A Critique of Plantinga’s Reformed Epistemology

Lee, Jae-Kyung

This paper aims to address the question of whether theistic belief could be rational without propositional evidence or any support by argument. In a series of articles, Plantinga argues that the theist is rationally justified in believing in God without much further evidence. His method is first to criticize classical foundationalism. After showing its inadequacy, he then identifies certain immediate non-inferential beliefs which most persons would agree are reasonable to hold. Having established the reasonableness of such beliefs, he claims that religious beliefs are analogous to such commonly held nontheistic beliefs.

I wish to examine Plantinga’s claim that belief in God is properly basic within some non-classical version of foundationalism. First, the basic theory of Plantinga’s Reformed epistemology shall be laid out. Then, I argue that his position is untenable as the method given by his account for demarcating proper and improper basic beliefs raises some difficulties. It is my contention that there are significant differences between theistic beliefs and properly basic nontheistic beliefs and so I question the legitimacy of asserting the proper basicity of theistic beliefs. Thus, Plantinga’s central claim that theistic beliefs have the same epistemic status as other more
commonly accepted nontheistic beliefs would be flawed. I also argue that
Plantinga’s account of criteria for proper basicality is not consistent.

I.

In this paper I shall concern myself with the question of whether
theistic belief could be rational without propositional evidence or any
support by argument. In a series of articles Plantinga juxtaposes what
he calls ‘Reformed epistemology’ (or Calvinist epistemology) with
‘classical foundationalism’ (which he finds in Aquinas, Descartes, Locke,
Hume, and many others) and concludes that the theist is rationally
justified in believing in God without much further evidence.¹ Plantinga’s
method is first to criticize classical foundationalism. After showing
its inadequacy, he then identifies certain immediate non-inferential beliefs
which most persons would agree are reasonable to hold, such as “I
see a tree”, “I ate breakfast this morning”, or “that person is in pain.”
Having established the reasonableness of such beliefs, he claims that
religious beliefs are analogous to such commonly held nontheistic

¹ Cf. Alvin Plantinga, “Reason and Belief in God(henceforth RBG),” in
Reason and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God, ed. Alvin Plantinga
and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press,
1983), pp. 16–93; “Is Belief in God Rational?,” in Rationality and Religious
Belief, ed. C. F. Delaney (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press),
41–51. Later, Plantinga has expanded his Reformed epistemology project
much further in a three volume work on epistemology. He argues that
theistic belief has ‘warrant’ because there is an epistemically possible
model according to which theistic belief is justified in a basic way.
Warrant is defined as that which, when added to true belief, yields
knowledge. I do not deal with Plantinga’s theory of warrant in this
paper.
I shall not take issue with Plantinga’s claim that there are significantly different versions of foundationalism. What I would examine rather carefully is his claim that belief in God is properly basic within some non-classical version of foundationalism. First, the basic theory of Plantinga’s Reformed epistemology shall be laid out. Then, I shall argue that Plantinga’s position is untenable since the method given by his account for demarcating proper and improper basic beliefs raises some difficulties. Furthermore, I shall maintain that there is a difference, one that I allege shows the falsity of the thesis that religious experience is a type of perception.

II.

Plantinga’s reformed epistemology is intended to rebut what he calls ‘the evidentialist objection’ to theistic belief. At issue in the debate between Plantinga and evidentialists is the question of what kinds of beliefs can be properly basic. According to this objection, made by W. K. Clifford and developed by contemporary antitheologians like Michael Scriven and Brand Blanshard, theistic belief is ‘irrational or unreasonable or not rationally acceptable or intellectually irresponsible or noetically substandard’ unless there are sufficient reasons for it. Thus the evidentialist denies that belief in God, in Plantinga’s terms, is ‘properly basic’. If the belief that God exists is properly basic, then, of course, the evidentialist objection fails. For the objection assumes that this belief is one which should be accepted only on the basis of, and in proportion to the strength of, the relevant

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2) RBG p. 27.
3) Plantinga, “Is Belief in God Rational?” p. 27.
evidence. And, if properly basic, the belief that God exists is not of that kind, but is such that accepting it without evidence is epistemologically proper.

