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Deane-Peter Baker, TAYLORING REFORMED EPISTEMOLOGY: CHARLES TAYLOR, ALVIN PLANTINGA AND THE DE JURE CHALLENGE TO CHRISTIAN BELIEF

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O'Connor's writing is suggestive enough that one can usually see how the details should go, and he exhibits so much good philosophical sense that one is inclined to work them out on his behalf. I heartily recommend this volume to anyone working in the philosophy of religion or metaphysics.

Tayloring Reformed Epistemology: Charles Taylor, Alvin Plantinga and the de jure Challenge to Christian Belief, by Deane-Peter Baker. SCM-Canterbury, 2007. Pp. xii + 228. \$90.00 (cloth), \$25.95 (paper)

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It is fairly uncontroversial to note that the contemporary philosophical landscape is balkanized and that meaningful conversation between the various 'factions' is relatively rare. It's not just that members of the different factions have different beliefs; very often there is no agreement on what the important questions are and how they should be approached. Deane-Peter Baker's book should be welcomed as an attempt to bring together two conversations that have been, until now, happening on opposite sides of the 'philosophical room.' As Nicholas Wolterstorff mentions on the dust jacket, "Reformed Epistemologists and Charles Taylor have been like ships passing in the night." While Charles Taylor and the guiding light of Reformed Epistemology, Alvin Plantinga, are both enormously influential, they have had minimal interaction with each other's work and, for the most part, their adherents have followed their lead. The value of Baker's book, however, is not found solely in the conversational bridge built between Taylor and Plantinga. This book will be appreciated by those who are not already fans of Taylor's and Plantinga's work, for it constitutes a substantial and original engagement with some of the most important questions and concepts in the field of religious epistemology.

Baker's goal for his book is twofold: first, "to demonstrate the feasibility of combining the Reformed Epistemologist's position with an argument for theism that I will draw from Charles Taylor's work"; second, to "show the value that would be added to the Reformed Epistemologist's position by such a combination" (p. 2). In the Introduction (not to mention the subtitle), Baker indicates that the primary focus of his volume is what Alvin Plantinga calls the *de jure* objection to theistic belief—"the idea that it is somehow irrational, a dereliction of epistemic duty, or in some other sense epistemically unacceptable, to believe in God" (p. 1). As Baker notes, Plantinga distinguishes the *de jure* objection from the *de facto* objection to theistic belief—"the objection that, whatever the rational status of belief in God, it is, in fact, a false belief" (ibid).

In chapters 1 and 2, Baker provides a very helpful and succinct summary of the arguments for and against the religious epistemologies of Nicholas

Wolterstorff and William Alston. While Baker acknowledges the contributions of each, he finds each of their approaches to be wanting. In fact, he takes advantage of Plantinga's criticisms of his fellow Reformed Epistemologists. With Plantinga, Baker finds Wolterstorff's account of epistemic entitlement and Alston's perceptual account of religious belief to be each based on "a form of justification that seems insufficient to the task of meeting the objections of Reformed Epistemology's opponents" (p. 54).

In chapters 3 and 4, Baker takes up Plantinga's religious epistemology. He first summarizes the basic contours of Plantinga's response to the *de jure* objection to Christian belief, his "Extended A/C Model of Christian belief." Plantinga offers this model as a description of how beliefs about God, if true, can have sufficient warrant for knowledge. Plantinga's model acknowledges the existence of sin and involves the claim that faith includes an explicitly cognitive element which involves repair of the *sensus divinitatis* and production of true beliefs about God. Plantinga's claims may be summarized as follows: (1) the *de jure* objection to Christian belief is best understood as an objection to the warrant of Christian beliefs, (2) because what one takes to be warranted is a function of what one takes to be true, the *de jure* objection, thus construed, is dependent on *de facto* considerations, and (3) the Extended A/C Model is a good way (even if not the only way) for Christians to think about the warrant of their beliefs.

