefectiveness. Classical foundationalism fails to account for the rationality (in either normative sense) of a broad range of our ordinary, everyday beliefs (e.g., memory beliefs, beliefs in other minds); for such beliefs

are neither properly basic by the classical foundationalist's criteria, nor as they entailed by beliefs that are properly basic. Similarly the very principle of classical foundationalism itself does not satisfy the conditions of proper basicity, nor is it entailed or rendered probable by beliefs that are properly basic. On the first count, classical foundationalism is false; on the second, self-referentially incoherent. This philosophical critique of the epistemological framework of classical evidentialism constitutes Plantinga's challenge to the evidentialist challenge to theistic belief. In this way, Plantinga's anti-evidentialism is parasitic on the recent collapse of classical foundationalism within general epistemology and the rise of modest versions of foundationalism. These modest versions of foundationalism do not restrict the class of properly basic beliefs to those possessing various kinds of epistemic immunities (from revision, error, or the possibility of doubt), thereby allowing a broader range of foundational beliefs (often along the externalist lines mentioned above). Plantinga's positive position is a version of foundationalism in which belief in God can properly belong to the foundations of one's structure of beliefs. To be more precise, Plantinga argues that [3] some people, at certain times and under certain conditions, have a rational belief in God (and by extension other religious beliefs) even though they do not have (or base their belief on) *propositional* evidence in the form of (theologically neutral) rational beliefs or knowledge which provide deductive or probabilistic evidential support for their belief in God, and even if such evidence is not available in their community.

When Plantinga speaks of theistic belief or belief in God being properly basic, he is actually thinking of beliefs like, God is forgiving me, God created this, God is speaking to me, etc, all of which self-evidently entail God's existence. I will speak of these theistic beliefs targeted by Plantinga as various *beliefs that Pt*. Secondly, as for the conditions in which basic theistic belief is rational, Plantinga emphasizes that these beliefs that Pt,

though not based on reasons, are nevertheless not groundless. He implements the Reidian distinction between propositional and nonpropositional grounds (or evidence) to urge that beliefs that Pt are grounded in appropriate widely realized experiential conditions which trigger the formation of the belief. They are in that way epistemically analogous to paradigmatic cases of properly basic belief, such as sensory perceptual or memory beliefs, which have rationality or justification conferring conditions. Thirdly, the criteria for proper basicity must be arrived at broadly speaking inductively, working from particular cases of beliefs which we believe are both basic and rational. Such paradigmatic cases of properly basic beliefs will include sensory perceptual beliefs (e.g., I see the tree), memory beliefs (e.g., I had breakfast this morning), and beliefs about other persons (e.g., that man is angry). Plantinga claims that, like these beliefs, belief in God can be (at least for some people under certain conditions) a properly basic belief. In other terms, his argument may be stated in terms of showing that there exists a certain *parity* between theistic belief and other paradigmatic cases of properly basic beliefs.

Although Plantinga's central epistemological thesis began as a statement about the conditions required for being *justified* in believing in God, and where "justification" is understood in a deontological sense to refer to certain epistemic duties, his religious epistemology has (since around 1987) taken a different direction with his development of the highly externalist theory of warrant, set forth with considerable detail in his 1993 works *Warrant: The Current Debate* and *Warrant and Proper Function*, and to be applied to theistic and Christian belief in *Warranted Christian Belief* (forthcoming). Unlike "justification" Plantinga takes "warrant" to be that quality enough of which is sufficient (or nearly so) to transform true belief into knowledge. Warrant involves the *proper functioning* of human cognitive equipment, the functioning of our belief-forming and belief-sustaining powers, faculties, or mechanisms in the way they were designed to

function, by God or evolution - or both. It also involves the proper functioning of our cognitive faculties in a specific context: the appropriate cognitive environment (one sufficiently similar to that for which a person's faculties have been designed). Moreover, bearing in mind the distinctly "epistemic" aim in warrant, given that different parts of our cognitive make-up have different purposes, warrant must have regard for the proper functioning of a particular segment of the design plan governing the production of the belief, that part aimed at the production of true beliefs. Not only so, but the epistemic aim involved in warrant entails a reliability constraint on warranted beliefs. The cognitive module parceled out for the production of the belief in question must have a high objective probability of producing true beliefs when one's cognitive faculties are functioning properly in the appropriate conditions. Lastly, the more firmly a person believes a proposition, the more warrant it will have for him.

