

A DEFENSE OF ALVIN PLANTINGA'S  
EVOLUTIONARY ARGUMENT AGAINST NATURALISM

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Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
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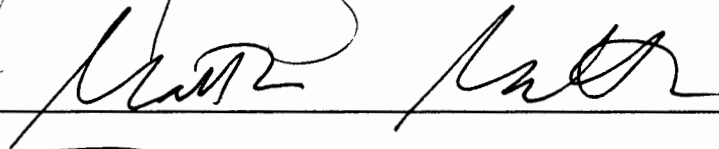
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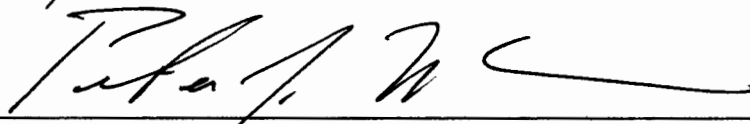
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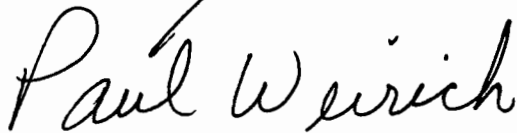
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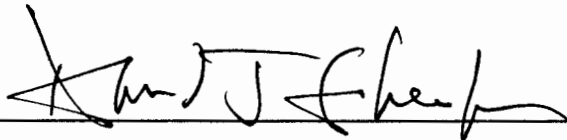
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ABSTRACT

Alvin Plantinga argues that naturalism it is irrational for a reflective person to hold to the doctrine of naturalism. If naturalism is true, some evolutionary doctrine must also be true and our evolutionary history must be accounted for in terms of only random mutation and natural selection. The probability of our being reliable cognitive agents given these origins is low or, at best, inscrutable. But it cannot reasonably be thought to be high. Consequently, the naturalist cannot reasonably hold to the belief that they are reliable cognitive agents. And since the reliability of their cognitive apparatus has been called into such grave question, naturalists are rationally bound to dismiss any belief accepted on the basis of trust in that apparatus. Specifically, to the extent that the naturalist is rational, they will give up their belief in naturalism.

In this dissertation, I explicate and defend Plantinga's attack on philosophical naturalism. My thesis is that it has survived all the current attacks available in the literature.

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## Chapter 1: The Evolutionary Argument

### A. Introduction

Almost a decade ago in his book “Warrant and Proper Function” Alvin Plantinga first presented an argument intended to demonstrate that it was irrational to affirm both the neo-Darwinist account of human evolutionary history as well as the doctrine of philosophical naturalism. This argument has been updated in a later book, “Warranted Christian Belief,” and also received important emendations in a later compilation of essays, “Naturalism Defeated?” It is the purpose of this dissertation to give a comprehensive and critical analysis of all relevant literature pertaining directly to this argument. I take it as my thesis that the argument has successfully resisted all current attacks upon it in the literature and that consequently the theistic worldview enjoys stronger rational support than does its naturalistic contender.

For sake of clarity I must briefly mention exactly *which* evolutionary argument of Plantinga’s I will be referring to throughout this paper, for in point of fact he has two. The first is what he refers to as a “preliminary argument” and the second is his “main argument.” The preliminary argument is simply intended to demonstrate that the existence of our rational faculties is more likely given the truth of theism than it is given naturalism. Consequently the very existence of our rational faculties constitutes evidence for theism (given some Bayesian

calculations) over its naturalistic rival. The main argument, to which most of the literature responding to Plantinga is addressed, reaches a more drastic conclusion. In this dissertation, I will focus exclusively on Plantinga's main argument and the replies thereto.

Interestingly, Plantinga is willing to concede that the preliminary argument that he makes in WPF is flawed, though not fatally. "This argument contains an error: it confuses the unconditional objective or logical probability of R with its probability conditional on our background knowledge."<sup>1</sup> In fact, Plantinga credits Fitelson and Sober, two of his harsher critics, for the insight. However, he also maintains that the preliminary argument has been repaired in the 2000 edition of WPF, on pp. 229-231.

In essence, the main argument claims that the naturalistic evolutionary processes widely assumed to have given rise the biological features of our species, and our cognitive machinery in particular, are processes one cannot reasonably believe likely to produce creatures with mostly true beliefs. Hence, if one accepts the naturalistic account of our evolutionary origins, agnosticism with respect to the reliability of our belief-forming mechanisms is in order. The most subtle portion of Plantinga's argument, perhaps, comes next: if our cognitive machinery is held suspect in the fashion just described, then all of those beliefs which are formed in and through these faculties ought to be held suspect. For the evolutionary naturalist, one such belief that ought to be held suspect will be the belief in

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<sup>1</sup> Plantinga, Alvin. "Probability and Defeaters." *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 84, 2003, 291-298, p. 291.

evolutionary naturalism itself. So, upon reflection at least, a belief evolutionary naturalism defeats itself. From this, Plantinga concludes that continued belief in the doctrines of evolutionary naturalism will be irrational. The doctrine is somehow self-defeating.

The foregoing paragraph gives the bare-bones outline of an argument which it is the purpose of this paper to scrutinize, criticize and ultimately defend. To do so will require not only a closer investigation of the argument itself but a defense of each step of the argument. In particular, I take the key issues to be as follows:

1.) Is Plantinga correct with respect to his claim that naturalistic evolutionary processes are unlikely to give rise to reliable cognitive machinery? Is this defensible given the fact that creatures with a complex mental life exist (most notably, ourselves)? In Chapter 1, I explore Plantinga's argument for this claim. Chapter 3 of this dissertation is devoted to defending Plantinga's claim against current attacks available in the literature.

2.) If Plantinga were correct with respect to his claim that naturalistic evolutionary processes are unlikely to bestow upon us reliable cognitive machinery, are there reasons to think that low probability in this case is insufficient to generate the defeat of our faith in our rational capacities? The low probability of a proposition being true can sometimes fail to generate a defeater for that proposition. For example, the proposition that I drew an ace out of a card deck last night on the first try has a low probability. But that fact alone does not prove that my belief that I had this fortunate recent draw is defeated or otherwise

irrational for me to continue to hold. So the crucial question at this point is whether Plantinga's demonstration that the probability of our cognitive mechanisms being reliable given evolutionary naturalism is low bears similarity to those cases in which low probability fails to generate a defeater for a belief. Arguments against Plantinga on this point will be discussed in Chapter 4 "Probabilities and Defeat."

3.) If Plantinga's critics fail to make the case just described, there still will remain the question as to whether any positive argument exists for the conclusion that the case of the reflective evolutionary naturalist is one in which low (or at least inscrutable) probability *does* generate a defeater for a belief. Plantinga claims that the plight of the reflective evolutionary naturalist bears strong *analogy* to paradigm instances in which recognition or acceptance of such probability claims with respect to a belief defeat the belief in question. The argument for the strength of this analogy is present in my next section along with the explication of Plantinga's overall argument. The extent to which Plantinga's argument hinges on this analogy is large enough that some, notably Erik Wielenberg,<sup>2</sup> have taken the argument as a whole to be an argument from analogy and this seems to me to be true. Hence, I will spend Chapter 5 "Defeat and the Crucial Analogy" defending Plantinga's analogy.

4.) Plantinga's argument has been thought of as an argument for global skepticism. So far as the evolutionary naturalist is concerned, the conclusion of Plantinga's

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<sup>2</sup>Wielenberg, Erik J. "How to be an Alethically Rational Naturalist." *Synthese*. 131, 2002, pp. 81-98.

argument might be *even more* disconcerting than Cartesian or Pyrronian skeptical arguments. For if we are to doubt the deliverances of our mental faculties to the extent that Plantinga suggests it could be the case that such propositions as “I exist” or “Modus ponens is a valid form of argument” might suffer defeat. At least one respondent to Plantinga’s argument, David Reiter, has rejected the argument simply because they see this as a *reductio*. Others, such as McHugh Reed and Nathan, have offered a more subtle form of this same objection. All of these will be examined in the course of this dissertation.

But global skeptical arguments have historically been met with forceful counterattacks and responses. Can the evolutionary naturalist appeal to one of these replies to global skepticism generally in order to make Plantinga’s argument look, if not unsound, at least uninteresting? If not, what is unique to Plantinga’s argument such that the evolutionary naturalist has a new skeptical issue with which to deal? This issue and the literature pertaining thereto will be explored in Chapter 6.

5.) On a related note, how is the theist, as opposed to the naturalist, spared this new source of epistemic grief? If an argument structurally similar to Plantinga’s can be advanced against the theist, it could at least be argued in a *tu quoque* fashion that the doctrine of evolutionary naturalism has not been shown more vulnerable to skeptical attack than the epistemic position of their theist opponents. This would not be an ideal response to Plantinga’s argument, but it would give a measure of comfort to the evolutionary naturalist. Whether or not any such

structurally similar skeptical argument threatens certain theistic beliefs will be taken up in Chapter 7, “Tu Quoques on Theism.”

These are the key issues with respect to Plantinga’s argument as I see them. Other issues of peripheral importance will be discussed, but the overwhelming majority of the literature and arguments contained therein can be directly related to one of these five areas of concern. All but two or three articles currently available in the literature (those of Lemos, Otte, Bielby and perhaps Alston) constitute attacks on Plantinga’s argument offered on the behalf of the evolutionary naturalist. Again, it is the thesis of this dissertation that those attacks have thus far met with no success.

## B. The Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism

### 1. The Argument Explicated

“Boiled down to essentials, a nervous system enables the organism to succeed in the four F’s: feeding, fleeing, fighting, and reproducing. The principle chore of nervous systems is to get the body parts where they should be in order that the organism may survive.... Improvements in sensorimotor control confer an evolutionary advantage: a fancier style of representing is advantageous *so long as it is geared to the organism’s way of life and enhances the organism’s chances of survival* (italics in original). Truth, whatever that is, definitely takes the hindmost.” -Patricia Churchland<sup>3</sup>

“With me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man’s mind, which has been developed from the mind of lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would any one trust in the convictions of a monkey’s mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?” –Charles Darwin<sup>4</sup>

The goal of Plantinga’s Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism

(henceforth, EAAN) is to take the popular doubts and concerns voiced in the quotes above, turn them into a positive argument, and then use them as ammunition against naturalist philosophy. So Plantinga’s first move is to give a formal presentation of what he calls “Darwin’s Doubt.” Let N stand for the thesis of naturalism. Whatever this entails, it should certainly entail that there is no God. E will stand for the claim that contemporary evolutionary theory is true. The

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted in all of Plantinga’s articles on the EAAN.

Plantinga, Alvin. “An Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism.” *Logos*, Vol. 12, 1991, pp. 27-48.

Plantinga, Alvin. “Introduction: The Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism.” *Naturalism Defeated?: Essays on Plantinga’s Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism*. Ed. James Beilby. Cornell University, 2002, pp. 1-13. Plantinga, Alvin. “Naturalism Defeated.” Unpublished. at

<http://www.homestead.com/philofreligion/files/alspaper.htm> but the original quote can be found in Churchland, Patricia. “Epistemology in the Age of Neuroscience.” *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 84, Oct. 1987.

<sup>4</sup> Again, quoted in al of Plantinga’s articles on the EAAN (see ft. 3). This quote allegedly from Darwin, Francis (ed.) *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*. Letter to William Graham, July 3, 1887, London, John Murray, 1887.

conjunction of N & E will therefore entail that whatever advantageous mutations occurred in the course of evolutionary history, they are genuinely random. There was no supernatural being interfering with historical evolutionary processes gearing them towards a particular favored outcome, say, the eventual rise of creatures capable of forming true philosophical beliefs or engaging in personally meaningful worship experiences, etc. It should be pointed out that although Plantinga is hostile towards the conjunction of N & E, he holds that E by itself is no threat to traditional theistic beliefs.<sup>5</sup>

Plantinga proposes that “Darwin’s Doubt” can be cashed out in terms of a probability assessment. Let R stand for the claim that our cognitive faculties are reliable: that is, when we form beliefs our cognitive faculties are such that those beliefs are likely to be true. Our faculties are just such as to give rise to mostly true beliefs. So what is the likelihood of R given the truth evolutionary naturalism? That is, what is the  $P(R/N\&E)$ ? The first step in correctly assessing this probability is acknowledging at least one seeming truth in the statement of Patricia Churchland cited above. Naturalistic evolutionary processes select for *behavior*. No belief or type of belief will be sustained in the course of such processes (except perhaps by sheer luck) unless that belief is likely to cause the organism in question to engage in activities such as the “four F’s” or avoid situations which make it difficult to engage in these four activities (such as landing oneself inside the mouth of a tiger). Crucially, the processes of natural selection

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<sup>5</sup> See also Plantinga, Alvin. “When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and the Bible.” *Christian Scholar’s Review*, Vol. 21, No.1, Sept. 1991, pp. 8-33.

are blind to any feature of an organism except insofar as that feature affects the creature's behavior. So the next step to be taken in giving formal expression to "Darwin's Doubt" will be to examine the ways in which beliefs or the physical machinery with which they might be necessarily connected might make themselves subjects of naturalistic evolutionary selective forces. This is, in essence, to examine the various ways in which beliefs and behaviors might be related.

Or more specifically, we need to examine the ways in which the *naturalist* might reasonably hold beliefs and *physical* behaviors to be related. Keith Yandell has pointed out that there are positions in logical space here (such as idealism) that Plantinga does not explore in the course of the EAAN. This is, of course, because any doctrine of naturalism worth the name rejects such doctrines. More curiously though, Plantinga will overlook the possibility of eliminativism with respect to the mental. The clearest account of his reason for doing so can be found in his reply to William Alston in ND.<sup>6</sup> Plantinga explains that if a naturalist were an eliminativist, then strictly speaking, this person would not believe that naturalists exist. Naturalists are by definition persons who have a belief in the doctrine of naturalism and on the eliminativist view no such beliefs exist. Hence, no naturalists exist. In WPF, Plantinga claims his list of possible naturalist positions with respect to belief-behavior interaction is "exclusive and exhaustive." Better to say that it is an exclusive and exhaustive list of reasonable *naturalist* positions.

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<sup>6</sup> See ND, p. 274.

By this I mean to say that they are naturalist in the sense that they admit that naturalists exist and are, unlike options such as panpsychism, seemingly compatible with naturalism.

Before pursuing this subject further, one point must be made with respect to Plantinga's a priori assumptions. It has been claimed<sup>7</sup> that Plantinga mistakenly thinks that natural selection has the opportunity act on all *possible* variants of traits. The traits referred to here are those in the set of possible beliefs had by certain organisms somewhere in the course of evolutionary history. But in fact natural selection can only work on *available* variants within a breeding population.<sup>8</sup> According to the objection, we have no way of telling apriori which beliefs and cognitive faculties were actually in the hunt for being selected. Therefore, we cannot tell if the false but adaptive beliefs to which Plantinga refers were part of this evolutionary contest. It is objected that the EAAN assumes the contrary.

Plantinga has replied to this objection. The EAAN does not assume that evolution acts upon all conceivable variants within a breeding population. Rather it assumes that the epistemic possibility of cognitive faculties that produce mostly false beliefs getting into the selective race is "not much lower" than the epistemic possibility of those promoting true ones.<sup>9</sup> It would be rather foolish to think

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<sup>7</sup> Fitelson, Branden and Sober, Elliott. "Plantinga's Probability Arguments Against Evolutionary Naturalism." *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 79, 1998, pp. 115-129, 121-122.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 121-122.

<sup>9</sup> Plantinga, Alvin. "Probability and Defeaters," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 84 (2003), pp. 291-298, p. 293.

evolution works upon all *conceivable* variants given that one conceivable state of affairs could involve advanced space aliens giving genetic help to the Australopithecines.

What Plantinga wishes to forestall here is any effort on the part of Fitelson and Sober to stall the EAAN. Clearly we do not know what variants were among the breeding populations that eventually gave rise to our species. Fitelson and Sober want to claim that the only way to make up for this deficit is for the EAAN to assume that every possible variant has an equal likelihood of getting into the race and then appeal to the principle of ignorance. Plantinga points out that it is perfectly natural to assume that both types of mechanisms had a roughly even chance of entering the selective contest, since any time at which a true belief is available to an agent there is also a false one available. But, he adds, if any objector contends that it is inappropriate to appeal to such epistemic probabilities, then they would likely regard the probability in question (of reliable faculties getting an entry into the selective race) as inscrutable. The EAAN is supposed to work off of that assumption just as well.

These are a priori assumptions regarding what beliefs and belief-forming mechanisms are likely to arise within a breeding population. From here, we turn to the question of what the odds are that selective pressures will weed out those variants possessing cognitive machinery not successfully aimed at producing mostly true beliefs.

The first possible naturalist position with respect to the relationship between belief and behavior is epiphenomenalism: beliefs neither cause behavior nor are they caused by behavior. The consequence of this view is that our beliefs might be wildly incorrect while our behavior is nonetheless adaptive. Given essentially no relationship between belief and behavior, natural selective forces might work to shape the latter while having no impact on the former. Therefore, there is no reason to think that such forces will promote any type of belief as opposed to another, let alone promotion of true beliefs over false ones. My current belief that I am sitting in front of a computer typing will have no more evolutionarily advantageous a result than the belief that I am currently wrestling an alligator. Now this claim has been disputed, as we will eventually see, by one William Ramsey. But for now, it seems safe to say that the probability of R given N, E and epiphenomenalism is low.

A second position available to the naturalist with respect to belief-behavior interaction asserts that beliefs may cause behavior, but only in virtue of syntax (i.e. electro-chemical properties) rather than semantics (content). It is admittedly strange that “syntax” and “semantics,” terms denoting properties of sentences and words respectively, have been employed in such a fashion. But the literature follows suit here so I will not revise with respect to this admittedly curious verbiage. Unlike the previous case, then, beliefs would not be entirely invisible to the hand of natural selection. For some aspect of beliefs, namely the electro-chemical processes with which beliefs are somehow associated, are causes of

behaviors. And natural selection can weed out any organisms lacking these electro-chemical properties whenever such properties fail to promote survival enhancing behavior. However, the content of such beliefs (“semantics”) would still be invisible to the hand of natural selection insofar as it has no behavioral influence. It would not matter with respect to an organism’s likelihood to survive what belief content was generated by the electronics and chemicals in question.

The difficulty here is that the content of a belief is precisely that item which may be true or false: electro-chemical events, by contrast, do not take truth values. So if our argument with respect to the likelihood of an organism’s having mostly true beliefs given N & E & epiphenomenalism is correct, we should be equally skeptical given this “syntax causation only” scenario. There is again little likelihood that true beliefs would be selected for due to the fact that the elements of belief of which truth and falsity can be rightly predicated would be completely invisible to the hand of natural selection. The probability of our having true beliefs thanks to having reliable belief-producing equipment given N, E and behavior generated by syntax only is low. Again, there are philosopher’s who have demurred on this point, for example Evan Fales, but for the present it seems that Plantinga has made a case for there being at best a low likelihood of R on this scenario.

Before moving further, it is worth noting that the foregoing two probability estimates should be sufficient to motivate concern on the part of the naturalist no matter what other possibilities with respect to belief-behavior interaction we might

explore. We will, of course, examine all of the naturalist's options for sake of being comprehensive. But Plantinga points out<sup>10</sup> that epiphenomenalism is the "received view" amongst naturalist evolutionary biologists and the "syntax causation only" view enjoys a comparable amount of enthusiasm amongst naturalist philosophers of mind. This is due to the fact that it is extremely hard on the naturalist's view to explain how beliefs or belief content can enter the chain of causation that eventually gives rise to behavior. Plantinga's point here can be given a Bayesian expression. Take whatever view of belief-behavior interaction the naturalist might wish to accept. Since we have thus far considered only the views under which belief does *not* cause behavior, let's refer to this as  $\sim C$  where  $C$  stands for the claim that belief *does* cause behavior. The relevant question will not merely be "what is  $P(R/N \& E \& \sim C)$ ?" Rather,  $P(R/N \& E)$  has to be a weighted average.<sup>11</sup>  $P(R/N \& E)$  equals  $P(R/N \& E \& \sim C) * P(\sim C/N \& E)$  plus  $P(R/N \& E \& C) * P(C/N \& E)$ . So long as  $P(\sim C/N \& E)$  is quite high,  $P(R/N \& E \& \sim C)$  is low, and as a consequence  $P(C/N \& E)$  is kept low, this weighted average will be dragged down. And that, of course, is precisely what Plantinga is after.

In his earlier explications of the EAAN, Plantinga seemed content to let this be all he had to say about naturalism and the possibility of content affecting behavior so as to be visible to the forces of natural selection. But since so many of his opponents appeared inclined to dismiss these as genuine possibilities,

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<sup>10</sup> See Plantinga's reply to William Alston (ND), his presentation of the EAAN in ND and his reply to Ramsey and Fales (ND).

<sup>11</sup> ND, p. 8-9.

Plantinga has more recently felt impressed upon to argue at greater length that the naturalist, if reasonable, must admit that on their view these are not only possibilities, but likelihoods or worse yet the only conceivable scenario for them to endorse.<sup>12</sup>

His reasoning is as follows. Nearly any materialist will endorse the claim that beliefs exist. But if materialism is true, these beliefs must somehow be material things, most likely neural structures or patterns. But it is difficult at best to explain how beliefs could be explained in terms of these neural structures or patterns. Beliefs have two things that these seemingly do not. First, they have content: the content of a belief is typically understood to be something that fills a “that clause.” For example, Joe has a belief *that* the Beatles have split up. Secondly, beliefs have intentionality; they are *about* something. Joe’s belief is a belief about the Beatles. So how could a neural structure ever have content or intentionality? If it could do so, the situation of the naturalist would be admittedly improved. But the epiphenomenalist has not explained how this could occur. Therefore, such aspects of beliefs remain out of contact with behaviors and hence, there is no reason to think that the forces that select for any particular behavior will select for any particular belief content.

Even if it could, how could such content become a causal link such that it could influence our behavior and hence be visible to natural selective forces? Next, the pitfalls of semantic epiphenomenalism loom. To use an example from

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<sup>12</sup> This discussion proceeds his reply to objectors in “Naturalism Defeated?” on p. 211 ff.

Plantinga, the voice of a soprano could break a glass no matter what the content of the lyric she sings, although admittedly singing a lyric with a strong “e” syllable in it will likely get job done more efficiently. The fact remains that physical pitches, volumes and frequencies will end up doing all the work. It seems as plausible to contend that a true lyric will more likely produce the effect as it is to contend that a commercially popular lyric would be more likely to do so. So then, it seems that a neural structure could have its electro-chemical impact upon its neighboring tissues and so on until an observable human behavior occurs. But there is as of yet no reason for thinking that this belief content must be true any more than the soprano must sing a true sentence in a lyric in order to get glass to break.

Therefore, even if the EAAN would not succeed on the assumption that belief content causes behavior, the naturalist is in a crux. For it seems that the naturalist cannot look upon the likelihood of belief content causing behavior with any rational degree of confidence if for no other reason than that there seems to be at present no promising way of conceiving of such a relationship obtaining. So the likelihood of beliefs causing behavior ought to be placed by the naturalist at no higher than .5. Of course, there is still the option of leaving this probability inscrutable. But the EAAN is supposed to work on either assumption.

But for now, let us turn to examine the P (R/N&E) under the assumption that there exists a causal relationship between belief and behavior. Although he offers few words with respect to a third possibility, Plantinga pauses to entertain the idea that the content of a belief might cause behavior but be maladaptive. If

this were the case, creatures would be better off without having these beliefs.

Cases such as this might be difficult to imagine. But suppose for instance that the entry of beliefs into the causal chain giving rise to behavior caused a lapse in speed of behavioral response. Creatures that are slow to act suffer an evolutionary disadvantage, perhaps even one that cannot adequately be compensated. So natural selective forces would operate so as to eliminate beliefs in general (and thus true beliefs in particular). So R will be improbable given N, E and maladaptive causation of behavior by belief.

The only hope, it seems, for natural selection to promote true beliefs in general is for the content of the belief to causally affect behavior and to do so in a manner *advantageous* to the creature possessing these beliefs. Now the issue is whether belief content that is causally efficacious in an advantageous respect is likely to be true. Might not such a belief be false? Plantinga is quick to remind us that belief alone does not produce behavior; belief, even belief of the true sort, would only generate a behavior when conjoined with some desire. Suppose tiger-avoidance behavior is selectively advantageous (as seems altogether likely) for some pre-historic hominid "Paul." Plantinga comments:

"Perhaps Paul very much *likes* the idea of being eaten, but when he sees a tiger, always runs off looking for a better prospect, because he thinks it unlikely that the tiger he sees will eat him. This will get his body parts in the right place so far as survival is concerned, without involving much by way of true belief....Or perhaps he thinks the tiger is a large, friendly, cuddly pussycat and wants to pet it; but he also believes that the best way to pet it is to run away from it....or perhaps he thinks the tiger is a regularly recurring illusion, and, hoping to keep his weight down, has formed the resolution to run a mile at top speed whenever presented with such an

illusion; or perhaps he thinks he is about to take part in a sixteen-hundred-meter race, wants to win, and believes the appearance of the tiger is the starting signal; or perhaps ....Clearly there are any number of belief-cum-desire systems that equally fit a given bit of behavior.”<sup>13</sup>

It seems clear that with respect to one action, there are many belief-desire combinations that might generate that one adaptive behavior. But there could exist in creatures with largely adaptive behavior propensities a network of mostly false belief contents that nonetheless generate the adaptive behavior in question

Wouldn't Paul's incapacity to correctly understand the nature of a tiger be part and parcel to misunderstanding other items and won't constant misunderstanding of this sort be disadvantageous *overall*? Plantinga thinks not. He asks us to imagine a creature whose beliefs always include some definite description of the subject (and perhaps even predicate!) thereof. For example, every object it sees is believed to be a witch or spirit in disguise. Or perhaps all the creature in question can do is believe the object in question to be animate, as many cultures do for natural objects in general. A mental life infected with these understandings of objects would contain few true beliefs. Yet the behaviors generated could be identical to those actions one would expect from the creature that understands the nature of the objects correctly. Plantinga concludes that the probability of R given N, E and the beneficial causal role of belief content in generating behavior is low. He is sometimes a little unclear on this point; sometimes Plantinga comes across as though he wishes to bank the EAAN on the

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<sup>13</sup> Plantinga, WPF, 225-226.

claim that this belief-behavior scenario is simply not that likely given naturalism. At other points, however, he is clear that his opinion is that the EAAN does not need this assumption. The probability in question would nonetheless be low even if this belief-behavior scenario were assumed.<sup>14</sup>

This portion of Plantinga's argument, admittedly, strikes me as the most vulnerable. That is not to say that I reject his conclusions with respect to the P (R/N & E & advantageous influences of belief on behavior). But rather, that there are a couple of plausible challenges to his point. First, do we seem to be using definite descriptions in the manner he has described? It is not clear that we often do this sort of thing, let alone with recourse to concepts such as "witch-hood" or such. Second, Plantinga points out that it is *possible* for creatures whose beliefs affect their behavior to have beliefs of this sort. But this does not demonstrate that such a network of beliefs is *likely*. So how does any of this demonstrate that the P (R/ N & E & advantageous influence of beliefs upon behavior) is low?

I will have to save the extended conversation with respect to these issues for the next chapter. But I will offer a few preliminary points. First, we have already discussed the fact that P (R/ N & E) has to be a weighted average and that pride of place in terms of likelihood given naturalism goes to those doctrines positing that belief content does not generate behavior. This weighted average would then still turn out to be low even if the likelihood of R on one of the four views we have looked at is somewhat high. Hence, simply noting a deficiency in

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<sup>14</sup> "Naturalism Defeated," p. 261.

Plantinga's argument at this particular point is insufficient to derail the argument. Second, on the assumption that definite descriptions are used at least in many points our forming of beliefs and that for any adaptive behavior far more false definite description giving rise to a certain advantageous belief can be imagined than true definite descriptions, it seems to make little sense to place the probability of R on this scenario any higher than .5. And the weighted averaged spoken of earlier will still turn out to be quite small.

Now for the naturalist, these seem to exhaust all of the possibilities. So what are we to make of the  $P(R/N\&E)$  at this point? Plantinga admits that some of the probability estimates are of necessity going to be vague and not well-grounded. Perhaps the right attitude to take with respect to this issue is one of agnosticism. Plantinga is prepared to concede at least that much to the naturalist. But as of yet, we have not seen any reasonable way that the evolutionary naturalist can claim that  $P(R/N\&E)$  is high. We have not yet seen any way in which such a probability could turn out greater than, say, .5. If much is conceded, then we can draw at least one conclusion from the foregoing considerations. Namely, that the  $P(R/N\&E)$  is either low or inscrutable, but not reasonably claimed to be high.

Plantinga's contention is that the EAAN will be successful in either of two ways. If the naturalist concedes that  $P(R/N\&E)$  is low, the argument runs more smoothly. But if the naturalist balks and throws their hands up in despair of ever finding a good estimate of this probability, then they will in point of fact admit that the probability is inscrutable. Plantinga hold that their situation will still be

one in which they come to possess a defeater for their belief in the truth of R. But Plantinga thinks the argument will succeed either way.<sup>15</sup> Essential to the EAAN at this stage, however, is keeping the naturalist from reflectively and reasonably maintaining that this probability is high. If Plantinga is successful in this endeavor, he may legitimately move to the second stage of the argument.

Sometimes the low probability (or even the inscrutable likelihood) of one of our beliefs being true given other beliefs we hold can generate defeat of the belief in question. Other times defeat is not so generated. But low probability of some of our beliefs given the truth of others does not by itself constitute defeat. For starters to assume this is to rule out the principle of total evidence.<sup>16</sup> Others have made this objection and Plantinga himself refers to it as the “perspiration objection.” It can be precisely stated as follows:

The Perspiration Objection: the fact that a proposition p has a low probability when conditionalized upon some belief of an agent does not by itself suffice to defeat the agent’s belief in p.

For example, the probability that the function of perspiration is to cool our bodies is low given evolutionary naturalism, but this does not defeat our belief that this is in fact the function of perspiration (hence the awkward name of this objection). This works no better than the argument that my belief that I am now typing suffers defeat because its probability given my belief that I had oatmeal for breakfast this morning is low.

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<sup>15</sup> See Plantinga’s reply to William Alston (ND), p. 272.

<sup>16</sup> A point first raised in the literature by Fitelson and Sober, p. 121 ff.

Now Plantinga admits that N & E are not *immediately or directly* defeaters for R. Low or inscrutable probability is not sufficient for defeat.<sup>17</sup> For example,

(J) You own a Japanese car.

(ON) You own an old Nissan.

The probability of ON given J is low, but surely ON is not defeated thereby. And yet in other instances it is clear that low or inscrutable probabilities do generate defeat. Each of Plantinga's examples (as we will soon see) seem to buttress this intuition. So what exactly is the difference between those cases in which such probabilities do generate defeat and cases in which they do not? This is a question that we will raise again at a later point. But it seems to me that at this point the EAAN can proceed if it can simply be demonstrated that the evolutionary naturalist is in a position analogous to those in which all parties to the debate agree that defeat occurs. For it seems clear that at least *sometimes* low probabilities of one of our beliefs being true given other things we believe can generate a defeater.

So does belief in N & E plus the belief that P (R/N&E) is low or inscrutable in particular constitute a defeater for R? Fitelson and Sober claim that a move for the affirmative answer must inevitably overlook the rule of total evidence. For people typically have other reasons for belief in R than careful consideration of their origins. Plantinga agrees; in fact, belief in R should be taken as basic. But this does not insulate the belief from defeat. For example, the belief "I now see sheep" might be basic but it can suffer defeat.

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<sup>17</sup> Plantinga, "Naturalism Defeated" (unpublished).

So such a belief seemingly *can* be the subject of defeat. But *does* the belief suffer defeat at the hands of the EAAN? The argument concludes that this is so. But Plantinga does not argue that it does so from the assumption that for *any* propositions A and B, if P (B/A) is inscrutable, then A is a defeater for B. Plantinga explicitly denies either believing in or employing such an assumption in the course of the EAAN. However, the EAAN does need to claim that there are *some* cases in which the combination of a low probability of B given A and belief in A constitutes a defeater and that the case of the reflective evolutionary naturalist is just one of those cases.

What would clearly be wrong (says Plantinga and I think most anyone would concur) is to think that low probabilities or even inscrutable probabilities are *never* a rational guide to belief. Plantinga thinks that Fitelson and Sober might even be assuming that low probabilities never function this way.<sup>18</sup> Trivially, for example, ignorance of the P (B/A) can be a defeater for some belief: for example, it clearly defeats the belief that the P (B/A) is exactly .23. More importantly defeat arising merely from reflections upon probabilities seems to precisely those forms of defeat employed in Plantinga's analogies, which we will investigate shortly. The point here is worth stressing again: the reason that Plantinga thinks that the case of the reflective naturalist is just one of those cases in which a defeater is in

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<sup>18</sup>Plantinga, Alvin. "Probability and Defeaters." Pacific Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 84, 2003, 291-298, p. 293 ff.

fact generated is because of the strong analogy it bears to cases in which defeat *clearly* occurs.

Now there is a two-fold distinction in what authors have detected as Plantinga's appeal to analogy. Here I will devote my attention to the first seemingly clear use of analogy by Plantinga. So far the argument we have examined is supposed to have convinced the reader that the P (R/N&E) is either low or inscrutable but not reasonably considered to be high. Assuming that a person is apprised of this probability calculation and that they believe the conjunction of N & E to be true, what should their informed attitude towards R be? Plantinga introduces an analogy intended to assist in figuring this out. After all, "interspecific chauvinism" might throw off our attempts at making a reasonable judgment here: that is, we might be inclined to claim that although evolutionary naturalism is a poor generator of cognitive faculties, it must have gotten this project right at least once. For notice how cognitively adept folks like me are! Plantinga complains that this sort of logic is clearly epistemically circular. The question at issue is "What should we think regarding the question of whether R is true when specified to ourselves?" The correct answer here cannot be "Whatever our cognitive faculties already assume with respect to this question." For this already assumes that the deliverances of such faculties are trustworthy in the first place, and this in turn assumes that the faculties themselves are rightly regarded to be reliable.

Now the temptation, given the foregoing insight on the difficulty of self-assessment with respect to R, is to write off the questions we have raised as either answerable only in the aforementioned chauvinistic fashion or as simply being unreasonable to ask or perhaps being mysteries beyond our comprehension. But this is far too hasty of a move. After, Plantinga asserts at one point, can an agent not reasonably come to the conclusion that they are losing their minds? Wouldn't balking at this point in effect be to adopt the overly strong position that R is beyond defeat *no matter what other propositions relevant to R's obtaining or failing to obtain are held to be true by the agent in question?* If we are willing to accept that an agent can reasonably come to doubt their rational faculties generally, then we should also accept that there is some intellectually respectable way to do so. Plantinga suggests such a way to do so.

In order to assess the likelihood of R with respect to oneself, given a commitment to evolutionary naturalism, one should imagine a race of hypothetical creatures whose rational faculties have developed only by means of evolutionary naturalistic processes. Rather than treat ourselves and our race in a special unjustifiably privileged fashion in the light of skeptical concerns raised thus far, we ought to regard the likelihood of R with respect to ourselves in the fashion that we would regard likelihood of R with respect to this population of creatures. Such an approach will consequently render toothless any attempts to be careless in assessing the probability with respect to ourselves. Therefore, the evolutionary naturalist is faced with two possible reasonable attitudes towards the rational

faculties of this hypothetical population and, as a consequence, towards their own. If one believes that the  $P(R/N \& E)$  is inscrutable, one should be agnostic in both cases. If one holds that  $P(R/N \& E)$  is low, one should be skeptical with respect to both cases. Again, the EAAN is intended to work either way...but of course there is more left to the argument. What we have offered so far is merely an argument in the form of a dilemma.

A few housekeeping points before moving on. If this is the approach (assessing ourselves just as we would some hypothetical population) which we opt for, we must bear in mind two points at all times. First, probabilities are very sensitive to what information is conditionalized upon. Even if it is agreed that R is not reasonably held to be true with respect to this hypothetical population given N & E, it might still be the case that there are other aspects of our evolutionary history about which we know such that if these were also aspects of the evolutionary history of the hypothetical creatures in question we might rightly regard the likelihood of R with respect to this hypothetical population to be high. So are there any other such facts which we should weight into such a consideration? This brings us to a second important issue with respect to this stage in Plantinga's argument. If it is allowed that we should perhaps assess the likelihood of R with respect to this hypothetical population by conditionalizing upon more than N & E, there are certainly going to need to be strict limits on what cannot be conditionalized upon. For example, it would seem to be cheating (and defeat the entire purpose of looking for a non-chauvinistic approach) if we

conditionalized upon R itself! So the second question here is “What may reasonably be conditionalized upon and what may not be?”

Some help with respect to this question comes from Richard Otte. Otte admits that there is no general answer to this question of what is permissible upon which to conditionalize, but submits that there are at least a number of plausible principles that should govern any such endeavor. Not surprisingly, these considerations will also weigh in favor of the EAAN. There are four such principles:

- 1.) Where the existence of some x is in question, you should only probabilize on information relevant to bring about or suppressing x. In the case of the EAAN, N and E cover this ground exhaustively.
- 2.) When matters of internal rationality are being evaluated, we should only probabilize on information accessible to us.
- 3.) We should not probabilize on information that would beg the question in favor of x.
- 4.) We should avail ourselves of *all* information relevant to x in the sense described by 1 above.

Now Plantinga seems to agree with Otte on this point although these two authors differ on other issues pertinent to the EAAN. So is there any proposition the naturalist might claim to know which meets all four of these criteria *and* succeeds in raising the likelihood of R with respect to our hypothetical population? It will be difficult to find any such proposition. Plantinga has not affirmed in

writing that such a proposition will never be found; but he is rightly adamant that the pious hope that some such true proposition exists and might come to be known is sufficient to wiggle out of the grip of defeat here.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, the two questions which we have raised as “housekeeping points” can be set aside although we will raise these general issues again in later chapters of this dissertation.

So let us take it to be the case that the only rational attitude that the naturalist can take with respect to the proposition that the hypothetical population possesses reliable cognitive machinery is either agnosticism or outright skepticism. Plantinga moves from here into some analogies intended to illustrate that whenever one comes to believe that the source of their beliefs are unreliable (the probability of reliability be low or inscrutable), they obtain a defeater for beliefs generated by said source. Again, these are intended to be paradigm cases in which probability assessments regarding the trustworthiness of a source of a belief generate defeat for any belief based only upon the source in question.

Plantinga notes several other situations in which defeat of some belief occurs and which allegedly bear striking resemblance to the situation of the reflective naturalist. For example,

- 1.) One may trust their perceptions while in a widget factory and consequently believe the widgets produced there to be red. But if a reliable source, or at least a source you deem honest, informs you that the owner of the factory

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<sup>19</sup>Plantinga, Alvin. “Probability and Defeaters.” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 84, 2003, 291-298. p. 294-295.

sometimes uses special lights to make the widgets appear a color other than what they are. You then come to believe that the odds of your perceptual faculties yielding trustworthy appraisals of the color of the widgets to be inscrutable. If this is the case, then you have a reason to not trust your faculty of perception while in the factory and consequently you have a defeater for these deliverances thereof.

2.) Suppose you come to think that you have been created by a deceiving Cartesian demon that takes pleasure in luring you into false beliefs. In such a case, you might believe the demon to be indulging in this pleasure or you might remain agnostic. But it seems that you have a defeater for any belief you hold; that is, you have a reason to abstain from holding the belief in question.<sup>20</sup>

The extent to which Plantinga's argument bears resemblance to a Cartesian argument for global skepticism will be explored in chapter 7. The relevant dissimilarity to observe with respect to the case of the naturalist and the theist who are approached with Cartesian-style arguments is that the naturalist *actually* believes in the existence of something that plays a role analogous to that of the Cartesian demon. The theist need only entertain the *possibility* of some such thing existing. Hence, the epistemic situation for the theist seems less dire than for the naturalist.

- 3.) A subject comes to believe that their faith in God is the result of *only* Freudian Wish Fulfillment (perhaps having read Freud in an injudicious frame of mind). Further, they hold that the probability of beliefs generated by Wish Fulfillment being true is low or inscrutable. Consequently, they have a defeater for their belief in God.

Michael Czadsky Sudduth, in an article somewhat related to the EAAN,<sup>21</sup> complains that if Plantinga allows that basic beliefs can be defeated, then Plantinga ought to allow that belief in God can be defeated. In short, he sees an inconsistency in Plantinga's employing this particular analogy. Plantinga holds that there are no situations in which a believer will obtain a defeater for their theistic belief and Sudduth sees this as inconsistent. I do not. The case discussed here sheds light on Plantinga's view. Situations in which theistic belief is defeated are conceivable, but perhaps an all good God would never allow a situation such as this to occur unless theistic belief already had some other trustworthy source (or at least a source the agent in question ought to have regarded as trustworthy), say the *sensus divinitatus* or internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, I see no inconsistency in Plantinga's comments up to this point this point.

- 4.) A subject believes that they have ingested a hallucinatory chemical XX.  
Such a chemical is believed to render the deliverances of the five senses

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<sup>21</sup> Sudduth, Michael Czapkay. "The Internalist Character and Evidentialist Implications of Plantingian Defeaters." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*. Vol. 45, 1999, pp. 167-187.

unreliable in 90% of cases. Consequently, the subject when reflecting on this fact obtains a defeater for the belief that their sense data is reliable.