Plantinga traces evidentialism to the epistemological theory which he calls ‘classical foundationalism’. The general theory of foundationalism is that beliefs are justified in one of two ways: They are either based on other justified beliefs, or are justified without such dependence (or, to use Plantinga’s term of choice, properly basic). These properly basic beliefs are generally understood to derive their justification from the circumstances or experiences that give rise to them, rather than from any doxastic phenomenon. These beliefs provide foundation from which all other justified beliefs are justified. A belief is justified, then, only if it is properly basic or can trace its support to one or more properly basic beliefs.

Plantinga identifies two epistemological strains that unite in classical foundationalism. First, there is ancient and medieval foundationalism, epitomized in Aquinas, in which beliefs are properly basic just in case they are self-evident or evident to the senses. A self-evident belief is of a proposition that is ‘perceived immediately by the mind’, such as “2 + 2 = 4”, “all bachelors are unmarried males”, and “the whole is equal to the sum of its parts” - one known ‘through itself (per se nota)’. These propositions are like the simple truths of logic and arithmetic - those that present themselves to us as obviously true, so that their denial would force us immediately into some absurdity. Beliefs that are evident to the senses are reports of

4) RBG 47-63.
immediate experience - such as “there is a piece of paper before me”, “there is a tree before me”, and “the wall that I am looking at is yellow”. The second strain is *modern foundationalism*, which maintains that beliefs can be properly basic just in case they are *self-evident* or *incorrigible*. Incorrigible propositions are those about one’s states of consciousness in which one cannot mistakenly believe what is not true, such as “I seem to see a red ball” or “I think, therefore, I am”, or “I am in pain”. To sum up, the classical foundationalist’s principle may be defined as follows:

(1) A proposition $p$ is properly basic for a person $S$ if and only if $p$ is either self-evident to $S$ or incorrigible for $S$ or evident to the senses for $S$.

The argument from (1) to evidentialism is clear. Beliefs are justified without evidence (properly basic) only if they are self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses. Hence, no theistic belief is properly basic. So, to the question of what is wrong with theistic belief so that it is not properly basic, the foundationalist replies that it is non-self-evident, corrigible, non-perceptual belief, and no such belief is properly basic. It seems to be Plantinga’s contention that classical foundationalism is one of the strongest motivations for evidentialism. So Plantinga argues against classical foundationalism, and thus seeks to undercut the evidentialist objection to the Reformed epistemology.

Plantinga levels two charges against classical foundationalism. First, he notes that (1) would deny properly basic status to many beliefs that it seems quite natural to regard as properly basic. Plantinga has in mind perceptual beliefs, memory beliefs, and beliefs about other

6) RBG p. 59.
minds. For instance, my belief that I had lunch a few hours ago seems to be properly basic even though it is not self-evident, not evident to the senses, or not incorrigible. These follow neither deductively, inductively, nor on a probabilistic basis from the basic beliefs allowed by (1). This shows that (1) is false or at least unjustified, since surely many beliefs about other minds and the past are justified.

Second and more important, Plantinga argues that the classical foundationalism is self-referentially incoherent - it cannot account for its own justified acceptance. In order for \( S \) to be justified in accepting classical foundationalism, Plantinga notes, (1) must be either properly basic for \( S \) or derivable from that which is properly basic for \( S \). No classical foundationalist has ever argued for (1) from propositions that meet its own criteria for proper basicity. But it seems that (1) is neither self-evident, nor incorrigible, nor evident to the sense. If (1) is properly basic, it is false - since it claims that no propositions of that sort is properly basic. So, Plantinga concludes, either (1) is false, or it cannot be justifiably believed. The upshot of this criticism is both to show the inadequacy of the classical foundationalist’s criteria of proper basicity and to claim that there are no good reasons to suppose belief in God cannot itself be accepted as properly basic.

To say that belief in God does not have to conform to foundationalist criteria is not to say that it stands without need of justification. Plantinga is aware that an apparent difficulty arises here. If God’s existence can be rationally accepted even though it is supported by no argument or evidence, why couldn’t just about any belief be accepted in the same way? Why couldn’t astrology, say, or voodoo be accepted as properly basic beliefs? The elimination of foundationalism may have got rid

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7) Ibid., pp. 59–63.
8) Ibid., p. 74.
of unduly harsh restrictions on proper basicity, but now it looks like we might have the opposite problem. Hasn’t Plantinga thrown open the floodgates to superstition and irrationality?9) If we eliminate the foundationalist criteria for proper basicity but have no new standards to put in their place, what is to prevent anyone from claiming just about any sort of belief as properly basic?

