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COGNITIVE FACULTIES, COGNITIVE PROCESSES, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT IN PLANTINGA'S WARRANT SERIES.

Andrew Dole

In *Warranted Christian Belief*, Alvin Plantinga argues that much of what Christians believe may well amount to knowledge. His argument for this claim is based on the criterion for warrant developed in *Warrant: the Current Debate* and *Warrant and Proper Function*. However, while in the first two volumes of the series this criterion was applied exclusively to human cognitive faculties, the argument of the third volume depends on the principle that the criterion can be applied to cognitive *processes* in general. I argue, by means of counterexamples, that cognitive processes will not necessarily produce warranted beliefs even if they satisfy the criterion for warrant as this applies to cognitive faculties. After a discussion of one proposal to address this problem, I offer a solution which avoids the claim that beliefs produced by the Internal Instigation of the Holy Spirit are warranted because they satisfy Plantinga's criterion for warrant, but reaches behind the criterion to find the warrant for such beliefs to be a direct result of their origin in God.

I

In the first two volumes of his *Warrant* series, Alvin Plantinga developed a general criterion for warrant, the property which makes a case of true belief into a case of knowledge. In the third book of the series, he argues that much of what Christians believe may well be warranted according to the same criterion. However, between the second and third volumes of the series, a major alteration takes place in the use of the criterion. Whereas the criterion was formulated, in the first two volumes, with reference to beliefs produced by internal human cognitive *faculties*, Plantinga now takes it to apply to beliefs produced by cognitive *processes* in general. The proposal of the third volume of the series hinges upon this broadening of the range of application of the criterion, for the beliefs which Plantinga argues may well be items of knowledge for Christians are produced, not by human cognitive *faculties*, but by a cognitive *process* instigated by the Holy Spirit.

I will argue that it cannot simply be assumed that a criterion which determines whether beliefs produced by cognitive *faculties* are warranted can perform the same function with respect to cognitive *processes*. Cognitive faculties are a subset of the set of cognitive processes, a subset whose members we are to a certain extent familiar and comfortable with. But the larger set of imaginable cognitive *processes* contains members which bear little if any resemblance to our own cognitive faculties. A belief

produced by a non-faculty cognitive *process* which meets the criterion for warrant may well suffer from defects sufficient to suggest that the belief should not be considered warranted.

II

To begin the argument, let's briefly recall Plantinga's criterion for warrant as it is found at the beginning of *Warrant and Proper Function*.

..as I see it, a belief has warrant for me only if (1) it has been produced in me by cognitive faculties that are working properly (functioning as they ought to, subject to no cognitive dysfunction) in a cognitive environment that is appropriate for my kinds of cognitive faculties, (2) the segment of the design plan governing the production of that belief is aimed at the production of true beliefs, and (3) there is a high statistical probability that a belief produced under those conditions will be true.¹

This criterion is offered in a shortened form in *Warranted Christian Belief*:

Put in a nutshell, then, a belief has warrant for a person *S* only if that belief is produced in *S* by cognitive faculties functioning properly (subject to no dysfunction) in a cognitive environment that is appropriate for *S*'s kind of cognitive faculties, according to a design plan that is successfully aimed at truth.²

How does Plantinga understand the shift in the criterion's application? The first explicit mention of this shift occurs in an exchange with Keith Lehrer which took place during the interval before the publication of *WCB*. Lehrer argues that "on Plantinga's account [as found in *WPF*] it is beyond the power of anyone, even God, to bypass our usual cognitive faculties and give us knowledge". Plantinga responds, "can't I take this to be a special limiting case of cognitive faculties or belief-producing processes functioning properly? God instills a true belief in you, intending in doing so to instill in you a true belief. Why can't I think of his doing that as itself a belief-producing process, especially since that is precisely what it is? True, this belief isn't exactly produced by a cognitive faculty, or at least by one of my cognitive faculties; but it is produced by a properly functioning cognitive process, and I think that's sufficient."³

This gives us some understanding of what Plantinga means by a 'cognitive process': roughly, any process which results in the existence of a belief in an individual. While a formal definition or detailed description of cognitive processes is not offered in *WCB*, Plantinga classifies the particular activity of the Holy Spirit producing beliefs in individuals as a cognitive process under the following rubric: it is "a cognitive device, a means by which belief, and belief on a certain specific set of topics, is regularly produced in regular ways"; commenting in a footnote, "Although this regularity is typical of cognitive processes, it isn't really necessary".⁴ So the class of cognitive processes turns out to be quite broad; in fact, about the only

feature which a thing must have to qualify as a cognitive process is the feature that it produces a belief.⁵

Now the notion that the criterion for warrant could have 'extensions' is not introduced for the first time in *WCB*. At the close of *Warrant: The Current Debate*, Plantinga discusses the possibility of such extensions:

What I propose to explain and explore is our notion of warrant, a notion nearly all of us have and employ in our everyday pursuits. The notion is not best explained, I think, just by producing a set of severally necessary and jointly sufficient conditions.... What we really have are *paradigms*: central, clear, and unequivocal cases of knowledge and warrant. But there is also a sort of preumbra zone of possible cases surrounding the central cases; these cases don't conform exactly to the conditions characterizing the central cases, but are instead related by way of analogical extension and similarity....