Generally speaking then, when one comes to abandon belief that a certain source of beliefs is veridical, one obtains a defeater for any beliefs based upon that source. “In general, if you have considered the question whether a given source of information or belief is reliable and have an undefeated defeater for the belief that it is, then you have defeater for any belief such that you think it originates (solely) from that source.”<sup>22</sup> The problem, of course, is that our cognitive faculties are the source of *everything* that we believe. Therefore, if one believes in the doctrine of evolutionary naturalism, all of their beliefs face the threat of defeat in light of the EAAN.

For the present, I will leave the general notion of “defeat” as undefined although I will take it up later in this chapter. It is a notion not beyond intuitive grasp. Generally speaking a person has a defeater for a belief *p* just in case the person has a good reason (propositional or non-propositional) for refraining from belief in *p*. To have a defeater for a belief does not necessarily make that belief irrational nor does it make the agent who holds the belief irrational. For example, if one comes to believe that a certain factory, the aforementioned widget factory for example, produces only white widgets, then the seeming perception of red widgets coming off the assembly line would provide a non-propositional defeater for their original belief regarding the color of the factory’s widgets. They have a

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<sup>22</sup> In Plantinga’s own words, from his reply to Van Cleve in “Naturalism Defeater?”, p. 241.

good reason not to continue to hold the belief. However, when informed by a trusted source that the widgets are being irradiated by a red light, their rational faith in their belief that only white widgets are produced in the factory could very well be restored. Their new faith in the proposition “There are red lights irradiating these widgets” defeats the non-propositional defeat generated by their sense data. But none of this obviates the fact that defeat is a serious epistemic issue: to continue in a certain belief in the face of an undefeated defeater seems to constitute irrationality of some sort or another. So for clarity’s sake the issues of defeat and rationality will be examined in the next section of this chapter.

One thing to make clear, however, is a distinction raised by John Pollock that is especially helpful for understanding Plantinga’s argument correctly. Pollock distinguishes between undercutting and rebutting defeaters. Undercutting defeaters are such that when an agent comes into possession of them the agent cannot reasonably continue to hold a certain belief. For example, if I believe a factory produces only white widgets based upon the overhearing the conversation of a friend, but later learn that this friend is colorblind, I lose all my reasons for thinking that the factory produces only white widgets. My reasons for believing this have been undercut. My new belief (that my source was unreliable in this case) makes continued belief in the claim that the factory produces only white widgets irrational. Rebutting defeaters are different and in a sense stronger. If I see a red widget come off the assembly line and form a belief in light of this, then I have a rebutting defeater for the claim that the factory in question produces only

white widgets. The defeater not only does the work that an undercutting defeater would, namely taking away my grounds for believing all the widgets to be white, but actually supports the contrary claim. In either case, defeaters serve to make continuing in a certain belief unreasonable.

Plantinga has thus far made the case that the reflective naturalist has an undercutting defeater for both their belief in R and consequently for all of their other beliefs. I have nowhere read that Plantinga claims to have provided a rebutting defeater for naturalism. It seems to me that he wishes merely to throw the sources of naturalist beliefs into question. And that is the nature of an undercutting defeater. Perhaps the case can be made that if the  $P(R/N\&E)$  is low, then the  $P(\sim R/N\&E)$  must be high and hence a rebutting defeater can be argued for. But this is to commit Plantinga to too much; far more than he seems to intend. He merely claims that  $P(R/N\&E)$  is low *or inscrutable*. This disjunctive claim drives the EAAN. We should be careful not to overcommit him here.

Fitelson and Sober complain that the lessons Plantinga intends to extract from the foregoing analogies are unlicensed. The variable R names the proposition that “the great bulk of our beliefs are reliable.” This is, they complain, is not sufficiently specific. Better to divide our rational faculties or beliefs into camps R1, R2, R3, etc. However, when we do this the probability of each of these might be high while the probability of the conjunction of them is low on N & E. They insist that evolutionary naturalism could do a good job predicting that each

of the conjuncts have high probabilities.<sup>23</sup> So even if we assess our cognitive faculties in the same manner as we would a those of a hypothetical population with similar origins and we hold the probability of R with respect to both ourselves and them to be either low or inscrutable, this does not mean that any *particular* belief is defeated, let alone each and every one of them. Consequently, there is no reason to think that some particular conjunction of only two of them, say N&E, faces defeat.

So does the EAAN show that the naturalist has a defeater for *all* of their beliefs? Fitelson and Sober claim that even if the argument were successful, it would not demonstrate this strong of a conclusion. “Even if E & N defeats the claim that ‘at least 90% of our beliefs are true,’ it does not follow that E & N also defeats the more modest claim that ‘at least 50% of our beliefs are true’.

Plantinga, they muse, must show that E & N not only defeats R, but also defeats the claim that ‘at least a non-negligible minority of our beliefs are true.’”<sup>24</sup>

Plantinga claims that the reasoning of Fitelson and Sober here turns on the following false premise: If I don’t have a defeater for the proposition that 50% of my beliefs are true, then 50% of your beliefs are such that you do not have defeater for them. The fact that this is a false claim can be illustrated. Suppose you believe all the 200 tickets given away to children at an elementary school are winners because the persons running the lottery are kindhearted towards children. You later find that only 50% will in (from a reputable source). The claim that

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<sup>23</sup> Fitelson and Sober, p. 117

<sup>24</sup> Cited by Plantinga, “Probability and Defeaters,” on p. 295 in the original.

50% of your original beliefs are true has not been defeated. But it would be irrational for you to hold *any* of the beliefs regarding the individual tickets that you originally held i.e. that ticket 14 is a winner. You also then have a defeater for any belief you have that rested upon such previous beliefs e.g. that child 14 will be very happy with their new prize by late this afternoon.

The feature of the EAAN to keep in focus is that it attempts to deprive the naturalist of reflective, reasonable trust in any of the deliverances of their cognitive faculties in light of the fact that reliable faculties and true beliefs are not necessary for the sake of having survival-prone behavior. It is hard enough to make the claim that beliefs of any sort are necessary for having selectively advantageous behavior. So there is as of yet no reason for privileging any subset of beliefs as being beyond the threats raised by the EAAN any more than the claim that only certain a minority of numbers in a certain phonebook are correct bequeaths undefeated status to some particular number (say Jon Kvanvig's) as being correct. In short, the original analogies still hold and consequently the reflective evolutionary naturalist has a defeater for all (or rather we should say *each and every*) of their beliefs.

Plantinga forges ahead by pointing out that if all of the reflective naturalist's beliefs have defeaters, then N & E also has a defeater. For this is of course one such belief. Therefore, the person holding N & E ought rationally not to hold such a view. For the view, upon reflection, provides its own reason for not

believing it to be true. In this sense, N & E is epistemically self-defeating. It gives the person holding such a view a reason not to do so.

Defeaters may themselves be defeated. Plantinga notes that the evolutionary naturalist may try to point out a bit of rationally acquired evidence that would allow the self-reflective naturalist a more optimistic assessment of their faculties. However, Plantinga complains that after an argument has been given against the reliability of a certain source of information, it would be question begging to assume the reliability of those faculties employed in acquiring the new evidence in question. So this defeater cannot be defeated. Once in place, it is bound to stay put. As one philosopher has stated, “There is no way to stop the rot once it gets started.” When one’s rational faculties themselves have been called into serious question, complete skepticism is hard to avoid. So if the EAAN can demonstrate that evolutionary naturalism provides a defeater for R, evolutionary naturalism has an undefeatable defeater.

When the only way to obtain defeater-defeater is assume the truth of a claim that was already the subject of defeat originally, Plantinga introduces a special term “Humean defeat.”<sup>25</sup> Plantinga characterizes this Humean Defeat.

But now comes the rejoinder: as soon as our devotee of N & E comes to doubt R, he should also come to doubt his *defeater* for R; for that defeater, after all depends upon his beliefs, which are a product of his cognitive faculties...So then his original condition of believing R and assuming N & E reasserts itself: at which point he again has a defeater for R and N & E. But then he notes that *that* defeater is also a defeater of the defeater of R and N&E; hence...So goes the paralyzing dialectic. After a few trips

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<sup>25</sup> Plantinga, Alvin. “An Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism,” *Logos*, p. 44.

around this loop, we may be excused for throwing up our hands in despair or disgust and joining Hume in a game of backgammon. The point remains, therefore: one who accepts N & E (and is apprised of the present argument) has a defeater for N & E that cannot be defeated by an undefeated defeater. And isn't it irrational to accept a belief for which you know you couldn't have an undefeated defeater?

Any defeater for R will be a defeater of this type, and if defeat of this type is at all with respect to a certain claim then that claim seems to be above hope of rescue. But Plantinga has in the course of the past several years adjusted and precisified his account of such defeaters and we will examine them in here in brief. Significantly, he retracts two points made originally in WPF (as quoted above) with respect to Humean defeat and the EAAN.<sup>26</sup> First, Humean defeat does not consist in diachronically plodding around an endless loop. However, it also does not consist in having some ultimately undefeated defeater. It seems clear that an infinite series of defeaters cannot genuinely occur because defeat only occurs in the context of belief by an agent and no agent can have an infinite number of beliefs one defeating another ad infinitum. The important point, overlooked in WPF, is that when one has a Humean defeater it is known that the original defeater shows up at every successive stage in such a possible infinite string of beliefs. The general form there of is as follows where Q defeats everything a person believes and Q(p) denotes that some proposition p is defeated upon recognition of this defeat relationship:

Level 0: Q

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<sup>26</sup> See unpublished "Naturalism Defeated" and his reply to Richard Otte in "Naturalism Defeated?," p 269 ff.

Level 1: Q and Q (Q), hence Q defeated

Level 2: Q and Q (level 1 defeat)

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Level n: Q and Q (n-1), so level n-1 is defeated for any level n

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Again, the important thing is that the original Q shows up at every level and consequently one never loses the original defeater.

Philosophers such as Talbot, Van Cleve and David Silver have raised challenges as to whether there is any harm in introducing an epistemically circular argument for R in the light of the EAAN. Epistemically circular arguments are not circular in the more popular sense that the conclusion appears amongst the argument's premises. Rather arguments are epistemically circular when, in order to rationally believe a premise, one has to have already assumed (or at least held above question) the trustworthiness of a certain source of information and the trustworthiness of the source is precisely what the conclusion of the argument asserts.

Plantinga grants that epistemic circularity may be harmless in some contexts. But that this is not the case in the present context. How does one tell the difference between the cases in which epistemically circular arguments might be intellectually respectable and those in which they are not? Plantinga, drawing on Thomas Reid, suggests that the difference lies in whether or not the proposition for

which the epistemically circular argument is presented has ever been called into question itself. For example, my cognitive faculties seem to work reliably and these faculties seemingly inform me that I have not ingested the cognitively corrosive agent XX. I conclude, with a bit of epistemic circularity at work, that I have not in fact ingested this material. Arguably, this makes sense. But if I am presented with an argument demonstrating that I did in fact ingest this chemical agent and if I come to believe this argument is plausible, matters are different. It is not reasonable to hold that an epistemically circular argument can restore R to its original epistemic status. Nor will such arguments alleviate rational concerns here. Analogously, if considerations raised in the EAAN generate serious doubts for the evolutionary naturalist as to whether R is true with respect to them, then epistemically circular arguments will not avail. In particular, they will not avail against a Humean defeater.

So, let us put the argument in a formal fashion so as to recap all that has been said thus far.

P1. If one rationally reflects upon the EAAN, they will conclude that  $P(R/N\&E)$  either inscrutable or low (but not reasonably considered high).

P2. To reflectively assess the likelihood of R holding with respect to ourselves, we should assess our epistemic position in a disinterested fashion as we would our hypothetical population for which N & E is true.

P3. If we assess our own position in such a manner we will conclude that the likelihood that our cognitive faculties generate mostly true beliefs (R) is inscrutable or low.

P4. If we conclude that the likelihood of our cognitive faculties being truth conducive is inscrutable or low, we have an undercutting defeater for the deliverances thereof. (This Plantinga argued for by analogy)

P5. If we have a defeater for the deliverances of a belief producing faculty, then it is irrational to believe/trust the deliverances of such a faculty unless a non-question begging defeater-defeater can be found.

P6. There is no possibility of a non-question begging defeater-defeater in the case in which R itself has been defeated.

C1. Therefore, if we have an undefeated defeater for the deliverances of our belief producing faculties, then it is irrational to believe/trust the deliverances of such faculties. (P5 and P6)

P7. Where (N & E) is believed true, it is a deliverance of R.

C2. Therefore, if a believer in N & E rationally reflects upon the EAAN then they have an undefeated defeater for N & E.

Plantinga takes C2 to demonstrate that in some sense evolutionary naturalism is irrational. Of course he is careful to point out that defeat only occurs in the context of belief in a defeater and such beliefs are likely to obtain only when the naturalist has rightly reflected on the foregoing argument. In fact, in “Naturalism Defeated” (unpublished) Plantinga urges that defeaters only occur when one is apprised of the defeat in question. For example, Frege’s set of beliefs with respect to the completeness of set theory were not defeated and not irrational for him to believe until Bertrand Russell explicitly pointed out paradoxes.

Therefore, the reflective naturalist must in order to remain rational with respect to their beliefs either abandon belief in N, belief in E or both. If one gives up N, one gives up naturalism. If one gives up both N & E, one gives up

naturalism. Of course, one could give up E, but if naturalism is true, then in all likelihood so is evolutionary theory. So N cannot be reasonably maintained.

One point is worth clearing up here. Fitelson and Sober mistakenly charge Plantinga with the claim that N *entails* E, for example they quote Plantinga quoting Phillip Johnson to the effect that for the naturalist evolution is the “only game in town.” Plantinga responds in a footnote of his reply to Fitelson and Sober to the effect that he intended no such thing.<sup>27</sup> It is simply the case that without evolutionary theory, the naturalist worldview seems remarkably untenable. So rejecting E but maintaining N is not a very plausible response to the EAAN.

This does raise a few thorny issues that we will have to take up later. The reasoning employed in the foregoing paragraph strikes me as sound. However, there are two important points here. First, is it possible to defeat a conjunction without defeating any part specifically? Anthony Peressini points out that this is often the case in science; at least, science as understood in the philosophies of such persons as Pierre Duhem and Quine.<sup>28</sup> Secondly, is the defeat of N & E just such a case? Thirdly, William Alston raises the question of whether N & E defeated R in the first place. Given the low or inscrutable probability of R/ N & E, can we not claim instead that N & E defeats R? That is, should we revise the EAAN so that instead of imagining hypothetical populations in which N & E

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<sup>27</sup> Plantinga, Alvin. “Probability and Defeaters.” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 84, 2003, 291-298, p. 298, ft. 7.

<sup>28</sup> A response similar to Peressini’s is also offered by James Bielby. See, Beilby, James. “Alvin Plantinga’s Pox on Metaphysical Naturalism.” *Philosophia Christi*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2003, pp. 131-142. Here Beilby retracts his former support for the EAAN.

account for that populations' origins and then making a judgment as to whether it might reasonably be asserted that R holds for them, why not imagine a hypothetical population in which R obtains for that population and then make a judgment as to whether the conjunction of N & E is likely to hold with respect to them?

Now the latter of these suggestions strikes me as an unlikely response from the camps of naturalism. In fact, Plantinga has taken this point on the chin and claimed that it does nothing to affect the original argument.<sup>29</sup> But Plantinga is not willing to concede that Alston's new approach to the EAAN excludes the original formulation thereof. Different arguments can be made for the same conclusions, that much seems certain. And if N & E defeats R, then continued faith in R on the part of the evolutionary naturalist is still irrational and this simply gets at the same conclusion as the original EAAN via a different route. Peressini's thoughts on the subject are a bit more challenging. But given the probability of E given N, the case seems to initially weigh favor of rejecting either rejecting both N and E or rejecting the one whose truth is strongly implied by the other. Still, the conclusion that belief in evolutionary naturalism taken as a whole is irrational.

So what should the naturalist do? Clearly, if a belief defeats itself, then any notion of "defeat" worth the term will imply that such a belief needs to be jettisoned from an agents' general noetic structure if rationality is to be maintained. But this ejection cannot occur in virtue of arguing to the falsity of some belief; at

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<sup>29</sup> "Naturalism Defeated?" p. 271.

least not when R has been called into question. For any argument for the falsity of some belief will implicitly assume that one can trust some of their rational faculties and their faculty for rational argumentation in particular. Plantinga admits this. The only rational option for the reflective naturalist at this point, he urges, is to simply give up the belief in naturalism. One cannot legitimately argue their way out of such a belief. Salvation here, Plantinga contends, must be “by grace and not by works.”<sup>30</sup>

Although this concludes our initial discussion of the EAAN, this introduction would be far from complete unless issues regarding the potential threat that such an argument raises to theistic worldviews were at least superficially explored. The issues raised here will be explored in greater detail in the penultimate chapter of this dissertation. But for now, let’s take stock of what is at risk should at least one argument analogous to the EAAN but with theism (whether theism in general or Christian theism in particular) as its target turn out to be successful. There have been an exceeding large number of attempts to formulate such a tu quoque: far too many to explore in any detail here. But here I wish only to make clear the initial case for the claim that such efforts do not look promising.

To demonstrate the superiority of the Christian theistic worldview, Plantinga contrasts the plight of evolutionary naturalists with that of those

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<sup>30</sup> Plantinga, WPF, p. 237.

believing themselves to have been created in the image of God. He quotes with approval from St. Thomas Aquinas:

Since human beings are said to be in the image of God in virtue of their having a nature that includes and intellect, such a nature is most in the image of God in virtue of being most able to imitate God (ST Ia q. 93 a. 4)

Only in rational creatures is there found a likeness of God which counts as an image....As far as a likeness of the divine nature is concerned, rational creatures seem somehow to attain a representation of (that) type in virtue of imitating God not only in this, that he is and lives, but especially in this, that he understands (ST Ia q. 93 a. 6)

Presumably then, the Christian theist is in a position in which the skeptical concerns to which the naturalist is doomed will never arise. The source of our cognitive faculties, though Plantinga will not admit that they guarantee our cognitive reliability, at least does not entail any problem with respect to the likelihood that our faculties are reliable. Again, the existence of the God in which Plantinga believes in no way entails the reliability of our cognitive faculties, but Plantinga asserts that the existence of such a God would make it likely that our faculties are functioning reliably. Here Plantinga is merely asserting a weaker form of a claim assumed true by even such skeptics as Rene Descartes.

So what *essentially* is the difference between the theist and the naturalist with respect to this point? The key difference is the fact that the naturalist has a defeater for their belief in R where the theist presumably does not. Now the theist, Plantinga seems prepared to concede,<sup>31</sup> might have a defeater if they do not believe that the Deity in question cares much for promoting the acquisition of true

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<sup>31</sup> He allows for this possibility in both the unpublished "Naturalism Defeated," p. 40 in the landscape printed version.

beliefs or avoidance of false ones in his creatures. For example, if one believes that a God who cares little for whether his creatures have true scientific beliefs as opposed to merely useful ones, a strong argument of the same form as Plantinga's EAAN might be constructed to the conclusion that we ought to distrust our scientific reasoning abilities. Or perhaps one believes that their God only cares that his creatures be capable of grasping certain moral truths and of knowing enough about how to manipulate the environment around them such as to take care of their fellow creatures (and has little concern for the veracity of any number of their other beliefs). Then, admittedly, one could upon reflection on an argument structurally similar to the EAAN come to doubt a great number of ones beliefs.

But these are big "ifs." What if the theist in question sees no need to think any differently on the matter than did Aquinas? In this case, there is no obvious reason as to why *any* belief of theirs would suffer defeat from reflection on an argument similar to the EAAN. The case of the naturalist is different. Upon reflection on every belief *they* have such that it is relevant to the issue of whether their faculties are reliable (and meets the criteria Otte suggested earlier so as to avoid "cheat" probabilizing) skepticism or agnosticism prevail with respect to whether R holds for them.

So the first point to bear in mind is that there is no apparent reason that the theist must accept beliefs such that they acquire defeaters for R. But a second point is closely related. Even if the theist muses that God had little interest in making sure that His creatures had true scientific beliefs or true beliefs with

respect to other issues, it does not follow that the theist has a defeater for R generally. It will pay at this point to recall the objection of Fitelson and Sober to the effect that Plantinga's EAAN has at best defeated merely the claim that each and every aspect of our cognitive machinery was reliable. Plantinga's response to Fitelson and Sober asserted that if one can cast doubt on the reliability of a source of information generally, then one cannot continue to have faith in some portion of information (if the information is based solely on that one source) which is a deliverance of that source. And evolutionary naturalism, it has been argued, is just the sort of doctrine that calls into account the reliability of *each and every* one of our cognitive faculties. The point I wish to stress is that even if the theist grants that there is some variant of the EAAN that casts doubt upon the reliability of their cognitive faculties in one area (say, scientific reasoning) it does not follow that they are in the same boat as a naturalist who has a defeater for the reliability of any one of their cognitive faculties. Fitelson and Sober's point will not help the naturalist. But it will save the theist from a charge of irrationality. And this will be the case whether it is argued that the theist (particularly the theist who is less confident that God would make them good all-around cognitive agents) faces a defeater for some particular area of their cognitive functioning which they believe God would have a vested interest in making reliable or whether they are faced with the even more testy claim that they have a defeater for theism itself.

To conclude, in this chapter I have explicated the EAAN as originally presented by Plantinga and have updated it in light of the comments made by

Plantinga in later writings. To explore every nook and cranny of the argument will take a considerable amount of time. It is simply the thesis of this dissertation that the argument has survived all current attacks upon it available in the literature. It is not the purpose of this dissertation to exhaust all possible replies to the argument; an argument that covers ground from such a broad variety of philosophical topics would be hard to handle in such an exhaustive fashion. And the EAAN employs insights from epistemology, the philosophy of mind, the philosophy of religion, probability theory, etc. The attacks upon the argument discussed thus far have been discussed for two main reasons. First they seem to me to illustrate general problems with popular styles of responses to the EAAN. Second, there are seemingly straightforward responses to them that put in focus certain key assumptions that underwrite the argument. As a last consideration, the EAAN does not seem to be a recipe for skepticism in general. It is not clear that any tu quoque argument will handle the two criteria of adequacy I mentioned in above. It is my contention that attacks of a tu quoque sort which have been offered thus far falter on at least one of these two points, most seemingly on the first. Hence, the naturalist has a defeater for their worldview of a particularly undesirable Humean sort that the theist does not. No current attempts to remove this defeater have succeeded.

## **2. Defeaters Explored**

Two years after the publication of WPF Alvin Plantinga defended the argument contained in the final chapter thereof in an unpublished paper entitled “Naturalism Defeated.” The primary purpose of this paper was to rehearse the argument for sake of the reader and address objections thereto. Most of the objections, Plantinga points out, concern the concept of defeat. This topic, though important to the field of epistemology, has received little analysis, the work of John Pollock being the notable exception. Therefore, Plantinga spends a great deal of the paper investigating this idea and formulating his own principles of defeat. In this section of my dissertation, I will attempt to supplement the proceeding one in which I presented the EAAN with a discussion of the nature of defeaters ala Plantinga. It is hoped that this discussion will strengthen the argument against objections that will be raised in subsequent chapters. Of particular importance are changes in Plantinga’s doctrines of regarding defeat over the past several years. It will be pointed out that his ideas on defeat have taken a turn recently and that these changes have occurred in the light of criticisms raised against the EAAN. It will be argued in this section that such emendations do not harm the EAAN. Issues that have clouded discussions of defeat actually have little bearing on the success of the EAAN.

Suffice to say, it seems that the analysis of defeat by John Pollock, widely recognized as the person who has made the most headway in investigating this topic, is both incomplete and false according to Plantinga. According to Pollock,

If P is a reason for S to believe B, R is a *defeater* for this reason iff R is logically consistent with P and (P & R) is not a reason for S to believe B. This seems false for, among other reasons, the fact that defeaters can come in the form of experiences rather than beliefs. Secondly, and more importantly for Plantinga, this view only allows that *reasons* for a belief may be defeated. Why cannot the original proposition P be defeated directly? In the EAAN Plantinga does not simply suggest that the reasons that the naturalist has for holding their distinct doctrine have been defeated; rather naturalism itself suffers defeat.

In his analysis of defeaters, Plantinga sets an outline in the form of a list of questions to be answered. First, what, fundamentally, are defeaters? Plantinga confesses that many qualifications and refinements will have to be made on his definition, but offers the following:

(D) D is a defeater of B for S iff S's noetic structure N includes B and is such that any human being (1) whose cognitive faculties are functioning properly in the relevant respects, (2) whose noetic structure is N, and (3) who comes to believe D but nothing else independent of or stronger than D would withhold belief in B (or believe it less strongly).

I will be treating (D) as Plantinga's primary notion of defeat. However, Plantinga has become apprised in recent times that this definition only captures one relevant notion of defeat: proper function rationality defeat. The problem with this definition of defeat is that it does not seem to adequately support the EAAN. For what person, functioning properly, would ever come to be skeptical of with respect to the issue of whether R holds for them? I will not deal with this question just yet, but rather save it for the end of this section. What will be said

there will have little effect, it seems to me, on the other insights Plantinga offers with respect to the nature of defeat. So let's forge ahead for the present time...

If you acquire a defeater for B, but continue to believe B, what exactly is your problem? The intuitively appealing answer is "some type of irrationality." Plantinga cashes out this "typehood" in terms of the contrast between this person and the properly functioning rational person, in a fashion simpler to his account of warrant. They are not to be confused however. It seems that beliefs can be warranted but defeated, unwarranted and defeated, unwarranted and undefeated, etc.

Can a defeater do more than defeat a reason for belief B, perhaps defeating B itself? Plantinga takes this to be the more natural approach. Memory and elementary a priori beliefs provide key examples of things for which we have ordinary form no reasons but they may nonetheless be subjects of defeat. Also, some beliefs are defeated simply when one realizes they lack any reason for the belief. For example, it would be irrational for me to believe that my prescription bottle contains a certain type of pills if I believed that all of the labels had been recently mixed and matched by a mischievous five-year-old. Notice, the EAAN is supposed to work even if one comes to the realization that they lack any reason for thinking R is true specified to them. So defeaters may be reasons, but they might also be other kinds of cognitive states of an agent, including states of doubt or agnosticism.

Do defeaters defeat beliefs directly or only relative to a set of background beliefs? Contra Pollock, Plantinga holds that defeat is always defeat relative to a background noetic structure. So D might defeat P but not defeat (P & Q). Further, it is necessary that an agent be aware of the relationship of their beliefs to the alleged defeater before any charge of defeat or irrationality can be rightly made of them. Frege was not irrational to hold his completeness theorem previous to receiving Russell's devastating letter. However, Plantinga's position does commit him to the claim if an agent does not modify their noetic structure when they perceive such a problem then they are irrational: it is left to wonder as to Plantinga's judgment concerning the status of the remainder of Frege's life in which he desperately tried to save this logical theories in the face of Russell's paradox.

How are defeaters themselves defeated? Plantinga follows Pollock in the widely accepted distinction between undercutting and rebutting defeaters which we mentioned in the previous section of this dissertation but makes further attempts to distinguish here between *intrinsic* "defeater-defeaters" and *neutralizing* "defeater-defeaters." The first are cases in which the original defeaters is removed from your noetic structure, the second is a case in which something new is added to the noetic structure (call it p) such that the conjunction of (B & p) suffers no defeat. Of course, naturalists have attempted to offer both types in response to the EAAN. These can be seen in attempts to derail the

original EAAN (which would constitute an intrinsic defeater for the defeater of R) and attempts to probabilize R upon something in conjunction with N & E.

Can anything really be its own defeater? Plantinga responds, “Well, why not?”<sup>32</sup> The example he uses is very close to the heart of the EAAN: if a skeptic holds that  $\sim R$ , then they have reason to doubt  $\sim R$ . That is, if they hold the belief that their cognitive faculties are completely unreliable, then clearly the first deliverance of such faculties that ought to be suspected is the belief that their faculties are completely unreliable. So belief in  $\sim R$  defeats itself; the belief provides its own grounds for not accepting it. Perhaps this is too close to the EAAN to convince someone that a proposition or belief can be its own defeater. But there seem to me to be other examples. Recall, for example, freshmen who are crushed to learn that their beloved proposition “There is no truth” undermines itself. Or consider students enamored with theories of omnipotence to the extent that they claim that God could cause them to falsely believe in their own existence. Given examples such as these I cannot imagine that Plantinga’s tongue-in-cheek question will receive anything in the way of a convincing reply.

This concludes our general discussion of defeat...but now we must take up a point raised earlier with respect to Plantinga’s admittedly incomplete definition of defeat (D). Accordingly,

- (D) D is a defeater of B for S iff S’s noetic structure N includes B and is such that any human being (1) whose cognitive faculties are functioning properly in the relevant respects, (2) whose noetic structure

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<sup>32</sup> “Naturalism Defeated,” p. 35 of my text.

is N, and (3) who comes to believe D but nothing else independent of or stronger than D would withhold belief in B (or believe it less strongly).

This is intended to capture both the nature of rebutting defeaters and undercutting defeaters. For example, if a person comes to believe that they are looking at a sheep decoy rather than a real sheep, the properly functioning individual will cease to believe the item in question to be a real sheep unless they come to hold independent evidence of some other sort (for example if the supposed sheep decoy begins to move about and eat grass in plain view!). By contrast, if a person comes to believe that the local townsfolk like to play tricks on persons like himself by setting up sheep decoys in fields, the properly functioning individual will also cease to believe that certain objects in their view are sheep, but for different reasons. In this case, the belief has been undercut. However, again, the person might rationally come to believe that certain objects are in fact sheep if he sees them move about, eat or otherwise acquires new pertinent information.

In “The Illusion of Defeat,” William Talbott intends to demonstrate that Plantinga has misappropriated the notion of an undercutting defeater. Specifically, Plantinga has employed in the course of the EAAN a notion of undercutting defeat such that rationality in the context of this type of defeat requires an undesirable kind of “cognitive inflexibility.” That is to say, if Plantinga were correct in his use of this type of defeater, persons in the context of this type of defeat (for R) would be faced with no rational way out of their conundrum by appeal to new evidence. Talbot introduces several analogies that seem difficult in the sense that they

seemingly introduce situations in which continued belief in R is rational although the belief in R faces defeat similar to that generated by the EAAN. Talbott's solution, which Plantinga rejects, is that such analogies demonstrate the propriety of employing what he calls *pragmatically circular* arguments to restore belief in R in such cases. An argument is pragmatically circular if one assumes that the beliefs one seemingly must maintain in order to behave in a reasonable fashion are true on the basis of the fact that it seems irrational to act as though any contrary belief were true.

Talbott first analyzes Plantinga's examples of when defeat with respect to a belief occurs. The following pattern seems to emerge:<sup>33</sup>

Step 1:  $P(x/y) \ll \frac{1}{2}$

Step 2: y

Step 3: I believe z on the basis of x

Step 4: I have no other basis for believing z

Step 5: Steps 1-4 are not themselves subject to defeat.

Step 6: Therefore, my belief in z is irrational.

Of course, Plantinga might rightly respond that this cashes out his argument incorrectly. The EAAN is supposed to work even if the probabilities involved are inscrutable...they do not necessarily need to be deemed far less than  $\frac{1}{2}$ . But Talbott seems to have the general idea in hand, so I will not quibble here.

However, there is a trend amongst authors to cash out the argument in a demonstrably incorrect fashion. When this occurs I will note it. The reader may contrast these accounts with my own account given on p. 41 ff.

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<sup>33</sup> Talbott, W. J. "The Illusion of Defeat." *Naturalism Defeated?: Essays on Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism*. Ed. James Beilby. Cornell University, 2002, pp. 153-164, p. 155.

Now a few points of, perhaps, some importance are necessary. First, Talbott believes that step 1 needs to be augmented to that  $y$  includes all items of belief relevant to the probability of  $x$ . Second, Talbott points out that Plantinga “can” allow that evolution and natural selection have promoted the reliability of two important features of our cognition: perception and memory. Again, Talbott thinks that he is putting the EAAN in its strongest possible form. For ideally it would only be required that the argument defend the claim that by lights of N & E our *abstract* reasoning faculties are likely to be unreliable. And evolutionary naturalistic doctrine would be a deliverance of just these faculties. The second of these moves Plantinga explicitly rejects as unwarranted. It is not a principle of philosophy that one can defend global skepticism only if one can defend a local skeptical claim without recourse to a more general global skeptical argument. I am convinced of Plantinga’s reply on this point. Such a principle of argument seems false. For example, Rene Descartes could have attempted to undermine my justification for the claim that a recent bump to the head caused me bodily pain. To do so, he could appeal to a global skeptical argument intended to demonstrate that I have no justification for the claim that my head exists at all; after all, I could not tell the difference between a world in which my physical head exists and one in which an evil demon deceives me into thinking such a head exists. A local skeptic such as Hume could have offered a different argument to the same conclusion but would rather point out as a premise that constant conjunction of hits and hurts are insufficient evidence to posit a causal relation between the two.

The local skeptic would not be forced to defend as strong a form of skepticism. But no right-thinking philosopher would claim that in order to undermine the causal claim in question that Descartes must be required to do so without recourse to his global skeptical argument. Yet Talbott raises this criterion of adequacy against Plantinga's EAAN and he has no independent argument defend it. Indeed, what I have suggested here is that no plausible argument of this sort is possible.

But I will not revise Talbott's argument in the course of this presentation so as to weed out this false assumption on Talbott's part. For it only seems that this issue is distinct from the question of whether faith in our abstract faculties can be restored via Talbott's alleged propriety of pragmatically circular reasoning. We can concern ourselves here specifically with whether such circular reasoning is legitimate given a defeater for R, and more importantly what emendations will eventually need to be made to Plantinga's notion of defeat given the elements of Talbott's argument which seemingly succeed.

To return to the above argument, where R (AF) stands for the proposition that our abstract reasoning faculties C the claim that our cognitive faculties have some agree upon trait (that the contents of our mental states are accessible to ourselves, for instance) we may instantiate the forgoing account of undercutting defeat in the following fashion.

Step 1:  $P(R(AF)/N \ \& \ E \ \& \ C) \ll \frac{1}{2}$  This is granted by Talbott for arguments' sake.

Step 2:  $N \ \& \ E \ \& \ C$

Step 3: I believe E based on AF

Step 4: I have no other basis for believing E

Step 5: Steps 1-4 are not themselves subject to defeat

Step 6: My belief E is irrational<sup>34</sup>

Before forging ahead, it is worth pointing out an oversight on the part of Talbott.

Plantinga's argument is not aimed at undermining E; it is aimed at undermining N.

However, it is fair to say that Plantinga's construal of the defeat in question here

could be turned on any number of abstract and scientific ideas in which the

naturalist believes, so it seems reasonable to overlook yet another problem (a

slight one) in Talbott's argument for the time being.

Talbott asserts that there is a disanalogy with respect to this application of Steps 1-6 and an application in which, say, belief in a proposition based upon one's sense of wish fulfillment experiences defeat: that is where G fills the spot of z and R (WF) the place of x. In our present case the conjunction of N & E & C defeats itself. For after all, these are the purported sources of AF. By contrast, G did not fill the role of z and y in the wish fulfillment example.

Talbott's main thesis, then, is that where different items fill the roles of y and z in our generic account of defeat, undercutting defeat indeed occurs.

However, when the same (or perhaps some portion of one) proposition appears in both places, defeat does not take place. He claims that one may rationally disregard this type of Humean defeat on grounds that might be admittedly *pragmatically circular*. Consequently, Plantinga's arguments work in the wish fulfillment examples, but not in the case of the alleged defeat of E (or N, rather).

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p. 157.

So why believe this is so? Talbott provides analogies to defend his claim. Defeat on the basis of probability estimates must only occur in the light of probabilities based on total evidence available (including, he claims, the pragmatically circular “evidence”). Plantinga excludes any other evidence as relevant to the correct and rational assessment of the probability of R on the basis of the fact that such “evidence” would already presuppose the reliability of our cognitive capacities. Talbott does not challenge Plantinga on this point. Rather, he argues that such evidence may rightly be employed in raising the probability of R nonetheless. In fact, he alleges that any attempt by Plantinga to restrict use of such pragmatically circular evidence can be rejected on grounds of being overly strict.<sup>35</sup> Talbott's examples are intended to underwrite this conclusion by depicting situations in which an agent might rationally continue to believe a proposition even when it is defeated in the pattern of Plantinga's EAAN.

In the first, a person takes a drug (H) highly likely to render them permanently hallucinogenic. Should he doubt the deliverances of his perceptual faculties or take the fact that they seem to be working well as *evidence* that he fell into the lucky class of those whom the drug does not affect? Second, consider the first case amended such that the person ingesting H later gets a call from his doctor telling him that he is among those in the population with a genetic H-blocker. Of course the question arises as to whether the phone call is real or hallucinated. But should not this phone call be admitted as evidence for R?

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

The third story makes perhaps the most significant amendments. Suppose after ingesting H, the subject in question experiences strange visions. Further, these experiences are committed to *memory*. A concerned friend administers the antidote for H and within a while our subject perceives that the strange experiences have dissipated and experiences similar to those in his pre-H stage have returned. Of course the new experiences might be hallucinatory as well, but should not these recollected experiences count, as a whole, towards R?

Talbott is careful in cases 4 and 5 to remedy the disanalogies with respect to his cases and Plantinga's. For starters, if Plantinga is correct, there would be no *trustworthy* doctors or friends, on the reflective naturalist's view, by which to measure how connected we are with reality. For their faculties are as likely to be unreliable as ours. So in case 4, H enters the food chain and affects all fetuses. But one fetus has a lucky mutation making it immune to H. This mutation is transformed by medical persons into an antidote for all of humanity. At the end of the day, what should this mutant conclude with respect to P (R)? Talbott believes that the total evidence delivered by sense perception (provided the agent in question is aware of all I have mentioned thus far) favors a high probability for R and that this should be taken into account.

Now the question Plantinga faces here is a sticky one. For we wish to say that the thing an agent ought to do in these cases where their belief in R is defeated is to restore their faith in R somehow. If they do not, then it seems that we should say that they are functioning improperly. And since Plantinga has defined the

term “defeater” in terms of proper function it seems plausible that a properly functioning person would sooner count circular evidence as admissible (as its sometimes might be) rather than do away with the faith that their brain works well.

Plantinga thinks that his account of defeaters in terms of proper function is sensible, but admittedly incomplete. Our minds function properly for a variety of ends; survival, day-to-day living, reflection, belief formation, etc. And certainly retaining belief in R would, for Talbott’s agents, qualify as functioning properly. Similarly, if after reading David Hume on induction I come to regard my inductive reasoning capacities to be incapable of giving me any evidence about the world around me I will still be rational (and functioning properly) should I run away from grizzly bears. But does this mean that Hume has failed to defeat the claim that our inductive faculties are reliable? It seems that it should not.

So Plantinga attempts to clarify what is going on in these sorts of cases.<sup>36</sup> Some of the processes in which our mental faculties engage are “purely alethic” or “purely epistemic.” Their purpose is simply the production of true beliefs. If one reads Hume and acquires a defeater for their belief that their inductive faculties are reliable, this will constitute a “purely alethic defeater.” A person who takes a hallucinatory drug such as the one Talbott discusses obtains a defeater of this type as well. In essence,

(D) D is a purely alethic defeater of B for S at *t* iff S’s noetic structure N at *t* includes B and S comes to believe D at *t*, and any person S\* (1) whose cognitive faculties are functioning properly in the relevant

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<sup>36</sup> Plantinga, “Naturalism Defeated?” p. 209 ff.

respects, (2) and who is such that the bit of the design plan governing the sustaining of B in her noetic structure is successfully aimed at truth (i.e., at the maximization of true belief and minimization of false belief) and nothing more, (3) whose noetic structure is N and includes B, and (4) who comes to believe D but nothing else independent of or stronger than D would withhold belief in B (or believe it less strongly).

When a person studies Hume, their minds operate not in the interest of physical survival or some such thing but precisely because they (probably a philosopher) are simply investigating whether it is true or false that inductive logic supports any claim. They do not, for example, read Hume so that they can better console themselves should they find themselves plummeting from an airplane without a parachute!

Now we typically employ such purely alethic processes in moments of reflection. And on those occasions, the naturalist can obtain a defeater for R just as they could obtain a defeater for their faith in their inductive reasoning skills. They might not be able to force themselves to give up either claim, but in reflective moments proper function will require the modifying of his noetic structure.

The strength of Plantinga's reply here is that it runs parallel to the comments of David Hume on the same topic. Hume was aware that no person could force themselves to give up the beliefs skeptical arguments seemed to require them to give up. Furthermore, it would be irrational to give up these beliefs. But the skeptical arguments are not thereby undermined. Therefore, it seems that any reply to Plantinga which attacks his appeal to "purely alethic"

defeat must be strong enough to demolish the arguments of Hume with regards to skepticism and that is an unenviable task in the extreme. Furthermore, if one grants Plantinga the defeat concept but attempts to make a case that such defeat is uninteresting, they will have to account for why Hume's arguments receive such universal applause.