Plantinga calls this the ‘Great Pumpkin’ objection because it charges that Reformed epistemology would license nearly any sort of belief as properly basic, even the belief that the Great Pumpkin returns every Halloween. Far from allowing any and every belief to count as properly basic, Plantinga replies, Calvinistic epistemology recognizes that beliefs can be properly basic in some circumstances but not in others.10) In other words, properly basic beliefs are those which arise out of appropriate corresponding circumstances. Improper basic beliefs lack the appropriating grounding experiences. So, to take the belief in the Great Pumpkin, we see that there is obviously no corresponding experience which serves as its grounds.

Why, Plantinga asks, would anyone think that such claims commit Reformed epistemologists to the view that anything goes? Perhaps underlying that charge is the recognition that Plantinga has eliminated the foundationalist criteria for proper basicity but has offered no better criteria to take their place. Plantinga replies that some judgments about proper basicity are possible even in the absence of precise, well-defined criteria. Consider an analogy: Surely “the slithy toves did gyre and gyemble in the wabe” can be judged meaningless even if we do not possess absolutely general criteria that would unambiguously settle every question about meaning.11) Likewise, Plantinga holds, certain beliefs

9) Ibid.
10) Ibid., pp. 76–78.
can be judged properly basic and others not even in the absence of criteria to judge justifiably that “1 + 1 = 2” is properly basic but that “The Great Pumpkin will return next Halloween” is not.

Here, it should be noted that, when Plantinga criticizes strong foundationalism, he is not rejecting foundationalism as such. He still accepts the foundationalist’s distinction between basic and derived beliefs, as well as the assumption that there must be properly basic beliefs from which all of our other beliefs have to be derived if they are to be rationally justified. What he rejects is merely the classical foundationalist’s overly restrictive criterion for what can qualify as properly basic beliefs. How, then, should one decide what beliefs can be properly basic? Or, how, then, should one approach the problem of the criteria for proper basicity? Here, Plantinga does not offer any criteria for proper basicity, but he does suggest that the manner of arriving at such will be broadly inductive.

The proper way to arrive at such a criterion is, broadly speaking, inductive. We must assemble examples of beliefs and conditions such that the former are obviously properly basic in the latter, and examples of beliefs and conditions such that the former are 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.\(^{12}\)

Plantinga, following Chisholm, pursues the option of ‘particularism’ rather than ‘methodism’.\(^{13}\) Stated simply, the particularist holds that

\(^{12}\) Ibid., p. 50.

\(^{13}\) For a detailed discussion of two options, see Roderick Chisholm, *The Problem of the Criterion* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press), 1973. Chisholm points out that there are two basic approaches: the methodists and the particularists. Methodists hold that prior to determining what proposition are reasonable to believe, what is needed
one develops a criterion, say for proper basicality, by comparing it to examples one already considers properly basic. The criteria are subsequent to our already having gathered examples of properly basic beliefs. One then tests the adequacy of the criteria by reference to those examples. Why, then, says Plantinga, cannot our criteria be developed so as to include belief in God?

More importantly, one should notice that although belief in God is basic, (it does not rest on other beliefs adduced as evidence for it), it is not ‘groundless’. For any belief \( q \ldots q_n \) there is a corresponding set of circumstances that spontaneously and non-inferentially gives rise to my belief and justifies me in my taking it as basic. For example, consider the belief, “I see a cat on the mat.” Typically I do not hold such a belief on the basis of other beliefs; it is basic for me. But this is agreement on a general method or set of principles suitable for determining just which beliefs are indeed reasonable. Unfortunately, according to Chisholm, one can always ask methodists how they know the principles they have adopted for determining the ‘reasonableness’ of claim are themselves ‘reasonable’. Their procedure appears to beg the very question that is being debated. Epistemologies developed among methodist lines tend also to suffer from the objection of being “self-referentially flawed.” That is, once the criteria for reasonable beliefs have been stated, when the criteria are judged by their own standards, they run out to be unreasonable. The particularist approach reverses the process. Particularists claim that we should begin by identifying certain beliefs that most persons would agree to be reasonable, and then, by way of induction, try to determine what common qualities or general principles all of these acceptable beliefs exhibit. The problem here is, as Kant pointed out, also one of circularity: If we really do not know what criteria must be met to make a belief rational, how can we know the beliefs people think are rational are indeed ‘rational’? The reference class of ‘all beliefs believed to be rational’ assumes that what is believed to be rational is indeed rational. But if the mere condition of ‘believing a belief to be rational’ made it rational, there would be no need for developing an epistemology in the first place.
belief is not groundless - it corresponds to an appropriate set of circumstances, namely, the experiences consisting of my being appeared to in an appropriate way; in this case ‘catly’ and ‘matly’. Plantinga says,