Accordingly, a good way to characterize our notion of warrant (more precisely: our system of analogically related concepts of warrant) is to specify the conditions governing the central paradigmatic core (here necessary and sufficient conditions are appropriate) together with some of the analogical extensions and an explanation of the analogical basis for the extension.⁶

On this model, what is offered in *Warrant and Proper Function* is not a criterion for warrant as such: rather, it is a criterion for the central core of 'our notion of warrant'. The shift from cognitive faculties to cognitive processes, I suggest, is best seen as an 'analogical extension' of the core criterion for warrant. The basis for the extension, then, is the analogy (similarity) between cognitive *faculties* and cognitive *processes*; and Plantinga appears to hold that these two are similar enough that the core criterion for warrant can be applied without alteration to cognitive processes in general.

The non-faculty cognitive process which is at the heart of *Warranted Christian Belief* is the "internal instigation (or testimony) of the Holy Spirit", which I'll refer to in this essay as the IIHS. This process, which (by hypothesis) produces belief in the truths of Christianity, is described as the middle tier of a larger, three-tiered cognitive process. The first tier is Scripture, which contains the truths which God has revealed to humankind. The final tier is faith, or (in Calvin's words) "a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence towards us... both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit". The middle tier involves the activity of the Holy Spirit causing, on the occasion of a person's encountering one of the truths of Christianity in Scripture, the belief that the proposition in question is true (as well as a correlated affective response).⁷

In light of this description of the IIHS, I think a brief word is in order about how the core criterion is to be understood. As stated, the criterion requires that the cognitive environment be appropriate for *my* kind of cognitive faculties, even though the criterion, as stated, doesn't restrict the cognitive faculties in question to *my* cognitive faculties.⁸ In practice, however, the relevant cognitive environment for the determination of warrant is determined with reference to the particular cognitive faculty being exer-

cised.⁹ So it seems to me that the criterion should be understood as requiring a link between the (types of) cognitive faculties under consideration and the cognitive environments whose suitability is required. The core criterion deals with *my* cognitive faculties and requires that the cognitive environment be suitable for *my* kinds of cognitive faculties; the 'analogical extension' will consist of shift from a concern with *my* cognitive faculties and the environments relevant to *their* exercise to a concern with cognitive processes and the environments relevant to their exercise.

If it is correct to see the comparison between our cognitive faculties (memory, introspection, sense perception, and so on) and the IHS as based on an analogy between cognitive *faculties* and non-faculty cognitive *processes*, then the claim which is at issue is an 'Analogical Extension to Processes':

- (AEP) Cognitive processes which are not cognitive faculties will be warrant-conferring just in case they satisfy the conditions for warrant as these apply to cognitive faculties.

Now (AEP) is a broad claim indeed, and one might wonder if Plantinga does indeed hold such a position. On examination, the project of *WCB* seems to turn on this principle, or some principle like it.¹⁰ But its breadth is grounds for concern. One suspects that there will be cases in which (AEP) will pronounce as warranted beliefs which there are good reasons to think ought not be pronounced warranted. This is precisely what I will argue.

III

The strategy I'll be pursuing is to offer examples of non-faculty cognitive processes which satisfy principle (AEP) but are exotic enough that we should have doubts about whether they could produce *knowledge*. The examples will grow increasingly baroque as the essay progresses, and in fact more exotic examples than the ones I'll present are conceivable. A few examples should be enough to make the point.

Here There Be Elephants. The first example makes use of a cognitive process described by Plantinga himself.

Suddenly and without your knowledge you are transported to an environment wholly different from earth; you awake on a planet revolving around Alpha Centauri. There conditions are quite different; elephants, we may suppose, are invisible to human beings, but emit a sort of radiation.... Imagine that the radiation emitted causes human beings to form the belief... that there is a large grey object in the neighborhood. Again, an elephant wanders by; while seeing nothing of any particular interest, you suddenly find yourself with the belief that there is a large grey object nearby. A bit perplexed at this discovery, you examine your surroundings more closely: you still see no large grey object. Your faculties are displaying no malfunction... you are not being epistemically careless or slovenly; never-

theless you don't know that there is a large grey object nearby. The belief has little by way of warrant for you....

