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Book Review: Faith In Theory And Practice: Essays On Justifying Religious Belief

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and purposes. But perhaps in our full autonomy, we will develop and grow even more in the afterlife than we could ever possibly do in the mundane.

Our Knowledge of God is a collection of good essays, but it is not a good collection of essays. One would enjoy a collection with more thematic unity and a few less typographical errors. Nevertheless, the essays are, by and large, well worth the read.

NOTES

1. See my *Rationality and Theistic Belief*.

Faith in Theory and Practice: Essays on Justifying Religious Belief. **Elizabeth S. Radcliffe and Carol J. White, editors.** Chicago and LaSalle, IL: Open Court Publishing Co., 1993. Pp. xix and 235. \$34.95 (cloth; \$16.95 (paper).

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This collection derives from a 1991 conference held at Santa Clara University on the topic of the epistemology of religious belief. The editors provide a helpful introduction with a brief description of each essay and an explication of the principle of unity they find running throughout the book: "Faith can be seen as not just a set of beliefs but a special way of living." This book would make an interesting text in an upper-level undergraduate or graduate course in the philosophy of religion. It touches on many of the issues which are at the cutting edge of discussion on the justification of religious belief, and moves that discussion forward in fresh and fascinating ways.

The lead essays by William Alston and Alvin Plantinga are especially intriguing, and the collection is worth having for these alone. In "The Fulfillment of Promises as Evidence for Religious Belief," Alston argues that, within a kind of cumulative-case apologetics for Christianity, "the fulfillment of (alleged) divine promises of spiritual development by a large number of persons provides us with a significant reason for accepting the Christian belief system that involves the claim that such promises have been made" (p. 7). According to Christian teaching, God promises to reward those who are open, receptive, and obedient to him with growth in holiness, or what Alston sometimes calls "spirituality" or "sanctity." Alston concludes that the phenomenon of fulfilled promises is widespread enough that "it raises the probability of the system [of Christianity] sufficiently to be worthy of notice" (p. 12). Alston's case is perhaps strongest when the focus is on lives of the saints, since the spiritual qualities of the saints are difficult to explain in purely natural psychological terms. Many converts have reported that it was the character of the Christians in their acquaintance that was most decisive in their coming to faith, and one can see Alston's essay as making this move epistemically respectable.

Alvin Plantinga goes on the offensive against atheism with "An Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism," arguing that anyone who accepts both metaphysical naturalism and contemporary evolutionary theory has a view which is self-defeating—if true, it cannot rationally be believed or accepted. The reason for this is that although "Most of us think . . . that at least *one* function or purpose of our cognitive faculties is to provide us with true beliefs" (p. 35), someone who accepts naturalistic evolution has no reason to think that our cognitive faculties serve this purpose. Mechanisms produced by the evolutionary process seem intended to make our behavior adaptive to our circumstances, or to the circumstances that obtained when they evolved. But since false beliefs could very well turn out to produce adaptive behavior, and since our behavior is a product not simply of our beliefs but of our beliefs in combination with desires, instincts, passions, etc., naturalistic evolution gives us no reason to think that our cognitive faculties are aimed at producing true beliefs. The essay concludes with a set of responses to recent objections.

The remaining essays in this volume shed light on current discussions on the nature of faith and on the various kinds of evidence for it. Richard Creel argues that faith can be understood as a type of knowledge as long as this is an "imperfect knowledge," in which one knows a proposition to be true without knowing that one knows it. According to Creel, a person who believes in God has imperfect knowledge of God's existence if her belief was causally produced by God, who is surely a reliable belief-producing "mechanism." Such a person knows without knowing that she knows, according to Creel, since her belief is non-evidentially grounded. Creel distinguishes two possible subjective attitudes toward belief in God—trusting faith and untrusting faith. He suggests that someone who simply "finds herself" with a belief in God (presumably because God has produced this belief in her) should move toward a trusting acceptance of the contents and author of this belief. However, if she has no reason to think the belief was produced in her by God, and no reason to think it was produced in her by the evidence, then it would seem that a healthy skepticism might be a more reasonable response.

In "The Certainty of Faith" Lad Sessions characterizes faith in God as a personal relationship, involving among other things belief in various propositions which God has proposed to one. As in Creel's essay, the act of faith is presented as a largely passive or involuntary affair. God is the agent-cause of the believer's faith, "proposing articles of faith for belief, *producing belief in such articles*, awakening natural capacities to believe, bestowing new or even 'supernatural' capacities, and so forth." (p. 77) If this is indeed the right analysis of faith in revealed truths, it could well lead to a high level of epistemic certainty for faith and to a blurring of the traditional distinction between preambles of faith (accessible to human reason operating by its natural lights) and mysteries of faith (which are not accessible to natural reason). It is interesting that the idea of basic belief in God, sometimes proposed as an alternative to natural theology, should combine with the causal theo-

ry of knowledge to produce a view of faith with a strong rationalist flavor. It may turn out on this model that not only the existence of God but also every article of the faith is actually *known* and known with certainty by most believers, as long as these items are true and God has seen to it that they believe them. It's not clear that Sessions adequately responds to John Hick's objection that faith by its nature must be free, so it is undesirable for the articles of faith to admit of epistemic certainty.