The notion of a human design plan has taken Plantinga's epistemology well into metaphysics and theology. According to Plantinga the *de jure* question about Christian belief is a question about whether Christian belief is sensible, reasonable, justified or rational. But the answer to this question depends on what sort of person one thinks human beings are, what sorts of beliefs their noetic faculties will produce when they are functioning properly. "The dispute as to whether theistic belief is rational," writes Plantinga, "can't be settled just by attending to epistemological considerations; it is at bottom not merely an epistemological dispute, but a metaphysical and theological dispute" (1993d, p. 31). Ultimately, what sorts of beliefs are taken as properly basic will depend on what sort of creature a person takes human beings to be, and so depends on one's metaphysical assumptions. Whereas a naturalist or atheist will tend to require reasons for theistic belief to have warrant, a theist may indeed have a quite different account of warranted theistic belief. Drawing on John Calvin and several thinkers within



the Reformed theological tradition, Plantinga argues that, on a theistic view, we may easily think of humans as created in such a way that they have a natural tendency to form belief in God on the grounds of widely realized experiential conditions. Plantinga interprets Calvin's talk about a *sensus divinitatis* (as well as the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit) in terms of immediate belief-forming mechanisms - modes of forming belief in God (and other Christian beliefs) in a basic way. So basic theistic belief can be warranted and constitute knowledge. Moreover, the account also suggests (as I shall argue in chapters 3 and 4) that [4] basic theistic belief is (typically at any rate) epistemically superior to nonbasic theistic belief by virtue of the theistic design and the degree of warrant conferred on basic belief in God.

### ***C. The Compatibilist Approach***

Although the responses to the claims of Reformed epistemology have been diverse, there has been a two-fold tendency in the literature critical of the movement's claims, and especially the claims of Plantinga. First, there has been widespread debate over whether theistic belief can ever be properly basic (Quinn 1985, 1993, Goetz 1983, Grigg 1990, Meynell 1993). Secondly, many have accepted the Plantingian proper basicity claim but have sought to modify either the notion of properly basic theistic belief or evidentialism (or both) in order to bring the two positions into closer relation (Mavrodes 1983, Wolterstorff 1986, Greco 1993, Garcia 1993, Lee 1993, Zeis 1993, McLeod 1994). The first approach I will call an *incompatibilist* account of proper basicity and evidentialism; the second approach, *compatibilist* Reformed epistemology. Although I think the arguments against proper basicity are interesting (and some of them quite challenging to Reformed epistemology), I intend to leave that question out of

the picture and focus rather on the second approach that I think is (at least potentially) far more philosophically interesting. Moreover, if adequately unpacked, the second approach will render the critiques of proper basicity fundamentally unnecessary and their motivation adequately answered. What I set out to do in this thesis is establish just such a compatibilist theory. I will argue that *there is a form of evidentialism that is compatible with the claims of Alvin Plantinga's religious epistemology*. This is, of course, only a first approximation. The plausibility of compatibilism rests on two points: (1) the explicit and implicit propositions which constitute Plantinga's religious epistemology and (2) the nature of evidentialism. Neither of these is easily spelled out, and therefore considerable effort will be made to analyze both Plantinga's claims (and their implications) and the nature of the evidentialist requirement. And the latter point is just as crucial to the argument as the prior, for not just any form of evidentialism will do. Some versions to be examined will be shown to fall short of being epistemically adequate. What must ultimately be argued is that there is an *epistemically adequate* form of evidentialism that is compatible with the religious epistemology of Alvin Plantinga.