After summarizing Plantinga's religious epistemology, Baker considers some of the objections that have been raised against Plantinga's theory and in chapter 4 he assesses the extent to which Plantinga's proposal survives the onslaught of objections. While he finds some of the objections raised against Plantinga to be unsuccessful, he argues that Plantinga has not successfully answered the *de jure* objection because of the problem of religious pluralism. In particular, Baker finds it problematic that other religions can develop models analogous to Plantinga's and claim that their beliefs are 'warranted if true.' To counter this problem, Baker articulates what he calls the 'expanded *de jure* objection' to belief in God. This objection involves three challenges. The first is a challenge concerning the deontic justification of Christian beliefs—the objection on which Wolterstorff and Alston focus; the second concerns the warrant of Christian belief—the objection Plantinga seeks to rebut. The third is the linchpin of Baker's argument against Plantinga. Baker says:

While this third question is difficult to formulate exactly, we will not be far off the mark if we take it to be the question of 'Why should the unbeliever take Christian belief seriously enough to consider that the *de facto* question warrants attention, even granting that the Christian believer might be both well justified and warranted in her beliefs?' (p. 97)

In effect, Baker is arguing that while Plantinga has shown that his version of the *de jure* argument is dependent on *de facto* considerations, there is another aspect of the *de jure* objection that is not similarly dependent. As a consequence, Plantinga cannot leave Christian belief at 'true if warranted.'

To answer the expanded *de jure* objection, he (or somebody) needs to give some reason to think that Christianity is true. And this is where Baker offers Taylor's help.

In his consideration of Charles Taylor, Baker interacts with the work of Melissa Lane, Gary Gutting, and Steven Mulhall. Following Lane, Baker identifies three central claims in Taylor's project: (1) humans necessarily view the world in moral terms, (2) our morality has a structure in which values are connected to conceptions of the good, and (3) our morality must be based on an incomparably higher good (p. 121). These claims are the topics of chapters 5 to 7. In chapter 8, Baker argues that, for Taylor, this 'incomparably higher good' is best articulated in Christian terms. Finally, in chapter 9, Baker discusses how this argument helps overcome the deficiencies of Plantinga's religious epistemology.

In summary, the purpose to which Baker puts Taylor's transcendental argument is that of providing "independent reasons for thinking that Christian beliefs might be the product of a properly functioning *sensus divinitatis*, reasons that are not dependent on the presumption of a functioning *sensus divinitatis* or its precondition, the existence of God" (p. 143). Baker's claim is not that Taylor's work is better than Plantinga's, but that combining the two improves each and will provide a more complete and more defensible response to the expanded *de jure* objection to belief in God. Taylor's contribution provides the Christian with positive reasons to believe that Christian beliefs might be true and Plantinga's contribution, particularly his account of the noetic effects of sin, helps Taylor explain "why it is so difficult to reach agreement on the best account of human phenomenology" (p. 15).

I have two questions regarding Baker's claims in this book. But neither of them should be taken as a devaluation of Baker's volume. His book is, I judge, a resounding success—not because I agree with every aspect of it, but because he has effectively raised some of the most important issues at the heart of Plantinga's and Taylor's projects.

My first question for Baker concerns his suggestion that 'Taylor plus Plantinga' is an improvement on Plantinga alone. In a sense, this is true. As Baker points out, Taylor attempts to do something Plantinga does not do—give an argument that a theistic belief system is the best account of our phenomenological experience. But for 'Taylor plus Plantinga' to be an improvement on Plantinga alone, Taylor's argument must, in some substantial sense, succeed where Plantinga's fails. So does Taylor provide positive reasons for the truth of Christian belief? Not as far as I can see. Following Steven Mulhall, Baker summarizes Taylor's argument as follows: "only theism provides the resources necessary to account for our moral commitments" (p. 202). While his phenomenological argument is certainly compatible with Christian belief, as far as I can see, it works best as an argument against naturalism—and even Plantinga has offered an argument against naturalism! Taylor's argument could, I suspect, be embraced by most stripes of theists and perhaps by a variety of other reli-

gions. If so, it is strained to see Taylor's work as a necessary contribution to Plantinga's work because it is not at all obvious that Taylor escapes the objection that supposedly plagues Plantinga's religious epistemology: religious pluralism.

But perhaps this is unfair to Baker, because he takes great pains to claim that the Plantinga-Taylor combination does not provide a full-orbed defense of Christian belief. He claims only that (1) Plantinga's and Taylor's arguments are mutually supportive and that (2) Taylor's argument fills a lacuna in Plantinga's religious epistemology. I am inclined to think that Baker has been successful with respect to the first of these goals, but I am more suspect of his success with respect to the second.