Joshua Golding writes to endorse the rationality of adopting Pascal's recommendation to take up religious practices in hopes of acquiring a relationship to God. It is reasonable to think that one will increase one's chances of coming to faith in God, and to belief in various claims about God, by taking up religious practices and becoming a "God-oriented religious person." This will involve developing some conception of God and looking into which religious practices might increase one's chances of entering into a relationship with him, which may in turn require empirical studies of existing religions and their practices. One might see Golding's essay as making a case for the oft-used apologetic suggestion that the agnostic individual should pray and see what happens. Pascal's advice was meant for the person who thinks it is more rational to believe in God than not to believe, but whose passions and appetites prevent him, but the general strategy may well have wider application.

Two of the essays in this volume consider the epistemic value of testimonial evidence. Francis Beckwith responds to Hume's attack on testimony as a justification for belief in miracles, contending that even if miraculous events are statistically improbable, this does not make them epistemically improbable with respect to a given person's evidence for them. Jesse Hobbs' article on anecdotal evidence nicely supplements Beckwith's discussion, arguing that although anecdotal evidence is much-maligned, it can be the only evidence available for certain beliefs, and at times it is superior to other forms of evidence.

In a careful discussion of Plantinga's epistemology, James Sennett argues that the problem of evil does, *pace* Plantinga, undermine the proper basicity of belief in God for most Western theists. This is because it is evidence against the existence of God and therefore against any proposition entailing the existence of God. But any proposed theistic basic belief will have this entailment. Therefore, says Sennett, theists cannot use any such beliefs as defeaters of the argument from evil, and so must turn to evidential support for these beliefs. The analogy Sennett suggests is with a person who has reason to think his memory is unreliable, and so cannot rely on memory-experiences as grounding his beliefs or as defeating evidence contrary to those beliefs. But it's not clear that this analogy holds, since the theist who comes to believe in God by way of certain religious experiences, for example, even if she later encounters the problem of evil, still has no reason to think that these experiences were invalid or that something has gone haywire in her belief-forming faculties.

Alston's reliabilist epistemological theory comes in for criticism in the essay by Michael Brown. Brown examines a principle of Alston's that

gives *prima facie* plausibility to established social practices. In cases of massive and persistent conflict between two such practices, Alston proposes that we give preference to the one that is more firmly established. Brown argues that in the case of religious belief systems, we can fall into a relativistic bog in attempting to determine which is more established—e.g., which is more compatible with the contemporary scientific enterprise. Unfortunately, this leads Brown to focus on the plausibility of the miracle stories in Christianity compared with those in an imagined rival religion. It may be that there is not much to choose from if we take such claims in isolation and ask which is the more “bizarre.” But that project distracts us from Alston’s larger insight that we might judge which practices are established by looking at historical and other evidence, including their fit with other things we already believe, the cultural institutions and practices they have given rise to, and so on.

Religious Experience and Religious Belief. **George Wall.** Lanham, New York, and London: University Press of America, 1995. Pp. vii and 340. \$51.50 cloth, \$39.50 paper.

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There are, some say, two kinds of people in the world: those who like noise and those who do not, or those who chew gum and those who do not. In the same vein, we might observe, there are two kinds of religious philosophers: those who ground their philosophical reflections in religious sensibility (some strain of religious sensibility) and proceed to philosophical issues concerning religion, and those who ground their philosophical reflections in philosophical theory and proceed to philosophical issues concerning religion. My dichotomous comment is on *religious* philosophers, *religious* philosophers of religion, not on all philosophers of religion. That is, my comment is on philosophers of religion who have religious sensibilities and, being religious, have some sympathy for religion. Though they all have religious sensibilities, not all start with those sensibilities in their philosophical reflections. Some do, but some start with philosophical theory.

George Wall starts with theory. Early on (p. 12) he states his acceptance of the innocent-until-proven-guilty or reliable-until-defeated epistemology of William Alston, Alvin Plantinga, and Richard Swinburne. But at the same time Wall, via an appreciation of the approach of William James, draws deeply upon religious phenomena. In this respect he is unlike most analytic philosophers. Like James’s *Varieties*, Wall’s book contains a collection of actual reported cases of religious experience. Most of Wall’s cases, he tells us, were obtained from the Alister Hardy Research Centre in Oxford, England, but many he has gathered himself through personal interviews. Although Wall is not presenting the cases he considers for their own sake, but rather to argue for his pri-