And the reason is not far to seek: it is that your cognitive faculties and the environment in which you find yourself are not properly attuned.¹¹

Plantinga describes this case, at the outset of his second volume, as an example of the production of unwarranted beliefs. However, once the criterion for warrant is expanded to include belief forming *processes*, the beliefs produced in this example will be warranted, provided that one small addition is made to the description.

Suppose that the radiation emitted by Alpha Centauri elephants produces the belief that a large grey object is in the neighborhood within all animals in close proximity to elephants, and does so reliably (most of the time). More specifically, suppose this process had been *designed* to produce such beliefs¹²— for the purpose of scaring away competitors for food, predators, or animals susceptible of being damaged if stepped on. In this case we could clearly say that, were a human to be haplessly transported to this planet, his belief that there is a large grey animal in the neighborhood would be warranted according to (AEP), and if held strongly enough, would constitute knowledge. It would be (1) produced by a properly functioning cognitive process (the process produces such beliefs when functioning properly), within an appropriate cognitive environment (the process is designed to function upon animals on Alpha Centauri); (2) the segment of the design plan governing the process is directly aimed at the production of true beliefs; and (3) the design plan is a good one, since we are supposing that the radiation succeeds most of the time in producing the requisite belief.

Note that the reason Plantinga gives for denying that such beliefs have warrant—that “your cognitive faculties and the environment in which you find yourself are not properly attuned”— would be, in effect, overruled by the broadening specified by (AEP). If cognitive processes in general can be warrant-conferring, there is no need whatsoever for *my* cognitive faculties to be properly attuned to the cognitive environment (local or global) for me to have warranted beliefs.¹³

Brain-in-a-Vat 1. Suppose you are a brain in a vat, with your nerve-endings hooked up to electric wires in the traditional manner. Suppose further that the scientists who are responsible for your well-being have devised the following procedure. A technician sits at a console beside the vat in which you reside, watching a small screen on which symbols flash periodically. Whenever the symbol ‘ π ’ appears on the screen, the technician presses a button marked ‘ π ’ on the control panel. This button activates a complicated algorithm whose termination is the production of a belief in your noetic structure that the symbol ‘ π ’ is appearing on a screen somewhere.

This belief, too, would be warranted under the analogical extension of the core criterion to cognitive processes generally, and if held strongly enough would constitute knowledge. As in the Alpha Centauri case, it would be (1) produced by a properly functioning cognitive process (the

process produces such beliefs when functioning properly), within an appropriate cognitive environment (the process is designed to function in brain-in-a-vat cases); (2) the segment of the design plan governing the process would be directly aimed at the production of true beliefs; and (3) the design plan would be a good one, since the process generally succeeds in producing the desired belief in you.

Brain-in-a-Vat 2. Suppose that the technician is still responding to the symbol ' π ' on the screen, but the button on the console is not marked ' π ' but 'Feike', and suppose that pressing the button produces a belief in you that 'Feike is a Frisian'. Furthermore, suppose Feike is in fact a Frisian—he is chief scientist on the project, designer of the whole experiment, and everyone involved knows (is warranted in believing and believes firmly) that he is a Frisian.

Once again, the belief in question would be (1) produced by a properly functioning cognitive process, within an appropriate cognitive environment; (2) the segment of the design plan governing the process would be directly aimed at the production of true beliefs; and (3) the design plan would be a good one, since it would in fact produce true beliefs. So in this case as well, your belief would be warranted under (AEP).

Brain-in-a-Vat 3. Suppose there is not just one belief-producing button on the console but many, each with its own label, and each one producing a true belief in you—one produces the belief 'Feike is a Frisian', another produces the belief 'Kant rarely left Königsberg', still another ' $\sim(P \& \sim P)$ ', and so on. Suppose that whenever the symbol ' π ' appears on the computer screen, the technician presses one of these buttons at random, thereby producing in you a true belief.

These beliefs will not be 'accidentally' true; each proposition will have been carefully examined and approved by a crack team of philosophers, geographers, logicians and so on. These beliefs would, according to (AEP), be warranted—they would be (1) produced by a properly functioning cognitive process, within an appropriate cognitive environment, according to (2) a segment of a design plan directly aimed at the production of true beliefs; and (3) the design plan would be a good one (there would be a high statistical probability that the beliefs so produced would be true).