But this does seem to raise a host of problems for Plantinga. First, let's recount the seemingly fair objections raised by Plantinga such that it motivated a rejection of Pollock's account of a defeater. Recall Pollock's definition; If P is a reason for S to believe B, R is a *defeater* for this reason iff R is logically consistent with P and (P & R) is not a reason for S to believe B.

Plantinga's objection 1: this account does not allow experience and memory to generate defeaters.

Now in fairness to Pollock, it might be said that Plantinga is reading "is a reason for" too narrowly. If that is so, Pollock's definition might require some precisising, but may nonetheless be correct. But more important, it seems, is Plantinga's second objection.

Plantinga's objection 2: this account only allows for reasons for certain beliefs to be defeated rather than, say, beliefs themselves.

But again, something seems wrong. A closer look at Pollock's definition reveals this; the general structure of this is a conditional sentence, not a biconditional. The main connective is a conditional, rather than an "iff." Therefore, there is nothing in Pollock's account that rules out beliefs being defeated. The definition

simply tells us when reasons are defeated, not that they are the only things that can be defeated.

However, as I mentioned earlier, this creates a problem with respect to the EAAN. In the EAAN, R itself is defeated for the naturalist. It is not simply the case that the naturalist loses their reasons for believing in R. After all, what could possibly be a rational *reason* for holding R in the first place? It seems clear that such a thing needs to be held as basic or some such thing. For any argument comprising reasons for believing in R would be hopelessly circular. And this point seems to hold even if we allow Pollock a looser notion of “reasons” as suggested earlier. For what person makes inferences to R on the basis of perceptual experiences or memories? This seems as strange as for an agent to make the converse inference; from their perceptions and memories to the claim that R holds for them. Normally we just don’t make these inferences and perhaps shouldn’t. So, in summary, Plantinga’s argument does seem to need something more than what Pollock offers.

But Plantinga’s account has its own difficulties. First, he has to concede in light of Talbott’s insights that proper function demands that we continue to believe that R holds for us despite the EAAN. Simply put, if any defeat of R occurs, it cannot be of the sort he originally described as (D). It will have to be something like purely epistemic defeat. But purely epistemic defeat is a deliverance of the proper functioning of those cognitive faculties aimed only at maximizing true belief and minimizing false belief. Since, as Plantinga pointed out earlier, defeat

has to be defined in terms of *rationality simpliciter* a curious question arises. If a person has a purely alethic defeater as Plantinga describes for their belief B, what would lead us to think continued belief in B is irrational? Consider an analogy. Plantinga is willing to concede that even the sympathetic reader of Hume rationally continues to believe that the future will be much like the past. They have a defeater only in their reflective moments, he claims. Perhaps there is something strange involved in thinking Hume's arguments sound but tenaciously holding on to the belief that the past will be like the future, particularly in one's reflective moments. But who would charge the person that does so with irrationality? There is more to rationality than avoiding these purely epistemic defeaters, or so it seems. There seems to be more to rationality than simply the proper functioning of only one specific portion of our brains.

Plantinga might complain that a person in the situation I have just described needs to jettison at least one belief from their noetic structure. He is thinking specifically of getting rid of the belief that Hume's arguments are sound. But it is hard to think of any justification that the agent in question could have for doing this. After all, one reason for all the discussion surrounding Hume's work is that it is hard to tell what exactly is wrong with his arguments. But let me grant the point now for sake of argument. By analogy then, what should the person who has a belief in R do with the EAAN? If Hume's argument could rationally be dispatched without any specific fault being found in it all for the sake of preserving the belief that the future will be like the past, the correct analogy to

Plantinga's case is one in which an agent throws out the EAAN without specifying where it went wrong.

I think that we can conclude here will a specification of the general problem Plantinga is encountering. His exposition of the EAAN requires that R be defeated for the naturalist before N & E gets a defeater. But he also has the following shadows following him.

1. He has described defeat in terms of rationality.
2. He has defined rationality (counterfactually) in terms of proper functioning agents.
3. He has admitted that properly functioning agents would not abandon R even in the face of the EAAN.

And with respect to point 3, even in reflective moments Plantinga has to allow that the naturalist cannot rationally abandon R but must rather hold to it in the ironic way that Hume continued to believe the future will be like the past.<sup>37</sup> But again, who ever accused Hume of irrationality on this ground?

Plantinga's most curious move is made in the light of this problem.

“That's the situation the naturalist will be in: he won't be able to help believing or at least assuming R; but (if he reflects on the matter) he will also think, sadly enough, that what he can't help believing is unlikely to be true. He will have a purely alethic defeater for R, but at those reflective moments when he thinks about his cognitive situation he will also have a proper-function rationality defeater for R—let's call it a Humean rationality defeater.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Plantinga, “Naturalism Defeated?,” p. 210-211.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p. 211.

Now things really seem to be unraveling. The prospects for a proper-function defeater looked like nothing given points 1-3 above. So Plantinga appeals to purely alethic defeat in order to get a backdoor to proper-function defeat; and that only in the naturalist's reflective moments. And he apparently needs this because only proper function defeat seems to have to do with rationality. I fear that something has gone dreadfully wrong. I think that the naturalist would be in their rights to insist that if 1-3 entail that no defeater for R is possible then 1-3 conjoined all this talk of purely epistemic defeat cannot generate a defeater for R.

Secondly before moving on, although Plantinga complains that Pollock's account does not allow perceptual experiences or apparent memories to serve as defeaters, he seems to have a similar difficulty. For on his account these experiences can be subjects of defeat (as the EAAN requires) but there is no room for them to serve as defeaters themselves. It seems clear that a successful account of defeat should allow for perceptions and experiences to serve as either defeatees or defeaters depending upon the epistemic situation an agent.

So does this leave the EAAN up the creek? Plantinga seems to think so. I think not. Plantinga has credited one respondent, namely Timothy "O'Conner, for

seeing that the EAAN cannot work without a theory of warrant and rationality.<sup>39</sup> He is also happy that O’Conner adopted a proper function theory with respect to each. In what follows, I take issue with Plantinga on these points.

For one thing, there are a great many arguments in epistemology in which key terms remain without a precise definition. For example, we have not had as of yet a successful definition of “knowledge.” In large part, we have Gettier to thank for that. But this has not stifled conversations regarding when knowledge does or does not obtain. It did not stop positivism from becoming a popular and persuasive school of thought. Nor has this fact stifled conversations on the scope and limits of human knowledge. It certainly has not stopped conversations regarding the thought of Kant and Hume. So there is no convincing argument from the claim that a key term can not yet be accurately formalized to the claim that all arguments employing the term are negligible. In fact, there is much in the way of reasons to reject this.

But clearly there are times at which a lack of clarity on a key concept seriously undermines arguments or positions couched in terms of it. Socrates seemed to rely on that point quite often; there is little sense, for example, in discussing whether the prosecution of one’s father could be pious unless one had a reasonably clear notion of what piety amounted to. So how can one accurately tell the difference between cases in which this lack of clarity generates a problem and those in which the lack of clarity is not of great importance? I suggest the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 235.

adequacy of one particular method; appeal to paradigm cases in which the concept in question applies. For example, if someone suggests that horses are incapable of having knowledge, one might point out that a 1 year old sometimes knows where to find his favorite toy when it is out of sight. Then, one can argue to the horse having knowledge by way of analogy. All this has been possible in the absence of a formal account of knowledge. Likewise, even without a definition of courage, Socrates could ask an interlocutor whether the term applied to a situation that he describes.

So what prevents Plantinga from working in the same fashion with respect to the EAAN? Plantinga gives several examples in defeat of a belief occurs. Significantly, some of these are cases in which belief that R holds with respect to one's self occurs. I see nothing that prohibits Plantinga from then making an analogy to the case of the reflective naturalist. For this maneuver has been so well respected throughout the history of philosophical thought.

Of course, this does raise one worry. It is equally respectable to hold it against a formalization of a concept that it gets the wrong answer in the paradigm cases; when it tells us that a concept does or does not apply when intuitively the opposite seems true. And this seems to be the real problem for Plantinga. Talbott seems rightly to have noticed that Plantinga's account of warrant makes it the case that persons who think that they are BIV's or that they have taken hallucinogens such as he describes do not have defeaters for the belief that R holds for them.

That seems to be the wrong answer. But as such, it seems to threaten Plantinga's proper function account of defeat rather than the EAAN.

But back to Talbott's complaints...Talbot complained that agents who took hallucinogens like those Plantinga described would *not* in fact have an undefeatable defeater for their belief that R holds for them. It seems to me then that Talbot's idea is to admit that defeat in the paradigm cases occurs and subsequently to argue that rational belief in R can be *reestablished* on the grounds of pragmatically circular evidence. I think that Plantinga is correct to complain that this cannot be reasonably done...but if Plantinga gives Talbot the proper function account of rationality to work with, I see no way for Plantinga to keep Talbot from claiming that this is the reasonable way for the naturalist to go.

In conclusion then, the EAAN seems to be incompatible with any account of warrant that I currently know of. But I have argued that this is of no consequence. So long as the naturalist is prepared to acknowledge that their situation bears strong analogy to cases in which defeat for R occurs for an agent, the EAAN can proceed. To demand that all philosophical arguments give successful accounts of their key terms in order to succeed is a criterion of adequacy that has little to sell itself upon. And Plantinga's argument bears strong similarity to those cases where it is universally acknowledged that these deficiencies are negligible. Contra Plantinga, the EAAN depends upon no theory of defeat.

## **Chapter 2: Initial Concerns about Knowledge Laid to Rest.**

The concept of defeat, which we dealt with in detail in the proceeding section, is widely considered to be the most crucial element of the EAAN. For the EAAN could not succeed unless at least some assumptions about defeat were legitimate i.e. can basic beliefs be defeated? Can probabilities generate defeaters? Can anything defeat itself? Surprisingly, however, many authors have charged Plantinga's argument with mishandling far more basic concepts. By "basic" here I mean to denote concepts already dealt with at length in philosophical literature; concepts such as justification, truth and belief. Topics such as defeaters, internal vs. external rationality, evolutionary epistemology and the like, though important, have received less philosophical scrutiny historically. It is often alleged that Plantinga's argument is only successful given controversial and perhaps false assumptions regarding the very nature of justification, truth or belief.

Now I have no intent to explore every major theory with respect to these subjects for purpose of showing Plantinga's premises and inferences to be consistent with them all. Rather, in keeping with the thesis of this dissertation, I will briefly investigate the objections raised at this level and answer them. A first reading of Plantinga's argument does not give the impression that anything is wrong on this deeper level and I argue here that there is no good reason given in the literature for abandoning this impression. But if any of these replies had been successful, the implications for Plantinga's EAAN would be dark. For they would

demonstrate that at best the conjunction of N & E & some further assumption is epistemically self-defeating rather than evolutionary naturalism itself.

## **A. Presumptions with respect to the nature of justification**

According to Plantinga's EAAN, upon reflection the naturalist will realize that given their beliefs as to the origin of their cognitive faculties, they have no good reason for trusting the deliverances of those faculties. Consequently they will lose the justification they had for the belief that any of their beliefs are true. Seemingly Plantinga's argument works from a moderate and intuitively plausible claim: if you have only one source of information on a subject and come to be either skeptical or agnostic as to whether that source is trustworthy, you cannot rationally and reflectively continue to believe the information you have received on the subject in question. Some authors contend that there are more subtle assumptions than this regarding the nature of justification (or lack thereof) had by agents and conditions under which it can be lost. The authors to which I refer take it that some such assumptions are either false or controversial or both. Here I examine and reply to such charges, specifically those made by Fitelson and Sober and those made by Christopher Hookway.

In his article "Naturalized Epistemology and Epistemic Evaluation" Christopher Hookway introduces an argument intended to demonstrate that the naturalized epistemology of W. V. O. Quine can somehow undercut Plantinga's EAAN. In general, he claims that although Quine and his adherents may be unable to convince their opponents of the truth of their naturalized epistemology, such adherents are in a position to *justifiably* assert some of its more controversial claims. Reasons for this will be reasons the critics of such a naturalized approach

to epistemology will not accept but are nonetheless sufficient grounds for the naturalized epistemologist to rationally maintain their views on epistemology. It is in light of the fact that this naturalized epistemology is defensible in such a manner, Hookway further argues, that the Quinean's position with respect to the likelihood of his own cognitive faculties being reliable is immune from any criticism including Plantinga's; naturalized epistemologists can justifiably ignore such issues as the ones Plantinga raises altogether, or so it is alleged. Quine offers a reply to Hookway in the same journal. I will explore the offerings of both writers. My thesis here is that Hookway has not given a sufficient demonstration of Quine's alleged immunity and that Quine's own reply to Hookway seems to demonstrate that Quine's epistemology is not so immune. Consequently, the EAAN survives an attack that is based upon the assumption that naturalized epistemology is wrong with respect to some of its commitments on issues of epistemic justification.

Hookway offers an overview of Quine's naturalized epistemology and its difficulties. Such an approach wishes to reduce epistemology to the science of psychology leaving behind such distinctly philosophical concerns as "justification," "warrant," or demonstrating the truth-tropic nature of induction or scientific reasoning. The initial problem is that this seems to leave behind any notion of responsibility with respect to how we *ought* to form our beliefs and reflect upon our acquisition thereof. The normative concerns entirely give way to merely descriptive accounts. Hookway notes three problems citing Plantinga as

one person who presses the first two of these problems. First, naturalized epistemology cannot even adequately *describe* epistemic norms in its own language. Second, it cannot *explain* why these norms are correct. Third, if epistemic evaluation rests upon some sort of means/end relationship, it might be difficult to give any account of what the propriety of certain means to ends amounts to in Quine's epistemology.<sup>40</sup>

Given that Quine cannot persuade his critics that there are good answers to these charges, can he at least satisfy himself that he ought not to reevaluate his position? Hookway takes it has his thesis that this is so. Naturalized epistemology, he thinks needs an intellectually respectable way to dismiss, ignore or otherwise get rid of traditional questions in epistemology<sup>41</sup> Consequently, with respect to the EAAN, "...we have to consider not only whether a naturalist account of 'warrant' is available, but also whether this evaluative concept is actually required. If Quine's practice could show that the lack of this concept did not prevent him carrying out his inquiries in an ordered and responsible way, then he may be able to ignore the objection (*and subsequently the EAAN*)." Italics mine.

So what Christopher Hookway proposes is that when it comes to issues of global legitimization (e.g. broad skeptical questions), epistemic appraisal (e.g. justification) and principles formed to guide epistemic appraisal (e.g. inductive

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<sup>40</sup> Hookway, Christopher. "Naturalized Epistemology and Epistemic Evaluation." *Inquiry*. Vol. 37, No. 4, Dec, 1994, pp. 465-85, p. 468.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 470.

logic) Quine has a viable means of answering the general challenge made against naturalistic epistemology:

Challenge: If we are called upon to *defend* an evaluative procedure E, we cannot consistently rely upon factual information or other norms or evaluations that would become dubitable were our defense to fail.<sup>42</sup>

For example, one may not defend induction with an inductive argument or reliability of senses with an appeal to sense data. Quine may offer one of two defenses. Number one: deny that our evaluative procedures ever need a defense. Science may explain why we have them or use them, but it cannot do what is actually unnecessary i.e. justify them. Or Quine may take option Number two: deny that the challenging of these procedures ever actually has a role in our cognitive life at all. Hookway claims that Quine writes as though he favors the first option, but suggests that the second is better. A “challenging” of these procedures does not take place and therefore, Hookway will argue, in the absence of a challenge these beliefs remain justified. The “challenging” in question, I take it, refers to a serious possibility of abandoning the epistemic processes we normally use to form our beliefs in light of skeptical, critical reflection upon these processes.

Hookway turns to a brief but helpful discussion of Quine’s descriptive account of our actual cognitive activities. We tend to choose the *simplest* theory that accounts for the data of experience. Therefore, accounting for experience is the main epistemic goal (and admittedly a good myth will suffice to do this) and

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 472.

simplicity some sort of non-normative virtue. Further, we revise our theories to accommodate new data in the manner that is most *conservative*. This is the nature of our passive and seemingly intuitive judgments: the one's which we supposedly never really challenge. Now it seems plausible that natural selection would select for agents acting upon the simplest and most conservative of their judgments. Simplicity allows for neurological parsimony and conservativeness for reducing cognitive labor. So these, it might consistently be said, explain and describe the origin and nature of our scientific endeavors. But the challenge for us remains, "Why think that these virtues of our judgments or theories are secure true beliefs?" Hookway suggests that Quine's defense is to place the burden of proof on those who claim otherwise: we should trust our intuitive simplicity judgments in particular until there is good reason to doubt them. It is "only if we are suspicious of 'passivity' rather than welcoming of it, that there is a problem. So long as we accept the 'shallowness of epistemic reflection' and insist that the only normative issues that arise are local rather than global ones, there need be no normative issues arising naturally out of our practice which a naturalized epistemologist cannot address."<sup>43</sup>

Now we turn to points bearing on Plantinga's argument. First, based on the foregoing points regarding naturalized epistemology Hookway has to this point argued that the naturalist will ignore questions of global epistemic import and justifiably so. Plantinga's argument is, of course, a skeptical argument of some

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 479.

global sort. The second of the moves in question involves explaining an interesting quote from Quine:

There is some encouragement in Darwin. If people's innate spacing of qualities is a gene-linked trait, then the spacing that has made for the most successful inductions will have tended to predominate through natural selection. Creatures inveterately wrong in their inductions have a pathetic tendency to die before reproducing their kind.<sup>44</sup>

Hookway claims that Quine here is referring to induction at the local level and is not trying to present a bulwark against global inductive skepticism. So at a local level, say a monkey trying to evade tigers, monkey's with eyes capable of spotting a certain spacing of visual qualities in their environment, correctly identifying it as dangerous and scurrying away will be more likely to survive and reproduce.

Hookway adds further that qualities that are helpful in this respect might also assist the scientific enterprise: inductions such as this might lead to greater predictive success.

Hookway pauses here, in a footnote,<sup>45</sup> to discuss a problem. Predictive success, the anti-realist with respect to science might claim, is no guarantee of truth. Hookway replies that the critic in question might be ignoring the fact that Quine general thinks of truth as a mere disquotational device. Therefore, Hookway asserts, the checkpoint for the truth of a theory is its predictive success.

“One relevant complication should be mentioned here. The anti-naturalist may object that predictive success is no guarantee of truth. Theories may be useful for predictive purposes even if they are not true. One wonders what notion of truth the critic is making use of, and recalls that Quine

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 480.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 481, ft. 29 located in text p. 485.

generally construes truth as a device of disquotation and emphasizes that prediction is the checkpoint of theory.”

Now I must be completely honest and admit that I am unclear as to why Hookway holds that this constitutes a reply to the objection or exactly how any such reply is supposed to work. I hope that Quine’s reply, part of which I will quote later, helps shed light on this peculiar dialectic.

So, to recap, Hookway has made a few moves in order to relieve the naturalized epistemology of science of a few burdens. First, deny that global skeptical concerns ever play a “challenging” role in our reasoning. Then assert that scientific reasoning remains justified until proven otherwise. From here, generate a story on the origins of our cognitive processes such as opting for simple theories, reasoning inductively etc. Finally, in a footnote, attach this account to a theory of truth. Quite an ambitious article, I think.

Now obviously all of this moves just a bit too fast. But here is what I take to be the “bare bones” of Hookway’s reasoning

1. Naturalized epistemologists dismiss the global skeptical challenges, replies to which constitute a significant amount of the work of traditional epistemology.
2. So long as their descriptive account of the nature and origins of their processes give rise to an account connecting these with the truth of their beliefs, they are justified in keeping them; the burden of proof is on those who challenge this view.
3. Plantinga’s argument introduces global skeptical concerns typical of traditional epistemology.

4. Therefore, the naturalist's descriptive account regarding the reliability of their cognitive processes is justifiably held by the naturalist even in light of Plantinga's arguments.

This exhausts most of Hookway's comments on Plantinga's arguments. I argue that Hookway's "Quinean" reply to Plantinga fails for three main reasons. First, he misunderstands Quine. Second, Quine genuinely has nothing to say in light of the EAAN. Thirdly, Hookway misunderstands Plantinga's argument. Let's begin with Hookway's commentary on Quine's naturalized epistemology. In point of fact, Quine denies that prediction is the checkpoint of truth for a theory, though it may decisively refute a theory.

"...the happy circumstance that nature has apparently persisted pretty well in her old ways right down to the present day, accounts for the continuing success by and large of induction. Our genes account for our still continuing to rely on it. But all this is compatible with a major change right now, in the course of nature, so I see no entitlement. Such a change would be contrary to our firmest scientific laws, but to argue thus is to argue inductively, begging the question...Where evidence can be decisive is rather on the negative side: refutation of an observation categorical by an observed counter-instance."<sup>46</sup>

Quine is explicit about this in his reply to Hookway, so the appeal to "disquotational theories of truth" (however that was intended to help) seems moot. The value of prediction on Quine's view is that it sometimes allows us to *falsify conjunctions* of claims, but no more than this. The consequence of this for Hookway's defense of Quine against Plantinga seems clear. Success in prediction

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<sup>46</sup> See Quine's reply to Hookway, p. 503.

does not imply truth of beliefs. And therefore, it does nothing to justify them.

Furthermore, Quine begins his reply with one short resounding paragraph:

Christopher Hookway cites as an issue of epistemic evaluation the question why we are entitled to rely on induction. I suppose my position is that we are not *entitled* to, though up to a point we are *bound* to.<sup>47</sup>

Hookway has mistakenly discovered in Quine a new defense of the claim that our faith in our general cognitive processes is justified; but such a thing, Quine claims, does not exist.

Now this does raise a thorny question as to just what Quine had in mind in offering his Darwinian account of the origins of our scientific faculties. I for one cannot tell if he ever intended naturalized epistemology to generate a “defense” of science; in fact, I suspect he never came down clearly on the issue of whether this is possible. But let’s take the points upon which Quine seems clear. He begins with a seemingly uncontroversial idea of perception (some arrangement of colors appears to us in a visual field) and then makes a claim regarding some general inductive skills of agents. What is the nature of this leap and most importantly *what does any of this have to do with having beliefs?* For a monkey to see an arrangement of visible qualities within its visual field is not the same as to have a belief. For most of our visual perceptions there is no time to form any corresponding beliefs. This is further complicated by the fact that Quine and Hookway both seem here to assume that perception causes both beliefs and behavior. So what exactly is going on here?

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<sup>47</sup> Quine’s reply to Hookway, p. 502.

My conclusion is that the fault for these confusions lies chiefly with Quine. Hookway is not the first to see an attempt at a genuine defense of our general cognitive faculties in Quine. Plantinga notes it as well.<sup>48</sup> And Quine disavows all of this explicitly. But the concluding paragraph of Quine's reply, I think, gives a little insight as to what could have gotten all of this confusion rolling.

“Hookway finds ‘Two Dogmas’ instrumentalist. I think this is fair, and that it applies to my later work as well. But realism peeps through at the checkpoints, and then takes over altogether when we adopt a sternly naturalistic stance and recognize ‘real’ as itself a term within our scientific theory.”<sup>49</sup>

My interpretation of all of this is that Quine intends for the terms “real” and “true” to be legitimately employed so long as one does not use them in any absolute sense. The term “real” interprets as something like “real according to the prevailing scientific worldview.” The same holds, I take it, for the term “true.” But I sincerely think Quine chaffs at the idea of employing the word for any more than this.

But if this is right, we might wonder what Quine himself would have to say in reply to Plantinga. Clearly Quine has no interest in justifying inductive practices or any of our other basic cognitive procedures. But the question here is whether Plantinga ever claimed in the course of the EAAN that we needed to do so? I think at this point we may safely return to our discussion of Hookway; for this is a point that will resurface and I suspect that if Quine has thought about the EAAN he probably took it the same way Hookway did.

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<sup>48</sup> In WPF, p. 219 for example.

<sup>49</sup> Op. Cite., p. 504.

So let us now focus on Hookway's alleged misunderstanding of the EAAN. What Hookway says suggests that R (or faith in one's scientific reasoning capacities in particular) can be held rationally unless the "burden of proof" against R has been fully met. He argues that this will insulate our faith in our cognitive faculties from attack from the EAAN. But when did Plantinga ever deny this? Plantinga never claimed that we should *begin* with skepticism regarding R like the Cartesians and other skeptics to which Hookway earlier refers. In fact, quite the opposite: Plantinga agrees that the burden of proof is on the skeptic. But the evolutionary naturalist will, upon reflection, have to admit that the skeptic can supply the needed argument against the claim that our cognitive faculties are reliable. This argument will consist only of what the evolutionary naturalist is prepared to admit as true. And the argument will constitute a defeater, for the naturalist, of R.

To emphasize this point and make clear exactly how Hookway is committing the mistake that I ascribe to him, I would call the readers attention to the "Challenge" in the indented paragraph above; it draws our attention to the requirements for evaluating a procedure of making judgments.

Challenge: If we are called upon to *defend* an evaluative procedure E, we cannot consistently rely upon factual information or other norms or evaluations that would become dubitable were our defense to fail.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Op. Cite., p. 472.

In other words, employ a certain “method of doubt” with respect to these and then try to work your way out of it without committing any circular judgments or other such fallacies. The way to answer this challenge is to find some independent justification for the procedures in question. But this is not Plantinga’s challenge and consequently the traditional moves to answer it are off target; a mistake made by many who respond to the EAAN.

Hookway’s mistake here lies in the tendency to lump Plantinga’s argument with other global skeptical arguments and use naturalized epistemology to write them all off. As we saw earlier, naturalized epistemology of Quine’s sort was never intended to answer those arguments in the first place; rather it ignores them. But more importantly, what we have seen in the previous paragraph is that even if it had succeeded in responding to those more traditional arguments, it does not follow that Plantinga’s argument against naturalism would be answered. In chapter 6 of this dissertation, however, I intend to take up this subject again. Here I simply wish to point out that there is no reason to think that answering traditional skeptical arguments will imply that Plantinga’s argument against the naturalist fails simply because it too is a global skeptical argument. But in chapter 6, I defend the stronger claim that even if it is admitted that traditional global skeptical arguments have been beaten, the EAAN would not be the slightest bit affected.

To further buttress the point made above, it would pay to examine the comments of Hookway in his section concluding the discussion of Plantinga’s argument.

“It seems that both Quine and his critics are rational to stick to their guns. If Quine can show that it is *possible* to live and inquire coherently without addressing these issues, his critics need not conclude that they are required to do so. If someone believes (before becoming involved in epistemological issues) that a range of claims may have epistemic merit which do not fit into the naturalistic view of the world, then he or she is likely to confront evaluative issues which cannot be addressed within a naturalized epistemology. If (like Quine) one lacks this initial belief, then a naturalized epistemology may meet all one’s needs. To refute Quine’s position, one would need to show that this standpoint is internally incoherent, and it is unclear that this has been done.”<sup>51</sup>

Here Hookway clearly gives away his misunderstanding of the EAAN. Having decided that Plantinga raises evaluative issues outside those the naturalized epistemologist will address, namely issues of the traditional and global sort, Hookway informs us that naturalism, with respect to epistemology at least, is safe until it is shown to be somehow incoherent. This, astonishingly, overlooks the fact that that is exactly what Plantinga spent his entire argument doing.

In conclusion then, why does the naturalized epistemologist need to pay just as much attention to the EAAN as anyone else? Naturalized epistemology advises us to ignore global skeptical concerns altogether and address only local one’s arising within the context of scientific inquiry itself. But what the EAAN demonstrates is that a global skeptical concern can arise in the context of scientific inquiry if that inquiry assumes both the truth of naturalism and evolutionary theory. Quine overlooks this possibility. And neither Quine nor Hookway can claim that reflective examination on the likelihood of our cognitive faculties being reliable is outside the domain of scientific inquiry; plenty of research is being done

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 482.

on those types of subjects. Quine, incidentally, offers nothing in reply to Plantinga's thought specifically. Furthermore, he seems also to not have noticed that it was Hookway's chief task to rescue Quine from Plantinga's arguments. It seems to me that this rescue has altogether failed.

Fitelson and Sober believe that Plantinga has made quite a different mistake with respect to assumptions on the nature of justification of beliefs. In the EAAN, Alvin Plantinga derives a defeater for N & E, in part, from the fact that the probability of R given N & E is low or inscrutable. But there are known to be difficulties with deriving defeat from merely low probability alone as Plantinga himself is willing to concede.<sup>52</sup> The issue that I wish to address here is whether or not the manner in which Plantinga develops this charge of defeat merits suspicion due to a reliance on principles adequately criticized in the literature by reference to the lottery paradox. My thesis is that there is no apparent argument from principles rightly learned from the case of the lottery paradox to the defeat of the EAAN.

Both the charges made by Fitelson and Sober and the replies made by Plantinga are imprecise. Fitelson and Sober suggest that Plantinga obtains a defeater from a low probability assignment in a fashion that suggests that "What Plantinga is coming up against here is a close relative of the phenomenon that Kyburg's lottery paradox made vivid" and thus conclude that "This connection

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<sup>52</sup> See his reply to Swinburne, Swinburne, Richard and Plantinga, Alvin. "Swinburne and Plantinga on Internal Rationality." Sept. 2001, Vol. 37. No. 3. P. 357-358.

with the lottery paradox suggests that the task of repairing the main argument is formidable.”<sup>53</sup> It seems left to the reader to discern the nature of “close-cousinhood” in question and the “phenomenon” in question. But the majority of Fitelson and Sober’s comments are spent pointing out (rightly) that high probability of a belief’s being true given one’s background information is not a necessary criterion of rational belief. Plantinga, in response, claims that the EAAN never asserts the contrary.<sup>54</sup> But then curiously moves on to the claim that rational beliefs based in no evidence (e.g. basic ones) can be subjects of defeat even if that defeater holds only in a persons reflective moments. It seems to me worth the time to examine what exactly is or is not the relationship between Plantinga’s argument and the lottery paradox.

Kyburg first introduced the lottery paradox in 1961. We are asked to imagine a lottery containing a large number of tickets (say, ten thousand) from which a winner will be selected at random. Suppose we take the time to form judgments about the prospects for each ticket. As each ticket is sold we use our inductive/ probabilistic reasoning skills to form these judgments. Consequently, for each ticket we observe to be sold a belief is formed in us that “This ticket is a loser.” At the end of the day, having observed the sale of each ticket individually and made ten thousand judgments we will notice that the *conjunction* of all of our beliefs thus formed will be incoherent.

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<sup>53</sup> Fitelson, Branden and Sober, Elliott. “Plantinga’s Probability Arguments Against Evolutionary Naturalism.” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 79, 1998, pp. 115-129, p. 126.

<sup>54</sup> Plantinga, 2003, p. 297.

T1 is a loser.  
T2 is a loser.  
T3 is a loser.  
.  
.  
.  
T10,000 is a loser.  
One of the tickets 1-10,000 is a winner.

The odds of the conjunction of all of our beliefs being true are 0. This is a probabilistically incoherent set of beliefs; similarly, if one accepts some of the claims of the EAAN one might conclude that the set of beliefs N & E & R are probabilistically incoherent. Yet it does not seem to be the case that we are rationally obligated at this point to jettison any one particular belief in the case of the lottery paradox. Why are we required to do so in the case of believing the conjunction of N & E & R?

So what lesson ought we to derive from all of this? The clearest lesson is that membership in a set of coherent beliefs is not necessary for the justification of any particular belief. This should come as a shock to those inclined to accept a coherence theory of justification. But what does any of this have to do with the EAAN? There is no place in Plantinga's argument that explicitly insists that coherence amongst one's set of beliefs is necessary for the justification of any given member of that set.

Fitelson and Sober attempt an answer to the question as to why any of this is relevant to the EAAN.<sup>55</sup> First, they point out that the low probability of X/Y is

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<sup>55</sup> Fitelson and Sober, p. 126.

not sufficient by itself to defeat X. Further, they hold that Plantinga has in some self-contradictory fashion adopted some principle of this sort. Simply put, they see Plantinga as setting a double standard.

From here, Fitelson and Sober claim that what Plantinga is wrestling with is a “close relative” of the lottery paradox. And even worse than assuming that probabilistic coherence amongst beliefs is necessary for each belief individually to be justified, Plantinga has gone one step further and made his argument turn on the claim that each belief must be highly likely to be true given the truth of the others if it is to remain justified. But this cannot be true if even probabilistic coherence of one belief with all others stands as a requirement for justification of belief.

Now Plantinga has stated that he does not believe his argument needs any *general* principle regulating defeat from which to work.<sup>56</sup> So it would be odd if he were assuming one such as Fitelson and Sober attribute to him. Where, in this reconstruction, is the argument from analogy Plantinga emphasizes? Where have Fitelson and Sober misunderstood the argument?

In fact, this is not an issue that Plantinga has overlooked. In “Naturalism Defeated,” Plantinga discusses a genuinely close cousin of the lottery paradox, by this I refer to the “preface paradox.”<sup>57</sup> The preface paradox features a writer who believes that each statement written in his book is true, at least when each statement is considered individually. However, in the preface of the book he is (humbly and rightly) willing to confess that he does not believe the book to be

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<sup>56</sup> See ND, p. 239-240, reply to Van Cleve.

<sup>57</sup> In my landscape copy this discussion is found in “Naturalism Defeated,” p. 31.

lacking for at least one false sentence. Taken together, such commitments are inconsistent. Plantinga, in his article, speaks of this problem in the contexts of the question as to whether a defeater can defeat a conjunction without defeating either conjunct: his unequivocal answer is yes. So on his view, and most everyone else's excepting the hard-core coherentist, conjunctions may be candidates for defeat where the individual conjuncts are not.

Given this express written position, it is hard to see how Fitelson and Sober would consider Plantinga's position so open to an easy and undeveloped attack as the one they have offered and which we have seen to fall short of its purpose. However, Plantinga also takes the time to close off another avenue of reply by his critics. He expressly states that in cases such as the preface paradox defeat *does* in fact occur: the writer of whom we spoke has a defeater for the belief that every sentence in their book (preface included) is true. The inconsistency of beliefs precludes the agent adding a belief that their book is flawless with respect to its claims to their noetic structure would generate an inconsistency that is rationally impermissible. By analogy, a person who in the case of the lottery added to their noetic structure the belief that all of their apparent beliefs regarding the lottery are true would be, if they continued to believe this even upon adequate reflection, irrational. So there is some necessary connection between consistency and rationality. And this connection, though not as straightforward as the one Fitelson and Sober attack, is enough to save the EAAN.

So how does the EAAN get from claims about probabilistic incoherence to claims about the defeat of one member of a belief set? Again, at this point Plantinga claims that the situation of the reflective naturalist bears a strong analogy to cases in low probabilities do actually generate defeat. And what is so important about the cases Plantinga raises is that in all of them the reliability a *source* of information on some subject is brought into question on the basis of other claims an agent believes regarding that source. There is no analogue to this in the lottery paradox or preface paradox cases. And this is why defeat of particular belief occurs upon reflection on the likelihood that its source is trustworthy. In the lottery paradox, the belief that ticket 19 is a loser is not defeated. But when one has a belief set consisting of “I am under the influence of a hallucination inducing drug” and “I have trustworthy perceptual beliefs” it does not take much reflection on the coherence of the set of beliefs to see that a defeater is in play.

In closing, we have seen that Plantinga’s argument offers no premises that commit the adherent of EAAN to the claim that only beliefs which are a part of a coherent set are justified. Fitelson and Sober have not been successful in this particular attempt to undermine the EAAN. It seems that Plantinga’s argument does not require controversial assumptions regarding justification of beliefs made in the presentations of the EAAN offered by Hookway, Fitelson or Sober.

## **B. Presumptions with respect to the nature of truth**

According to the EAAN, the reflective naturalist has a defeater for the claim that their cognitive faculties operate so as to make it the case that most of their beliefs are true. But what does it mean for beliefs to be *true*? Plantinga seems to hold that beliefs are some sort of representational state and that these representations are true just in case they depict the world as it really is.<sup>58</sup> But this seems to employ no more controversial an assumption than a platitude about beliefs and the basic T-schema as a criteria for truth; the belief that grass is green is a true belief iff grass is green. But it has been suggested that the EAAN requires more subtle and controversial an assumption than this. Here I examine and rebut such charges.

In “Theism, Evolutionary Epistemology, and Two Theories of Truth” John Lemos critically examines the evolutionary naturalism of Michael Ruse as well as the epistemology Ruse employs to defend it. Michael Ruse, Lemos explains, believes that Alvin Plantinga’s EAAN rests upon a theory of truth that the thoughtful naturalist will reject, namely, correspondence theory. Ruse’s position regarding theories of truth greatly resembles and is obviously highly indebted to Hillary Putnam’s coherence theory. Lemos does not attack this theory of truth directly, but rather points out three difficulties with Ruse’s argument that this theory of truth will undermine EAAN or any global form of skepticism. In this section, I will articulate Ruse’s position with respect to the theory of truth and

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<sup>58</sup> See Plantinga’s reply to Ramsey and Fales, “Naturalism Defeated?,” pp. 257-260.

explicate Lemos' general complaints with Ruse's reply to Plantinga. I contend that although a couple of Lemos' replies to Ruse fall short of refuting him in virtue of the fact that they misunderstand him, they nonetheless point to deeper problems with Ruse's reply which I believe establish the same conclusion Lemos was aiming for.

I must hasten to mention that sorting through this material is bound to be quite a burden for the reader. Several confusions will need to be cleared up before the issues raised here can be settled, e.g. Ruse's misunderstandings of Plantinga, Lemos' misunderstandings of Ruse, and such. I beg a little patience from the reader with respect to forging through some vague paragraphs before I attempt to pinpoint exactly where confusions (and there are several) have crept into the discussion at hand.

Lemos explicates Plantinga's EAAN in the following fashion:

P1: According to naturalism, our reasoning and cognitive powers are the product of evolution.

P2: Evolution, especially Darwinian evolution, cares nothing for truth, only for survival and reproductive success.

P3: Therefore, there really is no reason that our reasoning and cognitive powers should tell us the truth about the world—they tell us just what we need to believe to survive and reproduce, which information could as easily be quite false.

P4: If there is no reason to think that our reasoning and cognitive powers should tell us the truth, then there is no reason to think that we can know anything.

P5: Therefore, naturalism ends up in skepticism.

Now Plantinga sometimes quibbles with supposed explications of his argument by other philosophers (Ramsey's, Fales, Fitelson & Sober to name but a few) and with respect to other authors I am convinced that the same charge holds. The foregoing explication has a few failings as well. Premises 1-3 appear in Plantinga's argument in some form, but 4 and 5 do not. Furthermore, the leap from 4 to 5 is a stretch. And still more, 5 is not the conclusion of the EAAN. The actual conclusion is that the reflective naturalist has a defeater for their belief in evolutionary naturalism. But this will not affect the following discussion.

Ruse has it in mind to deny the second premise as it appears in this explication of Plantinga's argument.<sup>59</sup> His grounds for doing so are that this premise presupposes a metaphysically realist conception of truth (henceforth MR) and the Darwinist should be an internalist realist (henceforth IR). Ruse's evolutionary epistemology is also cashed out in an earlier book.<sup>60</sup> But first, let's examine the contrast between MR and IR.

“‘Truth,’ in an internalist view, is some sort of (idealized) rational acceptability—some sort of ideal coherence of our beliefs with each other and with our experiences *as those experiences are themselves represented in our belief system*—and not correspondence with mind-independent ‘states of affairs.’”<sup>61</sup>

Now on Ruse's view, beliefs in such things as an external world and, I think, belief that our mental life has causal efficacy with respect to behavior are beliefs

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<sup>59</sup> Ruse claims this in the postscript to “Taking Darwin Seriously,” 1998, p. 295-297.

<sup>60</sup> Ruse, “Evolutionary Naturalism,” 1995.

<sup>61</sup> Lemos, p. 793.

we cannot force ourselves to refrain from. Therefore, classical skeptical arguments are averted. Ruse quotes Putnam with approval:

“...a sign that is actually employed in a particular way by a particular community of users can correspond to particular objects *within the conceptual scheme of those users*. ‘Objects’ do not exist independently of conceptual schemes...Since objects *and* the signs are alike *internal* to the scheme of description, it is possible to say what matches what.”<sup>62</sup>

I think it safe to assume that given this theory of truth, even Plantinga’s appeal to the possibility of reference by definite descriptions (“witch-trees,” “created-trees,” etc.) will not convince Putnam and Ruse of the possibility that our beliefs might be mostly false. So trees exist independently of our consciousness. But what makes this fact true is that this fact coheres with our other beliefs and perceptions. The fact that skepticism remains a tangled philosophical question should not matter “in real life”<sup>63</sup> where common sense realism prevails. I take this further to be the reason that Ruse sees no point in challenging the common sense notion that beliefs cause behaviors; something which becomes relevant later on in this discussion.

Ruse argues that theories of truth must thus begin with the supposition that evolutionary naturalism is true: truth should be defined in terms of the faculties that such an evolutionary process would endow humans with. The capacity for correspondence of the mind with the external world is not likely to be one of those things. He agrees with Plantinga to at least that extent. So a correspondence theory of truth is, strangely, false simply because it does not cohere with what an

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<sup>62</sup> Putnam, 1981, p. 52, quoted in Ruse 1995, 65, and again quoted in Lemos, p. 794.