My being appeared to in this characteristic way (together with other circumstances) is what confers on me the right to hold the belief in question; this is what justifies me in accepting it. We could say, if we wish, that this experience is what justified me in holding it; this is the ground of my justification, and by extension, the ground of the belief itself. 14)

How, then, can theists be sure of having criteria that permit them to regard belief in God as properly basic? Simply by making belief in God one of their examples of obvious proper basicity. 15) In other words, since our criteria in large part will derive from what we initially take as obviously properly basic, those criteria will naturally permit the taking of such beliefs as properly basic.

What, then, are the circumstances in which Plantinga regards belief in God as obviously properly basic? He gives a number of such circumstances.

Upon reading the Bible, one may be impressed with a deep sense that God is speaking to him. Upon having done what I know cheap, or wrong, or wicked, I may feel guilty in God’s sight and form the belief God disapproves of what I have done. Upon confession and repentance I may feel forgiven, forming the belief God forgives me for what I have done. A person in grave danger may turn to God asking for his protection and help; and of course he or she then has the belief that God is indeed able to hear and help if He sees fit. When life is sweet and satisfying, a spontaneous sense of gratitude may well up within the soul; someone in this condition may thank and praise the Lord for his goodness, and will of course have the

14) RBG p. 79.
15) Ibid., p. 77.
accompanying belief that indeed the Lord is to be thanked and praised.\textsuperscript{16}

Plantinga claims that belief in God is properly grounded in other beliefs, such as “God is speaking to me” and “God forgives me”, which are properly basic. They are analogous to perceptual beliefs, memory beliefs, and beliefs about other minds. In proper circumstances (e.g., where there is no reason to believe that my noetic structure\textsuperscript{17} is defective), my having an experience of a certain sort confers on me the right to hold the belief in question.\textsuperscript{18} In like manner, having religious experiences is properly basic in the right circumstances. In this sense, strictly speaking, it is not belief in God that is properly basic for Plantinga, but rather beliefs such as the belief that God is speaking to me, that God forgives me, that God has created all this, and that God is to be thanked and praised.\textsuperscript{19} However, since beliefs of this sort self-evidently entail that God exists, Plantinga believes that there is no harm in speaking a bit loosely and talking as if the relatively abstract, high-level proposition “God exists” is itself properly basic.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 80.
\textsuperscript{17} For a discussion of Plantinga’s notion of noetic structure, see RBG pp. 48–50: “A person’s noetic structure is the set of propositions he believes together with certain epistemic relations that hold among him and these propositions.” Plantinga analyzes the noetic structure from the point of view of foundationalism in general. There are three ways of classifying the contents of our noetic structure: (1) in terms of basicality; (2) in terms of degree of belief; and (3) in terms of the depth of ingress of a belief.
\textsuperscript{18} RBG p. 79.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 81.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Ibid.}
According to Plantinga, there are many kinds of beliefs which can function as properly basic. As such they need not be based on the evidence of other propositions. These properly basic beliefs are grounded, and hence justified not by other propositions which serve as evidence but experience of a certain kind. Examples of the kinds of belief which can be properly basic are perceptual beliefs, memory beliefs, beliefs about other minds. The classical foundationalist’s criteria are defective because of self-referentially inconsistent or questioning-begging evidentialist presuppositions about what can count as a basic belief. But to say that classical foundationalism fails in its task, and theistic beliefs do not have to conform to foundationalist criteria is not to say that belief in God is properly basic. Plantinga’s strategy is based on the argument that some beliefs about God’s action and attributes can function as properly basic beliefs, and since these beliefs entails God’s existence, theism is thereby justified.