Brain-in-a-Vat 4. Suppose the many true-belief-producing buttons on the console are arranged in linear fashion, much like a piano keyboard, each again with its own label, and (we may suppose) each producing a tone of a certain pitch (designed to indicate to Feike, whose bench is in the next room, what you believe at any given moment). Further, suppose that the night-shift technician invites some of his friends to come around one night and see what he does for a living, and that once they arrive he sits down at the console, rolls up his sleeves, and announces that he is about to produce some true beliefs in you (who are all this time helplessly floating in the vat). Thereupon he begins to play selections from *Rigoletto* upon the true-belief-producing buttons, whilst singing at the top of his lungs. Finally, suppose our technician has only fair to middling talents as a

pianist, often missing the specific keys he intends to press.

In this case as well, each of the beliefs produced in you will be (1) produced by a properly functioning cognitive process within an appropriate cognitive environment; (2) governed by a design-plan segment directly aimed at truth (the technician's declared intent is, after all, to produce true beliefs in you); and (3) the design plan would be a good one, evinced by the fact that all the beliefs produced would be non-accidentally true. So in this case as well, application of (AEP) would result in the conclusion that these beliefs would be warranted, and if held firmly enough would constitute knowledge.

IV

Now all of these examples involve cases where (AEP) is satisfied; and yet I take it that few would think that the beliefs produced in all of the examples ought to be thought of as warranted. The examples trade on the fact that there are very many imaginable cognitive processes which are so different from human cognitive faculties that it is difficult to imagine any situation in which we would be willing to grant that these processes could produce what we think of as *knowledge*, even if the requirements of the core criterion for warrant were met. Certainly, more exotic examples than those I've presented above are imaginable; so certainly, (AEP) needs to be qualified in some way.

Now it seems to me that the move from cognitive faculties to cognitive processes shouldn't be rejected outright; that is, I think it's likely that there are imaginable non-faculty cognitive processes whose deliverances, in cases where the core criterion for warrant is met, might plausibly be thought of as cases of knowledge, and in the end the IIHS might well turn out to be one of these. But the claim that the IIHS *does* fall within this class is somewhat hollow if we cannot say what distinguishes non-faculty cognitive processes which might well produce warranted beliefs (when the core criterion for warrant is satisfied) from those which look as though their deliverances should not be considered candidates for knowledge.

So it seems to me that the counterexamples expose a gap in Plantinga's argument. If this is conceded, there are two ways to respond to the problem. The first involves deploying further argumentative resources to close this gap, arguing that a restricted version of (AEP) can be derived which the IIHS satisfies. The second involves looking for an alternative to reliance on (AEP) or any similar principle to secure the claim that beliefs produced by the IIHS can be warranted. I'll spend some time outlining what I think the first response would involve before recommending the second as the more profitable of the two.

One could attempt to derive a restricted form of (AEP) along the following lines. It's reasonable to think that cognitive processes which are *similar* to human cognitive processes will be more likely to produce knowledge when they satisfy the core criterion for warrant than those which are not. Probably not all of the features of cognitive faculties are relevant to the determination of warrant; it may well make no difference whether a faculty is part of our 'original equipment' or is acquired with experience or

implanted by God, for example—so we will want to say that a non-faculty cognitive process must be *relevantly similar* to human cognitive faculties if its deliverances are to be acknowledged as possibly warranted. That is, it is likely that there are *certain features* of cognitive faculties which account for the fact that their deliverances, where the core criterion is satisfied, are warranted; and the lack of some or all of these features is what accounts for the fact that very exotic cognitive processes are not likely to produce warranted beliefs even when they satisfy the core criterion.

So what is needed is a grasp of *which* features of our human cognitive faculties are essential for the purpose of producing warranted beliefs. Assuming we could somehow derive a list of such features, a broader criterion for warrant could then be constructed: for a non-faculty cognitive process to produce warranted beliefs, it would have to exhibit the relevant features as well as satisfy the core criterion. With such a broader criterion in hand, all that would remain would be the argument that the IIHS exhibits the necessary features.

It's not clear to me that such an argument could be mounted; certainly, it would involve quite a bit of work with no guarantee of success. To individuate our cognitive faculties and identify the features of each one is no small task; Plantinga himself admits that an adequate treatment of any one faculty would require substantial careful work.¹⁴ Further, as Plantinga himself notes, there is no agreement on the extent of 'our cognitive establishment'.¹⁵ While there is agreement among some parties to isolate certain of the more important faculties for the purpose of philosophical treatment, very different accounts have been offered of the makeup of these faculties. So it would not be easy to produce a list of our cognitive faculties and their various features which would not itself be subject to dispute, and thus of limited usefulness for the purpose of defending the claim that Christian belief can be warranted. Furthermore, it is not at all clear what procedure one would follow to distinguish features which are essential to the conferral of warrant upon a faculty's productions, and which inessential. Now certainly if the project appears interesting, then hands will be found to do the necessary work; this way of attempting to close the gap might very well succeed in the end. But such a project could barely even be started in the present essay.