<sup>63</sup> Ruse, 1998, p. 206, as cited by Lemos.

idealized scientific society would believe, that is, the doctrine of evolutionary naturalism. Note however (and this is important) that coherence of beliefs is merely one criterion that an idealized scientific community would have to meet. Rational acceptability requires this, but likely requires more.

However, Ruse claims, there are three things that selective forces would likely endow us with: mathematical skills, skill in deductive logic and scientific reasoning skills. These are “hard-wired” into us. Essentially then, evolutionary naturalism would likely give us all the skills and faculties necessary to keep our beliefs coherent with each other. Evidence for this stems from three sources: the fact that such skills are found cross-culturally, are detectable in very young children and even found to some extent in animals.

Two points should be addressed here. First, nothing Ruse has offered so far demonstrates that these three hard-wired functions of the mind correspond to reality: for example, that the universe is actually such that bivalence holds or that inference to the best explanation is a truth-tropic process (“truth” in the correspondence sense). But this is not essential to his argument and I think he in fact would agree to this point. Secondly, his three points of evidence for the alleged hard-wiring of our brains seem to already assume the validity of scientific reasoning: they are inductive forms of evidence if they can count as evidence at all. Does this damage his position? Is the reasoning circular? I think that neither of these points will damage his position so long as he adopts some type of coherence theory of truth. And that is exactly what he has in mind.

A third important point lies in his argument that natural selective forces would in fact select for any of these faculties. Plantinga, as we have seen, is radical enough in his stance as to claim that even the notion that modus ponens is a valid form of argument can be defeated by reflection upon the EAAN. By contrast, Ruse argues that animals that lack certain basic reasoning faculties would likely make poor decisions and inevitably get eliminated from the gene pool.

Ruse's argument<sup>64</sup> greatly resembles that offered by Evan Fales, which we will examine later. One point that Ruse seems to ignore, that Fales will not, is that this assumes beliefs play a causal role in behavior. Fales argues at length (unsuccessfully, I argue in a later chapter) that this would be the only possible relation of belief to behavior on an evolutionary naturalist's view. What is Ruse's argument? He offers none. The reason Ruse does not argue for such a claim is likely to be that he finds arguments for certain claims unnecessary given his internal realism regarding truth. The idea that beliefs do not cause behavior will be rationally unacceptable to an idealized scientific community.

Let us sum things up. MR plus what Plantinga refers to as N & E yields skepticism via the EAAN. IR plus N & E will not. Therefore, the Darwinist should endorse IR. Doing so, Ruse alleges, will allow the evolutionary naturalist to reject P2 of the argument we formalized at the beginning of this section.

Before forging ahead with the objections of Lemos, it is worth noting one fact of importance with respect to Ruse's theory of truth. There is currently a

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<sup>64</sup> An argument quoted at length in Lemos, p. 792, from "Evolutionary Naturalism" p. 162.

paradox being discussed in the literature with respect to anti-realist theories of truth referred to as the “paradox of knowability” which was first developed by F. Fitch.<sup>65</sup> The anti-realist defines truth in terms of what humans could come to know. But, according to the paradox, if all truths are knowable it follows that all truths are in fact known. I will not take up a detailed exposition of this paradox here; but suffice to say that there is no universally agreed upon solution to this paradox. Consequently, the theory of truth towards which Ruse is directing the naturalist has a potential fatal strike against it already in the form of a reductio.

So now let us turn to Lemos’ objections. Lemos’ first point of contention is that the theory of evolution itself plays no essential role in generating the skeptical problem that Ruse tries to unravel. If one wanted a case for skepticism, one needs only to go to Descartes’ Meditations.

From what I know of Ruse’s arguments here and elsewhere, I am led to suspect that Lemos first point is off track. First, it is true that Rene Descartes was able to generate skeptical arguments from the mere possibility of most of our beliefs being radically false. But this does not reduce the EAAN to any form of Descartes argument. The relevant dissimilarity is that Descartes never requires his listener to actually believe that such a creature as an evil demon exists. The epistemic situation for a person who believes that the evil demon is merely a possibility is by far superior to the person who believes the evil demon or something playing the same role to be a reality. The naturalist, according to

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<sup>65</sup> Fitch, F. B. “A Logical Analysis of Some Value Concepts.” *Journal of Symbolic Logic*, 28, 1963, pp. 135-142.

Plantinga, is in the latter position though. And Ruse seems to know this, unlike some of the other authors we have examined thus far. The skeptical problem is much more serious for the evolutionary naturalist it seems, as I explained earlier.

The question, with respect to the first issue Lemos raises for Ruse, is why do we not simply treat (N & E) along with  $\sim R$  as a possibility just as the evil demon is a possibility? If not this, why not simply treat  $\sim R$  as a mere possibility given (N & E)? I think considerations of remarks made elsewhere by Ruse will enlighten us here. Ruse has been for a long time a staunch opponent of alternative accounts of human origins (most notably the Intelligent Design Movement) and has committed himself to some rather polemic positions in order to argue against these alternatives meriting a foothold in public discussions of such.<sup>66</sup> This needs to be born in mind when Ruse states that our brains are hard-wired for certain forms of scientific reasoning. Simply put, given this hard-wiring and the evidence for evolutionary naturalism, *Ruse does not believe that it is an epistemic possibility that evolutionary naturalism offers a false account of our origins.* At least it is not an epistemic possibility for any well-educated person. For evidence of this, note his entry under “Creationism” in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. This quote follows a discussion (an unsympathetic one) of theories of intelligent design.

“Creationism in the sense used in this discussion is still very much a live phenomenon in American culture today — and in other parts of the world, like the Canadian West, to which it has been exported. Popularity does not

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<sup>66</sup> See his entry in the Stanford Dictionary of Philosophy, under “Creationism.”

imply truth. Scientifically Creationism is worthless, philosophically it is confused, and theologically it is blinkered beyond repair. But do not underestimate its social and political power. As we enter the new millennium, thanks to Johnson and his fellows, there are ongoing pressures to introduce non-evolutionary ideas into science curricula, especially into the science curricula of publicly funded schools in the United States of America. And things could get a lot worse before they get better, if indeed they will get better. Already, there are members of the United States Supreme Court who have made it clear that they would receive sympathetically calls to push evolution from a preeminent place in science teaching. If future appointments include more justices with like inclinations, we could find that — nearly a century after the Scopes Trial, when the Fundamentalists were perceived as figures of fun — Creationism finally takes its place in the classroom. If this essay persuades even one person to take up the fight against so awful an outcome, then it will have served its purpose.”<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, Ruse has already explained his theory as to the nature of truth: truth is whatever ideally coherent set of beliefs would be acquired by creatures that came about by the processes of evolutionary naturalism. To give up the actual truth of evolutionary naturalism is therefore to give up the claim that any of us are likely to have true beliefs about anything.

But what of the second option:  $\sim R$  as a mere possibility given (N & E)? The problem here is that according to EAAN, this is not a mere possibility. It is altogether likely, acknowledges Ruse, if we assume a correspondence theory of truth. Again, skeptical concerns run deeper here.

Lemos’ second point of contention is that it does not clearly follow from the fact that the reliability of our cognitive faculties might rationally be called into question that we do not know anything. Lemos suggests that perhaps Ruse is

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<sup>67</sup> Ruse, Michael. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/creationism/>

assuming some form of internalism *regarding justification* when he sees a problem with evolutionary skepticism. Pace Lemos, I think that there is nothing in Ruse's argument that commits him to internalism in his attempt to generate skepticism. But I can see why Lemos believes this so. To do this we need to look again at P4 and the conclusion to Plantinga's argument according to Lemos. As I mentioned earlier (though only in a footnote), Lemos overlooks much of Plantinga's argument here, probably in virtue of the fact that Ruse skips a lot of it as well. In particular, Lemos overlooks everything regarding Plantinga's argument from analogy and his employment of the concept of defeat. This is the appropriate link between P4 and the supposed conclusion P5. Now if P4 were all we had to go on, the inference to the conclusion might seem to hinge on some form of internalism *with respect to justification*. Anticipating some other authors I will examine in this dissertation, Lemos objects: a five year old who does math well might doubt his abilities yet nonetheless possess them.

But it has been rightly pointed out in the literature that even reliabilist/externalist can fall prey to the EAAN, especially if they allow that basic beliefs such as those based on memory and perception can be defeated. Lemos assessment of the child in question is correct. However, a five year old who doubts his abilities has reason to doubt the deliverances thereof e.g. his answers to certain test questions. Upon reflection, he should doubt whether he did well on the test that he just turned in. That is the nature of defeat. And it applies to externalists as well,

in virtue of the fact that externalists make room for defeaters to undermine justification for beliefs.

So let's put Lemos' missteps in perspective before going on to a better critique of Ruse. Lemos seems to take Ruse's approach to the EAAN to carry the following two assumptions.

Assumption 1: IR can beat traditional global skepticism.

Assumption 2: Beating traditional global skepticism will undermine the EAAN as well.

Having attributed these assumptions to Ruse, Lemos first two complaints target the second assumption: but they do not complain that this second assumption is false. Rather they complain that Ruse should not have brought up evolutionary naturalism to raise skeptical concerns in the first place and further that he overlooks the externalist reply to traditional skeptical concerns. But Ruse, I have contended, does not employ assumption 2 at all. In fact, as I pointed out in the previous paragraph (and in the previous section of this dissertation), this assumption is false. I think Ruse is aware of that much. As for the first assumption mentioned above, IR might well trump traditional skeptical concerns or it might not. But since assumption 2 is false, the point is moot.

The better issue is raised in Lemos' third challenge: does IR solve the problem of evolutionary skepticism? Recall the IR does not cash out truth simply in terms of rational acceptability only, but upon some idealized version thereof. The reason for this, as Putnam earlier realized, is that rational acceptability comes

in degrees, but truth does not. Truth, then, should be spoken of in terms of rational acceptability to an idealized epistemic agent or group thereof: agents endowed with cognitive powers such as ours who sit in the best of epistemic circumstances. Now Lemos complains that these ideal agents will be external to us and therefore we should be skeptical as to whether we approximate their epistemic circumstances to any large degree. But he notes that Ruse might reply by saying that we at least know that we approximate their *conceptual scheme*: for these ideal agents are stipulated to be capable of possessing only conceptual schemes which we may acquire. But Lemos adds the point that humans are capable of more than one conceptual scheme: which does the ideal agent employ and is it remotely like ours? A certain skeptical problem seems to lurk still.

Now Lemos' third complaint does seem to have bearing on issues pertaining to the EAAN. But it needs developed if it is to damage Ruse's reply to the EAAN. Here I make the connection. Certainly an ideal scientific community would, I concede, believe in an external world, causality and the like. But what Ruse needs is the claim that the ideal scientific community would believe in (N & E). This means not only that the ideal scientific community must have the concept of naturalism, but employ it in their understanding of the world around them. Otherwise, naturalism would be false by Ruse's reckoning. Notice a few points of interest from Ruse so far.

- 1.) Define truth in terms of what the ideal scientific community would

believe; that is in terms of idealized rational acceptability. We have referred to this as IR.

2.) Insist that rational acceptability be understood in terms of underlying commitments to naturalism.

3.) Insist that the only coherent account of the evidence we have regarding our origins that is consistent with naturalism is the account given by evolutionary theory.

The question is whether Ruse or anyone adopting his position has a defeater for the claim that the ideal scientific community would believe in evolutionary naturalism. For this would be equivalent on Ruse's view for having a defeater for the claim that evolutionary naturalism is true, given IR. And this is where Lemos' comments are helpful. For the idealized scientific community might be capable of employing a horde of possible conceptual schemes, one's that will likely include the concept of theism as well as naturalism. Which will they interpret their world in terms of?

If the EAAN is correct, the idealized scientific community will not interpret their world in terms of naturalism. For coherence is a requirement, even on Ruse's view, of ideal rationality. Furthermore, the ideal scientific community would believe their belief-producing faculties to be reliable; that is they would believe R with respect to themselves. If they did not, then by Ruse's definition of truth, R would be false with respect to the idealized scientific community and that would be disastrous for his view. But R is probabilistically incoherent with respect to N

& E. This means that no reflective person, let alone an ideal community of epistemic agents, would be rational to believe the conjunction of N & E & R. Therefore, even given Ruse's IR as a correct theory of truth, the internalist realist has a defeater for their belief in evolutionary naturalism. For they have a defeater for the claim that an ideally rational scientific community would accept it.

This suffices to demonstrate the thesis of this section of my dissertation. For I have intended to prove that the EAAN makes no controversial assumptions with respect to the nature of truth. What we have seen is that even the internalist view of truth espoused by Ruse will encounter difficulties with the EAAN, whether or not it escapes traditional skeptical concerns. I pointed out three commitments Ruse made in his attempt to stave off the EAAN. Upon reflection now, it becomes evident that the first of these (IR) can only be helpful for the evolutionary naturalist if the other two are employed in conjunction with it. But what we have seen is that the EAAN can be employed so as to render simultaneous employment of all three of these untenable. It does so by defeating the idea that their conjunction is true. Now Ruse, no doubt, would insist that idealized agents with cognitive faculties such as ours would not fail to believe in evolutionary naturalism due to the overwhelming evidence for it. I do not know exactly what the evidence for *naturalism* is to which he could refer; naturalism seems to have precious little evidence for it and thrives mainly as a philosophical assumption. But even then, the EAAN can be reemployed to show that any evidence that an ideal scientific community employed to support a belief in

naturalism would suffer and undefeated defeater. Hence, they would trust neither the evidence in question nor the doctrine of naturalism it was intended to support. Hence, neither should the internalist realist.

### **C. Presumptions with respect to the nature of belief**

Some of the earliest materials on Plantinga's EAAN focus directly upon the subject of what it means to have a true belief. Interestingly, one of the latest-coming articles, namely the reply of Lemos to Ruse, does this by focusing more on the nature of truth than the nature of a belief. It has become apparent that this issue will be of importance to my dissertation and consequently I will spend the first portion of this section investigating the options regarding a doctrine of the nature of true belief by means of which a naturalist might attempt to escape Plantinga's argument. After giving an exposition of this, I will turn my attention directly towards J. Wesley Robbins' very brief article. I argue that Robbins has overlooked many points made in writing by Plantinga that directly address the concerns he raises. Furthermore, these points are adequate to rebut Robbins' complaint that the EAAN requires some special assumption regarding the nature of belief.

Two controversial theories on the nature of belief have possible bearing on the weight of the EAAN. These are the theories of W.V.O. Quine on the one hand and the theories advanced by Donald Davidson and his follower Richard Rorty. W.V.O. Quine takes all truth to be truth relative to a conceptual scheme. Beliefs on Quine's view, according to Robbins, are merely "posits based on the irradiations of one's nerve endings."<sup>68</sup> By contrast, Davidson treats beliefs as sorts

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<sup>68</sup> Robbins, J. Wesley. "Is Naturalism Irrational?" *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 11, No. 2 April 1994, pp. 255-259, p. 258.

of “transactional states between organisms and their environment which, like any other organic state understood in evolutionary terms, can only be specified and understood with reference to their possessor’s surroundings.”<sup>69</sup> What it means for a “transactional state” to be true or false will be left to the further discussion this essay has to offer.

What remains to be seen is whether any of these accounts can dodge the force of Plantinga’s argument. Plantinga’s actual view of beliefs is somewhat clear given his replies to Ramsey and Fales.<sup>70</sup> Beliefs differ, he says, from other brain or mental states in that they *represent* the world as being a certain way. And they can do so correctly or incorrectly, consequently taking truth values which strictly speaking other mental and brain states cannot.

I think it fair to say that Robbins key complaint with Plantinga’s argument is that it takes beliefs to be “intrinsically specifiable,” describable without reference to what is occurring in an agent’s environment. Plantinga (in a reply to Ramsey in ND) notes that *truth* of a proposition is certainly not reducible to what goes on in an agents head, but beliefs in a proposition...that is another matter. The question of whether our beliefs are likely to be true given that our cognitive faculties are products of evolutionary naturalistic causes is examined by looking at the set of mutually exclusive and exhaustive options regarding the relationship between behavior and mental events. Now Robbins attack on Plantinga’s argument is obviously focused upon this stage of the EAAN. Robbins thinks that Plantinga

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>70</sup> “Naturalism Defeated?,” pp. 258-264.

has overlooked an option and further that none of the scenarios that he proposes with respect to the relationship of our beliefs to our behaviors is even possible. “On my view of beliefs, none of his scenarios in which “beliefs” are liable to be completely at variance with what is going on in the world around their holder, and thus largely false, is even possible in the first place.”<sup>71</sup>

So what, essentially, are beliefs? Robbins asserts that the pragmatic traditions, upheld by Davidson, Pierce and supposedly rooted in Darwin, holds these to be causal interactions between organisms and environments. Consequently, the content of a belief is not so far removed from the means by which we come to ascribe beliefs to other epistemic agents in our environment. Now it is impossible, on Davidson’s view at least, for us to understand another agent at all unless we try to make sense of their acts. And it is impossible to make such sense of their acts on the whole unless we assume them to apprehend the universe much as we do. Robbins concludes then that it is not possible for any agent’s beliefs to be mostly false given simply the nature of a belief.

Now Robbins does take a moment to consider whether Plantinga has an obvious reply to this line of thought. First of all, the creatures in the populations which Plantinga discusses to possess within their noetic structure items capable of being true or false, i.e. beliefs. But how can a “transactional state” understood in terms of an organisms behavior be true or false? To the question of whether the things Robbins’ naturalist has in place of beliefs are capable of truth values

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<sup>71</sup> Robbins, p. 258.

Robbins answers, "That depends."<sup>72</sup> From here, Robbins reply becomes a little confusing. He immediately states three propositions. First, transactional states of this sort are admittedly not the sort of thing persons on the street call true or false. Second, Darwinian philosophers interested in investigating human intelligence do not call them true or false. Third, Descartes and philosophers of his ilk could have called them true or false (had they desired to?). Then Robbins concludes "It is sheer bravado on Plantinga's part to claim that naturalists have no alternative but to accept his notion of beliefs as intrinsic states."<sup>73</sup> It is hard to see how these comments bear on the original question.

So let us simply grant that there is an understanding of the nature of belief at variance with that employed by Plantinga in the course of the EAAN. On Plantinga's view, beliefs are intrinsic states that represent the world as being a certain way. They are true if the representation is correct, and otherwise false.

The foregoing represents Plantinga's expressed opinions on the nature of belief. But more trouble lies in store for Robbins and Davidson. For beliefs seemingly have propositional content. It is this content (as Plantinga notes) that takes truth values. Propositions traditionally have been taken to fill in the "*that* clause" of a belief ascription: Joey believes *that* his Mom loves him, for example.

Robbins and Davidson do not share some of these views with Plantinga. Beliefs are not representational states. Further, whatever propositional content the mental state of an agent has, we simply ascribe this to an agent in the course of

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 257.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 257.

making sense of their transactions with the external world, that is, as a matter of practical necessity. But all of this would still be of no help to the naturalist unless their proposed alternative accomplished two things:

- 1.) Gave an account of how beliefs can take truth values.
- 2.) Demonstrate that on this view, the truth values can be mostly true as opposed to being mostly F.
- 3.) Demonstrate that this account is consistent with naturalist doctrine.

If these cannot be accomplished, then the appeal to a “naturalist alternative” to Plantinga’s argument that spares the naturalist the skeptical worries generated by the EAAN turns out to be hollow.

Davidson, at least, has tried to accomplish the agenda just mentioned. And since Robbins’ position bears so much similarity to that of Davidson it is curious that Robbins did not pay closer attention to Plantinga’s arguments concerning Davidson on this point.<sup>74</sup> Davidson argues that his view of beliefs entails not only that our beliefs can be true, but that most of our beliefs are true and he offered an argument to support this claim.<sup>75</sup> We are asked to imagine that there is in our world an omniscient interpreter: this interpreter makes sense of our behaviors just as we fallible interpreters make sense of each other’s behavior. If the omniscient interpreter were to have any understanding of our actions at all, he would have to

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<sup>74</sup> See WPF, p. 80 ff. and ND p.5 esp. ft. 8.

<sup>75</sup> Davidson, Donald. “A Coherence View of Truth and Knowledge” *Epistemology: an Anthology*, Ernest Sosa and Jaegwon Kim (eds.), Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 2000, pp. 154-164.

assume that most of our beliefs were correct. But since he is omniscient, it follows that most of our beliefs are in fact correct.

Plantinga has a couple of complaints with this argument. First, it assumes that an omniscient interpreter would have to make sense of other persons with only the same resources as we possess. The one omniscient being in which Plantinga believes need not do this necessarily. But the second and more interesting critique he borrows from Richard Foley and Fumerton.<sup>76</sup> They point out that Davidson reasons through a premise like:

- 1.) If there were an omniscient interpreter using Davidson's methods of interpretation, he would believe that most of what S believes is true.

But the conclusion

- 2.) Most of what S believes is true.

does not follow unless one affirms the antecedent of 1. Worse, 2 will not express a necessary truth even if 1 does unless the omniscient interpreter spoken of is a necessarily existing being. An appeal to a necessarily existent, omniscient being sounds very much like a traditional doctrine of God and very little like naturalism.

Plantinga thinks (along with Foley and Fumerton) that Davidson is relying on a third premise:

- 3.) Any proposition P that is such that any omniscient being would believe it, is true.

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<sup>76</sup> Foley, Richard and Fumerton, Richard. "Davidson's Theism?" *Philosophical Studies* (1985), p. 84.

However, there is one profound problem with the naturalist making an appeal to this premise: its truth would be *sufficient* to entail that there is an omniscient being due to the fact that any omniscient being would believe in their own existence. So the truth of proposition 3 would demonstrate that there exists an omniscient being. This is a comfortable outcome for the theist, but not for the naturalist.

So where does this leave us? This means that there is no reason for thinking our beliefs to be mostly true without accepting something like theism (assuming that the sort of naturalist we have described in this section has any way of connecting beliefs to truth values). So if there is no reasonable way for such a naturalist upon reflection to claim that any given belief is highly likely to be true, then they ought to regard the probability of its being true as at best inscrutable. And here the EAAN comes back in full force. Consider an analogy: if one looks at a book without prejudice as to which propositions in it are true or false and cannot rationally regard it as having more than 50% true claims in it, do they not have a defeater for belief in any proposition that they read out of the book? It seems that they do. Mere reflection will give them a defeater for any such belief. Consequently, if the Davidsonian naturalist lacks, upon reflection, any reason for thinking a large percentage of their beliefs to be true, they will likewise acquire a defeater for each and any of them, including the belief in naturalism itself.

In conclusion, Robbins reply fails because it rests on a theory of beliefs which either entails theism or fails to give the naturalist a reason to think our most of our beliefs are true. For surely, as a matter of practicality, we assume that

organisms have certain beliefs based on how they interact with the environment. But there is no omniscient interpreter on the naturalist view to guarantee that these beliefs of other agents (not to mention our own beliefs) are true. Robbins suggested that Davidson's account of beliefs trumps the EAAN because on this naturalistic view it is impossible for most of our beliefs to be false. What I have argued is that the view is either not naturalistic in the first place (covertly assuming something like theism) or else it does not succeed in explaining why Plantinga's claim that on the assumption of N & E there is no reason to think most of our beliefs likely to be true.

### **Chapter 3: Objections Based in Evolutionary Theory**

Plantinga holds that the only sensible thing for a naturalist to hold with respect to P (R/ N&E) is that it is low or, at best, inscrutable. He seems to further hold that this is the strongest point of the EAAN. Nonetheless, several authors have taken this to be the possible weak link in the argument and have focused their attacks on this premise. In this section I examine those attacks and conclude that they fail.

## **A. Arguments that P (R/ N&E) is high**

Arguments for a high appraisal of the value of P (R/ N & E) come from Michael Levin, William Ramsey and Evan Fales (Fales in two different published forms of his reply each containing much the same material). Ramsey takes the option on which beliefs seemed initially to be least likely true, namely semantic epiphenomenalism, and argues that in actuality this view, a highly plausible one for a naturalist, makes it likely that our beliefs would be largely true. Fales by contrast wishes to argue that P (R/ N & E) is either high or not low or not demonstrably low (I am afraid he is not clear here) whether or not beliefs cause behavior. By contrast, Levin's argues for a high likelihood for mind-brain identity theory being true and subsequent implausibility of several of Plantinga's proposed belief-behavior relationships. In this section, I examine the arguments of each of these authors and argue that they fail. In the course of doing so, I rely heavily upon responses made by Plantinga to both Ramsey and Fales.

Ramsey is primarily interested in the account of the relationship between the mind and behavior presented by the epiphenomenalist. The reader will recall that Plantinga and others have referred to this as the "received view" amongst evolutionary biologists. Ramsey proposes first that the epiphenomenalist can give an account in which beliefs are "causally salient" with respect to action *without* being themselves an actual link in causal chain that leads to an action.

Ramsey begins his argument with a few puzzling points regarding the "irreducibility" of both true belief and survival value of adaptations to features

intrinsic to an organism. In the case of true belief, the truth of most beliefs depends upon factors external to the mind of the agent holding the belief. My belief that snow is white, for example, is true in virtue of something that goes on external to my mind, namely, the presence of a property in the snow in the world around me. Ramsey points out that *truth* of a belief and *adaptivity* of a belief have at least that much in common. For similarly, whether or not any adaptation is beneficial to an organism will depend upon just what environmental context that organism is in: blue fur might be beneficial to an organism living in a blue forest, but probably not to an organism living in forests such as we experience them to be. Ramsey interprets Plantinga's argument to claim (as a premise) that, "Since the truth value of a belief is not reducible to those (intrinsic, neural) properties, then the truth value is irrelevant to the beliefs causal role."<sup>77</sup> Ramsey proceeds to attack this particular premise by explicating the commitments of semantic epiphenomenalists.

As a first point, Ramsey likens beliefs to "maps by which we steer," a notion found in both the work of F. P. Ramsey and Dretske.<sup>78</sup> He invites us to think of beliefs in this fashion because it supports an analogy that he thinks will allow for natural selection to select for true belief despite the fact that beliefs, on the epiphenomenalist's view, do not cause behavior. Maps, by supposed analogy, do not cause the behavior of hikers who use them. But nonetheless the maps are would be what Ramsey calls (his oft repeated term of choice, not mine) "causally

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<sup>77</sup> Ramsey, ND, p. 17

<sup>78</sup> Ramsey, p. 18, ft. 5.

salient.” The maps have some effect of a non-causal nature on the activities of hikers.

Whether Ramsey’s account of semantic epiphenomenalism successfully links adaptive success to true belief is a separate issue from whether he has rightly explicated Alvin Plantinga’s argument or no. Plantinga is adamant that Ramsey has not. It is clear that beliefs are somehow “irreducible” in the sense described by Ramsey: that is to say, a certain belief can be true in one possible context but not in another. And the same can be said with respect to the adaptivity of any feature of a given organism. But no premise in the EAAN asserts the contrary of this claim. Plantinga simply claims that if a belief does not cause a behavior, then it will be invisible to natural selection.<sup>79</sup> Consequently, the probability of R given N and E and semantic epiphenomenalism is low.

Ramsey’s attack seems to be in the vein of those that attempt to find a premise that could possibly have been employed to support their opponent’s position, attack that premise and then conclude that their opponent’s position has suffered some defeat.

Even if Ramsey mistakes the actual form of Plantinga’s argument, the rest of his article is still relevant to whether the EAAN is sound. For Ramsey offers an account of semantic epiphenomenalism in which the truth of a successful organisms beliefs are salient to the actions of that creature in virtue of the fact that truth here could *explain* the success of that organism. And if the probability of

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<sup>79</sup> Plantinga, “Naturalism Defeated?,” p. 257.

semantic epiphenomenalism given N & E is high and the probability of R given N & E & semantic epiphenomenalism is high, Plantinga might not be licensed to the general conclusion that P (R/ N&E) is low or inscrutable. To accomplish this end, Ramsey we have already noticed that he employs a common naturalist analogy: beliefs are “maps” which we use to guide ourselves.

Plantinga seems to find this point confusing. He writes on this point that, “...the first thing to see here is that what Ramsey says in these three passages seems to presuppose that the content of belief *is* causally efficacious with respect to behavior.”<sup>80</sup> And here Plantinga’s point seems perfectly reasonable. For whenever a hiker uses a map, it seems clearly to be the case that the map is at least a partial cause of their subsequent actions. Further, he adds that since the likelihood of beliefs causing actions on the naturalist’s view is already low, Ramsey’s points will not threaten the EAAN.

Ramsey, I think, would not agree with Plantinga on the phrase just quoted. A map is not a cause of a hiker’s behavior on his view. But Ramsey makes little effort to clear up what the difference between “causal salience” and being “causally efficacious” would amount to. And this could be behind Plantinga’s inclination to treat these two things as pretty much equivalent. Nonetheless, it seems that Ramsey has some picture of the physical brain somehow “consulting” (if I may be permitted the term) the content of a belief in a fashion analogous to a hiker consulting a map. If he wishes, in a similar fashion, to present us a picture

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

of the physical brain somehow consulting epiphenomenal belief states for guidance, the picture is not quite full at this point. And in light of that fact, I think that there is not yet any reason to think that the EAAN is in any peril. The simple fact that there *might* be some way of rescuing the person holding to semantic epiphenomenalism from a defeater for R does not by itself constitute a successful rescue.

But suppose we treat the content of a belief as a type of “map” by which we steer (as Ramsey suggests) *and* maintain that such content causes behavior (which Ramsey does not affirm but might be committed to). Might it not then be the case that beliefs of organisms who manage to successfully make their way in and about a particular environment have true beliefs just as hiker’s who make their way successfully around a certain environment have accurate maps thereof? Ramsey thinks so. This, at least, would afford the best explanation of why both the organisms and hiker’s are so successful with respect to their courses of action.

Plantinga raises an interesting objection at this point. Plantinga believes that Ramsey is confusing two types of representations. Plantinga takes great pains to contrast the essential characteristics of each type. The type of representation that is entailed by having a belief essentially has one particular characteristic: namely that it is a representation that *depicts* the world as being a certain way. If they depict the world as it is, they are true and are false otherwise. Plantinga suspects, rather, that Ramsey is treating beliefs as merely some sort of indicator representation. An example of an indicator representation would be temperature

registered on a mercury thermometer. We can even think of certain brain structures such as the hypothalamus as indicators of this type. These are accurate in a trivial sense and (if one stretches the term) one might regard them as possessing some sort of content. Does he mean propositional content? He does not say and seems genuinely uncertain, but it seems to me that both a belief-type representation and indicator representations might have something which, like a proposition, fills in certain types of *that*-clauses. For example, Joe believes *that* his mother loves him. Similarly, the mercury thermometer reads *that* it is 32 degrees outside. In both cases, the proposition following the *that*-clause gives us a representation of what is going on in the world.

It is worth taking a look at Plantinga's examples of indicator representations to get a better picture of what is going on so as to precise the contrast between the two types of representations. The first example is that of a football player attempting to evade tacklers. In this case, there will be no forming of beliefs (on Plantinga's view) by the elusive football player because in the heat of such a game there is "no time for that." In the second, a device in the brain that registers temperature tells the body to sweat when such an activity becomes necessary. Similarly, this mechanism will not form beliefs, let alone true ones. However, like the successfully elusive football player, we might say that there is something "accurate" about the internal states of each. Finally, Plantinga brings us to the example of a mercury thermometer: the readings of such an object are

“accurate” in a mere Pickwickian sense, but once again no beliefs are formed.

Each of these is intended to be an instance of an indicator representation.

Given this distinction, Plantinga makes two important points. First, natural selection would weed out an organism that did not have accurate indicator representations due to the fact that these sorts of things, when they exist within an organism, are the causes of behavior. Secondly, it is not even remotely plausible that such things as indicator representations are not causes of behavior (contra Ramsey’s intent to make them merely “causally salient”). However, if content of beliefs do in fact cause behavior, successful behaviors of an organism merely confirm the existence of beneficial indicator representations in an organism: such things that might be called “accurate” or thought of as bearing content in a rather broad sense. Here I mean “content” in the sense that a thermometer reading might be said to have content.

Even if contents of beliefs (not merely indicator representation contents) are causally salient with respect to behavior, why should we expect that true beliefs would have a selective advantage over false ones? Ramsey asserts that it is difficult to imagine an evolutionary scenario in which organisms have mostly false beliefs that nonetheless give rise to adaptive behavior. Plantinga initially defended this possibility by asking us to imagine some hominid “Paul” who runs from tigers because he thinks it is the best way to get eaten by it (assuming Paul wants to get eaten) or that it is the best way to get to pet it (assuming Paul desires to pet tigers). Ramsey complains that this example only demonstrates that it is

possible in one situation, a situation in which the only danger at hand is some ferocious feline, to have a false-belief/odd-desire pair exhibit a selective advantage. But what the naturalist will demand is an account of how the *mechanisms* with which an organism will have to live in many contexts can be flawed in such a manner as to consistently deliver false beliefs that consistently link up to just the right desires such that the organism in question survives to reproduce. Ramsey here echoes complaints made by Sober and Fitelson as well. For Ramsey infers from the fact that only those beliefs necessary to generate survival behavior are true that inductive logic might secure some justification due to its role in evolutionary history. And since science is largely an inductive enterprise, the claims of science may come to enjoy plausibility in virtue of being the deliverances of faculties which natural selection would most likely have promoted.

Plantinga, as Ramsey notes, has not overlooked this challenge. Plantinga thinks that false beliefs can work in conjunction, not only with odd desires, but with desires we typically do have so that they produce actions with survival value. Plantinga asks us to imagine a hypothetical population whose members have beliefs about their world similar in content to the beliefs we have about our world. Is it not possible that they would invoke reference by definite description? And could not these definite descriptions be incorrect in such a manner as to render the propositional content of their beliefs incorrect? This seems altogether possible. But then the definite descriptions employed by such creatures might always

employ inappropriate concepts such as witch-hood (to name but one possibility). And if these creatures have desires like ours, for example the desire to avoid tigers, their belief that “This witch who has turned herself in to a tiger is coming after me” would produce the exact same behavior that our belief that “This tiger is coming after me.”

Ramsey suggests, at this point that Plantinga might be making an implicit appeal to one of the two following claims:

P1: If any of your beliefs about some subject are false, then all (or most) of your beliefs about that subject are false.

P2: If you suffer from a deep misconception of some subject, then all (or most) of your beliefs about that subject are false.

The first is untenable. So Ramsey assumes that Plantinga might have something like more like P2 in mind. Consequently, since many of Plantinga’s examples of pervasively misguided belief-forming mechanisms involve references to “witch-trees” or some such mischaracterized object, an appeal to some form of content externalism can be employed to dismantle the attack. Plantinga, on Ramsey’s view, is appealing to P2, which, according to such an externalist, is false. Our concepts of natural objects, on this view, are determined by the actual object of which they are a concept. Content of a thought does not supervene on an internal psychological state.<sup>81</sup> Rather two creatures could be in psychologically

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<sup>81</sup> On p. 29 he cites Kripke, Saul. *Naming and Necessity*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1980 and Donnellan, Keith. “Reference and Definite Descriptions.” *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 79, 1966, pp. 281-304 with respect to these points, but it seems to me that the appropriate reference to make is to Putnam, Hilary. “The Meaning of ‘Meaning,’” *Language, Mind and Reality*, Cambridge University Press,

indistinguishable states with respect to their internal thought life, but one might have a concept of water (an H<sub>2</sub>O concept) while the other lacks it. This would not be the case in virtue of one having an internal thought life that the other did not, but rather be the case in virtue of the fact that one lives in an environment where H<sub>2</sub>O exists and the other does not. Similarly then, the content of our concept of a tiger cannot fail to appropriately correspond to the actual item in our environment (if our environment were, say, India) which we intend it to correspond to.

Plantinga has two points by way of response. First, he did not wish to imply in his argument that the creatures to which he draws our attention are similar to us with respect to the manner in which they refer to items in their environment. Merely that it is *possible that they do so*. And if they did this, odds are, their beliefs would turn out largely false.

Now one might doubt the wisdom of Plantinga's reliance upon this point. Couldn't the naturalist simply say "Hey, it's a good thing that we don't make use of concepts by employing definite descriptions!"? This seems to me to face the objection that it is merely casting a pious hope in the face of Plantinga's objection. After all, given N & E as the only relevant commentary on the sources of our belief producing faculties, what evidence do we have that we employ concepts in the fashion Ramsey has described? Why would N & E select for that? I see no reason to think it would as opposed to selecting for creatures that regularly employ

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Cambridge, 1975 and Burge, Tyler. "Individualism and the Mental." Externalism and Self-Knowledge, Ludlow, Peter and Martin, Norah (eds.), CSLI Publications, Stanford, CA, 1998, pp. 21-84.

definite descriptions. And if the thought life to which we have privileged access would admittedly be the same either way, it seems that upon reflection as to the origins of our cognitive mechanisms, the evolutionary naturalist has no real reason to think that one possibility for concept formation obtains rather than the only seemingly available alternative.

But, secondly, Plantinga attempts to accommodate Ramsey's contrary position. Let's assume that the objects to which the creatures refer are referred to in some sort of causal fashion. Might not the *predicates* that they ascribe involve definite descriptions? It seems clearly to be the case that they could have.

Consequently, most of their beliefs would be false. For the belief that "That tree is solid" might be saved from risk of having a false belief if the term "tree" is has its content by virtue of being causally related to certain objects in my environment. But if the term "solid" referred descriptively to "witch-instigated resistance of a certain type" our beliefs would still be false.

Now if Ramsey wishes to maneuver around this particular objection, it seems the only route available is to claim that the content of *both* the items that take the place of the subject and the items that take the place of the predicate in the propositional content of our beliefs are determined in a causal/ content externalist fashion. However, if the naturalist on the other hand wishes to place the content of all of our predicates and subjects in an externalist fashion, they are committed to the claim that none of our beliefs could ever be false.

Now I think that Plantinga's comments put a final coffin nail in appeals to externalism to circumvent the difficulties raised by the EAAN. However, my contention is that all of this was really unnecessary. At best, what Ramsey has done is demonstrated that *if* belief content influences behavior and *if* we use the faculties content externalists describe and *if* the workings of such faculties are responsible for those items holding the place of both predicates and subjects in the contents of our beliefs, then R might likely hold for creatures like us. But there are two questions of interest here. First, how likely are all these "ifs" given N & E? It seems to me there is no reason to think them likely and if anything good reason to think them unlikely.

But secondly, and most importantly, none of this would help the naturalist even if it were very likely to be the case. Even if we formed beliefs in the manner just described, it is clear that at least sometimes we employ definite descriptions. For example, when Stephen Hawking reflects upon his belief that "Gravity makes things that go up come down" he is clearly thinking of gravity in some definite sense. He is not entertaining the same subject as, say Newton, who held far different views about the nature of our universe. So it seems to me that the EAAN could be employed in the following manner. When a naturalist *reflectively* considers the nature of the world around them, they employ definite descriptions in the course of forming their beliefs. Beliefs such as this, at least, are highly likely to be false. Now when the naturalist in these contexts forms the belief "The entire universe is naturalistic," they are not employing concepts in the predicate

portion of their belief in an externalistic fashion. So in these contexts, Ramsey's comments will be of absolutely no help. Therefore, the naturalist, when they reflect on the EAAN *and also* on the content of the subject and predicate portions of their beliefs so that they are aware of the descriptions they are attributing to things will have a defeater for naturalism. And this strikes me as no lessening of the damage done by the EAAN originally.

Ramsey is not alone in the criticism that Plantinga has misevaluated the P (R/N&E). Evan Fales has chosen to attack the EAAN at the same point as Ramsey, but the strategy is remarkably different. Ramsey's primary goal was to accept that the likelihood of beliefs causing behavior given the truth of evolutionary naturalism was high and then argue that this does nothing to undercut our faith that we are likely to have reliable cognitive machinery. Evan Fales, by contrast, seems to realize that the truth of epiphenomenalism or even the claim that evolutionary naturalism is likely committed to it presents a threat to the naturalist position. So Fales intends to write this possibility off or at least mitigate the supposed implications of this before presenting a reevaluation of P (R/N&E).

Evan Fales response to Plantinga's EAAN is by his own description "a substantial revision of 'Plantinga's Case against Naturalistic Epistemology,'" <sup>82</sup> an earlier paper. Among the important additions to this revision is an extensive footnote intended to update the arguments in light of the subsequent appearance of Plantinga's unpublished manuscript "Naturalism Defeated." The most important

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<sup>82</sup> Fales, "Naturalism Defeated?," p. 43.

revision is made in light of Plantinga replies to tu quoque arguments intended to demonstrate that a defeat of theism can be generated from an argument analogous to his case against naturalism; a topic we will take up in a later chapter of this dissertation. Fales spends the second portion of his paper developing this argument and we will save this portion of Fales thought for that later chapter. By contrast, the first part of Fales article is intended to undermine the EAAN directly. Specifically, Fales wishes to argue that the  $P(R/N \& E)$  is either not likely low, very high, or some such thing (I am afraid he is not altogether clear here). Plantinga takes him to be arguing that  $P(R/N \& E)$  is high regardless of whether beliefs cause behavior or not. To be honest, I don't see that Fales ever carefully spelled out his position here; but his thoughts on the EAAN are relevant to any discussion of the EAAN nonetheless.