Moreover, the thesis claim is to be developed within the framework of a modest version of epistemic foundationalism. Inasmuch as the discussion of religious epistemology presupposes an array of issues in general epistemology, chapter 1 sets out the basic epistemological concepts and distinctions that will be employed in the thesis. My goal in chapter 1 is not to develop a rigorous epistemological theory but to articulate some of the general features of the epistemological terrain to be traversed in the course of the work, together with some critical commentary. One caveat though. Since my aim is to argue for the compatibility of evidentialism and Plantingian epistemology on the basis of foundationalism, I have chosen to omit discussion of coherentism, except as it relates directly to epistemic foundationalism. First, space constraints require delimiting the scope

of epistemological discussion to what is most relevant to the core arguments of the thesis. Secondly, evidentialism has usually been associated with foundationalism, as has Reformed epistemology. Also, I do not find epistemic coherentism very plausible. Regardless of how one spells out the coherentist position, it faces the trilemma of infinite regress, inappropriate detachment from reality, or vicious circularity. Also, it seems to me that theistic belief does just as well as any other doxastic candidate on epistemic coherentism. And although I have not been convinced by those epistemological theories which attempt a union of foundationalism and coherentism, I will have recourse at points to pointing out the ways in which coherence may reasonably enter into a foundationalist account.

The question is, minimally, to what extent the conjunction of something like [3] and [4] is compatible with some set of evidentialist requirements  $\{R_1, \dots, R_n\}$ , and where each member  $R_i$  of the set is severally necessary and jointly sufficient for an epistemically adequate form of foundationalist-evidentialism.

## **II. Bi-Level Evidentialism: A Sketch**

Although I am specifically interested in Plantinga's religious epistemology, the central thesis to be argued will be based on evidentialist requirements for belief which admit of broader epistemological relevance and application. In one respect the project seeks to establish evidentialist conditions for theistic belief in a way compatible with externalism, though many of my observations will have relevance for purely internalist accounts of justification and/or knowledge. The broader applicability of my arguments is developed in chapter 8. Among the items I take to be essential to my evidentialist case are: defeating conditions, overdetermining and partial sustaining reasons, belief

formation and sustenance, conditions for higher-level justification, and the evidentialist implications of the noetic effects of sin for the design plan and proper function. Here I briefly sketch the more significant facets of the arguments to be developed involving these topics.

### ***A. Defeaters, Partial Basicity, and Overdetermination***

A staple of contemporary epistemology is the distinction between *prima facie* and *ultima facie* justification. The justification S has for his belief that p may be overridden by reasons to the contrary, and where “reasons” are understood broadly as inclusive of either experiences or beliefs (and on some accounts conditions or states of affairs to which the subject has no introspective access). More precisely, it is recognized (even on many externalist accounts of justification and knowledge) that justification or positive epistemic status may be defeated by (i) reasons for regarding a belief as false (rebutting defeaters) or (ii) reasons for regarding the grounds of a belief as inadequate (undercutting defeaters). According to some accounts a belief is *ultima facie* justified just if it based on an adequate ground and nothing in the totality of a person’s noetic structure serves as a rebutting or undercutting defeater (or perhaps that no such defeaters are the sort of thing a person could come to have fairly readily upon reflection). Although it is common to think of “justification” as what gets defeated, the idea of proper function yields another sort of defeater that looms large in Plantinga’s more recent work. These are so-called *rationality defeaters*, where rationality is understood in the sense of proper function. Here defeaters (specifically, other beliefs or experiences of the form (i) or (ii)) defeat a *belief* in the sense that they constitute a reason for S to modify his existing noetic structure by the deletion of a previous belief or by simply holding a belief less firmly. S may rationally

believe that  $p$  at time  $t_1$ , but then acquire a defeater  $D$  at time  $t_2$ . What this means is that if  $S$  is rational (i.e., functioning properly) at time  $t_2$   $S$  will either no longer believe that  $p$  or believe that  $p$  with a less degree of firmness at  $t_2$  than  $S$  did at  $t_1$ .