My second question for Baker concerns his 'expanded *de jure* objection.' Baker's objection includes warrant, but also a requirement that the Christian answer the following question: 'Why should the unbeliever take Christian belief seriously enough to consider that the *de facto* question warrants attention, even granting that the Christian believer might be both well justified and warranted in her beliefs?' As phrased, Baker's expanded *de jure* objection is a little unclear. While he makes it clear that he wants to place this objection in the mouth of the unbeliever (92), it is difficult to see how an unbeliever who granted that a Christian might be "warranted in her beliefs" could avoid engaging the *de facto* question. This, of course, is Plantinga's point: the *de jure* objection (understood as an objection concerning warrant) cannot be independent of *de facto* considerations. But this raises an important question: who decides whether and when Christian belief should be taken seriously? The 'skeptic'? The 'Christian'? The oft mentioned, but clearly nonexistent 'neutral believer'?

But even if the exact phrasing of the expanded *de jure* objection is difficult to pin down, Baker's goal in raising it is not. He wants to encourage the Christian not to cut off the conversation as quickly as Plantinga does. In short, he wants to challenge the Christian "to offer some independent reason or reasons that might motivate her unbelieving interlocutor to take seriously the question of whether or not Christian belief is true" (97–98).

Is this challenge a reasonable addition to the *de jure* objection to Christian belief? I don't think so. First, it is far from obvious that a successful answer to the *de jure* objection must result in an unbeliever 'taking Christian belief seriously.' Perhaps some such requirement would exist if an unbeliever and a Christian were in identical epistemic situations, but there are good reasons (both theological and epistemological) to think that they are not. Second, even if this challenge is intuitively plausible in some sense, it doesn't follow that it is a reasonable addition to the *de jure* objection to Christian belief. Of course, Christians should do everything they can do to present Christian belief in its best possible light. But suppose a Christian does not meet this challenge and therefore does not answer Baker's expanded *de jure* objection. What is her epistemic defect, at this point? Does her inability or unwillingness to meet Baker's challenge mean that she is irrational, unjustified, or not warranted in her Christian beliefs? She will, of course,

have a hard time convincing a skeptic without at least attempting to meet Baker's challenge, but that doesn't mean her Christian beliefs are epistemically flawed. I am persuaded that Plantinga's argument demonstrates that it is epistemically possible that an ideally situated (epistemically speaking) Christian could be fully rational, justified, and warranted in her beliefs about God even if she does not meet the challenge embedded in Baker's expanded *de jure* objection. (It's another question completely whether there exist any ideally situated Christians. And it is on this point, I suggest, that Plantinga's religious epistemology should be pressed.)

In conclusion, while I'm inclined to think that there is some problem with a Christian that does not (or will not) meet Baker's challenge in any way, why assume that the problem is epistemic? What if instead the problem is theological (or maybe practical)? In other words, suppose that a person's beliefs are warranted (in Plantinga's sense) but that she doesn't meet Baker's challenge. Her problem is a failure to follow through on the Great Commission, to seek to present her beliefs in a persuasive fashion to her unbelieving friends. This failure, however, doesn't obviously suggest that her Christian beliefs are epistemically flawed; the problem might instead be found in her understanding and application of Christian beliefs.

God, Evil, and Design: An Introduction to the Philosophical Issues, by David O'Connor. Blackwell Publishing, 2008. Pp. 225. \$25.00 (paper)

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The focus of this book—the problem of evil—has been discussed by philosophers for the past two thousand years. It is a pleasant surprise, accordingly, to find a treatment of this issue from a new perspective, as is the case with *God, Evil, and Design*.

O'Connor's discussion of the relationship between God and evil focuses on two questions. The first is "whether the idea of God squares with the fact that many terrible things happen for no apparent reason, or whether that fact is good reason to think there is no God" (p. 7). The second is "whether, all things considered, the good as well as the bad, it is reasonable to conclude that God [exists and] is the original source and cause of the universe" (p. 8).

We are invited by O'Connor to conduct our consideration of these questions behind a "veil of ignorance." Specifically, we are invited to suspend any personal religious beliefs when considering the relationship between evil and God's existence and also to pretend to know nothing about religion or philosophy when considering God as a possible cause for our universe. O'Connor grants that stepping behind the veil in this sense is not easy. But it is possible, he contends, and can enable us to conduct a neutral, unbiased investigation.