Fales works with a canvass of five options for belief-behavior interaction, due to the fact that at the time of his writing of the first version of his reply to Plantinga, Plantinga himself had not yet collapsed the first two into one. They were at that point listed as follows:

- 1.) No relation between beliefs and behaviors.
- 2.) Beliefs are epiphenomenal side-effects of behaviors
- 3.) Beliefs cause behaviors in virtue of syntax only.
- 4.) The content of beliefs causes behavior in a maladaptive fashion.
- 5.) The belief content causes behavior in an adaptive fashion.

And, of course, Plantinga thinks that the odds of our having mostly true beliefs are low given any one of these possible scenarios.

Fales first move is to remove some of these options as genuine evolutionary possibilities. 1, 2 and 4, says Fales, are nowhere near likely given evolutionary naturalism. Why? The cognitive equipment necessary in order for an organism to have beliefs is *adaptively expensive*. Intelligence or belief forming apparatus (Fales seems to use these notions interchangeably) require the equipment necessary for generating beliefs via perception and other avenues as well as the cognitive capacity to use, catalogue and store this information. This has selective costs. It requires, for example, a large head, difficult births and other bodily mechanisms necessary to make some use of our intelligence such as erect posture and manual dexterity.<sup>83</sup> Fales concludes that belief mechanisms such as this could not possibly be getting a free ride: they must be doing some work in the way of giving us selective advantages and they can only do this if they are causally efficient.

From here Fales turns his sights on the two remaining “live” options. Notice, option 3 holds that belief content does not cause behavior and option 5 that it does. So the question of whether it is likely that belief content causes behavior given N & E is not something Fales seems to intend to address directly.

Fales then raises the following point with respect to option 3:

“...a central question is whether it is conceptually possible that semantic content would fail to map onto syntax so as to preserve truth. That is, we must ask: In virtue of what is it the case that a given mental representation denotes or picks out high temperature (say) as opposed to moderate temperature? Here much will depend upon one’s views about intentionality. But an entirely reasonable view,

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

from a naturalistic perspective, is that mental representations get their content in virtue of being caused in the right way by items in the environment; and that this is a *conceptual* truth. Thus if a mental representation is caused in the right way by heat, then it's a representation of heat; and if it is not so caused, then it's not a representation of heat. So long as representations are causally linked to the world via the syntactic structures in the brain to which they correspond, this will guarantee that syntax maps onto semantics in a generally truth-preserving way." (Italics in original)<sup>84</sup>

Fales concludes that the odds of option 3 being the case "may be" no more than those of option 1, 2 or 4. Further, he concludes that it might be the case that most of our beliefs would be true given this third possible scenario; in fact, it might be conceptually necessary that most of our beliefs turn out true on this scenario.

Before moving on, I want to flag a concern because I think Fales is a little off target here. Nothing of what he has offered here shows that option 3 may be no more likely than 1, 2 and 4. What he has attempted is to show that the probability of R given N & E and option 4 might be high. Of course, this requires more argument than what he has given. He also needs to argue, as he may believe himself to have done, that where beliefs cause behavior, true beliefs are the likely outcome.

What does Fales say of option 5? Like Ramsey, Fales believes that Plantinga's examples do not demonstrate that an animal whose beliefs cause their behavior could have *systematically* false beliefs. This is due to the fact that we tend to make logical and inductive inferences on the basis of these beliefs. So a lucky break for a creature with a few false beliefs may be possible, but in the long

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 50

run, it will catch up to them. For instance, believing a rock to be light and soft and believing that snakes can be crushed by light and soft things might get a creature out of one predicament. But it will likely get them in trouble in other contexts. For example, if they do not cover their heads with their hands when an assailant throws a rock at their head, they are in trouble. So, Fales concludes, unless there is some algorithm connecting false beliefs to appropriate actions, Plantinga has not shown us how we could have mostly false beliefs given option 5. The algorithm must meet, says Fales, three criteria and do so in detail. Plantinga must show how such false beliefs would come about in virtue of the algorithm such that

1. Combined with other false beliefs it leads on one occasion with all probability to appropriate behavior.
2. Yet combined with other false beliefs on other occasions it will do the same.
3. And if destructive desires are invoked, explain how a Darwinian account of the origins of these can be given.

Consequently, Fales claims, naturalistic evolutionary epistemology stands undefeated.

Plantinga begins his reply by granting, for sake of argument only, that there are only two plausible evolutionary scenarios with respect to the interaction of beliefs and behavior; Fales rejects the other three options on grounds of the biological expense of belief producing structures. But in footnote 60, Plantinga claims that “Inspection of the formula on page 9 (the lengthy formula involving every possible scenario and the probability of R with respect thereto) shows that

only a negligible contribution to the value of  $P(R/N\&E)$  is made by a term involving  $P_i$  such that  $P(P_i/N\&E)$  is very low.”<sup>85</sup> Consequently, Plantinga decides to “not quibble.” All that remains is to attack Fales’ claims that the probability of our having mostly true beliefs is high given the other two options.

Now where Plantinga wishes to “not quibble” I wish to quibble. Fales’ has attempted to rule out several candidates for the belief-behavior relationship including the one that is considered the “received view” amongst evolutionary biologists i.e. epiphenomenalism. It is a serious question as to how Fales assume that evolutionary theory can discredit epiphenomenalism? Moreover, did it do so without the schools of evolutionary biologists being aware of the situation? I suspect that they are not unaware that big brains come at a biological expense and by and large accept the doctrine of epiphenomenalism nonetheless. And there is plenty of logical space to do this. The reason that our large heads and other seeming selectively disadvantageous properties related to it have survived can easily be explained in terms Fales would not approve of. Namely, they survive because the *behavior* of our species is more complex than others as are our interactions with the environment around us or if it is not in fact more complex it requires large heads for some other reason. We use tools and perform complex rituals...Simply put the brain might need to be large in order to cause these behaviors, but that gives us no reason to advance a thesis regarding whether *beliefs* assumed to be housed in the brain cause behavior. An analogy: another feature of

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 262.

the brain is that it exhibits “grayness.” But why think that grayness of the brain causes behavior? It does no good to say “Because the brain is a selectively expensive bit of equipment...” Another analogy: the heart makes “glub-glub” sounds. The mechanics of this are complex but give us the necessary feature of circulation of blood. But it does not follow that the making of a “glub-glub” sound causes our blood to circulate. It seems to me then that we desperately need an argument from Fales which he does not provide. To recall Plantinga’s analogy with respect to the relation of content and behavior on the semantic epiphenomenalist view, one could argue that a soprano sings only true sentence lyrics due to the fact that her vocal apparatus is the only means by which she earns her living.

But back to Plantinga’s own replies to Fales... First, is the probability of R high given N & E & semantic epiphenomenalism? In the extended quote from Fales presented above, we find the claim that semantics may map onto syntax in a truth-preserving way and further the claim that this is a *conceptually* necessary truth. Plantinga charges the first of these claims as “pious hope” and the latter as simply false. As a further point, Plantinga notes that despite Fales awareness that our cognitive systems often suffer systematic error, his account here would make it difficult to explain how we ever have any false beliefs at all.

So why would Fales entertain such a position? Fales suggests that mental representations may get their content in virtue of being caused in the right sort of way by one’s environment. This is reminiscent of the remarks of Ramsey. But,

Plantinga asks, what is the *conceptual* guarantee that these will be *true* representations? Fales offers, perhaps, some explanation here. If mental representation of heat is caused in the right way by something hot, then it is a mental representation of heat. So now it seems, says Plantinga, that Fales is treating beliefs as sorts of representations. But even if they were so, the question remains, why would these be *true* representations?

Plantinga has considered, in print no less, what arguments might exist for the claim that neural patterns somehow map onto content in a truth-preserving fashion. But most of those comments are explored in the context of a reply to Jerry Fodor.<sup>86</sup> Curiously, he uses the similar expression here to denote the hope of this occurring as he does in his reply to Fales: it is merely a pious hope.<sup>87</sup> Content might be related to neural structures in one of two ways. First, having a certain mental content might just be *identical* with having a certain neural pattern. But this creates an issue. Namely, why would this imply that beliefs giving rise to adaptive behavior are likely true beliefs? If there is as of yet no reason to think that the electromagnetic workings of the brain need to be true in order to, say, raise my arm, why think that the content with which they are identical need be so?

The other view is that content supervenes on neural patterns. There could be a logical or nomic relationship between the two; but there seems to be nothing like a conceptual relationship such as Fales envisions. But given that there might be a logical or nomic relationship between the two, what reason is there to think

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<sup>86</sup> Plantinga, "Naturalism Defeated?" p. 216 ff.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. p. 219 ff.

that this will secure true beliefs for creatures with mostly adaptive patterns of behavior? Suppose that neural pattern N tends to bring about adaptive act A, supposing certain relevant desires are at work. But let us also suppose that, in accordance with semantic epiphenomenalism, it does so only in virtue of neurological properties. However, there is some content C that by either logical or nomic necessity attaches to N. Then B brings about A but not in virtue of having C. So the having of C (let alone C's being true or false) is irrelevant to whether A occurs because it never features as a cause of A. Hence C is still invisible to the hand of natural selection. So why would Fales think so far to the contrary?

Plantinga ventures a guess: perhaps Fales is confusing indicator representations with beliefs. We have already examined this confusion with respect to Ramsey's article. Indicator representations match up to the environment somehow and might even be said to have content (in a Pickwickian sense) and accuracy. But they are not beliefs. It might be the case that some structure cannot fail to have the relevant "content" in this sense, just as a mercury thermometer perhaps cannot fail to have the right "content" (its reading). "But it isn't even remotely plausible to think that the content of *belief* is somehow obliged to supervene in such a way as to be *true*. Only magical thinking, I believe, would lead to that conclusion."<sup>88</sup> So Fales has not given us reason to think that the P (R/N & E) is high with respect to this belief-behavior scenario.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid. p. 264.

Secondly, Fales offered a challenge with respect to the scenario under which beliefs cause behavior in an adaptive fashion; option 5 as he lists it. There are, he alleges, three criteria of adequacy that an algorithm must meet if one is to successfully argue that false beliefs could consistently generate adaptive behavior.

Plantinga believes these criteria can be, and already have been, easily met. Whenever the hypothetical creature in question is confronted with an object in their environment, it may be the case that they employ a “creaturely transform” when thinking about it. For example, instead of a tiger, they think of the object in question as a *tiger-creature* and so on and so forth. Since on the naturalist’s view there are no creatures (in the sense Plantinga employs, that created by a higher intelligence) all of these concepts are wrong and beliefs couched in them are false.

Now, whereas Ramsey proposed an externalist theory of mental content to sidestep this sort of reply, Fales has not. No matter, we have already seen that such appeals have little to offer. So recounting Fales three criteria, it is worth noting how Plantinga thinks they have been met. Many different beliefs can generate the same behaviors and very few, if any, beliefs are privileged such that in their absence a creature is bound to get themselves into adaptive trouble in at least one context in which they are likely to find themselves.

In summary then, Fales attempts to undermine the EAAN by reevaluating the P (R/N & E) consist of charges that Plantinga did his calculating wrong. Plantinga, he alleges, should have considered only two scenarios and set the P (R/N & E) high on both of them. Those are three distinct charges. And, in order,

they flounder due to reliance on three false claims. First, he incorrectly holds that the biological expense of the brain rules out the plausibility of any but two of Plantinga's scenarios. Second, that it is conceptually necessary that semantic epiphenomenalism entails that the reliability of our cognitive faculties. And thirdly, that Plantinga cannot give an algorithm for adaptive behavior as a function of false beliefs and non-destructive desires.

The last article that I intend to discuss with respect to its challenges directed against Plantinga's estimation of P (R/ N&E) comes from Michael Levin. In his article "Plantinga on Functions and the Theory of Evolution," Michael Levin takes aim first at Plantinga's claim that the idea of a natural function makes sense only within the context of theism and secondly, and for our purposes all importantly, at Plantinga's EAAN. With the possible exception of the submission of J. Wesley Robbins his reply is probably the least thought out (and sadly overly condescending in tone and content). Nonetheless, here I will comment on the points at which it misconstrues the EAAN or makes other mistakes in way of replying to it.

Levin introduces his responses with a confusing single-sentence paragraph<sup>89</sup>: "Like many oral-tradition arguments against 'evolutionary epistemology,' Plantinga's confuses truth with the whole truth and the function of an adaptation with a necessary condition for its performing its function, as well as ignoring the self-corrective nature of inquiry." Here we see at least three distinct

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<sup>89</sup> Levin, Michael, "Plantinga on Functions and the Theory of Evolution," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 75, No. 1, March 1997, p. 94.

charges. But, I think the reader will soon see, none of these seem to constitute the conclusion to his arguments. So what exactly is supposed to be going wrong with the EAAN?

Levin begins with what appears to be a theory about mental states<sup>90</sup>:

“Correctness for models of the world must be understood functionally: if image A represents the gazelle and image B represents the cheetah’s body, and by so moving as to superimpose A on B the cheetah overtakes the gazelle, the relation of A to B faithfully represents the cheetah’s position.” I am not sure exactly of what he is driving at here, and his comments seem at best highly speculative. But I will attempt to make some attempt here at cashing out an understanding of this as well as giving a reply to it.

Upon inspection of Levin’s comments, it seems that all of Plantinga’s comments to Ramsey and Fales are appropriate here as well. Robbins seemingly conflates indicator representations with beliefs. Indicator representations are accurately correlated to the world in some fashion (as a thermometer is to temperature) but they need not be representational states. And moreover they cannot take truth and falsehood predicates merely in virtue of functioning as the cause of some action deemed appropriate in a given circumstance. If this were the case, it would be *impossible* for a person to undertake a successful action based on a false belief. Perhaps Levin means to take this point on the chin when he states in the following paragraph that genes “also program learning, and learning is

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid. p. 95.

adaptive only if the beliefs acquired are correct.”<sup>91</sup> Notice here that his comment seems to justify my impression that he is employing some notion of indicator representations: such representations may be rightly referred to as accurate or correct. But these are not beliefs, and consequently do not take truth predicates. So whatever the foregoing quote is driving at, it seems irrelevant to the EAAN.

In the remainder of this portion of Levin’s article, he attempts to apply the foregoing theory of beliefs to each of the possible belief-behavior scenarios discussed by Plantinga. The first possibility, that no causal relations between beliefs and action and epiphenomenalism, are dismissed by appeal to Ockham’s Razor. Neural structures *do* have propositional content on his view (hence, I interpret him as espousing some identity theory with respect to mind and brain) and that is determined partly by their role in behavior.

The idea that the beliefs might cause behavior in virtue of something other than content of belief is dismissed because Levin finds it hard to see how anything but content causation could yield *systematic* behavior responses to the environment. That beliefs might cause behavior but do so in a maladaptive way is dismissed due to its genetic link with genuinely advantageous traits: say colorful plumage. Levin dismisses this without argument. Plantinga hints at the possibility that a desire system might be in place that systematically offsets the behavior-producing role of beliefs so as to render the resulting actions advantageous; recall Plantinga’s discussion of the hominid “Paul.” Levin dismisses this idea with an

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid. p. 95.

irreverent “say what?”<sup>92</sup> and a charge that such belief-cum-desire pairings could not be *consistent* generators of advantageous behavior.

I will save the last of the possibilities discussed by Levin for the next paragraph. First, it behooves us to recognize the difficulties in what has been said so far in his reply to the EAAN. In a Fales-like fashion, Levin intends to diminish the number of genuinely plausible belief-behavior scenarios and then move to the claim that on the remaining plausible views R is likely given N & E. But an initial problem with this strategy is that his dismissal of the possibilities of no causal interaction and epiphenomenalism rely on an implausible account of mind and brain interaction: in fact, although identity theory with respect to mental content and neural structures has often been touted in virtue of its satisfying the strictures of Ockham’s Razor, it has been generally disregarded in light of other deficiencies. For example, how can a content of my mental representation be green, no portion of my brain be green and this content be identical to brain states. Further, how are we to account for the possibility of creatures without neurons possibly having mental states such as belief (the problem of multiple instantiation)?

Still, even if Levin could overcome these classic difficulties, the view of true belief which he defends seems untenable. Again, I refer to a difficulty involving a conflation of indicator representations and beliefs. Levin’s example of gazelles, tigers and mental images is clearly intended to bring to the reader’s mind

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid. p. 96.

the notion of perceptual representations in particular. But to have a perceptual representation and to have a belief are not the same thing. If it were so, the football player who tries to elude tacklers would have to form in the course of a few fleeting moments an extraordinarily high number of beliefs. But, as Plantinga points out, there is no time for all of that. All the football player in question needs are accurate indicator representations of the locations of such would-be tacklers.

Since Levin's other objections to possible evolutionary belief-behavior scenarios turns on the issue of how such scenarios can generate *consistent* or *systematic* behaviors, we may simply appeal to Plantinga's replies to Ramsey and Fales for answers here. These have been hashed out in earlier portions of this chapter and there is no need to rehash here. In particular though, it is important to note that nothing in Plantinga's argument seems to necessitate the assumption that odd desires might likely link up to false beliefs so as to consistently help a creature possessing them to survive. Plantinga's reply to Fales pointed out that even creatures with desires similar to our own might have largely false beliefs and yet their resulting belief-desire combinations give rise to adaptive behaviors.

Finally, Levin turns to what might be considered Plantinga's most serious charge against evolutionary naturalism. Even if beliefs cause behaviors and truth of beliefs is a requisite for appropriate advantageous behaviors, how would this account for the truth of our philosophical and theoretical beliefs? Even if the naturalist succeeds in demonstrating that organisms with though lives like our own need to have correct beliefs about the locations and nature of, say, tigers, of what

survival value is having a correct but highly abstract philosophy of the universe such as naturalism or having a correct theory of gravity? After all, both evolutionary theory and naturalism are doctrines that any creature could survive just as well without possessing. Levin, to his credit, is one writer to have noted this problem early in the literature, although we have seen William Talbott also take this distinct issue seriously. Plantinga does not discuss this difficulty because he seemingly holds the EAAN to be so strong in general that limiting its force to an attack on only the more abstract of a naturalist's beliefs seems moot (although I suspect he has other reasons as well).

So how does Levin help the evolutionary naturalist escape having a defeater for their abstract theoretical beliefs in particular? Levin appeals here to the "self-correcting nature of inquiry" he mentioned earlier on. Certainly errors have been made from time to time even in areas of inquiry such as set theory (he recounts the case of Russell coming up with his famous paradox). But Levin's point is that such mistakes were eventually corrected. Consequently, so long as this pattern of self-correction is maintained Plantinga will be unable to come up with *positive instances* of systematic theoretical errors and will face "much contrary evidence."<sup>93</sup>

Now this is a move identical to that made by William Talbott in his reply to Plantinga; a full discussion of this is given in chapter one under the heading of "Concepts of Defeat Employed." The first parallel between the replies of Talbott

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid. p. 97.

and Levin to note is that both have to somehow affirm the reliability of perception and memory before moving on to defend our more abstract beliefs. And secondly, both appeal to some sort of “running up against the boundaries of experience” or “contrary evidence” to make this further defense. So by way of reply to both, it seems sufficient to point out that both Talbott and Levin failed in the first of these steps. Levin because his comments on belief and its interaction with behaviors did not bear scrutiny and Talbott because, as noted earlier, he relied on the theory that global skepticism could not be defended where local skepticism alone could not.

But both authors’ make a further mistake, one not pointed out explicitly by Plantinga. Even if it were granted that the reflective naturalist had no defeater for their perceptual (and/or memory) beliefs and that consequently we can justifiably hold ourselves to be constructing theories on the basis of true beliefs of these sorts, neither has yet approached the question as to why these theories need to be true. There are plenty of anti-realists in philosophy and science who affirm that our perceptual and memory beliefs are veridical. But even lower animals, they can point out, can plausibly be said to have veridical beliefs of these sorts and furthermore these creatures seem to correct their beliefs in light of their interactions with the external world...but how does that equip them to do science or philosophy? Talbott and Levin both seem to assume that there is some analogy between the inquiries carried out by, a horse, and that of a scientist or philosopher. But neither makes this analogy look particularly strong; in fact, it seems intuitively to be weak. Further, even if such an analogy were strong, how specifically does

this help the naturalist? Neither author makes an attempt at illuminating this further issue either.

In sum, Levin offers little in the way of help to the naturalist. His attempts to offset the probability estimates of Plantinga regarding P (R/ N&E) rely on theories of belief and behavior relations that misunderstand the nature of belief and further make failed appeals to “Ockham’s Razor” in order to write off genuinely plausible belief-behavior scenarios. But to his credit he introduces a bogey the naturalist will face even if initial replies to the EAAN defending perceptual or memory beliefs are successful. Yet his own replies to this further issue are too undeveloped (as are Talbott’s I think) to offer comfort to the naturalist.

## **B. Arguments that P (R/ N & E) has not been shown likely to be low**

The EAAN, it might seem, would be compromised if the reflective naturalist were entitled to all-out agnosticism regarding the P (R/ N&E). Of course, Plantinga points out that the argument is supposed to work even if this probability is inscrutable. So let's put things in perspective. Allegedly, if a person reflects on the probability of a source of information being trustworthy and comes to think that they might rationally hold this likelihood low, but not reasonably hold it to be high, and further decides subsequent to this discovery that agnosticism regarding the reliability of this source is in order, then they should seemingly distrust any information received on the basis of the testimony of this source alone. But what if one has no convincing argument that upon reflection this probability cannot be held to be high? Then it might be a matter of controversy as to whether any defeater for the deliverances of this faculty obtains. Plantinga seems clearly to hold that in the case of the EAAN in particular, defeat will clearly still occur...a point which we will examine in this section.

Several authors have tried to argue that such agnosticism is rationally licensed. These arguments take two distinct forms: positive and defensive. Here I explicate the positive defense of William Alston as well as attempts to stall attempts at making such probability assessments. Both moves, I conclude, are unsuccessful. The probability estimates made by the EAAN are admittedly imprecise, but enough can be reasonably pointed out about them such as will be sufficient for the sake of the EAAN.

## 1. Positive Arguments

In “Plantinga, Naturalism and Defeat,” William Alston critically examines the EAAN found in Plantinga’s unpublished “Naturalism Defeated,” focusing on the “main argument.” Alston has two major objections. First, he believes that not all of the probability assignments are adequately defended. Second, even if the  $P(R/N \ \& \ E)$  is low or inscrutable, this would not constitute a defeater for naturalism. Here we will deal with the first charge as well as with Plantinga’s reply. Discussion of the second charge will be put off for a later chapter.

As a preliminary step, William Alston analyzes the ideas of probability being employed by Plantinga. His determination is that Plantinga is employing a *parochial* form of conditionalization: in other words, Plantinga is insisting that the naturalist consider only those propositions which count directly for or against  $R$  or its denial. By contrast, a *global* form of conditionalization would allow the naturalist to conditionalize upon all their knowledge (and perhaps, it is implied, this might render the probability in question rather high).

Allowing this, is the  $P(R/N\&E)$  low for the hypothetical population who have a mental life similar to our own? Not necessarily, claims Alston.<sup>94</sup> For one thing, we have allowed that the hypothetical population is in some way *rational*. And with no more to go on than this fact and the fact that their cognitive faculties have evolved by way of  $N \ \& \ E$ , what further claims can be reached? “I see no alternative to throwing up our hands and declaring these probabilities *inscrutable*.”

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<sup>94</sup> Alston, ND, p. 182-3

But then the project of weighting the  $P(R/N \& E \& P_i)$  for each  $P_i$  by the  $P(P_i/N \& E)$  breaks down.”<sup>95</sup> Alston here is commenting on Plantinga’s attempt to weigh the  $P(R/N \& E)$  by the likelihood of each belief-behavior relationship, here referred to as  $P_i$ , given the truth of  $N \& E$ .

Can Plantinga invoke the principle of indifference at this point in order to forge further? Alston balks. To invoke the principle at this point seems unfair. For we do know more about ourselves than that we have a rational thought life and that we hold (perhaps) that our faculties evolved naturalistically. We also know that our cognitive faculties are reliable. In other words, we are not restricted in contexts where the principle of indifference is invoked to a parochial approach to conditionalization of  $R$ . Rather, we may use all the propositions that we hold ourselves to have knowledge of.

Plantinga demurs, of course. Alston, he alleges, incorrectly assumes that the likelihood of beliefs not causing behavior given naturalism to be merely inscrutable. Actually, he claims it seems to have a high epistemic probability given naturalism. After all, it is difficult for the naturalist to explain how beliefs (or at least the content of beliefs) could affect behavior. And it is seemingly easy to demonstrate that  $P(R/N \& E \& \sim C)$  is low where  $C$  is the claim that beliefs cause behavior. Still, Plantinga argues, even if  $P(R/N \& E \& \sim C)$  is inscrutable, all we really know is that  $P(R/N \& E)$  will fall somewhere between  $P(R/N \& E$

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid. p. 182.

& C) and  $P(R/N \& E \& \sim C)$ . And since the probability of the latter is either low or inscrutable,  $P(R/N \& E)$  is either low or inscrutable.

So let's be a bit clearer (clearer than even Plantinga I hope) on the premises he invokes and their application to the present case. First, the evolutionary naturalist, like everyone else, is committed to the claim that either beliefs cause behavior or they do not. If they do not, then the probability of R is low. Secondly, on the naturalist view of the universe, it is not likely that beliefs cause behaviors. Therefore, it is likely that the probability of R is low given the truth of the doctrine of naturalism. Now the naturalist, Plantinga seems prepared to admit for sake of argument, may try to set the probability of R given  $N \& E \& C$  high. But even if this attempt were successful, the reflective naturalist is not licensed to the conclusion that R might be likely on their worldview. The phrase "inscrutable but likely low" still applies. And that is all the EAAN requires.

So contrary to Alston, Plantinga does not need to invoke the principle of indifference with respect to considering which belief-behavior scenario the evolutionary naturalist must consider in weighting the probabilities in question. There are, of course, arguments in the literature intended to write off possibilities such as epiphenomenalism altogether, but these have not met with success, or so I have argued.

Furthermore, since the principle of indifference is not being invoked, Alston's comments regarding what may be conditionalized upon seem to be beside the point. But one thing is worth noting. Alston seems aware that for the

naturalist to conditionalize upon R itself, that is to insist that the naturalist should only consider  $P(R/N \ \& \ E \ \& \ R)$  rather than  $P(R/N \ \& \ E)$ , would be cheating. He seems to want to suggest that this move would, however, be licensed if Plantinga's argument required an appeal to the principle of indifference. This seems a plausible assumption. Therefore, it might be justly concluded that Plantinga's EAAN depends vitally upon the assumption that either  $P(R/N \ \& \ E \ \& \ C)$  is low as well or that  $P(\sim C/N \ \& \ E)$  is high. But both of these claims seem to me to have been adequately defended.

## 2. Stalling Tactics

We have just seen Alston argue for the claim that any attempt to estimate  $P(R/N \& E)$  will end in a reasonable assessment thereof, but failure to generate despair on the part of the evolutionary naturalist. But authors that I discuss in this section, by contrast, think it will begin in despair when one tries to give a reasonable assessment of  $P(R/N \& E)$  of any kind. Erik Wielenberg makes arguments for this claim that bear a strong similarity to those of Fitelson and Sober. In this section, I discuss both and argue that they give us no reason to despair over our abilities at rationally assessing  $P(R/N \& E)$  and hence do not block the EAAN.

Wielenberg begins his critique of Plantinga by examining cases in which a person takes a first person perspective on the issue of whether their own faculties are reliable. Instead of considering our evaluation the likelihood of  $R$  with respect to some other race of creatures with thought lives like our own, we are invited to consider what we would think of our own epistemic powers if we discovered that we were created by a certain machine. Suppose we understand how the machine puts beings together and we conclude that the likelihood of its producing a creature with reliable truth-grasping faculties is low or inscrutable. There is one other crucial piece of information; this machine, like naturalistic evolutionary processes works with inputs, just as evolutionary processes work with the set of available variants in a breeding population. The output of the machine, that is the final product, depends very heavily upon just what input it has to work with.

Given this scenario, very closely analogous to what the reflective naturalist takes to be their own historical origin, there is no need for despair with respect to

R. Wielenberg writes:

The processes posited by contemporary evolutionary theory are processes that operate on – takes as inputs- organisms. What sort of organisms the processes produce as outputs depends a great deal on what sort of organisms they receive as input. Therefore, an important piece of information about the process by which our own cognitive faculties came into being is this one: what were these initial organisms like? Or perhaps even more importantly, what were the first organisms like that (i) possessed ways of representing the world and (ii) were capable of misrepresentation? Evolutionary forces operating on organisms that were reliable cognitizers would be much more likely to produce reliable cognitizers than would those same forces operating on unreliable cognitizers. The nature of the starting point is crucial—and this is a piece of information the typical reflective naturalist does not have.<sup>96</sup>

Wielenberg goes on to point out, that evolution is not an intentional deceiver as an evil demon would be. So we need not bias our opinions as to what these initial conditions might have looked like. So unless the machine came with a front cover reading “This device guaranteed to produce unreliable cognitizers 99% of the time” we have nothing to go on here such that we would end up the cognitive despair.

A similar move has also been employed by Fitelson and Sober.<sup>97</sup> The difference with their use of the “we don’t know what natural selection was working with” objection is that they employ it against Plantinga’s claim that animals that employ such concepts as “witch-trees” were just as likely to be

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<sup>96</sup> Wielenberg, Erik J. “How to be an Alethically Rational Naturalist.” *Synthese*. 131, 2002, pp. 81-98, p. 91

<sup>97</sup> Fitelson and Sober, pp. 120 and 121.

selected for as those that believed in trees as we regularly believe them to be. They write:

Plantinga describes another (situation) in the unpublished manuscript. If “that is a tree” is a true belief, then “that is a witch-tree” is a false belief that would lead to the same behavioral consequences, and so be equally fit. Plantinga’s mistake here is that he ignores the fact that the probability of a trait’s evolving depends not just on its fitness, but on its *availability*. The reason zebras don’t have machine guns with which to repel lion attacks is not that firing machine guns would have been less adaptive than simply running away; the trait didn’t evolve because it was not available as a variation on which selection could act ancestrally (see also, Fodor 1997).<sup>98</sup> italics in original

And

Plantinga might reply that witch-beliefs and other systems of adaptive false beliefs were available ancestrally. However, we don’t see any reason to think that this substantive claim about the past can be successfully defended. By ignoring the question of availability, Plantinga, in effect assumes that natural selection acts on the set of *conceivable* variants. This it does not do; it acts on the set of *actual* variants.<sup>99</sup> italics in original

Although employed in different manners, the strategy for Wielenberg, Fitelson and Sober seems to bear similarities. Each insists that we cannot make a determination of the likelihood of our faculties being reliable until we know the original inputs available for the processes of evolution (natural selection in particular) to act upon. But there is a crucial difference between the two. Wielenberg’s point is that ignorance regarding *both* the workings of the mechanisms that gave rise to our species combined with ignorance of the original inputs upon which these mechanisms operated should stall any attempt to put faith in an estimate of the likelihood of R with respect to *ourselves*. Fitelson and Sober

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

claim that ignorance regarding what variations in prehistoric breeding populations *alone* suffices to stall estimates of the likelihood of R *for any population*.

Let's begin with a critique of traits these replies have in common. First, it may reasonably be contended that we know more about the nature of the initial inputs or actual variants (however one refers to them) than these parties are willing to concede. The most important thing that we know about them, according to the traditional naturalistic evolutionary story, is that these variants and inputs will be generated at random. And contra Wielenberg in particular, we know something of significance with respect to the workings of the primary mechanism by which evolution supposedly operates: Natural selection selects for random genetic changes in organisms that have behavior consequences, the four F's as Patricia Churchland puts it.

Now, contrary to Fitelson and Sober, I do not see Plantinga assuming or needing to assume that natural selection has a field of options as wide as all conceivable variants. Plantinga need only assume that which the evolutionary naturalist would willingly grant; that whatever it is that natural selection works upon it is something that is randomly generated. False belief producing genetic variants have just as much a likelihood of entering the race as true belief producing ones. In point of fact, Plantinga has recently published a reply to Fitelson and Sober confirming that this is what he intended to assume. The EAAN does not assume that evolution act upon all conceivable variants, but rather that variants with faculties giving rise to false beliefs is "not much lower" than the

epistemic possibility of those promoting true ones.<sup>100</sup> It would be rather foolish to think evolution works upon all conceivable variants given that one conceivable state of affairs could involve advanced space aliens giving genetic help to the Australopithecines. This point bears with equal force on Wielenberg's concerns regarding initial inputs.

I think the Plantinga is entitled to more than he advances here though. Even if a true belief forming mechanism entered the selective race, we must bear in mind that this does not settle the question as to whether future descendants of the creature possessing such a mechanism would continue to have it via some form of genetic inheritance. To advance this further claim we would need other assumptions. For example, we would need the assumption that beliefs cause behavior and that no creatures competing with those having true belief forming mechanisms had any other selective advantage over them. All of this is highly speculative. Contra Fitelson, Sober and Wielenberg, a specter of very reasonable doubt if not complete pessimism hangs over all of this and that is all the EAAN requires.

Another point worth bearing in mind is that all of the foregoing authors seem to assume a falsehood with respect to the importance of these initial variants or inputs. They seem to assume that if initial inputs or variants are of the sort we would all like them to be, ones such that they make it more likely that in the end creatures will arrive on the scene with reliable belief-producing faculties, then we

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<sup>100</sup> Plantinga, 2003, p. 293.

may assume that the odds of such creatures being the final product of evolutionary history to be good. This is a non-sequiter. For even given the best possible start, evolutionary history is subject to many possible pitfalls; frankly history could just as well take an unlucky course such that these contenders were wiped out of the race for survival. This is particularly troubling reflecting on the fact that Wielenberg's "machine" metaphor overlooks the very relevant fact that machines produce their products (typically) in a far more rapid and straightforward fashion than the tedious and unpredictable fashion that evolution employs. Simply put, it is not clear at all as to why these concerns over initial stages of our evolutionary history have any bearing on the debate over the EAAN. Pessimism regarding how fortuitous this initial situation was seems justified. Optimism regarding the initial situation, were we rationally licensed to it, seems to bear little if at all on what is reasonable to think of what the future situation for such creatures would look like.

But given that we have at least some insight as to initial variants or inputs upon which natural selection operated, I come to a complaint aimed at Wielenberg's contention that we do not know enough about the workings of naturalistic evolutionary processes to warrant rational assessment of P (R/ N&E). But we do know one thing pertinent to making this assessment; these mechanisms have no direct interest in creating true belief producing faculties but rather only producing organisms which behave so as to survive. Given this we may complete Wielenberg's analogy: suppose I come to believe that I have been created by a machine and wonder if I have been created with reliable belief-producing

faculties. We know that whether or not the machine generates a creature with reliable faculties of this sort is highly contingent upon the initial inputs given. We also know as much about the initial inputs as we know about the variants in the breeding populations that gave rise to the human race. Now suppose furthermore that the machine has at least one legible sentence written on the side: name “This machine cares only for creating creatures that survive, and takes no direct interest in whether they have true beliefs.” Then it seems that I should deem it either unlikely that the machine has succeeded in creating such a creature in my case, or otherwise regard the likelihood as inscrutable given the initial inputs the machine was likely to have upon which to work. Contra Wielenberg, one needs no assurance that the machine acts (as an evil demon would) to create false belief producing mechanisms most of the time in order to have a defeater for R with respect to oneself. There are ways of it becoming irrational to trust a source of information other than having proof that that source is likely unreliable. Specifically, it seems to become irrational to trust a source of information when it becomes irrational to regard it as reliable. And this is a point that Wielenberg overlooks.

## Chapter 4: Probabilities and Defeat

One curious feature of the EAAN lies in its employment of a probability thesis to generate a defeater. In chapter 3 I defended this probability thesis, namely the thesis that  $P(R/N \ \& \ E)$  is low. In Chapter 1 we saw that Plantinga's EAAN moves from this claim to the claim that the evolutionary naturalist has a defeater for R and hence, a defeater for all of their beliefs. In this chapter, I explore objections claiming that the first of these defeaters is never really generated. According to these objections, something goes wrong in Plantinga's attempt to show that the naturalist has a defeater for R and consequently there is never a need on the part of the naturalist to try and remove or block this defeater. Now if Plantinga succeeds in demonstrating that the evolutionary naturalist both can and does have a defeater for R, it should be an easier task to demonstrate that they ought to distrust any information they receive on the implicit trust in their cognitive faculties general (which of course is pretty much all the information they accept period). Nonetheless, I will explore whether this "easier task" is carried out successfully in my chapter on the relationship between the EAAN and traditional global skepticism. But this chapter and the next will focus instead on whether the probability thesis can be employed as Plantinga hopes.

## A. The Perspiration Objection

The Perspiration Objection: the fact that a proposition  $p$  has a low probability when conditionalized upon some other belief of an agent does not by itself suffice to defeat the agent's belief in  $p$ .

For example, the probability that the function of perspiration is to cool our bodies is low given evolutionary naturalism, but this does not defeat our belief that this is in fact the function of perspiration. This works no better than the argument that my belief that I am now typing suffers defeat because its probability given merely the truth of my belief that I had oatmeal for breakfast this morning is low. Consequently, it seems that it ought to be admitted that if Plantinga's argument assumes that the contrary is true and further employs it as a premise in the EAAN, the EAAN will seemingly fail.

So in response to the perspiration objection, Plantinga is prepared to admit that  $N \& E$  are not *immediately or directly* defeaters for  $R$ .<sup>101</sup> Low or inscrutable probability of the truth of one belief given the truth of another belief is not sufficient for defeat of a belief. For example,

(J) You own a Japanese car.

(ON) You own an old Nissan.

The probability of ON given J is low, but surely ON is not defeated simply in virtue of this. The probability that Holland, Michigan is thirty miles from Grand Rapids (given  $N \& E$ ) is also low. But how can the latter claim serve as a defeater for the former?

Yet it should be admitted that in other instances it is clear that low or inscrutable probabilities can generate defeaters. For example, suppose I move into a college dormitory and possess a dorm phone book. But it is a dorm phone book from two semesters ago. I look up the number for some Joe Smith whom I have never met just to pull a prank call. Upon reflection I ought to regard the probability that I have Joe Smiths correct phone number as low (if I think most collegiate dorm dwellers change rooms from semester to semester) or inscrutable (if I don't know the policies or practices that might determine dorm assignments from semester to semester). It seems that I have a defeater for the belief that I will reach the room of Joe Smith; I have reason to not believe it. So what exactly is the difference between cases in which such probabilities do generate defeat and cases in which they do not?

James Van Cleve conjectures that Plantinga has not done the necessary work to distinguish these two types of cases and therefore must be assuming one of two general principles. Either...

P1. "For any propositions A and B that I believe, if B is improbable or inscrutable with respect to A..., the A is a defeater is for B."

...which is demonstrably false as we saw above or...

P2. "For any propositions A and B that I believe, if B is improbable of inscrutable with respect to A, the A is a defeater for B *unless A derives its warrant from B.*"<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Van Cleve, ND, p. 117 and 118.

The reason that Van Cleve is exploring the possibility of P2 here it seems to me is not because it is so much intuitively plausible, but for the fact that it bears so much resemblance to what Plantinga calls the “First Principle of Defeat.” It is not necessary to discuss this principle here, but it is in point of fact a general principle pertinent to discussion of tu quoque objections to the EAAN, which will be discussed in a later chapter.

But considerations similar to those just discussed will undermine P2 as well. The probability that I am writing currently typing is low given just the fact that the Broncos have won a Super Bowl. Further, my belief that I am currently typing does not derive its warrant from my belief that the Broncos have won a Super Bowl. And yet clearly I have no defeater for the claim that I am currently typing. So P2 is to be rejected.

Now Plantinga’s reply to Van Cleve is interesting, if for no other reason than the fact that one page after Plantinga makes the foregoing reply to Van Cleve, he seems to offer just the general principle (I do not take it be a universal or necessity claim though) that he seemed unwilling to introduce previously. It is as follows: “In general, if you have considered the question whether a given source of information or belief is reliable and have an undefeated defeater for the belief that it is, then you have a defeater for any belief such that you think it originates (solely) from that source.”<sup>103</sup> By making this a general claim and not a universal one, it seems to me that Plantinga is continuing to employ inductive reasoning

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<sup>103</sup> Plantinga, ND, p. 241.

against his naturalist opponent. Plantinga does not say whether he thinks that he is licensed to the stronger universal claim, but draws the conclusion that this principle applies in the context of the EAAN. The only argument against this offered by Van Cleve, so far as I can tell, was that R seems so “certain” to us. But, drawing on considerations already employed by Plantinga, this shows us at best that belief in R is a deliverance of proper function rationality, not that it can escape a purely alethic rationality defeater (or as a consequence in this case) a Humean defeater.

It might be helpful here to recall that there are, as I pointed out in the first chapter of this dissertation, two uses of analogy in the course of Plantinga’s EAAN. With respect to the first, Plantinga asserts that the reflective naturalist ought to note the similarity that their own situation bears to that of a hypothetical population whose cognitive faculties developed as a result of only naturalistic, evolutionary means. It is only after Plantinga offers this invitation to reflect on the obvious similarities that he insists that the naturalist ought to, by analogy, regard both the situation of this hypothetical population and the naturalist themselves with either pessimism or skepticism concerning whether R holds for them.