V

But is such a response, after all, so much as needed? Just where does the objection that not all cognitive processes which satisfy the core criterion will produce warranted beliefs leave the project of *Warranted Christian Belief*? Is the 'gap' which I've attempted to point out really a threat to Plantinga's aims?

Let's recall the fact that the argument which Plantinga is most concerned to offer in the third volume is, in the end, an unresolved conditional, essentially:

- (A) If Christianity is true, and if God has instituted something like the IIHS as a way of informing believers about the great

truths of the Gospel, then a good bit of what Christians believe may well be warranted.

The intent of this conditional is to show that any *de jure* objections against Christian beliefs collapse into the *de facto* objection: that is, if the conditional is true, then the only way to demonstrate that Christian belief suffers, in every case, from certain defects *other than* falsity (irrationality, lack of warrant, and so on) is to demonstrate that Christian belief is *false*.¹⁶ Now the argument presented here doesn't show that the conditional is false; but it does add a further specification to the conditional which must be satisfied if the *de facto* and *de jure* arguments are to be successfully collapsed. If the defense of the IIHS suggested above were to be undertaken, it might be discovered in the end that the IIHS does possess the relevant features of cognitive faculties which are necessary to insure that its productions can be warranted; so it might well turn out that, if the antecedents of Plantinga's conditional is true, then the consequent is true also. But as stated, (A) lacks one necessary condition. The argument I've presented should be seen as revising (A) to read:

- (B) If Christianity is true, and if God has instituted something like the IIHS as a way of informing believers about the great truths of the Gospel, *and if something like the IIHS is relevantly similar*¹⁷ to human cognitive faculties for the purposes of determining warrant, then a good bit of what Christians believe may well be warranted.

Now this is hardly a crushing blow to Plantinga's project; but it should be noted that the new condition in (B) differs from the original one in two important respects. Both the claim that Christianity is true and that God instills faith in some individuals are consonant with the Reformed Christian tradition. But the claim that the sort of divine activity specified by the IIHS is similar to human cognitive faculties in important but unspecified respects is not a claim which has the backing of any significant part of the Christian or philosophical traditions. Further, while the truth of the first condition (the truth of Christianity) not only makes the truth of the second condition possible but in fact makes it rather likely, it does not seem to me that the truth of Christianity or the existence of something like the IIHS would make it more likely that the IIHS would have the requisite set of features in common with our cognitive faculties than if the IIHS 'existed only in the understanding'. If the gap in the argument is to be closed, it looks as though more in the way of argument will be needed than the supposition of the truth of Christianity, or even the truth of Plantinga's "extended Aquinas-Calvin model" of faith.¹⁸

Now a rejoinder is possible here. One might think that the gap which I claim to have pointed out— between the claim that cognitive faculties which satisfy the core criterion for warrant will produce warranted beliefs, and the claim that a cognitive process carried out by God upon an individual will do the same— doesn't amount to much at all, when viewed in light of the supposition that the cognitive agent in question is, after all,

God. Can't what we know about God—omnipotence, omniscience, and so on—assuage any worries that we might have about the epistemic status of beliefs produced directly by God in an individual? Do we really need the argument that such beliefs would be warranted to be airtight to believe, reasonably, that they would be warranted? If Plantinga's argument gets us close to seeing how such beliefs can constitute knowledge, can't we just say that something like the IIHS will just not suffer from any of the defects which we can imagine characterizing very exotic cognitive processes, because God possesses all perfections and no defects?

I think that this is broadly correct; it seems to me that, if we are supposing the truth of Christianity, beliefs produced by something like the IIHS will be highly desirable epistemically. But let me point out that such a response does not close the gap in Plantinga's argument, but *jumps* it, leaving it in place. It amounts to saying, in essence, "well, we know not how, but we trust that God's power (and omniscience) is enough to jump this gap and give us warranted beliefs". Relying on such a proposition at this important juncture would certainly be out of step with the rest of Plantinga's argument; it seems to me that it would amount to giving faith not only the last, but the strategically crucial—but somewhat imprecise—word in what is otherwise a rigorous philosophical argument.