Let us return to the ‘Great Pumpkin’ objection. Plantinga’s reply was, first, that not all judgments about proper basicality need be grounded in criteria, and second, that Reformed epistemology allows for the inductive formulation of such criteria. These replies certainly show that

21) Plantinga makes a distinction between evidence and non-evidential ground. Evidence consists of beliefs on the basis of which other, non-basic beliefs are held, whereas grounds are not beliefs at all, but conditions or circumstances that occasion properly basic beliefs, and thereby justify them without being formulated as beliefs. To have evidence for a belief is to hold that belief on the basis of other beliefs which one consciously takes as supporting it. To have grounds for a belief, however, is to hold it in such way that there are conditions in which it arises and that justify it, even though the believer may typically be unaware at the moment of what those conditions are.
Plantinga himself is not required to accept, say, astrology or vooboo as properly basic. But is this the core of problem? Is the important question whether or not Reformed epistemology allows Plantinga to hold these things as properly basic? The crucial issue is whether Reformed epistemology provides any grounds for denying that others have the right to make such claims. One problem with Plantinga’s account is that the precise relationship between the grounds for our belief and the belief itself is not adequately specified.

Plantinga makes it clear that not just any belief can be properly basic but that a properly basic belief is not groundless although lacking discursive evidence. Thus, some beliefs are not properly basic because they lack grounding. Furthermore, Plantinga claims that arriving at the criterion for proper basicity leads to identifying belief in the Great Pumpkin as irrational. But why should the Great Pumpkinite accept this? Admittedly, belief in the Great Pumpkin is not something I take to be rational, but what if we come upon some tribe that believes it is? Suppose this tribe has read Plantinga, followed his inductive procedure, and takes Great Pumpkin belief as properly basic. Suppose they even specify their criterion for proper basicity and it does not lead to any incoherence. What is Plantinga to say?

Plantinga’s reply is that we do not have any natural inclination to believe in the Great Pumpkin, whereas we do have a natural inclination to believe in God. Nevertheless, Plantinga would admit the rationality of Great Pumpkin belief insofar as such belief actually resembles theistic belief.

How would it be possible, once the inductive procedure is completed, for Great Pumpkin belief to be rejected as irrational? First, if no one ever has Great Pumpkin experiences and simply chooses arbitrarily

22) RBG p. 78.
to believe in the Great Pumpkin, no such belief is rational. It is not grounded. Second, if one does have Great Pumpkin experiences to ground such belief and Plantinga still rejects the belief as irrational, he must mean that no Great Pumpkinite’s Great Pumpkin belief is irrational. At this point, he must have some independent reason for rejecting Great Pumpkin belief. He seems to think that if one inductively arrives at the criterion for proper basicity and the criterion rules out Great Pumpkin belief, then no one’s evidentially unsupported belief in the Great Pumpkin could be rational. But pace Plantinga, what if the Great Pumpkin takes his belief to be properly basic and thus arrives at a different criterion? Plantinga’s response is inconsistent with his inductive procedure and its potential results. To be consistent, he must allow for such a potentiality.

To sum up, Plantinga does not give any criteria to help us distinguish in advance of his inductive procedure unacceptable from acceptable candidates for proper basicity, but merely suggests that the manner of arriving at such will be broadly inductive. Plantinga’s point is that it is not his concern to make judgments about other people’s rationality. Perhaps his only concern is to show that the fact that someone accepts the existence of God as properly basic doesn’t mean that that person is thereby committed to accepting practically any belief as properly basic. Maybe we can speak for ourselves, but we cannot impose standards of proper basicity on others. Consequently, it leads Plantinga to claim that there is a certain relativity in the process of searching for criteria for proper basicity.

Since different people regard different beliefs as non-inferentially obvious, it is not to be expected that the inductive formulation of criteria will result in the same set of criteria for everybody. If two people start with fundamentally different views of proper basicity, then the
rules that they construct on those views will also be quite different. They may even be incompatible. However, since a person’s rules derive from her views, she can hardly expect her rules to apply to someone who starts with a fundamentally different set of examples. This seems to imply that a belief might be rationally accepted as basic by one person but equally rationally rejected by another. Again, it all depends on which set of beliefs is initially taken as obviously properly basic. This point has led to another objection that has been stated by Gary Gutting.