Two significant consequences follow from this for the rational and epistemic status of theistic belief. As with beliefs in general, so with theistic belief in particular - there are putative defeaters. Among these are: (a) the atheological argument from evil, (b) the projective theory of theistic belief, and (c) the case for the incoherence of theistic propositions. Given that Plantinga holds that the more firmly  $S$  believes  $B$  the more warrant  $B$  has for  $S$  (assuming that the other conditions of warrant are satisfied), partial defeaters may reduce one's firmness of belief. As a consequence, the degree of warrant had by  $B$  is insufficient for knowledge. In such a case I suggest that for some people reasons may play a partial causal role in a person's continuing to be epistemically warranted in their theistic belief. These reasons may take the form of either undercutting or rebutting defeater-defeaters (i.e., either reasons to think that the defeater against theism is inadequately supported or false). The latter obviously translates into reasons for believing that there is such a person as God, and so natural theology becomes important to a person's remaining epistemically warranted in his theistic belief. Whether a rebutting or undercutting defeater-defeater is required on some particular occasion is a thorny issue that I will tackle in terms of considerations from subjective and epistemic evidential probability (e.g., how a person weighs the evidence, his view of relevant prior probabilities, as well as how strong the argument is given correct inductive standards).

Secondly, since the proper functioning of one's relevant cognitive faculties is necessary for warrant and knowledge, this includes the necessity of the proper functioning of one's defeater system. This gives rise to what can be called the *no-defeater condition*: roughly stated,  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  is warranted only if  $S$  does not have a defeater

for the belief that *p*. Given the acquisition of a defeater for theistic belief, it may be that a person is no longer rational in believing some theistic proposition (or at least not believing it with the same degree of firmness as before the acquisition of the defeater). What is required in such an instance for a person's being rational (and so knowing the theistic proposition) is a defeater-defeater. Although theistic belief may, by virtue of its degree of warrant as basic, act as an intrinsic defeater-defeater for various putative defeaters, I present conditions under which this will not be the case. Typically, a defeated theistic belief will need an extrinsic defeater-defeater. Although Plantinga has argued that only undercutting defeater-defeaters would be required in such instances, I defend some scenarios in which rebutting defeater-defeaters will be required. Moreover, Plantinga has claimed that in the case of undercutting defeater-defeaters, though they may be required as part of the warrant conferring circumstances, theistic belief need not be *based on* such considerations (and perhaps should not). Here I argue that the notion of partial causal sustenance brings intelligibility to the idea of a person's basic belief being partly based on reasons in the form of undercutting defeater-defeaters.

The function of reasons in supplying a person with grounds for remaining epistemically warranted in their theistic belief suggests that *overdetermination* plays an important epistemic role, where this overdetermination is either psychological (refers to the causal source of a belief) or epistemic (refers to what confers positive epistemic status). In cases where *S*'s theistic belief is causally sustained by multiple sufficient grounds, or where *S* has other beliefs which are potential grounds for theistic belief, *S* has epistemically relevant cognitive resources for *continuing* in a state of epistemically warranted theistic belief given the existence of putative defeaters for theistic belief. To highlight how the importance and even necessity of propositional evidence may emerge for a person at different points in their cognitive history as a result of relevant changes in

their cognitive circumstance, I present a case for a two-fold evaluation of noetic structures. The first considers the epistemic status theistic belief has at some particular time, either the time of its acquisition or maintenance. The second considers a belief's epistemic status charted through time (a kind of history of a noetic structure). I will refer to the former as *synchronic* epistemic status; the latter as *diachronic* epistemic status. I conclude that there is a case for regarding noetic structures that are propositionally overdetermined with respect to basic theistic belief as diachronically epistemically superior to their non-overdetermined counterparts (where the history of a noetic structure includes defeating conditions against which basic theistic belief is not an intrinsic defeater-defeater). Moreover, I will argue that in certain defeating conditions (minus intrinsic defeater-defeaters) a noetic structure in which theistic belief is partly basic and partly nonbasic is synchronically epistemically superior at  $t_n$  (with respect to theistic belief) to noetic structures in which theistic belief is based solely on an immediate source at  $t_n$ . Carefully spelling out belief and rationality defeating conditions  $C^*$ , I conclude that for some people at certain times and under certain circumstances that include  $C^*$ , their belief in God is rational (and constitutes knowledge) only if their belief in God is at least partially causally sustained by reasons in the form of either rebutting or undercutting defeater-defeaters.