VI

There is a way, however, to give the sentiments expressed in this response a bit more in the way of philosophical backbone. It seems to me that resting the claim that the IIHS produces warranted beliefs on principle (AEP) is problematic enough that, if a more elegant way to accomplish the same aim can be found, then the better part of valor would be to abandon it. And there are resources within Plantinga's own work on whose basis one could defend the epistemic merits of beliefs produced by something like the IIHS without appeal to a principle like (AEP). What I have in mind involves not an alteration of the core criterion for warrant, but a readjustment of the central paradigm of knowledge, based on an appreciation of what the Christian tradition tells us about God and of the differences between human and divine knowledge.

In his article entitled "Divine Knowledge", published in the same year as the first two volumes of the *Warrant* series, Plantinga addresses the relation between human and divine knowledge. One difference, he argues, is that the process whereby human beings come to have warranted beliefs requires supposing that human cognitive faculties have been designed to function in a certain way; but no such supposition is to be thought necessary with respect to God's knowledge. In fact, our having any knowledge at all—our being designed at all, for example—depends on God's knowing how to design beings with reliable cognitive faculties, and knowing how to set up a world of things that could be known by such beings. "An important difference between God and us is that our knowledge presupposes knowledge on the part of someone else; his does not."¹⁹

Furthermore, unlike our knowledge, God's knowledge doesn't come by way of 'following the causal channels' according to which the world runs.

Plantinga puts the point thus: "Our knowledge... is indeed *derivative*; and it goes by way of the various causal structures and channels God has established.... But [God's] knowledge does *not* go by way of these causal connections (or any other); God's knowledge *precedes* the causal connections in the world."²⁰ And in exploring the question of whether there's anything equivalent to the regular functioning of cognitive faculties in God's case, Plantinga concludes: "if in an analogical sense we say that there is a way in which God's knowledge works, then, so far as we can see, that way is given by his being necessarily omniscient".²¹

According to this account, God's knowledge is not subject to any of the restrictions to which our knowledge is subject, and God's knowledge is a precondition for our knowledge in several ways. This picture suggests a way of understanding the relation between divine and human knowledge which offers an alternative to the defense of the IIHS suggested above. I would like to say (perhaps tugging on a fugitive stand of Christian Platonism in Reformed thought) that this picture suggests that God's knowledge is a *higher* form of knowledge than human knowledge. God's knowledge is superior to our own in its range, presumably the certainty with which it is held, and its accuracy with respect to the details of what is known; and our knowledge is essentially *dependent* upon God's knowledge. Without God's knowledge (superior to our own) of the things which we know and other things, we could know nothing.

Why do I think this is relevant to the project of the *Warrant* series? Well, Plantinga understands warrant to be a matter of a belief's *credentials*. Throughout the three volumes of the series, these credentials have been understood with reference to the ways in which humans ordinarily come to know things; satisfying the core criterion for warrant is a way of displaying good epistemic credentials. But according to the picture sketched just above, items of God's knowledge, even though they do not (so far as we know) come by way of properly-functioning cognitive faculties in God, have far *better* credentials than any of our own beliefs could ever have. God's beliefs don't have to satisfy any criteria to count as items of knowledge. Any belief held by God will be true, and infallibly so, and will not suffer from any imaginable defects in the area of credentials.

At the beginning of this essay, I mentioned the fact that Plantinga sees himself as describing the paradigm-center of our common notion of knowledge by way of the core criterion for warrant. But when the discussion turns explicitly theistic, as it does in the third volume, one might want the center of this paradigm to be occupied not by human knowledge, but by God's knowledge. That is, suppose we argued in the following way: God's knowledge is the center of our paradigm for knowledge: infallibly and non-accidentally true, with no need to inquire into its history to evaluate its epistemic credentials, and so on. God's knowledge is the best, highest sort of knowledge we could possibly imagine. *Our* knowledge gets its good credentials by way of being produced in a certain way: namely, in a way captured by Plantinga's core criterion for warrant. But even when one of 'our' beliefs has as much warrant, and is held as firmly, as is humanly possible, it is still lower than any item of God's knowledge: it is not the case, for example, that the proposition in question is true if and only if we

know it, and our knowing it is essentially dependent upon God's knowing and doing a great many things.

On this view, how would one evaluate a belief produced by a 'cognitive process' such as the IIHS? It certainly seems to me that the mere fact that the belief is implanted in a person directly by God gives this belief good credentials. In fact, it seems to me that the credentials of a belief produced in this way, while they may not be as impressive as items of God's own knowledge, will be more impressive than those of beliefs produced by our own cognitive faculties (I certainly think of God as more reliable than my own memory, or faculty of *a priori* knowledge, or ability to reason...). In fact, I find it difficult to imagine better credentials for an item of *human* knowledge besides its being produced directly by God. If beliefs produced by our cognitive faculties deserve to be called knowledge when they display satisfactory epistemic credentials, then beliefs produced directly by God, it seems to me, have even more right to the title—whether or not they satisfy the criterion for warrant as this applies to the productions of *our* cognitive faculties. So beliefs produced by something like the IIHS will be warranted, and if held firmly enough will constitute knowledge—and this without an analogical extension of the core criterion for warrant to cognitive processes in general.