How can a believer just blithely claim that it’s utterly obvious that he’s entitled to believe without having any reasons for his belief? What of the fact that there are all sorts of honest and intelligent people who’ve thought a lot about religious belief and simply don’t see belief in God as properly basic? … As philosophers, we surely have to take as clear cases only those that would be admitted as such by just about any rational person. 23)

Gutting also argues that the theist may not include belief in God in his set of properly basic beliefs because there is widespread disagreement about the claim. 24) He contends that when there is widespread disagreement about a truth among one’s intellectual peers (people who are roughly equivalent in intelligence and education), then that claim needs to be justified by an argument. Given disagreement among intellectual peers about the existence of God, Gutting holds, the theist needs to justify the claim that there is a God; the theist cannot take belief in God as basic. For example, a mathematician ought to take account of her opponents’ views. She should see whether they have

any good arguments against her views and, if she concludes that they do not, she must see if there is any reason to trust her opponents’ judgment rather than her own on this point. But even if there is no reason to prefer their judgment to her own, she should be moved from her certainty by the fact of their difference. To cling tenaciously to her intuition rather than weakening her hold on the proposition is to be guilty of ‘epistemological egoism’\(^\text{25}\) which is just as ‘arbitrary and unjustifiable as ethical egoism is generally regarded to be.’\(^\text{26}\) That is, there is something like peer review of important propositions within any given field. While such review may not always cause us to give a belief that we cannot defend, it ought, at least, to cause us to loosen our grasp on the belief, to realize that we could be wrong, and to hold with a lesser degree of certainty than before.

Plantinga is well aware of this objection. His response is as follows:

> Criteria for proper basically … should be … argued to and tested by a relevant set of examples. But there is no reason to assume, in advance, that everyone will agree on the examples. The Christian will of course suppose that belief in God is entirely proper and rational; if he does not accept this belief on the basis of other propositions, he will conclude that it is basic for him and quite properly so. Followers of Bertrand Russell and Madalyn Murray O’Hair may disagree; but how is that 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.\(^\text{27}\)

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\(^\text{27}\) RBG p. 77.
Plantinga notes that there is no universal agreement on any substantive issue in epistemology. Why should we expect or demand that there be universal agreement on the base examples used to establish criteria for proper basicity? Or why should the theist be barred from placing examples of theistic beliefs in the base set simply because of lack of universal approval? Plantinga’s point here is that a theistic philosopher is fully justified in taking “God exists” to be a properly basic belief, even if others do not agree. That is, all a person needs to do to be rational in holding basic theistic belief in a properly basic way is to meet the criteria of only her own theistic community. At this point, he is in effect giving up something that has often been thought of as an important goal of the philosophical enterprise. Philosophers have often assumed that if they hit upon the right method of approaching philosophical problems, and applied that method carefully, then agreement on substantive conclusions would be bound to result. Plantinga is saying that it was unreasonable to expect this in the first place - that philosophers come to their task bringing with them deeply rooted prephilosophical commitments, and these commitments may sometimes make reaching substantive agreement on important philosophical questions impossible even if both sides in a dispute are equally well informed and fully rational.

Plantinga’s point here is that rationality theory is a community-relative project. If someone starts with a set of basic beliefs fundamentally different from ours, then our conception of rationality need not apply to that person. The question of whether Plantinga’s claims are correct in his account of community relative rationality is beyond the scope of this paper. It does not seem to be possible to settle such disagreements.

by argument. It seems to me that in deciding this question, a significant role is played by one’s willingness to give up the goal of a ‘universal method’ for reaching philosophical agreement sought by Plato as well as Descartes.

Nevertheless, another problem still remains. We must examine whether or not Plantinga’s strategy for equating the epistemic statues of beliefs about God with perceptual beliefs, memory beliefs, and beliefs about other minds is valid. He seems to assert that there is nothing in the phenomenology of certain types of religious experiences that precludes them from prompting properly basic theistic belief. Just as perceptual beliefs, memory beliefs, and beliefs about other minds are grounded properly in the types of circumstances under which they are normally produced, so theistic belief is justified when arising immediately from certain types of religious experiences, he holds, whether the alleged experience of God can be used to ground our beliefs depends upon how one characterizes religious experience.