### ***B. The Evidentialist Implications of Hamartic Cognitive Malfunction***

The second major plank in my evidentialist case draws on the notion of cognitive malfunction, which figures prominently in Plantinga's epistemological theory. One of the ways in which a belief fails to have warrant (and so fails to constitute knowledge) is by arising from cognitive faculties which are not in proper working order, which are

subject to malfunction or dysfunction. On a Christian theistic metaphysics cognitive malfunction is the result (indirectly at any rate) of sin in the human personality. Within the Reformed theological tradition there has been much emphasis on what the older Princeton theologians of the 19th and early 20th century called the noetic effects of sin, a doctrine which has frequently been used to question either the propriety or usefulness of natural theology. What I will call the hamartic grounds of cognitive malfunction is simply shorthand for the conjunction of the principles of the noetic effects of sin and the epistemological theory of proper function. The central cognitive module of immediate or basic theistic belief formation in Plantinga is the *sensus divinitatis*. One of my evidentialist lines of enquiry (in chapter 5) maps out some plausible ways the *sensus divinitatis* may be thought to malfunction as a result of sin. Such an account will show that for some people, whose circumstances include the exemplification of any one of the several cognitive malfunctions to which the *sensus divinitatis* is subject, propositional evidence will be necessary (to varying degrees) if such people are to have epistemically warranted belief in God. A case for the existence of other theistic relevant cognitive modules that generate or sustain theistic beliefs is presented. Even though these mediate sources are subject to similar cognitive malfunction (as a result of sin) the justification of mediate warrant for some people rests on a principle of the variable instantiation of the noetic effects of sin. According to this principle, different cognitive systems will be adversely affected by sin in different ways and to varying degrees. But unless we postulate mediate sources as well as immediate sources for theistic belief, it will be hard to account for the fact that despite the noetic effects of sin, there is genuine natural knowledge of God possessed by many people. The conclusion is somewhat unorthodox and may appear somewhat startling: if man is totally depraved propositional evidence for belief in God is necessary, for some people will not be able to form epistemically



warranted belief in God (or even mere belief in God) unless they have reasons, such as those supplied by natural theology. Ultimately, Plantinga's design plan theory must account for the damage done to the human cognitive system, and as I shall argue this requires a distinction between a pre-lapsarian and post-lapsarian design plan. Such an account will impose a restricted strong evidentialist requirement according to which for some people propositional evidence is necessary, or necessary and sufficient, for epistemically warranted theistic belief.

### ***C. Higher-Level Evidentialism and the Pursuit of Reflective Rationality***

The evidentialist requirements that develop out of the preceding discussion contribute to what I will call **modest evidentialism**. In chapter 6 I continue my focus on epistemic foundationalism in order to develop another evidentialist requirement to complete the case for an epistemically adequate version of evidentialism. Drawing on the multi-level foundationalism of William Alston, I present an important modification to the theistic foundationalism hitherto developed, a modification which will allow, among other things, an important distinction between putative belief in God and belief in the rationality or justification of belief in God. Even if a person's belief that *p* is immediately justified (and let us suppose *only* susceptible to an immediate justification), this does not rule out finding reasons for the higher-level belief that one is so justified. Moreover, according to Alston, the only mode of justification for higher-level beliefs is mediate, they must be based on reasons if they are to be justified. This gives rise to *the strong higher-level evidentialist requirement*. The satisfaction of such a requirement leads to what I will be calling *reflective rationality*. After articulating the multi-level scheme, I consider both internalist and externalist versions of reflective rationality.