The second appeal to analogy is different. If the naturalist accepts Plantinga’s offerings with respect to the first analogy, then it might further be asserted that the naturalist should employ the general principle noted above; namely, that if you come to distrust a source of information then upon reflection you should distrust any information you have accepted solely on the basis of

assumed reliability in this source. It is *this* general principle which most of Plantinga's analogies are introduced to support. For example, if I come to believe that I am under the control of a powerful evil demon or that I have ingested hallucinatory agent XX, I should come to doubt the deliverances of my cognitive faculties based on the fact that I would withhold faith in R on the part of other agents so situated.

Now here I suggest that there is some confusion in the discussion over the EAAN and, in particular, move from the claim that  $P(R/N\&E)$  is low or inscrutable to the claim that the reflective naturalist has a defeater for their belief in N & E. It is a confusion that I think Plantinga may share with his opponents. I think it is clear that Van Cleve's comments on the implicit premise thesis seem to mistake the general form of Plantinga's arguments; in particular it is not clear that the two steps that appeal to analogies have any hidden assumptions involving the implicit premise thesis. But Plantinga's reply to Van Cleve moves too quickly; he claims to argue not from general principles but from analogies and then recounts only the second set of analogies mentioned above. Even if the naturalist grants the point that Plantinga's second set of analogies firmly support his claim that to distrust the source of some information rationally obligates someone to skepticism regarding that information, the question remains as to why distrust of the source should occur in the first place. To establish that such distrust ought to occur for the reflective naturalist, Plantinga needs to employ and defend the first appeal to analogy which he makes, not the second.

Now such a defense is, I think, simple to provide. On the naturalist view, the origins of our cognitive faculties bear an extraordinary similarity to the hypothetical population in question. This is true in virtue of the fact that Plantinga describes this population in terms of the naturalist's account of our own history. What is crucial to the EAAN is not to make any fast moves here, and especially not to hastily employ the implicit premise thesis. Here are examples of overly-quick moves that should be avoided.

FM 1: If I am skeptical with respect to whether R holds for this hypothetical population, then I should be skeptical as to whether R holds for any creature whose cognitive faculties arose in a fashion similar to those of this hypothetical population.

FM 2: I have no source of information with respect to whether R holds for me (if I am a reflective naturalist) than I do that R holds for the hypothetical population in question, and therefore should regard each with equal skepticism.

Moves like these might be legitimate and might not be, but I suspect that the simple fact that they can be called into question would weaken any argument which depended upon them. But both would offer a fast track from the claim that  $P(R/N\&E)$  is low or inscrutable to the claim that the reflective naturalist has a defeater. And more importantly, they would do so in a way that avoided the "perspiration objection." But both will founder on other difficulties. The first move overlooks the fact that there might be other evidence than N & E upon which we should conditionalize when we try to discover the likelihood that R holds for us. The second seemingly overlooks the fact that our belief that R holds for ourselves is not based on the same kind of evidence that we employ to find out

if R holds for other persons; we tend to take it as basic or hold it in virtue of some sense of repugnance at holding the opposite view.

Now many replies to Plantinga's argument seem to assume that he is covertly employing some sort of principle like the ones mentioned above. But it is important to note that a successful attack on either of these principles will not help the naturalist if they already grant the two steps in Plantinga's argument that employ analogies. That is, if they grant that there is really no good reason to think that R holds for the hypothetical population in question and secondly that upon reflection there is no good evidence that our epistemic situation is better than theirs, then Plantinga can move to the second set of analogies and the general principle regarding distrust of sources of information.

So why doesn't the following argument work? The probability of the Bronco's having won a Super Bowl given that I am currently typing is low; therefore my belief that I am typing defeats my belief that the Bronco's have won a Super Bowl. It does not work, first of all, because P1 and P2 are false. So the real question is why can't this work in a more Plantingian fashion? Well, the first step would be to reflect upon those possible worlds in which I am currently typing. And it should be admitted that most of them do not feature a Broncos Super Bowl win. Now certain familiar looking questions arise. Do I have any better reason for thinking my belief that the Bronco's won a Super Bowl is true than for thinking that they won in that other world? This seems to me to be the case. For one thing, I believe certain things to obtain in this world that would likely give rise

to their winning one (for example, the longtime existence of such a football franchise). For another, the sources of information such as newspapers and TV that I have on this subject have not themselves been called into question on this subject. And even if they were, is there any convincing reason that I cannot place the likelihood of these sources being veridical as high? So there seems to be no convincing reason that I should regard my own beliefs regarding Bronco's history as just as likely to be veridical as I would the same beliefs of some typist in another world. So a Plantingian argument will not underwrite the extraordinary claims that P1 or P2 would underwrite.

In conclusion, Plantinga's argument must move carefully from claims regarding P (R/N&E) to the claim that the reflective naturalist has a defeater for R with respect to themselves. The moves employed at this point are subtle enough that I take even Plantinga himself to have overlooked them from time to time. However, the important point is that so long as Plantinga does not hastily employ principles open to the perspiration objection or other dubious principles, his argument retains its plausibility.

But this raises a host of concerns that will be the subject of the remainder of this chapter. For example, why can't the naturalist assert that there is another relevant fact with respect to *both* the probability that R holds for us *and* for the hypothetical population such that it raises the likelihood of R for each. On the other hand, is there a feature of our own experiences such that it justifies regarding these probabilities as different? Failing this, is there a reason that the low

probability should generate skepticism with respect to whether R holds for the hypothetical population but should not generate such skepticism with respect to whether R holds for us? Other objectors have pursued these questions and we will now take inventory of what has been accomplished in the pursuit.

## B. “Add a Little?”/ The Rule of Total Evidence

It is well-known that probabilities are sensitive to what is being conditionalized upon. To overlook relevant evidence for or against a claim the probability of which we are searching for is to undermine the trustworthiness of the estimate. Has Plantinga’s argument against the naturalist overlooked some claim relevant to the probability of R upon which it is fair for the naturalist to conditionalize? According to this objection, our situation is not to be regarded as analogous to a hypothetical population for whom N & E hold, but to a population for whom N & E & some other fact hold. So Plantinga’s first appeal to analogy allegedly fails.

There seems to be a tendency amongst authors who employ the “add a bit” strategy” to follow this up with an argument that theism suffers defeat from an argument analogous to the EAA. But I will put off a discussion of the “tu quoque” portion of Ginet’s and O’Conner’s argument and those of others until the penultimate chapter of this dissertation. The task at hand is to answer the question, “What is so illegitimate about this move when employed by the naturalist?”

## 1. Suggested Modifications on the Conditionalization.

The points offered by Ginet and O'Conner bear obvious similarities, but also bear subtle and perhaps significant differences. In fact, Plantinga points out three general versions of this reply:

**Version 1:** (Carl Ginet) The naturalist similarly might insist that “N+” be conditionalized upon. N+ is simply N & E plus the proposition R or “we won the evolutionary lottery. So R becomes *a part* of naturalist doctrine.

In a précis of WPF, Carl Ginet offers some of the earliest objections to the EAAN. This is the earliest response making the following appeal: “Why can't the naturalist add a little something?” In other words, why can't the naturalist insist upon adding something to N & E in virtue of which the probability of R goes up? Ginet's comments take up merely the last four paragraphs of his contribution to the précis. The key question which he raises here is

“How is it that the theist is allowed to build into her metaphysical hypothesis something that entails R or a high probability for R but the naturalist isn't? Why isn't it just as reasonable for the naturalist to take it as one of the tenets of naturalism that our cognitive systems are on the whole reliable (especially since it seems to be in our nature to have it as a basic belief)?”<sup>104</sup>

The theist, it is alleged, builds R into their metaphysical worldview in the following fashion. First, and vitally, it is confessed that the likelihood of R given merely the existence of a powerful, cosmic Being is low. Call the latter proposition T-minus. So P (R/ T-minus) is low or inscrutable. If we add the

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<sup>104</sup> Ginet, Carl. “Comments on Plantinga's Two-Volume Work on Warrant,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 55, No. 2, June 1995, p. 407.

further commitments of western theism (W) such as the ideas that we are made in the image of God, that God plans to redeem the human race, etc. then it might be claimed that  $P(R/T\text{-minus} \& W)$  is high. But what Plantinga needs is a clear distinction between the case of the naturalist who employs the former strategy and a theist who employs the latter analogous strategy: a distinction in virtue of which the theist is vindicated of the charge of “cheating” to protect R from defeat while the naturalist is not.

**Version 2:** (attributed by Plantinga to John Perry in personal conversation)

The naturalist may simply adjust his noetic structure so that it contains the proposition “we won the evolutionary lottery.” So R is not a part of naturalist doctrine, but the noetic structure of the naturalist is not in any danger of incoherence since  $P(R/N \& E \& L)$  is 1.

Perry has no published form of response to Plantinga. Therefore, it will be impossible to do him the justice of spelling out his claims in more detail. But suffice to say, there seems to be a genuine difference between his reply and those of others with respect to “adding a bit.” Consequently, his contribution to the discussion and Plantinga’s reply might throw light on defeaters in general.

**Version 3:** (Timothy O’Conner) This move differs from that mentioned in Version 2 in that the naturalist simply restores some coherence to their noetic structure by insisting that there is some (who knows what) true proposition P such that  $P(R/N \& E \& P)$  is high.

Again, to give more detail.... Epistemic coherence can be regained by the naturalist, claims O’Conner if other evidence is adduced in favor of R. Granting that P (R/Traditional theism) is high, O’Conner points out that while the P (R/ N & E) might be low, the probability of P (R/ N & E & O) may be significantly higher. O, which we may assume to be a proposition which the naturalist is inclined to believe, stands for the claim that “the initial conditions of the development of organic life and the sum total of evolutionary processes (including ones as yet unknown or only dimly understood) were and are such as to render P (R/ N & E & C & O) rather high.”<sup>105</sup>

Now O’Conner seems to be aware of the fact that this move *seems* to constitute a form of “cheating.” First of all, evolutionary processes as we understand them are wildly unpredictable and can generate perhaps infinite organic outcomes given the same initial starting points. So O’Conner specifies his proposition O specifically to take this into account. But the resulting proposition is so specific that if this move is rationally justifiable, it seems that no challenge to R can be maintained if the agent wishes to resist it in this fashion. To answer this objection, O’Conner allows that evidence against R may in fact be considered, but only if that evidence is direct. That is, O’Conner seems to contend that R might suffer from having a rebutting defeater, but from no other source of defeat.

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<sup>105</sup> O’Conner, p. 535.

Plantinga's argument provides an undercutting defeater for R and that, to O'Conner's mind, seems insufficient.<sup>106</sup>

In fact, O'Conner, while conceding that his argument rests on speculations regarding an unconfirmed missing chunk of evolutionary history, argues that this is of no consequence. He argues that even if evolutionary history and its mechanisms were so well-known as to provide no evidence for O whatsoever, R would still be safe from defeat in virtue of the fact that no *direct* (I take him to mean "rebutting") evidence has been adduced against it.<sup>107</sup>

Of course, Plantinga provided evidence for the propriety of using rebutting defeaters against R: he argued by analogy. This O'Conner recognizes, but argues in turn that the situations referred to by Plantinga are significantly disanalogous to that of the reflective naturalist. This being the case, I have come to understand O'Conner's argument as primarily an attack on Plantinga's analogies and have dedicated space elsewhere in this dissertation to an extended reply. Still, it is worth noting that Plantinga has a reply to O'Conner on the issue of whether this move invokes a successful defeater-defeater.

The reason that the replies of Ginet, Perry and O'Conner seem to fail lies in the fact that if they succeeded, an agent could employ the same strategy to get out of any defeater. In which case, they seem to rest on assumptions that are implausible. Therefore, Plantinga (and Richard Otte incidentally) point out a criteria of adequacy for defeater-defeaters; any legitimate employment of an

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 536.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 538.

alleged defeater-defeater should, by analogy, yield correct answers to whether defeater occurs in paradigm cases. For example, take the case of the widget factory. Widgets coming off of an assembly line appear red, but a source that I deem trustworthy informs me that they appear so only due to a special light used in the widget factory. My belief that the widgets are indeed red has a defeater. If an agent were to employ anything like the three strategies suggested above one could obtain a defeater-defeater in the following fashions and hence continue to “rationally” believe the widgets to be red.

- 1.) Continue to hold the belief that the widgets are red even though the supposed lighting would make them look red no matter what color they were.
- 2.) Hold the belief that the widgets are red even though it is unlikely given the trustworthiness of your informant; that is, hold that these widgets are the exception to the rule that most red-looking widgets in fact are not.
- 3.) Form the belief that there is some other true proposition (such as “Someone is currently shielding the widgets from the deceptive lighting in a manner that I cannot detect”) so that the proposition that the widgets are red now becomes likely given your other beliefs.

In Plantinga's unpublished "Naturalism Defeated" he seems to offer what might be called "cheating clauses:" principles governing how a defeater *cannot* rationally be dealt with.<sup>108</sup>

CC1: you cannot defeat a defeater by merely believing in the conjunction of it and the defeatee. (contra Ginet)

The fact that Plantinga takes Ginet's objection seriously from the outset might well be reflected in the fact that his reply exceeds the original objection in length. And, Ginet added, theism can be challenged in a tu quoque fashion, so it is best if Plantinga just allow the naturalist the legitimacy of this maneuver.

First, Plantinga seems content to allow that what problem raised by Ginet, if successful, demonstrates is that *both* views seem to be in trouble, not that neither seems to be in trouble. After all, if one were rationally permitted to simply add a belief to their noetic structure in order to escape defeat, then no defeater could ever succeed.<sup>109</sup> So as a general strategy it is not reasonable to conjoin a defeat candidate with any proposition which either entails or probabilistically it and then triumphantly note that the belief is no longer defeated.

CC2: you cannot defeat a defeater by merely holding that the defeatee is true even if improbable given your evidence (contra Perry)

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<sup>108</sup> "Naturalism Defeated," p. 45, also reaffirmed in "Naturalism Defeated?" p. 220 ff.

<sup>109</sup> In Plantinga's reply to Ginet, Carl. "Comments on Plantinga's Two-Volume Work on Warrant." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. LV, No. 2, June, 1995, see p. 440.

CC3: you cannot defeat a defeater by simply believing that there is some true proposition that makes the defeated proposition likely. (contra O'Conner)

It seems to me that Plantinga has the better side of this argument thus far.

But there are other versions of this “add a bit” strategy available in the literature on the EAAN. Nathan, for example, takes a slightly different route. For unlike the responses 1-3 above, Nathan does not so much suggest “adding something” as he insists that there are already elements of the naturalists noetic structure that are relevant to the probability of R with respect to ourselves. Nathan sees Plantinga as offering the following:

“Someone who accepts N & E and also believes that the proper attitude toward P (R / N & E) is one of agnosticism clearly enough has good reason for being agnostic about R as well. She has no other source of information about R...but the source of information she does have gives her no reason to believe R and no reason to disbelieve it. The proposition in question is the sort for which one needs evidence if one is to believe it reasonably: since there is no evidence, the reasonable course is to withhold belief.”<sup>110</sup>

Nathan claims that other sources of information about R do in fact exist. He draws our attention to propositions such as (M): Our seeming memories have been reliable in the past. This he takes as evidence for R. Of course there are other elements to R that he believes to be capable of receiving similar support: that our seeming perceptions have been reliable in the past, that our seeming inductive

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<sup>110</sup> Plantinga, WPF, 1993, p. 229.

skills have been successful in the past, etc. Furthermore, says Nathan, it makes no sense to keep demanding of propositions such as (M) that further evidence be demanded in order to underwrite them, on pain of an infinite regress.

I think he misunderstands the nature of the problem at hand; a misunderstanding betrayed in the paragraph that I quoted. Plantinga's argument never insists that the reflective naturalist needs a defense of R nor for M. What is necessary if internal rationality is to be maintained is for the naturalist not to have discovered an undefeated defeater for these among their other beliefs. I will return to this issue under the chapter on global skepticism, because I think it to be an important mistake which is made (probably) in many of the replies to the EAAN.

This problem aside, does probabilizing on N & E & M significantly affect our estimate of R? This seems to me to depend upon what exactly Nathan means when he defines M as "Our seeming memories have been reliable in the past." Does he mean "It seems to us that our memories have been reliable"? This would be true, but Richard Otte, whose views on this issue will be examined momentarily, has argued that probabilizing upon the fact that we have had certain internally definable mental experiences is not going to significantly raise this probability. On the other hand, Nathan might have meant something like "Our seeming memories of the past are true." In which case, contrary to what I offered previously and what Nathan himself seems to think, is very similar to the versions 1-3 offered above. And if those are open to the charge that such a defense in the

face of defeat constitutes “cheating” then Nathan’s version will be as well. The reliability of our faculty of memory is one thing that the EAAN calls into question.

So in these circumstances, just what is fair to conditionalize upon? Otte suggests a few items that seem clearly unreasonable. First, the naturalist could insist that the information O consist of claims such as “There is no God” or “Naturalism is true.” Otte shows little regard for this apparently illegitimate maneuver.

When we look for the probability of x given y, we look at a set of y-like worlds and see what proportion of them are x-worlds. The more information that is built into y, the smaller our set will be. So just how far are we to limit the set? And what information may y contain in virtue of which we limit our search? Otte admits that there is no general answer to this question, as does Plantinga<sup>111</sup> but maintains that there are at least a number of plausible principles that should govern any such endeavor. But, he thinks, these considerations will also weigh in favor of the EAAN. There are four such principles:

- 1.) Where the obtaining of some proposition x is in question, you should only probabilize on information relevant to bring about or suppressing x. In the case of the EAAN, N and E cover this ground exhaustively.
- 2.) When matters of internal rationality are being evaluated, we should only probabilize on information accessible to us.

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<sup>111</sup> Plantinga, 2003, p. 294-295.

3.) We should not probabilize on information that would beg the question in favor of x.

4.) We should avail ourselves of *all* information relevant to x in the sense described by 1 above.

Before proceeding, Otte gives several examples in which his four restrictions seem to lead to correct results with respect to rational probability assessments and resulting assessments of whether defeat occurs. For example, if we came to believe that we were BIVs, assessing the probability of R given *the veridical nature of our perceptual faculties*, would violate one of Otte's provisions and lead to the counterintuitive result that R is likely to hold for us even if we are BIVs. However, less obviously, if the scientists who extracted our brains in the previous example informed us that a certain percentage of brains in these experiments retained veridical perceptual experiences and that the evidence that such were preserved was the presence of a red tint to those experiences, I may rationally conditionalize R upon both the fact that I am a BIV and whether I in fact have a red tint to my perceptual experiences.

Is there any information then relevant to R other than N and E that would meet the foregoing criteria? Otte proposes, in a fashion similar to the "non-cheating" interpretation I gave of Nathan's argument, that one source of information might fit the bill. We have privileged access to our own internal mental experiences. Otte characterizes these *experiences* so as not to presuppose them veridical. But the question remains as to whether this will do any good on

the naturalist' behalf with respect to raising the probability of R. Therefore, the naturalist can and should conditionalize on EXP. And when considering whether the resulting probability of R generates defeat, the naturalist may examine worlds in which there exist hypothetical creatures for whom not only N and E hold, but who also have experiences such as ours.

So what bearing does this have on the main EAAN? For one thing, we must not, says Otte, consider worlds in which beings have beliefs about objects involving definite descriptions such as “witch-trees” or “tiger-creatures.” This is not a part of our experience of perceiving the world around us. Even if we may be using definite descriptions in generating our beliefs (and Otte does not concede this even) these are not the definite descriptions we employ. At least it is not our experience (EXP) that we do such things. So the introduction of odd belief-cum-desire combinations will not help the EAAN.

There are two issues here: one that Otte addresses and one that he does not. Regarding the latter, it should be pointed out that Plantinga only raises such far-fetched scenarios in the context of the discussion of whether our beliefs are likely to be true given that the content such beliefs causes behavior. Consequently, if it is highly unlikely that belief content causes behavior given N & E, Otte's insights are headed in a direction that might not have much impact on the EAAN at all.

But Otte takes a different direction with respect to defending Plantinga's argument. He point out that if we conditionalize upon EXP, we will still have to deal with that set of worlds containing creatures for which N & E & EXP are true.

Now even if EXP forbids including worlds in which the creatures in question have “witch-tree” perceptions of the world, or the like thereof, the question remains as to whether their experiences (which are assumed to be much like ours) are veridical. Otte introduces the idea of an “equivalence class” to illustrate this point. And equivalence class would be that subset of the set of worlds in question in which our internal experiences (privately accessible) and our external experiences match up. So the question is "What is the ratio of the equivalence set of worlds to the set in which N & E & EXP hold?" If it is low, then the P (R/N & E & EXP) will still be low and the EAAN will sidestep the objection at hand.

And in fact, naturalistic evolutionary theory gives us no reason to think that the ratio in question will be high. Consequently, it seems that the introduction of possibilities such as odd belief-cum-desire combinations into the EAAN was superfluous. If Otte is correct, then this might render one of the more counterintuitive portions of the EAAN unnecessary and hence strengthen the overall argument. Otte concludes then that the main argument can emerge from one of its most challenging objections unscathed.

Now one would think that Plantinga would welcome such insights with open arms. He does, in fact, concede that Otte’s insights are powerful and that he is not confident that he understands everything that has been offered. Nonetheless, he is again typically hesitant in accepting a reformulated approach to the EAAN. Otte claims that the naturalist should probabilize upon P (R/ N & E & EXP). Plantinga is not certain of this. For one thing, nothing in Otte’s discussion

involves the Humean loop, the dread snare of Plantinga's version of the EAAN.

So here is the contrast which Plantinga sees as best I am able to explain it.

#### PLANTINGA'S APPROACH:

1. Assess the probability of R in a rational way. Note, R is initially assumed to, but due to considerations Otte rightly introduces, it may not itself be an item we probabilize upon.
2. See that R would not likely hold for the hypothetical population.
3. Assess R with respect to one's self as equally unlikely.
4. Recognize that one's original probability assessments and such are equally subject to this defeat.
5. Begin to move (in a synchronic fashion) in a Humean loop.

#### OTTE'S APPROACH:

- 1.) Determine to assess the probability of R in a rational way (according to his four guidelines), this involves being willing to initially call R into doubt.
- 2.) Conclude that R given N & E & EXP is unlikely and hence not likely for the hypothetical population.
- 3.) Move to the claim that N is defeated.

Now what essentially is the difference here? Plantinga says that Otte places doubt of one's beliefs in a position that is dialectically prior to conditionalization whereas the original EAAN generates doubts in a place dialectically posterior to the conditionalization. EXP will also include an account of our having beliefs, seeming to be rational, etc. More importantly, it seems that Otte is overlooking whether our internal experiences such as our experience of seeming logically minded and rightly aware of the powers of certain arguments are veridical (in contrast to Nathan). Consequently, the Humean loop never gets started. But in his version of the argument, these Humean considerations do not appear to be necessary.

Upon reflection, it seems to me that Plantinga is rightly concerned here. Otte's reformulated version does seemingly ask us to doubt or even remain agnostic with respect to R or anything entailed thereby. Perhaps an example will make this clearer. Let's imagine the case of the widget factory once again. The widgets coming off the assembly line appear to be red. A trusted supervisor informs you that they are being irradiated by lighting that makes them look red. If you proceed in the fashion that Otte recommends, you need to initially doubt that these objects are in fact red. You merely reflect on whether such a belief should be maintained and in order to determine whether this is so you estimate the probability of our perceptual faculties being veridical in this case in such a fashion as to not beg the question. Doubt emerges the moment that the agent in question beings to probabilize the likelihood of the widgets actually being red, but forbids

himself to employ any considerations arising from his *seeming* perception of them being red other than the fact that they are just that, *seeming*.

Plantinga, by contrast, states that "...it *seems* that Otte's suggestion has the consequence that the naturalist can't rationally conditionalize on *anything*."<sup>112</sup> For if doubt is dialectically prior to conditionalization then N & E are to be doubted initially. For after all, how can one rationally allow N & E to enter the probability assessment in question but forbid anything to enter that is seemingly more obviously such as "This is really a chair in front of me."

But Plantinga accepts a great deal of Otte's insights as to what can be probabilized upon. And if Otte is correct, none of the means of escaping defeat explored thus far will work; for each violates at least one of his criteria, typically more than one. On the other hand, however, Plantinga does not wish to commit himself to any skeptical argument that must ask the reader to doubt the deliverances of their cognitive faculties at the outset of the argument. Can he have it both ways? It seems to me that he can. And that is why he needs the appeal to the Humean Loop. R is assumed true until defeated. When it is defeated, the loop gets started.

So what does he gain by employing this strategy as opposed to Otte's? If Plantinga took Otte's route, his EAAN would start to bear an eerie similarity to the traditional skeptical argument of Descartes; it may be recalled that Descartes' arguments began with the employment of a method of doubt. But whatever their

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<sup>112</sup> Plantinga, "Naturalism Defeated?" p. 268, italics in original.

starting point, nearly all skeptics in this school of thought will appeal to the following principle;

Skeptical Principle: If upon reflection you cannot find non-question begging, reasonable source of justification for your belief that P when  $\sim P$  is consistent with all the information you can reasonably adduce, then you cannot rationally continue to believe P.

The stipulation that the source of justification be non-question begging is intended to rule out Moorean style responses. I do not say that the foregoing is the only (or even the best) formulation of the principles appealed to by skeptics. Only that it is similar. The problem for us at present is that this sort of principle has objections to it; objections which will be explored in the chapter on the EAAN's relation to global skepticism. But my point here is that if the EAAN employed anything like this premise, for instance by instantiating P to the claim that our rational faculties operate so as to give us mostly true beliefs, those same objections would apply to the EAAN. And Plantinga's concern is that Otte is implicitly introducing such a premise. By contrast, the EAAN does not require us to initially doubt R; it only requires that the naturalist probabilize the likelihood of R only on beliefs they have such that the truth of those beliefs would, in Otte's language, "suppress or bring about R" and not introduce beliefs such as "We won the evolutionary lottery" such that by analogy defeaters could never escape being defeated in an ad hoc fashion. And this seems reasonable enough.

In conclusion, we have examined several candidates for additional factors that might raise the probability of R, but none meet the rationally necessary

criterion. Plantinga may reasonably invoke these criteria (as spelled out by Otte) without collapsing his argument into the more traditional form of skeptical argument. He can so, ironically, by insisting that R be initially assumed true by the reflective naturalist, but also be inappropriate to probabilize upon when the likelihood of R itself is being considered. And I see no problem with this stipulation. Consequently, all attempts we have examined thus far still seem to constitute some form of “cheating.”

## **2. Charges of Epistemic and Probabilistic Incoherence**

Plantinga's EAAN seems a formidable challenge to the naturalist. It seems difficult, if not impossible, for the naturalist to account for why they can trust their rational faculties upon reflection while also admitting that there is no good reason to think that this universe would have given them reliable belief producing faculties. Plantinga insists that the charge irrationality is bound to follow upon this. Now when a particular school of thought (especially one as popular as naturalism) is put into this corner, there is an understandable tendency to call "foul." If a philosophical question gets too unwieldy, there is a discernable pattern in the history of philosophy of calling for a reevaluation of the original problem; consider personalities such as Hegel, Kant and Wittgenstein. The hope is that a problem can be found in the formulation of the question so as to render an answer to it unnecessary. I take authors discussed in this section to be making a similar maneuver. Perhaps the formulation of the EAAN is a conceptual mess to start with. It does not seem to be on the surface, but perhaps the incoherence lies beneath. For example, perhaps incoherence lies in the employment of a certain concept of defeat or incoherent assignment of probability estimates.

The purpose of this section is to dismiss the criticisms of Thomas McHugh Reed regarding the seeming epistemic incoherence in the EAAN as well as to answer charges made by Fitelson and Sober to the effect that the EAAN works upon incoherent probability assignments. James Beilby has raised a criticism of the EAAN similar to that of Reed's but he also attempts to answer it. I argue that

although Beilby's attempt at salvaging the EAAN fails, there is nonetheless an adequate reply to the objection he raises.

Reed detects three distinct stages to Plantinga's EAAN:

Stage 1: arguments to the conclusion that  $P(R/N\&E)$  is low or inscrutable.

Stage 2: argue that N&E thus constitute an undefeatable defeater for R.

Stage 3: argue that any such defeater for R will defeat N&E as well.

Reed contends that stage 2 is the source of worry. According to this portion of Plantinga's argument the naturalist cannot adduce any independent evidence that might adjust or raise the probability of R; by independent evidence we mean to refer to evidence that would not already assume R. Examples could be inductive arguments or scientific inferences; to assume these sorts of cognition reliable would beg the question already at issue.

But Reed believes Plantinga to have overlooked one non-question-begging source of justification for R. Namely, both Plantinga and his naturalist opponent would have to agree that the premises and logic of the EAAN have been clearly understood in order for either to accept the conclusion that evolutionary naturalism is incoherent. It is only when the evolutionary naturalist becomes aware of this argument, Plantinga says, that the position becomes irrational to maintain. But in order to understand the argument, the naturalist and Plantinga must both agree that faculties of reasoning, perception and memory have been employed properly. In other words, for the naturalist to understand this argument regarding the reliability of their cognition, they would have to already assume such faculties reliable. "But

if Plantinga is assuming this, then the defender of N & E can hardly beg the question against Plantinga by making a like assumption.”<sup>113</sup>

At this point, Reed claims that if the second stage of Plantinga’s argument breaks down in such a fashion, the first stage will falter as well. The naturalist will be in a position to claim that  $P(R/N\&E)$  will be high indeed.

“For we are assuming in this section that N& E is the only live option in this context, i.e., that it represents the only plausible account of the development of our faculties. Instead of rejecting N&E, then, the naturalist can legitimately challenge Plantinga’s estimate of the probability of R on N & E. Where N & E is the only live option, indeed, this is the naturalist’s only reasonable course.”<sup>114</sup>

Now there seems to me that both portions of Reed’s argument are fatally flawed. The first part is flawed in that Reed makes the false assumption that when person A makes an argument against person B, that A must allow that B is entitled to any claim which A’s argument assumes or that A holds to be true. Consider a context in which an external world skeptic approaches me with their Cartesian-style arguments. Could I simply respond by pointing out that my opponent must concede in the course of their arguments that *they* exist? Is this not presupposed by both parties? But if they exist, then there is something external to my mind (other than an evil demon) and their argument fails? If this sort of reply to a skeptic were at all satisfactory J. S. Mill would have had a much easier time answering skepticism about other minds: he could simply point out that skeptics who offer such arguments do so upon the presupposition that their minds have

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<sup>113</sup> Reed, Thomas McHugh, “Evolutionary Skepticism,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 42, p. 79-96, 1997, p. 84.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* p. 84.

concocted a delightfully paradoxical argument. End of story. Perhaps Reed in fact intends to do away with all skeptical arguments just this easily. He quotes Moore<sup>115</sup> to the effect that no argument will succeed when its conclusion is so radical that it is easier to doubt the premises than to accept the conclusion.

But there is a deeper problem still. For as we saw in the closing paragraphs of the previous section, Plantinga explicitly disavows the claim that the EAAN begins, from a dialectical standpoint, by invoking skepticism and then requiring an independent source of evidence to restore rational faith in our cognitive faculties. In point of fact, Plantinga allows that the naturalist may continue to trust their faculties until such a time as they reflectively find a defeater for such a belief. So Plantinga does not in fact require that the naturalist give up the belief that (to use Reed's examples) our faculties of perception, reasoning and memory function as we take them to *in the course* of his argument. Rather, this is the conclusion reached at a later point in the argument. And when this conclusion is reached, considerations of the Humean Loop are the next step. In short then, Reed moves to quickly in his explication of what he thinks is Stage 2 of Plantinga's argument. There are two objections that might be raised here on grounds of what Beilby often refers to as "apparent duplicity." The first involves a problem of self-referential incoherence. Apparently, Plantinga offers an argument against R, but in order to understand the argument *requires* R. Presumably, the naturalist may claim that to accept such an argument is incoherent. Of course the upshot of this

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid. p. 92

is that providing *any* argument against R is going to involve some self-referential incoherence of this sort. That would make it difficult to explain, for example, how Plantinga's example of a person being able to reasonably diagnosing themselves to be going insane could make any sense.

A related second charge is that Plantinga's argument thus begs the question against the naturalist. How can it be that the naturalist is *not justified* in believing R yet their cognitive faculties are sufficient to understand the EAAN and Plantinga's faculties are sufficient to create the EAAN? Only if, Beilby muses, our faculties are intelligently designed. But this presumes the theistic metaphysics already, i.e. it already carries with it the assumption that naturalism is false. Hence, Plantinga's argument is rendered in a question-begging form.

Let's turn now to Beilby's replies. The first objection can be answered, Beilby thinks, by pointing out that Plantinga never actually tries to demonstrate that our faculties are actually unreliable. He is merely attempting to demonstrate that we lack justification for such a claim. The object of defeat here is simply the claim that the naturalist has grounds to trust their cognitive faculties. So, in short, it is fair for Plantinga to assume R is instantiated to the naturalist. Beilby quickly then dismisses the second objection, since it relied in part upon the first.

I have more than a few criticisms at this point. Beilby states in the opening of his reply "First of all, *in principle*, let me grant ... these objections. Surely it is self-referentially incoherent to propose an argument which both defeats the reliability of the naturalist's cognitive faculties, and simultaneously requires that

those faculties be reliable.”<sup>116</sup> What exactly is going on here? It is true that any argument that works from contradictory premises commits a fallacy. But the “requirement” that the naturalists faculties be reliable is not such in virtue of the proposition that such faculties are reliable features as a premise in the EAAN. On the other hand, it is perfectly reasonable to make an argument with a premise P to the conclusion  $\sim$ P. This occurs all the time in philosophy: so what would be the problem here?

So here, in a nutshell, is where Beilby is going astray. First, he is inclined to think that it is self-referentially incoherent for Plantinga or anyone else to raise an argument against R because this would require the person entertaining the argument to assume R (for reductio). I have pointed out that there is no reason to think this. But then, secondly, he moves to explicate Plantinga’s argument such that it merely shows the naturalist to lack justification for R. Again, this is not the point of the EAAN. Nor does the EAAN move from this point to the claim that a defeater for N & E can be generated from the inability so supply such justification. Rather, the EAAN concerns itself with demonstrating that if one beings by assuming R to hold for them (as is reasonable) and also holds that the naturalistic origins of their cognitive faculties calls the reliability of these into question, then they have a defeater for R.

If Reeds charge that Plantinga is working from contradictory premises does not hold water, Fitelson and Sober try to make a deeper cut into the EAAN: according

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid. p. 75.

to this charge, Plantinga's probability assignments are inconsistent. He supposes first that  $P(E \& N)$  roughly equals  $P(TT)$ , or "traditional theism." The probability of R should initially be assigned, Plantinga admits, near unity. So  $\Pr(R)$  roughly equals  $\Pr(R/N \& E) * .5$  plus  $\Pr(R/TT) * \Pr(TT)$ . But this cannot be the case. Nothing near 1, Fitelson and Sober claim, can be reached where  $(low) * .5 + (high) * .5$  are summed.

Via, they claim, personal correspondence with Plantinga, Fitelson and Sober have come to believe that Plantinga's preferred way out of this problem is to claim that "comparable probability" assignments to N & E and TT only implies that they be roughly the same, but that this assignment could vary from .05 to .95 just so long as they co-vary. So here is a look at the actual situation:

$$\Pr(R) = \Pr(R / N \& E) * \Pr(E \& N) + P(R/TT) * P(TT)$$

$$1 \quad \text{'roughly equals' } (low) * (?) + (high) * (?)$$

There is no contradiction here. However, Fitelson and Sober continue, there will be a problem once we fill in the question marks. "Pr(R/N & E) must be very close to zero and Pr(R/TT) must be very close to unity."<sup>117</sup> So those not already convinced of theism should reject this argument. For they claim that this begs the question in favor of theism.

Fitelson and Sober seem to be acting here as though the argument is unfair to naturalism but they demonstrate nothing of the sort. All this proves is that if Plantinga is correct about the Pr(R/N & E) being as his *earlier* arguments in the

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<sup>117</sup> Fitelson and Sober, p. 123.

EAAN show it to be, namely low or inscrutable but not reasonably held to be high, then the respective probability of  $\Pr(R/TT)$ , where TT is the only alternative and R is set close to unity will have to be high. So much the better for the theist if this turns out to be the right way to go. If Fitelson and Sober wish to extricate themselves from this argument, they need to block an earlier premise rather than claim that some question (I know not what) has seemingly been begged against them. All they have proven is that the naturalist is in a bind with how they assign probabilities to E & N if they accept the other probabilities being such as Plantinga argued.

Consequently, I see no successful argument in the literature for the claim that Plantinga has made mistakes in his move from the low or inscrutable probability of R/N&E to the conclusion that the naturalist has a defeater that involve working from contradictions or from incoherent probability assignments. Neither Reed nor Fitelson and Sober have demonstrated this. Therefore, there is no reason here to dismiss the probability assignments used by Plantinga in the course of generating this defeater as irrelevant.

## **C. Maximal Warrant/ Basicity Objections**

### **1. R Beyond Defeat?**

Some authors have sought to argue that although the judgment that a source of information is unreliable tends to discredit any information received on the basis of that source alone, that R is a special case. R cannot be discredited no matter how strong the information accepted that weighs against its reliability may be. Plantinga demurs that if this were the case, then no one could rationally judge themselves to be going insane. Or, to use one of his analogies, the person who believes they have taken a hallucinogenic drug could never reasonably come to doubt R with respect to themselves. Here we will examine the arguments of authors who make the case that despite Plantinga's concerns R has the privileged position of being beyond defeat. I argue that these authors have not succeeded.

In his article "Commonsense Naturalism" Michael Bergmann advances an argument intended to demonstrate that the epistemology of Thomas Reid can supply the evolutionary naturalist with resources sufficient to disarm Plantinga's EAAN. Bergmann is willing to grant that P (R/ N&E) is either low or inscrutable. Nonetheless, belief in R is of a special sort such that these considerations alone will not serve to defeat the belief. Here, I examine both his argument and Plantinga's reply. I argue that there is, in fact, much more wrong with Bergmann's account than Plantinga points out.

Thomas Reid maintained that some beliefs are justified in a non-inferential manner on the basis of non-propositional evidence. Examples of such beliefs would be “My cognitive capacities function in a reliable fashion,” “Other minds exist,” “ $2+2=4$ ” and “My thoughts are my own.” The tell-tale sign that a belief in question of this sort is the “emotion of ridicule”<sup>118</sup> one senses when attempting to doubt or deny these sorts of propositions.

Now Plantinga has appealed to such a notion on occasion. For example, despite the fact that the existence of God might be improbably given horrendous evils existing,  $P(G/HE)$  is low a continued belief in God might be justified in virtue of non-propositional evidence (*sensus divinitatus* perhaps) for the belief. If this example is not convincing, cases in which memory serves the role of such non-propositional evidence might be, such as in the case of the Purloined Letter. In this curious case, all of the public evidence, evidence that you note the weight of, indicts you for the theft of a letter yesterday at 3:00. Still, you might reasonably believe that your belief that you did not steal the letter remains undefeated in light of your basic belief based upon apparent memory; you remember being far from the of the crime at 3:00 yesterday and have no memory of taking a letter. So defeat in light of such probability assignments can occur, but only when the *total* evidence for the belief weighs against it and the cumulative evidence must include that of the non-propositional sort.

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<sup>118</sup> Bergmann, “Naturalism Defeated?” pp. 67 and 81.

Now an interesting aspect of this non-propositional evidence is the non-public form that it often takes. My memories, for example, are only privately accessible. On these grounds, Bergmann maintains that the fact that we would judge a hypothetical population of creatures with a cognitive life like ours to have mostly false beliefs is irrelevant. This occurs simply because we do not have countervailing non-propositional evidence with respect *to them*. Propositional evidence is all that we have to go on in that case.

Here Bergmann raises a difficulty. Does not the foregoing consideration place R (implausibly) beyond defeat? In fact, does it not place all beliefs that are basic in this Reidian sense above defeat? Bergmann concedes that if a person actually believes that their memories were the implant of an evil demon, then defeat would for R would occur. Likewise, if a person believes that the source of their belief in God was faith in Freudian wish-fulfillment then belief in God would be defeated. So hasn't Bergmann supplied us with a reply to his own argument?

So defeat accrued in this probabilistic reasoning fashion can be undermined by non-propositional evidence such as evidence from memory, perception or from, perhaps, the *sensus divinitatus*. But what of cases in which the non-propositional evidence itself is called into question? For this is precisely what the EAAN calls into question.

Bergmann argues at this point that non-propositional evidence from memory and perception does not serve as defeater-defeaters in these cases. Once a person begins to doubt the reliability of their cognitive faculties, there is no

escape. The question he poses is rather whether the naturalist should ever entertain those doubts in the first place: the idea is to use these considerations to not come to believe that one is a BIV or such in the first place. It is only then, at this latter point, that the problems which Plantinga describes in terms of the Humean Loop get started. Bergmann holds that it does not, at least that it need not do so.<sup>119</sup> For there is no other way to rationally hold to R except in a basic way: one cannot argue for it without begging questions. Therefore, it is the *basicity* of R as evidenced by the “emotion of ridicule” one feels in challenging it which serves as the countervailing non-propositional evidence to the purported defeat generated by the consideration that P (R/ N& E) is low or inscrutable.