First of all, some may object as follows: Cannot we be mistaken about our religious experiences just as we can be mistaken about our perceptual experiences? If so, how can they play a role in justifying religious beliefs? This objection would not be fatal to Plantinga’s claims. For, according to Plantinga, the fact that a belief is properly basic in no way guarantees the truth of that belief. Plantinga would say that we can be mistaken, but this is neither contrary to the presumptive weight of our perceptual experiences nor sufficient to deny that religious experience justifies religious belief. For example, a person may believe that she ate breakfast this morning, not because she has an argument for it, but just because she seems to recall having done so. Yet, she may have skipped it. Similarly, in the absence of special contrary considerations, religious experience should be taken by experiencers
providing good grounds for religious belief. This does not mean that experiencers could not be mistaken in their belief. But parallel to the case with ordinary perceptions, persons are justified in maintaining their religious beliefs until good reasons are given why they should not accept religious beliefs into the foundations of their noetic structure. The religious experience provides a prima facie justification for religious beliefs.\textsuperscript{29)

Even if Plantinga’s account of \textit{prima facie} justification is accepted, there remains an important problem created by dissimilarities between theistic beliefs and properly basic nontheistic beliefs. At least, it seems to me that there are important differences between ordinary perceptions or sense experiences and religious experiences.\textsuperscript{30}) Suppose that both theist and nontheist share an identical sense experience. Nearly everyone will form a nontheistic belief only if nearly everyone is nontheistic, whereas only the theist will be led to form a theistic belief. Although both theist and nontheist experience awe at the beauty of universe, only the theist will form a belief about God’s creativity. Or take another example: both theist and nontheist stare into a glorious star-filled sky. But in the theist this experience immediately prompts the belief that God made the star, whereas the nontheist will form only the belief “I see stars.” Whose response is the correct one? Or are they both correct? What I am saying is that this universality of belief formation indicates the firmly grounded nature of the perceptual, and since the experience that generates the theistic belief does not provide universality, it does not provide sufficient grounds for proper basicity. Thus, Plantinga

\textsuperscript{29) RBG p. 84f.}
needs to explain why we do not all generate the same belief, given the same experience.

Furthermore, how can Plantinga explain differences of religious experiences, and the interpretations of those experiences, in different religious traditions? Clearly, there is quite a diversity of reports about religious experiences and the claims based on them. Religious experiences are conditioned by distinctive cultural and religious perspective, so that what people in various religions perceive widely differs. The Ultimate Reality that a Hindu experiences is very different from the God a Christian experiences.

It is my contention that there are significant differences between theistic beliefs and properly basic nontheistic beliefs and so I question the legitimacy of asserting the proper basicality of theistic beliefs. Thus, Plantinga’s central claim that theistic beliefs have the same epistemic status as other more commonly accepted nontheistic beliefs would be flawed. I have also argued that Plantinga’s account of criteria for proper basicality is not consistent. His point seems to be simply that there is no worry about fictions like Great Pumpkin which are not serious candidates for proper basicality. However, he does not show what is wrong with such a belief. Thus, I believe that without strong criteria for proper basicality, his response to the Great Pumpkin objection is not successful.
REFERENCES


국문요약

플란딩가의 개혁주의 인식론 비판

이 제 경

이 글은 유신론적 믿음이 명제적 증거나 논변에 의해 지지를 받지 않고서도 합리적일 수 있는가라는 물음을 다룬다. 개혁주의적 인식론을 주장하는 플란딩가는 신의 존재를 옹호하는 타당한 논변들이 없더라도 신을 믿는 것이 정확히 기초적이라고 주장한다. 그의 전략은 고전적 정초론을 비판하면서 일상적인 지각에 의한 믿음, 기억에 의한 믿음, 다른 사람의 생각과 느낌에 대한 믿음처럼 군이 유신론적일 필요 없는 믿음을 분석하는 것이다. 이런 분석을 토대로 플란딩가는 이런 믿음들과 유신론적 믿음이 크게 다르지 않다는 입장을 취한다.

필자는 유신론적 믿음이 비 고전적 정초론의 맥락에서 볼 때 정확히 기초적이라는 플란딩가의 주장을 검토하기 위해 먼저 개혁주의 인식론의 기본이론을 설명하겠다. 다음으로 정확히 기초적인 믿음과 정확히 기초적이지 않은 믿음 사이의 경계를 정하는 그의 기준이 일관적이지 않음을 입증할 것이다. 종교적 경험이 지각의 유형이라는 주장의 문제점을 지적할 것이다. 따라서 유신론적 믿음이 공통적인 용인되는 유신론적이지 않은 믿음과 동일한 인식론적 지위를 지닌다는 플란딩가의 주장은 옳지 않다는 점이 드러날 것이다. 결론적으로 정확히 기초적인 믿음에 대한 플란딩가의 설명이 일관적이지 않다는 것이 필자의 해석이다.

주제어: 플란딩가, 종교적 믿음, 종교적 경험