A few possible misunderstandings concerning this alternative suggestion can be averted by drawing attention to the fact that the proposal I am advancing here is fairly modest in scope. For example, I am not proposing a *replacement* for Plantinga's IIHS as the source of the Christian's knowledge of the truths of Christianity. I am merely offering an alternative account of why beliefs produced in the way specified by the IIHS are warranted. Nothing about my proposal suggests that God works any differently than the way Plantinga suggests when instilling faith in individuals. My proposal makes no particular claims about whether or when God actually does instill beliefs in individuals, merely discussing the epistemic status of beliefs thus produced.

It might be thought that my proposal makes Scripture inessential to the process whereby individuals come to know the truths of Christianity, whereas on Plantinga's original proposal Scripture is essential. It seems to me, however, that on both Plantinga's and my accounts, Scripture is essential to Christian knowledge only to the extent that God decides to make it so. According to Plantinga, Scripture is essential to the IIHS in the sense that if Scripture is not involved in a particular instance of belief-production, then this will not turn out to be an instance of the IIHS. But nothing about Plantinga's account suggests that God cannot bypass the IIHS altogether, and produce beliefs by way of another sort of cognitive process (even in Christians), and if that cognitive process satisfies the core criterion for warrant as expanded by (AEP), beliefs so produced will be warranted. There is no particular reason to think that God could not engage in non-IIHS cognitive processes which would satisfy these requirements; in fact, it is difficult to imagine a case where God directly inspires a true belief in an individual that could *not* be described in such a way as to meet these requirements. So on Plantinga's original description, Scripture is essential to warranted Christian belief only to the extent that God makes it a policy

only to produce belief in the truths of Christianity by way of the IIHS rather than by other means.

So too on my proposal, if God has made it a policy only to inspire belief in the truths of Christianity upon the occasion of those truths being read in Scripture (that is, by way of the IIHS), then Scripture is essential to warranted Christian belief. But should God decide to produce beliefs directly in individuals in a manner which bypasses Scripture, God can certainly do so, and my proposal explains why beliefs produced in this manner will be warranted.²²

Another possible misunderstanding can be averted here by the reminder that Plantinga's intent, which this proposal maintains, is to be thoroughly externalist: it is no part of Plantinga's proposal to argue that human beings have internal access to the fact of the matter about which of their beliefs constitute knowledge. If a belief satisfies the core criterion, then it is warranted, regardless of the believer's awareness of the belief's epistemic merits. So too, my proposal does not involve any believers' being aware that a particular belief has been implanted in them directly by God, and thus does not involve an evaluation of the epistemic merits of a belief which a believer merely *takes to be* the result of God's direct influence. And just as certainly, the proposal does not invite the thought that any believers could justifiably claim to know a particular fact due to God's direct activity, and thus with God's authority. Rather, the proposal specifies that in the cases in question the beliefs in question *have in fact* been implanted directly by God, regardless of the individual's own awareness (or lack thereof) of that fact. In addition, nothing I have said suggests that beliefs produced directly by God are not susceptible to 'internalist' evaluation, defeat or undercutting, and so on. On Plantinga's own proposal, warranted beliefs in general are susceptible to such challenges. So regardless of whether Plantinga's account or my own of why beliefs produced by the IIHS are warranted is viewed as the more plausible, Christian belief still faces the challenges of Freud and Marx, historical criticism, postmodernism, pluralism, and so on. Plantinga argues that all of these challenges can be met, and it seems to me that my alteration to his proposal does not significantly affect his arguments in this regard.²³

I take it that the line of thought I have proposed offers a way around the difficulties involved in defending a principle such as (AEP). It offers another way to achieve Plantinga's aim: to collapse *de jure* objections to Christian belief into *de facto* objections. Beliefs implanted directly by God will have a good deal of warrant, and if held strongly enough will constitute knowledge, whether or not this takes place by way of a cognitive process which can be positively evaluated according to the criterion of warrant which applies to our own cognitive faculties. Thus, if God (as understood by Christianity) exists, and if God is in the business of instilling faith (understood along the lines of Plantinga's extended Aquinas/Calvin model) in individuals, then Christian belief very likely amounts to knowledge. If the rest of Plantinga's arguments hold, then the only way to challenge this conclusion is to argue either that God does not exist, or that God is not in the business of instilling faith.²⁴