In response to the argument thus far, Plantinga contends that the most Bergmann has demonstrated is that R cannot be defeated when the defeat in question is proper function defeat. The “emotion of ridicule” is perhaps staunch evidence that faith in R is immovable. But that does not demonstrate that in more reflective moments that the naturalist cannot find some probabilistic incompatibility between R and their other beliefs. And when those cognitive processes aimed at the formation and maintenance of true belief are active, the reflective naturalist will obtain a purely alethic rationality defeater. “Powerful inclinations” to accept R will not constitute evidence in such a reflective context.<sup>120</sup> After all, we would have faith in R regardless of whether it was true or not provided that we are functioning properly. Whether such powerful

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid. p. 75.

<sup>120</sup> Plantinga, “Naturalism Defeated?” p. 232

inclinations are themselves trustworthy will then become a subject to which the notion of Humean defeat will apply.

In response, I think that Plantinga's points are a little off track. If Bergmann wishes to argue that the emotion of ridicule should keep a person from forming the belief that they are a BIV or are under the influence of a hallucinogenic drug or some such defeater for R, Plantinga should grant the point. But by analogy all that is proven is that the believer in N & E should have reflected enough on the global skeptical implications of this view so that the emotion of ridicule would have served in their case as grounds for not accepting it. But Bergmann has already told us what happens in the case of a person who actually does already accept a view with such global skeptical implications. And that is all Plantinga needs to make his argument work; in this case, they have a defeater for R. Bergmann's crucial oversight is not in the failure to distinguish purely alethic defeat and proper function defeat, but rather lies in the failure to see that the situation of the evolutionary naturalist is analogous to those situations in which defeat occurs even on his view.

## 2. What Defeats What? The Requirements of Internal Rationality.

Alston admits that Plantinga's response to the "perspiration objection" is a good one.<sup>121</sup> So why does P (R/N&E) being low or inscrutable still fail to provide a defeater for R? Alston's view is that it *does* in fact provide some sort of defeater, but just not of type which Plantinga asserts. And hence internal rationality, on his view, does not demand the abandonment of R in cases such as these. Strictly speaking, Alston's views expressed here do not so much undermine the EAAN as they suggest a reformation of it; one in which R defeats N & E. Here, however, I argue that Plantinga is not in the position of having to choose between the EAAN and Alston's suggested reformation. The requirements of internal rationality can be legitimately employed to serve in both arguments.

First, we need an account of the difference between internal and external rationality. Plantinga and Alston use Descartes account of the madman who believes that his head is made of glass in order to illustrate the difference. Such a madman would not exhibit external rationality. A person is externally rational when they properly take into account the incoming information provided by their sense data (or other data) and form beliefs or refrain from forming beliefs accordingly. Hence, the madman in question is seemingly not taking into account the apparent construction of his own head in forming his quirky belief. But surely there is something rational about this madman if he opts to purchase and wear a

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<sup>121</sup> Alston, "Naturalism Defeated?" p. 184.

helmet to protect his supposedly fragile head. This is due to the fact that given the truth of his belief (which is in fact false) this would be the proper thing to do in the light of his other assumptions about the dangers such fragility affords. This is rationality “downstream from experience.” This latter sort of rationality, internal rationality, concerns what is reasonable to believe given the requirements of coherence with our other beliefs. And it would be incoherent in the case of the madman for him to hold the belief that his head is made of glass yet simultaneously hold that it is in no eminent danger of shattering. Moving on then...

From the naturalist point of view, Alston admits, it seems that if our cognitive faculties arrived on the scene by pure chance, that it should hence be conceded that each of the possibilities for belief-behavior interaction are legitimate contenders. Further, it is the case the probability of R given N & E and any one of these contenders is low or inscrutable. But then again, this seems on Alston’s view merely to point to the claim that there is some difficulty in adopting all of these beliefs N, E and R together. There is no hard and fast rule regarding *which* member of the probabilistically incoherent set must be ousted upon pains of irrationality.

Now if one adopts the general rule (as seems reasonable) that when a set of beliefs becomes internally irrational that one should keep the most warranted of their beliefs, then Plantinga would have to agree that this would argue in favor of keeping R (which arguably enjoys warrant of a basic sort) and ousting N (which

Alston and he agree enjoys little support). But now this comes up against a difficulty. There do seem to be cases in which irrationally acquired beliefs can defeat rationally acquired ones. If so, the general principle just mentioned might not pertain to Plantinga's argument. Returning to our earlier example, from the writings of Descartes, a person comes to think that their head is made of glass. This belief would be externally irrational. But *given that a person has this belief*, it might be internally rational for them to buy a helmet in order to protect their fragile head. Alston wishes to argue that the belief "I ought to buy a helmet" is irrational in such cases and that consideration of whether or not the persons head is reasonably believed to be made of glass should play into our evaluation of this belief of the agent in question. External features regarding how the belief in question is formed or sustained need to be taken into account. But this flies in the face of Plantinga's attempt to get the seemingly externally warranted belief (R) defeated by the less warranted belief (N&E) in virtue of merely the internal irrationality of the conjunction of the two. Alston raises some questions here regarding whether Plantinga is insisting that matters of external rationality be overlooked when evaluating whether the belief R remains warranted for the reflective naturalist, but settles finally upon the affirmative. Alston raises some questions regarding whether Plantinga is insisting that matters of external rationality be overlooked when evaluating whether the belief R remains warranted for the reflective naturalist, but settles finally upon the affirmative.<sup>122</sup> So

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid. p. 192.

similarly, if the Cartesian agent above holds to the conjunction of “I have a glass head” and “I don’t need a helmet” then they are irrational, because one (upon reflection) probabilistically excludes the other. But which should defeat the other in the sense of it being rationally obligatory to give up? Alston claims that our rational obligation, whether we know it or not, would be to give up the former in all such cases. But then why does Plantinga allow for a possibility that the opposite is the rational think to do? In fact, his EAAN seems to rest upon this possibility of irrationally obtained beliefs defeating rationally obtained ones.

It is worth noting that Alston distinguishes his objection from the objection that “R is beyond defeat.”<sup>123</sup> The claim here is not that R has such great initial warrant that it can never be defeated. The claim is rather that R has such a great amount of initial warrant that only something with more warrant could defeat it in virtue of R being probabilistically incoherent with respect to that defeater.

Now given the plausibility of the general claim regarding defeat mentioned a moment ago, we turn to one last consideration. Suppose that Plantinga insists that internal rationality is all that should be considered when evaluating which of two probabilistically incoherent beliefs. Even so, the same considerations which argue for a low or inscrutable  $P(R/N \& E)$  argue equally for a low or inscrutable  $P(N \& E/R)$ . Could it not be that rather R defeats N & E instead of vice versa. The foregoing paragraphs have made a positive argument for this claim. But now,

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<sup>123</sup> Plantinga, “Naturalism Defeated?” p. 200.

given that R likely enjoys more initial warrant, what argument to the contrary is plausible?

Of course, Plantinga might welcome this conclusion: it is at least the case that one belief, N & E or R, defeats the other (pick your poison). But Alston maintains, that if we reject the more subjective account of what belief is the defeater and which is the defeatee as we do when we allow for considerations of external rationality or greater initial warrant of each belief, the only remaining principle to which Plantinga might appeal in order to make sure that it is R that gets defeated is a grossly implausible principle of conservatism. Accordingly, it is the last belief acquired which is kept and the belief held for the longer amount of time that is defeated. But this does not seem epistemically justified.

So can the naturalist still get a defeater for R out of this? Plantinga does not seem to engage this point for more than two paragraphs. On the whole, his considered opinion is that at least *some form of defeater* for a rational belief can be obtained in the form of the acquisition of an irrational belief. Witness again, Descartes' madman who thinks that his head is made of glass. *Given that* he believes such a thing, is it not irrational for him to think that he stands without the need of a helmet? And is this not a "perfectly respectable and epistemically relevant kind of defeater,"<sup>124</sup> even allowing Alston's point that defeat of this sort takes on a subjective tone given that the madman could have just as well maintained internal rationality by giving up the belief that his head was made of

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid. p. 275.

glass. In light of this consideration, Plantinga sees no problem with the idea that the naturalist might have a defeater for R even given the fact that such a defeater on both his view and that of Alston's takes the form of belief in something irrational in some external sense: i.e. belief in evolutionary naturalism.

Can it possibly be the case that two beliefs held by one agent can defeat each other when one is rationally obtained and the other is not? If so, then Alston has little to offer to persuade Plantinga to go one direction or the other. Take the following case: an agent comes to believe that their big brother is a reliable source of information on whether widgets of sort 817 were used in the manufacturing of all early Ferraris. In fact, his brother claims that widgets 817 were so used. Further, the agent believes this (irrationally) due to a sort of familial respect and not due to the fact that his brother spends any amount of time researching the subject. Later, he meets a genuine auto mechanic expert who claims to be "reasonably certain" that there was a certain model of early Ferrari that did not use these widgets. The agent quickly agrees without noting the contradiction between this and his belief that his brother has true beliefs regarding the status of widgets in early Ferraris. The newly acquired belief could be maintained in an externally rational fashion. But, if the agent continues (tenaciously) to hold on to the belief that his big brother was correct, is there not an interesting way in which that belief makes it somehow irrational to trust the auto mechanic expert? It seems to me to be the case.

Given this, it seems to me that Plantinga can allow that the two beliefs, R and N & E, defeat one another even if he also holds that one is far more rational to give up one than the other. But this does leave open a question; can the agent in question, in virtue of refusing to give up his irrationally obtained belief, restore internal rationality by merely holding two probabilistically incoherent beliefs, but holding them less strongly? The reflective naturalist might wish to think that even if Plantinga's argument succeeds, that neither R nor N & E need to be abandoned completely. But it might have to be admitted that the degree to which an agent holds one of these reflects the degree to which they must restrict the strength of their belief in the other. What I take this section to have demonstrated is that the requirements of internal rationality have not restricted Plantinga to making only one case or the other.

## **Chapter 5: Defeat and the Crucial Analogy**

Low probabilities, in general, do not provide defeaters. Yet sometimes they do. For example, if I believe that my lottery ticket is a winner, a reflection on the odds of my winning should provide me with a defeater for the belief that I will win. What Plantinga's argument requires, in order to be successful, is either a general account of when probabilities generate defeaters or an argument from analogy to demonstrate that the case of the EAAN is sufficiently similar to non-controversial cases in which low probabilities generate defeaters to warrant the inference that the EAAN provides a defeater. He opts for the latter. In this chapter, we will explore whether his appeal to analogy is sufficiently convincing.

## **A. The Charge of False Analogy.**

We have noted that there are at least two places in the course of the EAAN where Plantinga seemingly employs analogies. First, he asks us to envisage a hypothetical population whose cognitive faculties arose strictly through the operations of evolutionary naturalistic mechanisms. Given that the naturalist has no better information by which to assess the likelihood of R for them than they do for R for this hypothetical population, similar estimates are in order. Hence, the reflective naturalist ought to regard the likelihood of R holding for them to be either low or inscrutable, but not high. Consequently, they ought to regard their own epistemic situation as analogous to several cases Plantinga is eager to discuss; the case of the person ingesting a hallucinogen, the case of a person who thinks they are a BIV...etc.

Now naturalists are, understandably, eager to attack these analogies. However, it is often unclear which they intend to attack. Often, I take them to be attacking the employment of each. In any case, there is supposedly something relevant about the reflective naturalists position that Plantinga overlooks in virtue of which either a.) the naturalist should not hold themselves to have the same odds of being a reliable cognitizer as the hypothetical community or b.) even if these odds are the same they should not regard their own epistemic situation as if they were something like, for example, a BIV.

O’Conner and Wielenberg both hold that Plantinga’s appeal to analogies in the course of the EAAN is flawed. The situation of the reflective naturalist, on their view, is demonstrably and relevantly dissimilar from those situations Plantinga describes. Here, I argue that O’Conner’s argument fails due primarily to the fact that the cases which Plantinga regards as analogous to that of the reflective naturalist are more appropriate analogies than those suggested by O’Conner. Wielenberg’s argument fails, I argue, because his position commits him to the claim that any defeater of a knowledge claim will be subject to a defeater-defeater.

O’Conner, while conceding that his argument (mentioned earlier) rests on speculations regarding an unconfirmed missing chunk of evolutionary history, argues that this is of no consequence. He argues, as we saw earlier, that even if evolutionary history and its mechanisms were so well-known as to provide no evidence for O whatsoever, R would still be safe from defeat in virtue of the fact that no *direct* (I take him to mean “rebutting” as opposed to “undercutting”) evidence has been adduced against it.<sup>125</sup>

Of course, Plantinga provided evidence for the propriety of using rebutting defeaters against R: he argued by analogy. This O’Conner recognizes, but argues in turn that the situations referred to by Plantinga are significantly disanalogous to that of the reflective naturalist. Plantinga’s cases in question are the Freudian wish-fulfillment case and the red widget factory case. In the wish fulfillment case, wish fulfillment turns out to have a poor track record of promoting true (or at least

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<sup>125</sup> O’Conner, 1994, p. 538.

coherent) beliefs. But when has belief in R done so? The naturalist does not have the reasons for giving up R that an agent might have for giving up belief in wish fulfillment.

By way of reply, it seems that O’Conner’s point misconstrue Plantinga’s analogical argument. Let’s observe the wish fulfillment case more closely. It is quite clear to my mind that Plantinga never suggested that the naturalist was in the same position as a person who initially believes wish fulfillment to be a truth-tropic means of forming beliefs but encounters countervailing evidence. Rather, Plantinga suggested that the position of a naturalist was relevantly alike to the situation of a person who initially accepts wish fulfillment in the manner described above but later attaches a low probability to the likelihood of wish fulfillment generating mostly true beliefs. It does not matter to Plantinga exactly *how* this belief in the low likelihood comes about. After all, an irrationally obtained belief might still serve as a defeater. O’Conner seems to assume that it cannot when he considers only cases in which the believer in wish fulfillment needs *direct* countervailing evidence to the claim that wish fulfillment is reliable.

In essence then, O’Conner’s objection to Plantinga’s employment of the wish fulfillment analogy seems to rest on an assumption that we have not yet discussed. Namely, how can irrationally obtained beliefs serve as defeaters, let alone for such rationally obtained beliefs as belief in R? I will return to this topic under my discussion of the “Requirements of Internal Rationality.” But it suffices to note at this point that O’Conner provides no argument that this cannot occur.

O'Conner's reply to the widget factory example is a little more complex. Accordingly, the person in the widget factory case has discovered and "inconsistency of output." The agent recognizes that visual perception and other belief producing mechanisms are, due to external factors, out of alignment with each other. This supposedly accounts for defeat in the widget factory example and is supposedly disanalogous to the situation of the reflective naturalist.

Now it seems to me that O'Conner is simply confused here. In the widget case, the agent does not adduce such *direct* evidence against the reliability of his senses; that is, evidence of "inconsistency of output" or general unreliability (as I take him to mean). His considerations are merely probabilistic. It is unlikely, or otherwise not rationally determinable, as to whether perception is tracking reality. Consequently, there is no direct evidence that the senses of the agent are flawed, but merely a rebuttal of all evidence to the contrary. So O'Conner's points do not seem to apply to this case.

Worse, O'Conner has not investigated other analogies presented by Plantinga. For example, O'Conner does not consider the case in which an agent ingests hallucinatory drug XX. Doubtless O'Conner would claim that the reflective agent in this case should not doubt the reliability of their cognitive faculties. But just how plausible is this? Even if O'Conner's points held up, there would still be much work left to do with respect to writing off the other analogies.

In a later article entitled "A House Divided Against Itself Cannot Stand," O'Conner attempted to salvage the charge of false analogy that he tried to reach

previously. He does so by means of employing our justified faith in our *memories* (and odd unique tu quoque on theism that we will discuss later). Initially, he agrees, it is appropriate to assume that R has a high probability. Subsequently, however, we should conditionalize upon other factors. For example, we might regard our eyes to be reliable detectors of sheep in fields (and the associated cognitive faculties linked thereto to be reliable belief generators) until a trusted friend informs us that residents of the locale enjoy placing sheep decoys in their fields. But, O’Conner questions, can the same sort of reasoning undermine rational trust in R *generally*?

O’Conner appeals to one of Plantinga’s own favorite examples, the case of the Purloined Letter. Accordingly, you are accused of stealing a letter at a certain time. All public evidence seems to incriminate you. However, you continue to believe that you are not the thief due to the fact you remember being somewhere else at the time of the robbery would have occurred.

Analogously, the theist may continue to believe in God despite the horrendous evils in our world even though the P (God exists/ Evil such as this exist) is inscrutable. This may be considered rational, claims O’Conner, in light of the fact that disbelief in God is an instance of cognitive malfunction.<sup>126</sup> Like the last case, considerations in favor of giving up a certain belief or accepting a new one are overridden by issues of proper cognitive function.

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<sup>126</sup> O’Conner, “Naturalism Defeated?” p. 131.

Now the same considerations seem to apply to R. In fact, O’Conner claims that there is “no plausible evolutionary story one might tell about why our cognitive faculties should be designed to *regulate* this belief (in R) strictly in accordance with our evidence for it.”<sup>127</sup> Consequently, “there *couldn’t* be a defeater for R, for any creatures in any possible world. That would require a *design plan* which reliably aimed at truth in some circumstances, a part of which was that we ought to give up belief in R when we take note of certain of our beliefs about the world and about related probabilities.”<sup>128</sup> In sum, O’Conner seems to argue that since justified faith in one’s memories being reliable will trump any purely alethic defeater for R and no consideration of proper function could imply that R has a defeater, there are simply no defeaters left to threaten R at all.

At this point, O’Conner returns to an issue raised briefly in his previous paper: does this not (implausibly) put R above defeat? O’Conner responds as before: only *direct* (rebutting, I think he means) evidence can undermine R. The internal incoherence generate by such a defeater must be more than mere probabilistic incoherence.

Plantinga argues, to the contrary, that probabilistic coherence *can* generate defeat. For example, if I come to believe that an evil demon is controlling my mind, it is highly doubtful but not perfectly certain that the overwhelming majority of my beliefs are false. Is this not a paradigm case in which probabilistic

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 131, italics in original, parenthesis mine.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 131-132, italics in original.

incoherence generates defeat? Or again, that it is 95% likely that a person who swallow's XX will hallucinate so as to lose complete track of reality and I hold that I have just swallowed this XX?

O'Conner replies that a person with such a belief should continue to believe R with respect to themselves. This is in accordance with their proper function and is thus warranted. What evidence is there for this and how does it bear analogously on the situation of the naturalist? "Well, if the agent is like most naturalists who encounter Plantinga's argument, he is not *inclined* to do so (give up belief in R). So the only evidence the agent has in this matter—his own tenacious belief—suggests that he is functioning properly in continuing to believe R."<sup>129</sup>

Plantinga responds by attacking the connection which O'Conner posits between proper function and warrant.<sup>130</sup> As a matter of proper function, R has initial warrant for us. But it is not immune from defeat. When defeated, as a matter of proper function, something called an *optimistic overrider* will ensure that continued belief in R is maintained, but it does not follow that the belief in R will continue to have warrant. For example, if a person lost on a remote mountain knows that they are likely to not be found in time to save their lives, a properly functioning brain might optimistically override this belief and generate the belief that a hospitable mountain village is nearby so as to motivate continued travel. But this does not entail that such a belief will be warranted. Here Plantinga

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 133, italics in original, parenthesis mine.

<sup>130</sup> Plantinga, "Naturalism Defeated?" p. 235.

appeals to a distinction made earlier between proper function rationality defeaters, purely alethic rationality defeaters and Humean defeaters. All O’Conner has demonstrated is that R is immune probably from the first of these types of defeat.

Before moving into my own criticisms of O’Conner and Plantinga, one point seems worth making. For, although O’Conner does not seem to recognize this, it seems that if his points regarding the indefeasible nature of R hold in cases of proposed rebutting defeaters then they also hold in light of undercutting defeaters as well. For why would proper function rationality dictate that we should give up belief in R simply because so-called *direct* evidence contradicts it? Hence, it seems that he is committed to the implausible claim that R is above defeat.

But to return to Plantinga’s reply, I think that it is wanting in a few respects. For, even if it is conceded by all parties that R can never have proper function rationality defeater, it seems to me that O’Conner can (and fully intends to) employ his argument to prove that the reflective naturalist will not have a purely alethic defeater either. The genuinely close analogy to the situation of the reflective naturalist is not found in those that Plantinga proposes but is rather the case of the Purloined Letter. And in such a case, the basic belief in the reliability of one’s cognitive faculties trumps the publicly available evidence. And the alethically rational agent continues to trust their memories. So why is this not the case, by analogy with respect to how the reflective naturalist should approach the EAAN?

For present purposes, it seems sufficient to point out that O'Conner's analogy is crucially disanalogous to what is being asserted in the EAAN in two respects. In the EAAN, it is already assumed that the evolutionary naturalist believes in the conjunction of N & E. But in O'Conner's story, where is the analogous individual? The accused person who trusts the publicly available evidence as a reliable indicator as to who stole the letter? There is no agent in this story who *initially* trusts the evidence that a certain person stole a letter and then later acquires a defeater for this claim in light of the fact that it conflicts with certain basically held beliefs. It is rather that the fact that trust in one's memory faculties is never called into question that no defeater for this trust occurs *because an adequately reflective person would have used their trust in their memory so as to either distrust the public evidence or not believe it strongly in the first place.* But by analogy, this merely proves that the person who is aware of the fact that belief in N & E undercuts faith in R has grounds for rejecting N & E initially. This does nothing to answer the question of what should be done in the case of a person who does not see this relationship and unfortunately adopts both positions.

So what should be done if a person has unreflectively adopted a belief and its defeater when they become aware of this situation existing? I suggest that in those cases the person has a rational obligation to adjust their noetic structure so that internal rationality is restored. This leaves open the question as to which of the two elements in question must be adjusted and how. Which item should go? Should both beliefs be maintained, though perhaps less strongly? I will return to

this question under the heading “The Requirements of Internal Rationality.” What suffices for the present is to note that O’Conner’s proposed analogy is significantly different from the case of the reflective evolutionary naturalist and therefore does not seemingly support the claim that Plantinga has overlooked something in proposing analogies to the situation of such.

A second crucial disanalogy between the Purloined Letter case and the situation of the reflective evolutionary naturalist lies in the fact that in the latter case the truth of the proposed defeater has a special relationship to the defeatee. For in that case, to use the language of Richard Otte, N & E are held to be the only factors relevant to “suppressing or bringing about” the obtaining or non-obtaining of R with respect to the agent. But in the Purloined Letter case, whether a certain agent’s faculty of memory is reliable or not is not “brought about” by the truth or falsity of the public evidence. The obtaining of these truths is at least causally independent. Again, many of Plantinga’s analogies capture this relevant factor where O’Conner misses it. Consider the widget case: the truth or falsity of the testimony that strange lights illuminate the widgets would bring about the reliability or unreliability of my perceptual faculties in the context of the widget factory. Or again, whether I am being experimented upon by Alpha Centari aliens would likely figure into my account of what elements would bring it about that I am or am not a reliable cognitizer. By contrast, the public evidence to which O’Conner refers merely makes it *evidentially* likely that my memories are unreliable; evidence that can be trumped if one holds to a belief that if true would

bring it about that one's memories are likely unreliable. But the mere existence of such publicly available evidence cannot be said to exhaust a sufficient number of relevant considerations of the factors that would bring it about that we are reliable memory makers.

Erik Wielenberg takes a different track regarding the use of these analogies. Merricks did not attack the analogies as weak, but merely argued that they could not be employed against the naturalist. Wielenberg believes that the analogies cannot be used against the naturalist precisely because they show a weakness. First he rightly points out that Plantinga has no problem with epistemically circular argument *in some cases*. It is perhaps reasonable to argue for the reliability of one's rational faculties on the basis of claims that will presuppose those faculties to be reliable. But this does not apply when those faculties have been called into "serious question." So, previous to hearing Plantinga's evolutionary musings, the evolutionary naturalist *can* justifiably believe their faculties to be reliable.

It is this fact, according to Wielenberg, that makes the situation for the naturalist so different from those alluded to by Plantinga. But interestingly, Wielenberg is interested in the first of Plantinga's analogies rather than the second group (a distinction I pointed out earlier). Plantinga asks us to imagine a group of beings about whom nothing else is known except that they evolved through natural means only. What Plantinga should have had us imagine, though, is a group of beings that *know* their rational faculties are reliable and who have evolved in a

manner like that described by contemporary evolutionary theory. For this is more strictly analogous to the situation faced by the reflective naturalist. And, of course, we would certainly judge most of the beliefs of this population to be true given that we know their rational faculties are reliable. Therefore, when we look at a situation more closely analogous to that of the naturalist, we find no reason for despair over our own capacities.

I think there to be clear difficulties in this reply. To illuminate them, consider the following two scenarios both of which will be very highly analogous to each other. Peter enters a widget factory and sees red widgets coming off the assembly line. His faculties are in fine working order and his belief is in fact true. Therefore, at this point, we may plausibly claim that he knows the widgets are red. Then someone he trusts approaches him and informs him that the owner of the factory likes to use special lights to trick people into thinking that all the widgets are red when the overwhelming majority of them are not. It seems that Peter has a defeater for his belief and so he should refrain from believing the widgets to be red.

In the second scenario, all these same events occur except that they happen to Paul. Now Paul, when he is informed by the trustworthy informant, pauses to consider whether he should cease to believe the widgets to be red. So he thinks of a situation highly analogous to his own, that is he thinks of Peter's situation. Of course Paul includes as a stipulation that Peter's faculties were working well. For up to this point Paul has not doubted his own faculties and so this stipulation will

serve to make the two situations more alike. However, this entails that there is no reason to doubt whether Peter's original belief was true and consequently Paul decides that the best thing to learn from this analogy is that he ought not to refrain from his belief that the widgets are red.

First, but less importantly, Wielenberg has seemingly mistaken the conclusion of the EAAN. Plantinga does not claim that the naturalist fails to know that R holds with respect to themselves. He holds that upon reflection they will find that they have a defeater for that belief; a defeater that makes it irrational for them to hold R. This means that they have a reason to abstain from the belief. But it is not obvious that this entails that they do not know that R holds with respect to themselves.

But secondly and more importantly, Wielenberg seems to assume that when we reflectively examine the likelihood of a certain belief we hold being true, we are licensed to probabalize on the basis of any and perhaps all of our justified, true beliefs. But our example above demonstrates that this would license an undesirable type of cognitive rigidity. In essence, an agent could never obtain a defeater through a consideration of the likelihood of a proposition being true *except in cases where either the agent refrains from belief in the proposition already or chooses not to employ an epistemically circular argument to defend the belief.*

Clearly something has gone wrong here, and I am hard pressed to see how this is any different than the solution that Wielenberg offers the naturalist.

Wielenberg believes that if the naturalist takes the reliability of their senses (argued for in an epistemically circular fashion) as a stipulation by which to judge whether proposed situations are strongly analogous to theirs then they will never get a convincing argument from analogy to the conclusion that their faculties are unreliable and hence no doubt, “serious” or otherwise, will arise for them in the first place.

For Wielenberg, the epistemically circular arguments that underwrote trust in one’s faculties previous to encountering Plantinga’s argument are similarly employed to ward off consideration of whether one’s faculties might be unreliable after encountering Plantinga’s argument. And this proves too much as the above case of Peter and Paul was intended to demonstrate. Circular arguments *for* the reliability of one’s faculties may be OK in certain circumstances, perhaps when one has no defeater for this claim. Circular arguments *against* even considering the possibility of our faculties being unreliable are seemingly not.

In the case of Peter and Paul above, we saw that even a basic belief (e.g. belief in the reliability of our perceptual faculties) which enjoyed initial warrant and were in fact true beliefs could later be the subject of defeat. It seems that Wielenberg intends to argue that they cannot be or can only be so if an agent chooses to allow this to be the case by writing off their epistemically circular evidence. What is needed here, however, is a principled distinction between the cases of basic, true beliefs that epistemically circular arguments render immune from all possible future defeat and those that are not.

In conclusion then, O'Conner's attack on Plantinga's analogies fails.

Secondly, it can be seen that considerations of the case of the Purloined Letter will show us that that case is not sufficiently analogous to the case of the reflective naturalist so as to license the conclusion that defeat of a basic belief either occurs in both cases or in neither. Wielenberg attacks the propriety of another of Plantinga's uses of analogy, but does so in a fashion that at least makes it impossible for an agent to obtain a defeater for a belief they hold (be it basic or otherwise) unless they choose to abandon circular arguments for their belief; and that proves too much.

## **B. Questions Regarding What a Successful Analogy Would Prove (Issues of Epistemic Circularity).**

In the previous section we examined the issue of whether or not Plantinga could defend the propriety of the analogies to which he appeals. The driving assumption was that if the analogies hold, then the reflective evolutionary naturalist would be in peril with respect to how they can regard the workings of their own cognitive faculties. But this move may be overly hasty, though intuition seems to weigh firmly in its favor. Could it be the case that the naturalist may thank Plantinga for the insights rendered thus far and yet consistently assert that there is nothing of consequence that follows from them? For example, why can't the naturalist regard their situation as like unto a BIV who just happens to have mostly true beliefs? Or if their situation is genuinely analogous to that of a person who ingested a substance that causes hallucinations in 90% of those who swallow it, why can't the naturalist rationally assume that they are a member of the lucky 10%? A further related question is why the naturalist can not simply do this on the grounds that *something* about the EAAN must fail to give a reliable indication of how their rational faculties are functioning because, after all, we are seemingly quite rational. In this section, I intend to deal with attempts to block the EAAN from having its intuitive power at just this point of the argument.

In this section I examine the charges of such authors as Trenton Merricks, David Silver, Van Cleve and David Reiter. These arguments grant that Plantinga's crucial analogy is a genuine one. But they charge that nothing of

significance follows. For Merricks and Silver, this is due to the fact that the EAAN will require premises that are either false or dubitable. For Reiter this is due to the fact that the EAAN is subject to a devastating counterargument.

Merricks and Plantinga both agree that the crucial claim in Plantinga's argument is as follows:

The Crucial Claim: If P (R specified to oneself/ N & E) is low or inscrutable, the one who believes N & E has a defeater for R specified to herself or himself.<sup>131</sup>

Merricks argues that Plantinga has attempted to motivate belief in this claim by pointing to an analogous claim.

Analogous Claim 2: If P (R specified to oneself/ revised demon hypothesis) is low or inscrutable, the one who believes the revised demon hypothesis has a defeater for R specified to herself or himself.<sup>132</sup>

The "revised demon hypothesis" here is simply Descartes' original skeptical hypothesis with the amendment that the demon in which one believes is only highly *likely* to be interested in deceiving. This is more analogous to the case of N & E, for the forces of evolution cannot be said to have certainly conspired against us with respect to our having reliable belief producing mechanism.

Merricks then moves on to claim that one should not believe the Analogous claim 2 unless they believe the following:

Analogous Claim 3: If P (R specified to someone else/ revised demon hypothesis) is low or inscrutable, the one who believes the revised demon hypothesis about someone else has a defeater for R specified to that other person.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Merricks, Trenton. "Naturalism Defeated?" p. 166.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

But, Merricks claims, the analogous claim 3 is false. Imagine that you know a guy named Sam and you live and work with him day in and day out. You believe the evil demon hypothesis (revised) with respect to him or perhaps we may say that you believe him to have ingested the agent XX mentioned above. But Sam seems fine; he shows no visible signs of cognitive malfunction. Therefore, you would not believe that Sam's beliefs were mostly false, but rather that he had beaten the odds. Similarly, the naturalist is justified in believing that they have won what Plantinga calls "the evolutionary lottery."

Plantinga, of course, finds this unconvincing.<sup>134</sup> The analogous claim 2 is true, but its persuasive value does not rest on whether or not the supposedly "analogous" claim 3 is true. In fact, the analogous 3 is both false and disanalogous in the following manner. With respect to Sam, in the previous paragraph, we were given the opportunity to objectively investigate whether his actions were the actions of a well-functioning cognitive agent. In the course of this investigation we also assumed that our own faculties necessary for the investigation were in good shape. But this is not at all like the situation in which the reflective naturalist finds themselves. One who comes to believe one of the hypotheses regarding themselves does not have such a privileged position from which to evaluate themselves. They are in the unfortunate position of having to use the very faculties whose reliability has come to be questioned in order to

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid. p. 173.

<sup>134</sup> Plantinga, "Naturalism Defeated?" p. 247 ff.

establish the reliability of just those same faculties. This is a crucial point not captured in Merricks account of examine another human being. In this case, as opposed to Merricks, epistemic circularity becomes an issue.

Given that epistemic circularity in this case is an issue, it would no doubt help to define the issue precisely before forging ahead on it. An argument is circular when it assumes as a premise that which is the intended conclusion. By contrast, an argument is epistemically circular when it employs as a premise that which could only be true if the conclusion were true. Now from a logical point of view, there is no problem with this. But the problem would occur, if a person employed such reasoning to convince themselves that the conclusion had evidence. For example, if I were to take a person's testimony that they are trustworthy as evidence for the claim that they in fact are. And this is the nature of some responses to the EAAN; Wielenberg's for instance. It defends R, not by assuming R, but assuming something that would only be true if R were true.

Authors who have employed this response against Plantinga are careful to note several items of importance. First, epistemically circular arguments are OK in some circumstances but not others. No one wants to endorse this sort of reasoning across the board. Second, wherever such arguments are legitimately employed there is one place they clearly cannot be; they cannot serve as defeater-defeaters. They seem ad hoc when so employed. Consequently, epistemically circular evidence for R must be employed if at all in such a fashion as to keep R from being initially defeated in the first place.

In his article “Evolutionary Naturalism and the Reliability of our Cognitive Faculties” David Silver argues that Alvin Plantinga’s EAAN is incomplete: Silver believes that Plantinga has not adequately closed off every means of escaping the argument, in particular, he has not closed off those avenues which the naturalist is fully justified in taking. Before Silver can argue for this, he senses the need to reconstruct the EAAN. Thereafter, he presents two possibilities under which naturalism remains viable. These appeal to epistemically circular arguments and the basic/maximally warranted nature of belief in R. I will cover both of these in this section, although a different section of this dissertation is devoted to the issue of maximal warrant.

Silver divides the argument into two stages: a probability thesis and a defeater thesis. The former, with which he takes no issue, refers to that portion of Plantinga’s argument intended to demonstrate that the  $P(R/N\&E)$  is low or inscrutable. The latter refers to the portion of the argument intended to demonstrate that the probability thesis, if successful, presents a problem for evolutionary naturalism in the form of epistemic defeat. Plantinga, Silver points out, employs four basic analogies to demonstrate that the latter thesis is true with respect to the naturalist. They are:

1. The Widget Cases
2. The Freudian Theist Cases
3. The Space Radio Case
4. The Brain-in-a-Vat Case

Silver argues that the first step in understanding the EAAN is to discern the principle governing defeat in all of these analogical cases. Now at first glance this attempt is a little disconcerting given the fact that Plantinga explicitly stated his intention to use analogies in order to bypass the need for such principles.<sup>135</sup> But Silver seems to have it in mind to construct valid deductive arguments to the conclusion that each of these cases represents one in which certain beliefs are defeated.

So by what principle do we conclude that epistemic defeat occurs in each of these circumstances? Silver dismisses four possibilities for not being sufficiently general to cover all the cases:

(LR) S has a defeater for the belief p if, relative to all of her evidence, S takes as low the probability that the source of p is reliable.

(LR') S has a defeater for the belief p if, relative to all of her evidence, S takes as low, or it would be *internally irrational* for S to deny as low, the probability that the source of p is reliable.

(IS) S has a defeater for the belief p if, relative to all of her evidence, S takes as inscrutable the probability that the source of p is reliable.

(IS') S has a defeater for the belief p if, relative to all of her evidence, S takes as inscrutable, or it would be *internally irrational* for S to deny as inscrutable, the probability that the source of p is reliable.

Both LR' and SR' employ the notion of internal rationality: a concept Silver claims to borrow from WPF, p. 110 f. In an admittedly vague fashion Silver depicts internal rationality as consisting of some undefined degree of *coherence*

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<sup>135</sup> Plantinga, "Naturalism Defeated?" pp. 239-240.

amongst an agent's beliefs. Now none of the forgoing four principles will cover all of Plantinga's cases. In some, Plantinga depicts the discerned probabilities as being low, in others inscrutable. In some, the agent forms a belief as to the probabilities; in others agents depicted are still in a confused daze. But in each situation they experience defeat. So Silver concludes that we can best cover each of the cases by combining LS' and IS' to obtain the "Unsubstantiated Source Principle" or

(US) S has a defeater for the belief p if, relative to all of her evidence, S takes as low or inscrutable, or it would be *internally irrational*, for S to deny as low or inscrutable, the probability that the source of p is reliable.

Before looking at replies to Silver's suggestion, it is worth noting that there are explicit statements by Plantinga himself to the effect that he does not believe low probabilities themselves generate defeaters. Consider his case of the Purloined Letter: you are presented with evidence that yesterday you committed the theft of a letter. But you have no such memories; rather you believe that yesterday you were on a wilderness hike. Evidence is adduced consisting of such things as witnesses you previously deemed reliable. Is your belief defeated? Not on Plantinga's view. Elsewhere he also states,

"Swinburne points out that some of my basic beliefs may be improbable with respect to the rest of my basic beliefs; these beliefs, then, might be thought irrational, at least if they are not held as firmly as those with respect to which they are improbable. But this seems to me an uninteresting sense of 'irrational.' Many of my basic beliefs are improbable with respect to my other basic beliefs; they are none the worse for that. I now remember, as it seems to me, that in the second bridge hand last night I was dealt three aces, three jacks, and three deuces. This is

unlikely on the rest of my basic beliefs. It is, nonetheless, not irrational in any useful sense; memory is an important and independent source of rational belief, a source such that its deliverances do not necessarily depend, for warrant or rationality, on their probability with respect to other basic beliefs.<sup>136</sup>

Again, the evidence seems to indicate that Silver has parsed out Plantinga's argument incorrectly. In his defense, however, it is worth noting the two different uses of the term "source" here. Silver's US seems to take "source" in the sense of "that which delivers information to us." For example, my eyes deliver perceptual data and the postman delivers messages. But access to this information is not enough to create a belief on the part of the receiver thereof. By contrast, Plantinga seems to use the term "source" in the foregoing paragraph in a general fashion to refer to those mechanisms that deliver the information, cause it to take the form of a belief and simultaneously justify it. So I think Plantinga would be sympathetic to Silver's US (although he does not want the EAAN to rest on such a general principle). For if the "sources" Silver refers to are unreliable, the beliefs based on them are not likely reliable either.

As mentioned, however, Silver does not attack Plantinga's argument at the point of US, a principle that Silver seems to endorse. Rather, he sees the difficulty in the principle referred to as the "Attended No-Reason condition:"

(ANR) If agent S's attention is brought to bear on whether her belief B is formed in a warranted way, and it is internally irrational for her to accept any reason for thinking that B is warranted, then it is internally irrational for her to continue to believe B.

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<sup>136</sup> Plantinga, replying to Swinburne in *Religious Studies*, Sept. 2001 v. 37, i3, p. 358.

This principle, ANR, combined with US, seems by Silver's lights to deliver the conclusion that it is internally irrational for the naturalist to continue to believe R. For US tells us the sufficient conditions for defeat and ANR states conditions under which such defeaters render an agent internally irrational; the latter of these conditions will have been met by the reflective evolutionary naturalist, Plantinga would say.

What Silver disputes is that the naturalist meets the second criteria in the antecedent of ANR. He contends that the naturalist can produce reasons for thinking this has not been met: "My aim is to show that *for all that Plantinga says* these reasons are internally rationally acceptable to the evolutionary naturalist."<sup>137</sup>

There are two reasons can the naturalist present according to Silver. The first is what Silver calls "maximal warrant": belief in R can be taken as basic. Basic beliefs have the maximum degree of warrant possible. Plantinga has given us no reason to believe that the naturalist cannot claim that their belief in R is the result of functioning according to a design plan aimed at true belief. Consequently, it is not internally irrational for the naturalist to present the basicity of R in defense of their internal rationality.

There are two mistakes here I think. First, in referring to the sort of warrant possessed by basic beliefs as "maximal" and in the comments that follow, Silver seems clearly to be confusing basic beliefs with indefeasible beliefs. These are not

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<sup>137</sup> Silver, "Evolutionary Naturalism and the Reliability of our Cognitive Faculties," *Faith and Philosophy*, v. 20, n. 1, Jan. 2003, 50-62, p. 57.

the same. I may take it as basic that my faculty for memory works in a truth-conducive fashion. This is not to say that I may never obtain a defeater (say from a psychologist whom I trust as a specialist in Alzheimer's) for my basic belief. Plantinga will admit that the naturalist's belief in R is basic; the naturalist was designed by God after all, fallen though they are. But this does nothing to restore internal coherence to a belief set once undermining beliefs are adopted. Similarly, if I have the basic belief that my faculty for perception is reliable, I might have warrant for my belief that a flock of sheep are in a field in front of me. But if I accept the testimony of a local as reliable and further they tell me that the flock really consists of sheep decoys, then I have a defeater for my original belief. And it would be irrational for me to persist in it.