In Part III of chapter 6 I develop the implications of higher-level evidentialism for assessing the relevance of a project such as natural theology. Although the arguments of chapters 4 and 5 established the kinds of conditions under which natural theology will be necessary and/or sufficient for epistemic warrant, considerations drawn from reflective rationality will show that arguments from natural theology are, when appropriately developed, essential to achieving a form of propositional reflective rationality. Although one may be reflectively rational about one's own theistic belief by rationally considering the adequacy of one's actual ground for believing it, one may also exhibit reflectively rationality about a particular theistic *proposition* (typically the proposition that God exists) by rationally considering the adequacy of the evidence for that proposition (and so what would constitute an adequate ground for theistic belief is one were to hold it on that basis). The basic distinction here falls on differentiating between the kind of evidence  $e$  which provides evidential support for  $p$  and the kind of (logical) evidence  $e^*$  which provides support for judgements about the force, weight, or adequacy of  $e$  for  $p$ , as well as the kind and degree of investigation and critical assessment which goes into arriving at such judgements. The distinction is developed with discussion of the relevant categories of epistemic and subjective probability. My conclusion is that since propositional evidence is necessary for reflective rationality, the resources of natural theology become crucial for satisfying such an epistemic desideratum, thereby contributing toward a Reformed conception of *fides quaerens intellectum*.

In chapter 7 I focus on the relation between justification at the higher and lower levels, specifically how being justified in higher-level beliefs contributes to justification at the lower level. A fairly sophisticated picture of the kind of epistemic merit achieved by reflective rationality arises from this. I also consider the epistemic merit of higher-level justification. Even if such a requirement exists, it is important to uncover its

epistemic significance. I suggest that the internalist intuitions which loom large in the evidentialist tradition are fairly well satisfied at the higher-level in being justified in believing that one is justified in believing that p. And here one must always have reasons for belief. Presupposing that individuals are typically critically reflective (or at least ought to be), and frequently assuming the Cartesian thesis about the mind's transparency to itself, the evidentialist tradition has failed to distinguish between unreflective rationality (having a rational belief that p) and reflective rationality (having a rational belief that one's belief is rational). Consequently, requirements for the latter have been made requirements for the former. Although there is no strong lower-level evidentialist requirement for theistic belief, I shall argue for the restricted necessity of reflective rationality for one's being justified in holding theistic belief(s) given some of the defeating conditions canvassed in the earlier chapters. This analysis further suggests that the evidentialist tradition has failed to distinguish between the conditions required for being appropriately related to the epistemic goal (of acquiring true beliefs and avoiding false beliefs) and those for being a responsible seeker after such an epistemic state, especially in the presence of certain defeating conditions.

The conjunction of *modest evidentialism* with respect to theistic beliefs at the lower level and *strong higher-level evidentialism* constitutes an epistemically adequate version of evidentialism which is compatible with Plantinga's religious epistemology - what I will call **Bi-Level Evidentialism**. Although the evidentialist requirements developed in chapters 4 through 7 are closely tied to Plantinga's religious epistemology, chapter 8 offers, by way of summary, an account of bi-level evidentialism in which my evidentialist requirements are given broader application in the form of a version of theistic foundationalism of more general epistemological appeal. Bi-level evidentialism establishes that there can be no real Reformed "objection" to natural theology or

evidentialism, if the claims of proper basicity are judiciously balanced with a proper conception of the function of reasons with respect to religious belief. Such a conclusion does violence neither to proper evidentialist desiderata nor the *sensus divinitatis* or the *testimonium spiritus sancti* so much a part of Reformed epistemology. Moreover, if the arguments developed here are sound, then it follows that the highly externalist features of Plantinga's epistemology, so frequently taken to marginalize "reasons for belief," are compatible with the sort of internalist intuitions which gave rise to classical evidentialism in the first place.