NOTES

1. *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) (hereafter WPF) pp. 46f.
2. *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) (hereafter WCB), p. 156.
3. Both in *Warrant and Current Epistemology* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996): Lehrer, "Proper Function vs. Systematic Coherence", p. 36f.; Plantinga, "Respondeo", pp. 338f.
4. WCB, p. 256.
5. As we have seen, a cognitive process can be quite spare: "God instills a true belief in you, intending in doing so to instill in you a true belief" is cited as a cognitive process by Plantinga himself in his response to Lehrer.
6. *Warrant: The Current Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) (hereafter WCD) pp. 212f.
7. WCB, pp. 243ff.
8. Reading the criterion strictly according to the letter would raise problems for Plantinga's proposed extension of the criterion. Imagine the following scenario: if I am transported to a distant environment that is inappropriate for *my* kind of cognitive faculties but in which I still have access to Scripture, then if God inspired beliefs in the truths of the Gospel upon the occasion of my reading Scripture (by way of the IIHS), then the resulting beliefs would not, according to the criterion's original formulation, be warranted. In fact, God *couldn't* create a cognitive process appropriate for that environment such that it could produce warranted beliefs in me, since this wouldn't make the cognitive environment suitable for *my* kind of cognitive faculties. God could, of course, create a new cognitive faculty in me for which my new environment was appropriate, in which case beliefs produced by this new faculty could have warrant. The IIHS, however, is explicitly not a faculty but a process, and is in no sense 'mine'.
9. As shown in Plantinga's discussion of mini-environments; see, for example, WCB pp. 157ff.
10. Plantinga certainly appears to rely on just such a claim when he argues (WCB pp. 257f.) that the beliefs produced by the IIHS, referred to in the text as *faith*, are warranted, *on the grounds that* they satisfy the core criterion for warrant. He summarizes the argument thus: "Why, then, does faith constitute knowledge? Because what one believes by faith satisfies the conditions that are jointly sufficient and severally necessary for warrant." WCB p. 258.
11. WPF, p.7.
12. Plantinga explicitly denies that one need presuppose the existence of a conscious designer (i.e. God) to make sense, and make use, of the notion of a design plan. So if the observation of a teleology is sufficient for the ascription of design, the fact that the radiation serves this function is sufficient to suppose that a design plan governs its operation. Cf. WCB p. 154.
13. Nicholas Wolterstorff has noted that the process in question, even without the addition which I suggest above, looks in fact suspiciously like an internal human cognitive *faculty*— the faculty of forming correct beliefs about the presence of large gray objects when exposed to radiation of a certain type— albeit a faculty which remained unknown until activated. If this is so, then on the one hand this process will produce warranted beliefs, undercutting Plantinga's original use of the example; but on the other hand, the process can't be seen as an example of the analogical extension with which I take issue, which undercuts my use of the example. The remaining examples, however, clearly are not vulnerable to this sort of reading.

14. "An even reasonably complete account of self-knowledge, say, would require a book all by itself; and the same goes for the other main modules [of our cognitive establishment]." *WPF* p. 48.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Plantinga describes his project in these terms in the "Preface" to *WCB*, pp. vii-xvi.

17. That is, possesses those features of human cognitive faculties which account for the success of the core criterion for warrant, and lacks any features which we might think would render beliefs so produced lacking in warrant.

18. Cf. *WPF* ch. 8.

19. "Divine Knowledge", in *Christian Perspectives on Religious Knowledge*, edited by C. Stephen Evans and Merold Westphal (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 57.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 63; italics original.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

22. I leave entirely open the question as to whether God has in fact set such a policy. If God has done so, then of course this means that God does not inspire beliefs in the truths of Christianity without Scripture's being involved. But if this were so, it would not necessarily mean that there could not be another source of warranted Christian belief (for example, the *Sensus Divinitatis*, when functioning properly, will produce true beliefs about God, and the warrant-conferring ability of the *Sensus* will still be explained by appeal to Plantinga's core criterion of warrant); nor would it imply that God does not inspire true beliefs of other sorts in individuals, both Christian and non-. Such questions are properly answered by reference to what God has decided to do; the present proposal suggests merely that true beliefs produced by God in these direct ways should be thought of as warranted.

23. Cf. *WCB* part IV.

24. I am grateful to Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff, J. Todd Buras, William Hasker and an anonymous referee for *Faith and Philosophy* for comments on earlier versions of this essay.