The second source of salvation for the naturalist would lie, by Silver's lights, in an inductive argument for the reliability of one's cognitive faculties. It seems that our faculties have been reliable in the past. The best explanation for this is that they are in fact inclined to perceive truth and will continue to do so. Now Silver is aware that this argument is epistemically circular. It defends R, not by assuming R, but assuming something that would only be true if R were true. Namely, that our inductive reasoning skills are reliable.

The problem with this approach is that once the naturalist is aware of this rather obvious point and forms the belief that such arguments are bad, internal incoherence will once again loom. But is this form of reasoning so bad? Silver thinks that it is not in certain cases. The defeat experienced by each of Plantinga's

subjects in Cases 1-4 occurred not only due to the fact that the internal rationality beliefs could only be preserved by such circular justification, but by the additional fact that they did not meet the criteria of US. Otherwise, such circular justification would have been epistemically acceptable. To put it generally,

An epistemically circular argument for belief B is epistemically unacceptable if B already faces a defeater; however, the epistemic circularity of an argument for B is not necessarily a problem if B does not already face a defeater.

Silver does not argue for the principle, but simply points out that Plantinga has not given the naturalist a reason to think it false.

So has Silver understood the EAAN correctly? Plantinga argued that the naturalist had a defeater for their belief in R due to the fact that upon reflection they could see that their situation bore such a striking analogy to situations in which persons ought reflectively to doubt the reliability of their cognitive faculties. Silver, by contrast, makes the EAAN rest upon dubious general principles (if not altogether false) and then notes (wrongly, I argued) that the naturalist can meet the demands of these principles. But let us pause to consider; even if the principles explicated by Silver served in an evolutionary argument against naturalism and Silver was correct in his assessment that the evolutionary naturalist met the criteria demanded to escape it, what would we have? The answer seems to be that we get an argument that persons who think that they are BIVs have upon reflection on their belief no defeater for the claim that R holds for them. And isn't that the wrong answer?

David Reiter is just as unconvinced that anything of significance follows from the EAAN as Silver and Merricks; but he takes a different track in trying to demonstrate this. Merricks tried to demonstrate that Plantinga's argument will need to employ a principle that is not defensible if he wishes to convince the naturalist that anything follows. Silver uncovers a principle of defeat that seems to him to be unobjectionable, but then turns to argue that Plantinga needs assumptions regarding what items can serve to deflect defeaters and which cannot; of course, Silver thinks that Plantinga will not be able to defend these assumptions. By contrast, Reiter does not concern himself with showing that Plantinga will need implausible assumptions to convince the balking naturalist. Rather, he attempts to show that Plantinga himself (and everyone else) should balk at the implausible conclusion should the argument succeed at this point.

In his article "Plantinga on the Epistemic Implications of Naturalism," David Reiter gives an explication of the latter portions of Plantinga's EAAN; those portions of the argument that deal primarily with the purported self-defeating nature of naturalism. Reiter's primary complaint against EAAN is that it carries consequences for naturalism that are too drastic for us to regard the argument as sound. Nonetheless, Reiter argues that there are points of insight worth drawing from the argument.

Reiter parses out Plantinga's argument in the following fashion.

1. If Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism is sound, then the perceptive naturalist has an undefeated defeater for any belief which he or she holds.

2. If S believes p and has an undefeated defeater for p, then S's belief that p is irrational (due to the presence of an undefeated defeater).
3. If S's belief that p is irrational (due to the presence of an undefeated defeater), then S does not have propositional knowledge that p.

From these points Reiter draws the following

4. If the EAAN is sound, then if the perceptive naturalist believes that p, then his or her belief that p is irrational (due to the presence of an undefeated defeater. (from 1 and 2)
5. If the EAAN is sound, then the perceptive naturalist has no propositional knowledge. (from 3 and 4)

But Reiter intends to argue that

6. The perceptive naturalist has some propositional knowledge.
7. Therefore, the EAAN is unsound.

Reiter begins by rehearsing Plantinga's case for 1. The low probability of R given N and E functions as a defeater for any of our beliefs, including those beliefs that the naturalist would likely employ to raise the probability of R. It is in light of the fact that this serves as a defeater for *any* (crucial point for Reiter!) belief of the naturalist that Plantinga can specifically target N itself as a subject of defeat.<sup>138</sup>

Reiter does not conclude that the EAAN is sound. Rather, he argues that since the naturalist knows that  $2+2=4$ , premise 6 is true and thus we move to 7. His argument for this is very short, one paragraph. And half of the paragraph engages in defending the claim that it is not absurd (though it is false) to say that

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<sup>138</sup> Reiter, David. "Plantinga on the Epistemic Implications of Naturalism." *Journal of Philosophical Research*, Vol. 25, 2000, pp. 141-146., p. 143, italics in original.

reflective naturalists lack any knowledge. After a lengthy exposition of Plantinga, he immediately concludes:

“While I think the ignorance claim is not absurd, I do believe it is false. It seems plausible that perceptive naturalists know obvious truths such as *I exist*,  $2+2=4$  or *modus ponens is a valid argument form*. Therefore, I think that perceptive naturalists possess some propositional knowledge. So I conclude that Plantinga’s evolutionary argument against naturalism is unsound.”<sup>139</sup>

Now in one sense, Reiter’s argument is clearly unsatisfactory. Namely, he does nothing to show us where precisely the EAAN goes wrong. Rather, he simply raises an interesting counter argument; an argument that the EAAN implies the truth of a manifestly false proposition. So here it will suffice to see whether this counterargument holds water.

It is worth noting that Reiter’s argument depends vitally on the premise linking defeat to a deprivation of knowledge. That is the third step: If S’s belief that p is irrational (due to the presence of an undefeated defeater), then S does not have propositional knowledge that p. For sake of clarity, let’s try to understand the premise this way: if upon reflection a person comes to believe that their belief in p is irrational, then they do not know p. Other writers have seemingly assumed this very plausible point, for example, James Van Cleve entitles his reply to Plantinga as “Can Atheists Know Anything?” So the issues here are various and sundry. First, does Plantinga hold this premise true? Is it true? Second, does the EAAN actually employ it? Third, does it need it?

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid. p. 146.

First, it seems to me that Plantinga does hold this view. In his reply to Van Cleve he writes “It’s worth noting, however, that the conclusion of the EAAN is not just that the naturalist doesn’t *know* R or N & E...but rather that he has a rationality defeater for it—a Humean rationality defeater.”<sup>140</sup> But is it true? On that I am skeptical. Imagine the case of a reliable clairvoyant. This person acquires mostly true beliefs through their powers of clairvoyance but due to lengthy chats with naturalist philosophers they have come to regard those powers as unreliable. Sadly, they cannot force themselves to abandon the beliefs delivered by these faculties any more than you or I can abandon the belief that the sun will rise tomorrow after having read a bit of David Hume. But upon reflection they are aware that they have a defeater for these beliefs in the form of another belief, namely the belief that clairvoyance is an unreliable source of true beliefs. So does the clairvoyant have knowledge when such a power delivers a belief? It would be an understatement, I think, to say that there are plenty of ways to defend either answer to that question.

But fortunately, I do not think that the EAAN *needs* to go this far. The conclusion of the EAAN would be interesting if it merely showed that the reflective naturalist has a defeater for all their beliefs and that it is consequently irrational to hold them. Similarly, it seems that the same can be said for our clairvoyant. There is no need to endorse Reiter’s premise connect defeaters and deprivation of knowledge.

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<sup>140</sup> Plantinga, “Naturalism Defeated?” p. 238 & 239.

But does Reiter's objection hold if we do in fact endorse this premise? I think that the proponent of EAAN is not in grave peril here. On the one hand, they might welcome this drastic conclusion; the atheist, at least the reflective one, knows nothing. But if they choose to allow that the reflective naturalist knows that  $2 + 2 = 4$  or that they exist there is a principle way for them to do so. On Richard Otte's reconstruction of Plantinga's argument the EAAN asks us to consider a hypothetical population with a mental life like ours whose faculties arise merely by the operations of N & E. How likely is it that their belief in their own existence is a true belief? This seems pretty likely. How likely is it that their basic mathematical beliefs are correct? Again, this is perhaps likely. But it would be unreasonable for us to think them apt philosophers or cognizers in general. Now I think Plantinga would rather just take Reiter's point on the chin. But my point is that it is far from clear that taking it on the chin is the only option for the proponent of EAAN. Reiter has overlooked the portion of Plantinga's argument that invited us to evaluation R with respect to ourselves in a fashion similar to the manner in which we evaluated it for the hypothetical population. And as Richard Otte pointed out, there may be elements in the mental life of this population which we may rightly deem reliable; there just seemingly aren't enough of these to comfort the naturalist.

## **Chapter 6: The EAAN & Global Skepticism in General**

### **A. On the Possibility of Rationally Ignoring the EAAN**

In the previous sections we have explored whether or not anything of consequence follows when one accepts the crucial analogies employed in Plantinga's arguments. We looked at authors who seemingly wish to grant the points made in Plantinga's arguments from analogy without conceding that the naturalist ought to take inventory of them. By contrast with the authors reviewed in this section, those discussed in the last attempted to show what would go wrong with any argument intended to force the evolutionary naturalist to take inventory of these points. In this section, we will examine arguments to the effect that no such account is necessary. The EAAN can be ignored altogether regardless of whether there is an argument to the effect that naturalist should take inventory of the successful analogies. Van Cleve, Nathan and McHugh Reed have argued that the EAAN might be rationally dismissed without explicitly challenging a premise thereof. I argue here that they have not offered any convincing evidence for this claim.

Van Cleve disputes the claim that the atheist/naturalist can escape the EAAN by simply abandoning N & E. For they would still face the problem that...

I do not believe N & E; but for all I know, (i) N & E is true and (ii) R has a low probability given N & E.

Consequently, a skeptical argument can still be generated. In fact, unless the theist or atheist comes to *know* that N & E is false, they will both face this argument. Salvation here, contra Plantinga, must be by works not grace.

This brings us to Nathan's argument: how should the Naturalist respond to the argument even if it does turn out to be sound? Should one choose to stop believing in Naturalism? Nathan briefly points out that there might be a difficulty here: we do not generally seem to be capable of choosing our beliefs. But suppose we can with respect to this particular case. Nathan believes that the proper response on behalf of the Naturalist is to "not be troubled by the irrationality" of their position.<sup>141</sup> Why? First, the person in question genuinely believes that the doctrine of naturalism is true. Therefore, to give up the belief would be to give up believing in something one holds to be true. This is, in his view, incoherent. To hold that one's opinion is false is the same thing as not to hold it. He briefly draws attention to Plantinga's notion of proper function rationality: I take his point to be that a properly functioning rationalist (if there is such a thing) would not introduce such incoherence into his mental life. "This may well console you for the irrationality."<sup>142</sup> Nathan and Van Cleve clearly have similar ideas in mind, but one appreciates Nathan's candor. Nathan confesses that the resulting epistemic state of the naturalist would exhibit some irrationality on account of their reflection on the defeater in question. It seems by contrast that

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<sup>141</sup> Nathan, N. M. L. "Naturalism and Self-defeat: Plantinga's Version." *Religious Studies*. Vol. 33, No. 2, June 1997, pp. 135 ff., p. 4.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5

Van Cleve holds that the resulting noetic state is rational due to the fact that the EAAN is simply another global skeptical argument and anti-naturalism faces this problem as well.

The only objection to this line of reasoning to which Nathan draws any attention is the objection that we typically want other people to agree with us. Could Plantinga's argument put a roadblock in the way of our obtaining this desideratum with respect to agreement on R or N? Certainly not with respect to R, thinks Nathan. People already generally believe R as pertaining to themselves. More importantly, could this occur with respect to N? Nathan replies, "But the chances of a consensus in favour of N will not be diminished by the irrationality of his own belief in N if that is a product merely of the irrationality of his belief that R."<sup>143</sup>

Reed's point is a little different: his contention that if stage two of Plantinga's argument fails then the naturalist will have to reject the first stage as well. It may be recalled that Reed argued that the naturalist had independent evidence for R with respect to themselves in the form of the presumption that they understood the EAAN that this understanding itself was evidence for R. So no undefeated-defeater exists. So why then should the naturalist reevaluate their estimate of  $P(R/N\&E)$ ? Why should they not admit that it is low but that we just got lucky? Or better still, admit that it is low but that the probability will be raised when other relevant facts are added to N & E? Here, Reed introduces a move

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 5

similar to that of Van Cleve and Nathan above. Reed claims that the reevaluation is unnecessary in light of the fact that for the naturalist, the evolutionary account is the only live option.

Plantinga has nothing published in reply to this particular objection.

Perhaps it is best then to line up the three published versions of this objection and then forecast a reply on his behalf.

- 1.) Van Cleve: it is rational for the naturalist to continue to affirm N due to the fact that a move to belief in the contradictory has all the same problems.
- 2.) N. Nathan: it is *irrational* for the naturalist to continue to affirm N but they should do so due to the fact that it is psychologically impossible for them to reject it or to affirm the contradictory.
- 3.) T. H. Reed: it is rational for the naturalist to continue to believe N due to the fact that the EAAN does not succeed and a naturalist can do no other than believe N.

Now Reed and Van Cleve have a difficulty in the fact that their replies piggy-back on other arguments that they have made; arguments that have been found wanting in other areas of this dissertation. But here I am interested in arguing that their points will not hold even taken as independent arguments.

Van Cleve's response, in addition to the problem of relying on a flawed earlier argument, seems to rest on a false premise. Namely, that if an agent has a belief B and cannot rationally affirm the contrary, they ought rationally to remain a believer in B. He overlooks the possibility that agnosticism with respect to a

proposition might be a rational possibility; indeed, sometimes it seems a rational obligation. Plantinga merely tries to demonstrate that naturalism is defeated; but the defeat here is from an epistemic standpoint, not a logical one. The falsity of anti-naturalism is still a possibility. Therefore, naturalism's defeat in this sense does not imply anti-naturalism's triumph if by triumph one means to imply that all reflective agents must hold it. It might well turn out that both views suffer the same sort of epistemic defeat.

Nathan's reply seems to offer little in the way of the "consolation" he thinks the naturalist should take.. This sort of cognitive inflexibility may, in some cases, be unavoidable. It may be the case that the Naturalist might have to say, "I know this belief is irrational, but I cannot deny that I believe it without lying to myself." But why would anyone find consolation in this? Cognitive inflexibility of this sort should render the opposite of comfort. In this context paradoxes are not allowed to do the one thing for which they are intended, that is, to tease the mind into thought. Rather, this paradox in thought now provides "consolation."

Furthermore, the Nathan's reply to the "consensus" objection is weak. Granted, the chances of a consensus in favor of naturalism will not be diminished by the irrationality of the naturalist's belief in naturalism, but that is a separate issue from whether the chances of consensus will be affected once everyone else finds out that the naturalists belief is irrational.

Reed by contrast makes it seem that the naturalist has no choice but to be a naturalist with or without a defeater. First, in what sense is it true? Necessarily, if

you are a naturalist, you must reject theistic accounts of our origins (necessity of consequence). It does not follow from this that if you are a naturalist you must necessarily reject theistic accounts of our origins (necessity of consequent). The naturalist still has a live option here: they can abandon naturalism. Evolutionary naturalism is the only live option for the naturalist in merely the same manner that belief in extra-terrestrial life is the only live option for a believer in Martians. Should this force the Martian-believer to inflate the probabilities for the existence of extra-terrestrial life? Clearly it should not. One should not confuse the set of live epistemic possibilities *for my belief given my other philosophical commitments* with the set of possibilities *simpliciter*. To do so is rather immodest from an epistemic point of view. Even if projections of objective probability are somehow dependent upon subjective probability estimates, the latter should reflect some sense that we could be wrong. To overlook this is to confound the two altogether. But this seems to be what Reed is recommending to the naturalist in order to circumvent the impact of Plantinga's argument.

## B. Plodding Loops and the Possibility of Humean Defeat of R.

Plantinga has admitted that his characterization of Humean defeaters as presented in WPF is inadequate.<sup>144</sup> According to his earlier characterization, skepticism of this sort creates a loop in which the original defeater is synchronically defeated and resurrected. There are two potential objections here.

**Version 1:** An ultimately undefeated defeater would be one that is undefeated at some point and *undefeated forever after*. But that does not happen here. So the defeat is not genuine.

**Version 2:** If someone sees a problem like this coming (and who would be so imperceptive to not see it coming) they would likely be rational enough not to get into the loop to begin with. So no problem would be generated to begin with, at least for the perceptive naturalist.

In this section, I argue that Plantinga's revised account of such defeaters is able to handle the concerns just raised.

One key concern with the EAAN has centered on whether a rational person would get themselves into the loop in the first place: could they not see what was coming? Here Plantinga retracts his early characterization of the loop. Influenced by Hume and Sextus Empiricus he characterized the loop as *diachronic*. Clearly a rational person would see where such a dizzying dialectic was headed and wisely avoid such a prolonged and useless conversation. Furthermore, neither the

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<sup>144</sup> Plantinga in "Naturalism Defeated" p. 50 in landscape version and expressed in "Naturalism Defeated?" p. 269.

defeater nor the defeatee in such a dialectic is ultimately defeated. So it might in synchronic fashion become rationally acceptable to believe R with respect to one's self, then irrational, then rational...and who is to say where this ends, let alone what it implies with respect to whether R might presently be rational to affirm.

On the other hand, Plantinga notes, there is nothing wrong with characterizing the loop *synchronically*. The agent faced with such a loop might see the pattern to it immediately and recognize that there would inevitably be an infinite series of propositions each of which would be a *potential* defeater for the one preceding it. Of course they would not be actual defeaters unless someone actually came to believe them and we are not now discussing an infinite series of beliefs.

The important point, then, is that in seeing this pattern one would realize that the defeat for the original proposition is never defeated at all.

“This is, of course, extraordinary: ordinarily, if one acquires a defeater-defeater for the belief B, i.e., a defeater for a defeater of B, one no longer has that defeater for B—or else its defeating power is neutralized. But not so here. The difference is that the original defeatee shows up at every subsequent level. When that happens—when, roughly speaking, every defeater in the series is really the defeatee plus a bit, the defeater-defeater doesn't nullify the defeater. The defeater gets defeated, all right, but the defeatee remains defeated too.”<sup>145</sup>

Now this seems in effect to constitute a reply to Anthony Peressini's comments on the subject of Humean Defeat of R. Peressini challenges Plantinga on the notion of defeat: he grants much of EAAN but thinks that when Plantinga

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<sup>145</sup> Plantinga, *Naturalism Defeated*, p. 52.

either admonishes agnosticism regard the status of R with respect to us or uses this agnosticism to generate a defeater for most of our knowledge claims there is some mistake involved. I detect three main points of objection. I will explicate each and argue that Peressini's reply can be answered and the remaining two can succeed only if our intuitions regarding when beliefs are defeated have been revised in an unacceptable fashion.

Peressini explicates Plantinga's argument as follows:

- P1. If N, then E (or at least E seems *probabilistically certain*).
- P2. Pr (R/ N&E) is low or inscrutable.
- P3. P2 defeats R.
- P4. P3 defeats (N & E)
- P5. P4 and P1 defeats N.

P4, which claims that the defeat of R defeats N & E, is what Peressini refers to as the emergence of "truly unique aspects" of Plantinga's argument.<sup>146</sup> Peressini launches here into an extended quote from Plantinga to the effect that this defeater for naturalism cannot be defeated: to do so introduces the Humean skeptical loop. P5, then, simply pulls the rest together.

Peressini seems to ask, "What's so bad about having a Humean Rationality Defeater?" If there is nothing epistemically problematic this these "defeaters" then Plantinga will not get the complete rebuttal of naturalism that he is after.

Peressini points out two truism regarding persons who possess such defeaters:

- (a) at any level on which the subject believes N & E (or any proposed Humean defeater) the subject has a defeater for N & E.

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<sup>146</sup> Peressini, Anthony. "Naturalism, Evolution and Self-Defeat." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 44, 1998, pp. 41-51, p. 42.

(b) at no level does the subject have an undefeated defeater for N & E.

So what exactly is the proper attitude to take in these sorts of situations? Whether you opt for pessimism or optimism with respect to N & E depends upon which of the two features you wish to highlight:

(a') N & E is defeated since it cannot be rationally accepted without accepting a defeater for it.

(b') N & E is *not* defeated since there is no undefeated defeater for it.

Peressini notes that a' and b' are contradictory and asks whether there is any non-arbitrary reason to privilege one over the other.

Peressini likens the prospect of finding a solution to this problem to finding a solution to the “counting to infinity problem.”<sup>147</sup> Could a person count to infinity if they lived indefinitely? For any number, there will be a time it is counted. On the other hand, for any time, it will not be the case that we have reached infinity for we can always add 1 more number to our counting.

First, it should be acknowledged whatever the force of Peressini's points that Humean defeaters do generate problems for the epistemic status of a belief.

Now Plantinga has answered, I think, the concern regarding the ongoing diachronic characterization of Humean defeat, but he has not directly answered Peressini's charge that the analogy to the “infinity problem” serves as to raise suspicion about the legitimacy of such defeaters. Yet something is clearly wrong with this analogy and it is this: the person's reason goes on infinitely of course,

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 47

but one deep problem is that it goes on infinitely *in a circle*. That which is defeated is resurrected to new life as a defeater. So the form of the problem does not bear any strong resemblance to the problem of infinity. The question it bears a resemblance to is “Could a person reach infinitely if they counted for an indefinite amount of time starting all over again each time they reached the number 2?” The answer is clearly no. And it would do no good to point out that there would never be a time that the person had reached the end of their counting or that they could always be taking one step more as an easy proof from mathematical induction demonstrates.

### **C. Partial vs. Total Defeat**

Plantinga's EAAN attempts to demonstrate that the naturalist has a defeater for R; consequently a sort of global skepticism becomes the only rational possibility for the naturalist. But there is a curious difference between traditional global skeptical arguments and the EAAN. The latter argument attempts to demonstrate that many of our beliefs fall short of knowledge by directly attacking the justificatory status of our beliefs. For example, according to Hume we were *never* really justified to believe in causality. We simply never had adequate rational grounds for asserting it. By contrast, Plantinga admits that we have initial grounds for believing that R holds for us. But other beliefs, if we reflect upon them, might render it irrational to continue to do so. So, the topic of "To what degree are our beliefs undermined if we accept Descartes arguments?" has not seemed to generate any interest. It seems pretty well acknowledged that Descartes' arguments, if successful, undermine any knowledge claim to which they pertain. By contrast, the topic of "To what degree are our beliefs defeated by the EAAN?" seems a more reasonable question. For here it is admitted that we initially had justification for believing in R and the question is how much of this justification remains when we are apprised of a defeater, apprised of this purportedly good reason to not believe that R holds for us? In this section, I argue that Plantinga's argument, if successful, would have just as dire a consequence for the naturalist claim to know anything as would be the case if they conceded to one

of the more traditional global skeptical arguments. And this will be true whatever justification is will remain for R after such a concession.

Peressini offers his first object to the EAAN as merely “an initial concern”<sup>148</sup> and not as his main objection. This initial concern regards the issue of partial defeat. Since defeat is essentially a matter of degree, Peressini muses that the defeat of R generated by the EAAN may amount to almost nothing. If solid independent evidence on behalf of R can be produced, then accepting this partial defeat might not be so bad. And this is especially the case if  $\Pr(R/N\&E)$  is deemed *inscrutable* as opposed to low. So what independent evidence do we have for R? Peressini replies that:

“We cannot begin our epistemology from nothing; the process must start somewhere and where it is almost universally taken to begin is with the provisional acceptance of our cognitive faculties as trustworthy with respect to the ordinary, common-sense, middle-sized world. Plantinga’s epistemology is no exception...”<sup>149</sup>

So Peressini notes a few important facts. First, basic beliefs have a large degree of initial warrant. Second, they can be subject to defeat, for example, partial defeat. And thirdly, Plantinga’s epistemology acknowledges this fact.

Now I think Peressini’s point is strong and that this initial concern should be answered rather than merely dismissed. So our first step should be to clearly distinguish these two types of defeat. What would this distinction amount to? In this section, I attempt to explicate this and argue that the defeat of N at the hands of the EAAN is complete if anything at all.

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 43

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 44

Some headway on this has already been offered by David Reiter. Reiter is the only other author to have brought up the issue of partial vs. total defeat as a threat to the EAAN. He defines complete and partial defeat as follows:

S has a *complete* defeater for p iff S has something which (other things being equal) renders it irrational for S to continue believing that p.

S has a *partial* defeater for p iff S has something which (other things being equal) does not render it irrational for S to continue believing that p, but does render it irrational for S to continue believing that p *with the same degree of firmness*.<sup>150</sup>

Reiter offers two more insights worth mentioning. The first is that even an undefeated *partial* defeater for naturalism would be interesting. I think this is correct. Such defeat could feature in a “total case argument” against naturalism.

Reiter does not draw the distinction between rebutting and undercutting defeaters, but it can easily be seen that his definitions could apply to both. The question here is, when an agent has a defeater how does that person determine which of these they have? By the definitions just given, it can be seen that having a complete defeater entails having a partial one; for if it is irrational to continue believing p it is certainly irrational to continue believing p with the same strength.

Now I wish to maintain that even though all of these distinctions are legitimate ones, that they have no bearing on the EAAN. For the one point of relevance that Peressini and Reiter overlook is that according to the EAAN belief in N & E undermines *itself*. Naturalism is epistemically self-defeating. Now the

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<sup>150</sup> Reiter, p, 143-144.

present question is whether any belief which undermines itself can be regarded as merely a partial defeater. Both partial and complete defeaters, I pointed out, have the characteristic that they make it impossible to rationally hold to a belief with the same firmness; complete defeat entails partial defeat. But that insight will not do the work I intend to do here.

What is needed is to look at the concepts of “holding” and “holding firmly to some degree.” Now the epistemic goal, I take it, in holding a belief is gain true beliefs. We hold “less firmly” to some beliefs because their likelihood of contributing to this goal seems not sufficiently promising. At least, that is what rationality demands if we construe rationality here in a “means-end” fashion. By illustration, if your goal as a shipwreck victim is to reach a shore and you are tenaciously holding to two life-preservers, hold firmly to the one that looks like it will do the job for you and perhaps less firmly to the one that you suspect has structural problems. But it is grossly irrational to hold onto one believed to be made entirely of cast iron. By its very nature, this one is bound to sink. Any “holding on” to this would be irrational. And so it is in the case of a belief (holding) of anything self-defeating. Hence, self-defeat should always be regarded as complete defeat.

Now although Reiter has not said anything that would pertain to the foregoing line of thought, Peressini has. On Peressini’s view, the EAAN did not show that naturalism was self-defeating, but rather that naturalism conjoined with many other claims encounters a problem of epistemic incoherence. Those other

claims include claims regarding P (R/ N & E), claims about the nature of defeat, etc. One of these might be the culprit that the reflective naturalist ought to abandon. In the meantime, agnosticism is in order as to the question of what member of this incoherent set is to be abandoned.

Now it seems to me that Peressini's reply rests on a false assumption. True, the EAAN works off of many premises and assumptions. But Peressini makes it seem as though epistemic incoherence can almost never, by itself, make an agent rationally obligated to adjust their noetic structure. That is to abandon the requirements of internal rationality altogether. Peressini suggests, by reply, that Plantinga's argument overlooks the insights of Duhem and Quine on a related subject. According to Duhem and Quine, one cannot move to the claim that a theory is false simply because some data seems to contradict it. For the testing of a theory involves many auxiliary assumptions and those, rather than the theory itself, might be the culprits responsible for the flawed prediction.

So what exactly do we make of the requirements of internal rationality with respect to these incoherent belief sets? Peressini's answer, I think, is that an adjustment must be made with respect to the conjunction of beliefs in question. This conjunction has a complete defeater. But consequently, each conjunct may have at most a partial defeater and therefore the only adjustments to an agent's noetic structure that are necessary are possible adjustments in firmness of belief in at least some conjuncts.

By way of reply, it seems to me that Plantinga ought to point out that it is not the case that any old adjustment will suffice. One cannot, for example, rationally hold to the truth of each conjunct with a degree of confidence of, say, 90%. Rather, the degree of rational confidence in one member of the set must be kept in balance in such a fashion that members of the set that seem most likely to be true are ascribed higher levels of confidence. Now the question for the naturalist is, upon reflection, is there any way to rationally ascribe a high likelihood to R or will the naturalist's confidence levels in the other members of their belief set require them to keep belief in R low or inscrutable? Suppose that the naturalist manages to find some satisfactory system of confidence levels such that R is ascribed something in the neighborhood of .5 while N & E get .5. I take it that anything less than a valence of .5 would not qualify as belief in a proposition. For it is an axiom of probability theory that the likelihood of p or its negation must sum up to 1 and I am assuming that a rational adjustment of one's noetic structure would take this into account. And if an agent believed p had a likelihood of .6 and that  $\sim$ p had a likelihood of .4 it seems that if any belief is rightly ascribed to them would be belief in p. Therefore, it is to be concluded that a defeater that makes it the case that an agent must lower their degree of confidence in a proposition to less than .5 qualifies as a complete defeater.

So the interesting question for the naturalist is as follows. If an agent has a defeater for R such that their level of confidence in R cannot exceed .5 or otherwise they must remain agnostic on whether R holds for them, can rational

belief in any other proposition exceed .5? It seems that it cannot. Imagine that a person receives a phonebook and believes that 50% of the numbers in it are incorrect. Furthermore this phonebook is their only source of information with respect to person's phone numbers. Can their rational confidence in any one of the numbers exceed .5? It seems to me that it cannot. Hence, they cannot rationally trust any one of the numbers. Hence, this would qualify as a case in which complete defeat of a belief occurs. And, I argued, this is the situation for the reflective naturalist should they accept a partial defeater for R. For trust in R is of a special sort since it is the only source of any of our information. If reflective trust is lost here, the skepticism generated reaches everything else in one's noetic structure. Therefore, the naturalist must still find it imperative to place the likelihood of R/ N & E as high or otherwise face a complete defeater for their belief in naturalism.

Does the reflective naturalist have enough leeway to pull this project off? I think not. As we look back through the exposition of the EAAN we find that Plantinga was exceedingly careful to make his premises the sort that naturalists would be committed to a high level of confidence in. For example, as a premise Plantinga takes it that there are four basic possibilities with respect to how mind and behavior are related. How can this receive much less than a confidence level of 1 from any reader? He argues that epiphenomenalism of some sort must be given at least a .5 likelihood on grounds that no naturalistic way to avoid it has yet been discovered. And it is hard for me to see any way around this. So Peressini is

correct to note that a mere adjustment of confidence levels might be in order. What he lacks is any reason to think that there is any sufficient leeway for the naturalist to adjust these confidence levels such that a complete defeat of R can be escaped.

Now I wish to make an adjustment to the foregoing comments so as to ward off a false impression; I should not argue here that *all* beliefs are subject to defeat if an agent cannot, upon reflection, be able to reasonably assign them a probability of .5 or greater. That would be controversial at best. For example, last night I drew a hand of cards. The probability of my getting that exact hand is extremely small. But I rationally believe myself to have drawn this hand due to the fact that this belief is a deliverance of my faculty of memory. However, in other cases, if I cannot assign a probability of better than .5 it seems clear that I have a defeater for my belief; for example, my belief that the next flip of a coin will be heads. So why should we assume that the naturalist is in the curious position of facing complete defeat due to a probability assignment? The answer to this lies in Plantinga's appeal to analogy. The evolutionary naturalist, he has argued, is in a position similar to the agent who thinks that they are a BIV or some such thing. And in these cases, probabilities can generate defeaters. Specifically, a low or inscrutable likelihood of R given this situation generates a defeater for R. Furthermore, the situation of a person who thinks that they are a BIV is such that appeals to such things as memories cannot allow them to rationally disregard this probability issue. For if they did so, they would draw the conclusion that

believing one's self to be a BIV does not undermine their trust in their rational faculties. This appears to be an obviously wrong conclusion to draw.

Therefore, the argument here can be summed up as follows. First, Plantinga has pointed out that the reflective naturalist is in a position that bears strong analogy to situations in which a probability thesis generates a defeater. Secondly, rational belief in situations such as these seems to demand at least getting the probability just mentioned up to or above .5. It seems that the naturalist has no way to pull this off. Consequently, the naturalist does not merely have a reason to hold R less firmly. They have a reason to abstain from the belief that R holds for them in the same way that they ought rationally not to believe the next flip of a coin will yield a heads; the agent should simply not have any mental state with respect to this proposition such that it would qualify as a belief. Hence, the naturalist faces a complete defeater for R. And from there, it is not hard to see that they have a complete defeater for all their beliefs.

## **D. Attempted Reductions to Traditional Skepticism**

One popular means by which to escape the EAAN is to try to make it uninteresting by reducing it to some form of traditional global skeptical argument. Thus far, we have examined several issues regarding the relationship that the EAAN bears to questions of global skeptical import. For example, in the first section of this chapter we examined whether or not the naturalist could accept the global skeptical implications of the argument but maintain a rational commitment to naturalism. In the second section we examined Humean Loops; the question arose here as to whether any global skeptical argument that attacks R will undermine itself by needing to employ such loops. It was argued that this did not seem to be a problem. In the third section, we noted a relevant difference between traditional global skeptical arguments and the EAAN and argued that nonetheless, both have similar outcomes for the naturalist. But granting all of these points, there remains a question. There are conceptual resources available to fend off the threat of traditional global skepticism. So why think that Plantinga's arguments cannot be met by appeal to these? That raises the general topic of this section.

There are a couple of strategies that might be employed at this point. First, one could claim that such a reduction is successful and move on to the claim that both the old-school skeptics and Plantinga can be responded to in the same fashion. The other is to claim that both parties win their points, but to do damage control, to claim that such arguments as these merely undermine knowledge of

certain types. Bergmann and Van Cleve take up positions of the former sort, Sosa the latter. In this section, I critically examine and reject these on grounds that the alleged reduction is unsuccessful.

Technically, the project in question for each of these authors consists of several steps. First, one has to give an account of traditional skepticism that is accurate; a criterion of this accuracy is whether the reconstruction of these arguments has the same weight as the original skeptical argument have historically had. Secondly, one must propose genuinely plausible solutions to these traditional concerns. And thirdly, one must demonstrate that the EAAN is sufficiently similar to these older arguments that new solutions would be superfluous. I do not quibble with any author over their position with respect to whether the second of these tasks has been accomplished, nor to the best of my knowledge does Plantinga quibble here. But Bergmann seems to me to clearly fail at the first step. Sosa and Van Cleve make valiant but failed efforts to make headway at the third stage.

Bergmann proposes to make the EAAN uninteresting by reducing it to the more general forms of global skeptical arguments already available though the history of modern philosophy. According to Bergmann, the arguments in question have the general form of:

X: I currently have these experiences and beliefs.

Y: P (R/I currently have these experiences and beliefs) is inscrutable and it is reasonable to doubt.

Z: I should doubt R.<sup>151</sup>

It seems that Bergmann has gravely mistaken the skeptical arguments of Descartes and others. There seems to me to be no argument of this sort in the literature (to the best of my knowledge. Arguments such as

P1. If I might be mistaken about R, then I do not know R.

P2: I can be mistaken about R.

C: Therefore I do not know R.

are available to those who hold (wrongly, most philosophers think) that the standard for knowledge is infallibility. More often skeptical arguments take the following more plausible form...

P1. In order to know something I must be able to rule out anything incompatible with that something.

P2. I cannot rule out the truth of some skeptical hypothesis that is incompatible with nearly everything I believe.

C. I know very little if anything.

Bergmann seems to believe that Moorean considerations can prevail in the light of such arguments and consequently that they can prevail in the case of EAAN.<sup>152</sup>

But something is curiously disanalogous in the case of Moore's reply to the typical skeptical argument and Bergmann's reply. True, Moore could have appealed to the initial justified status of basic beliefs in order to make his reply more plausible. But even if he had done so, his general approach would have been as follows:

P1. If I were a BIV, I would have no hands.

P2: I do have hands (perhaps a basic Reidian truth)

C: Therefore I am not a BIV.

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<sup>151</sup> Bergmann, "Naturalism Defeated?" p. 80.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. p. 87 and 88.

Bergmann's reply to the EAAN, by analogy, should take the following form:

- P1. If N & E are the case, then faith in my cognitive reliability is undermined.
- P2. Faith in my cognitive reliability cannot be undermined.
- C. Therefore, N & E is not the case.

It seems to me, then, that appeals to G. E. Moore to solve the naturalist's problems cannot bear any fruit.

Thus far, I have merely attacked the claim that Moorean responses to the EAAN will work. The point at which Plantinga most ardently disagrees with Bergman, however, is on the claim his construal of the typical skeptical argument is even an accurate reconstruction. How do such considerations (such as X and Y) generate Z? This move seems to rest on the assumption that in order for R to be justified, I must be able probabilistically to infer it from other beliefs that I have. But why believe that? We do not infer the reliability of our memories, for example, on the basis of such reasoning (it would constitute circularity) nor need we do so. Plantinga concludes that X and Y do not imply Z and that further more, there is little similarity between this argument and the EAAN.<sup>153</sup>

Bergmann had the general strategy of reducing the EAAN to traditional skepticism, but Van Cleve attempts the reduction from the opposite route. In other words, where Bergmann began by analyzing traditional arguments and attempting to show their remarkable similarity to the EAAN, Van Cleve wants to dissect the EAAN and reduce it to the traditional arguments. Van Cleve wishes to do this by

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<sup>153</sup>Plantinga,, "Naturalism Defeated?", p. 234.

simply showing that the only elements of the EAAN that do any work are the more dubious assumptions regularly employed by skeptics.

In his article “Can the Atheist Know Anything?,” James Van Cleve pursues a strategy similar to that also pursued by Ernest Sosa. He points out that the question that is the title of his article was raised early on by Descartes, who eventually sought epistemic refuge in theism. Furthermore, Ernest Sosa, Keith DeRose, Mark Heller and even Van Cleve himself have all proposed answers to this question. An answer to Descartes’ concerns, it is hoped, will answer those of Plantinga. Significantly, James Van Cleve also offers a critique of replies given by Plantinga on behalf of the EAAN in Plantinga’s unpublished paper “Naturalism Defeated.”

But first, what Cartesian issue is Van Cleve drawing our attention to? Descartes faced the famous problem of the Cartesian Circle: One can be certain of that which they clearly and distinctly perceive to be true only if God exists, but we can show that God exists only if we certain that what we clearly and distinctly perceive to be true is actually so. Van Cleve takes Descartes (like himself) to have a *purely externalist reply* to the problem. In order to know p, it is not the case that a subject needs to know that the mechanisms giving rise to p are reliable nor do they need to know that the reliability of such mechanisms confer justification. Clear and distinct perception is already powerful grounds for justified belief and knowledge.

By contrast, Sosa and DeRose wish to distinguish higher reflective knowledge (*sciencia*) from lower non-reflective knowledge (*cognitio*). Clear and distinct perception of something will not by itself generate the former, but merely the latter. A coherent picture of our world, says Sosa, is necessary for *sciencia* (assuming here that coherence to be a reliable truth-tracking trait of beliefs). If an atheist lacks this or is deprived of it by force of skeptical argument, *sciencia* will escape them and they might upon reflection lose justification for almost any belief.

DeRose's solution, by contrast, strikes Van Cleve as a bit less tenable and he seems to treat it with mild attention. Accordingly, to have higher order knowledge one must have a *cognitio* (some lower perception based knowledge) plus *cognitio* which underwrites the reliability of our *cognitio*! Clearly such a criterion will be hard to meet and worse still it will run straight into skeptical objections on account of its apparent circularity.

So let us return to Sosa. Sosa's claim according to Van Cleve is that "Animal knowledge is (roughly) reliable true belief, such as unreflective beasts may have and such as even a thermometer might have if it could be said to have beliefs at all."<sup>154</sup> Van Cleve takes it to be the case that both DeRose and Sosa affirm that whenever enough *cognitio* is achieved, *sciencia* may follow in virtue of the coherence belief in R will generate between individual beliefs. Further, this does not constitute any objectionable form of "epistemic circularity."<sup>155</sup> "The really damaging kind of circularity, the kind to be shunned, is the kind in which

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<sup>154</sup> Van Cleve, "Naturalism Defeated?" p. 109.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

not merely the *truth* of an argument's conclusion, but *knowledge* of it, is a necessary precondition of obtaining knowledge of the argument's premises." So externalism is intended to answer concerns at the level of cognition and the justification it underwrites there must be very high, for these cognitions alone serve to underwrite *scientia*.

Mark Heller, by contrast, offers an internalist solution to Descartes problem. Accordingly, there are three basic replies to the skeptic's arguments: skeptical surrender, a Nozickean denial of a closure principle or a dogmatic Moorean response. Clear and distinct perceptions (such as that  $2 + 2 = 4$ ) are so overpowering that initially even the atheist is entitled to a Moorean response to skepticism. Closure principles are maintained, contra Nozick.

It is in light of the foregoing two pages of thought that Van Cleve analyzes the EAAN. Given that the atheist has means around skepticism in general, what is so new with respect to Plantinga's skeptical argument? In the EAAN, the naturalist has a defeater for all of their beliefs. Is this so? Van Cleve proposes that three objections addressed in Plantinga's unpublished "Naturalism Defeated" will work jointly so as to demonstrate that this is not the case. Therefore, Plantinga's EAAN can be reduced to a more traditional form of skepticism: it merely demonstrates that there is a possibility (perhaps likelihood) that R is false with respect to us but does not rest upon any new notions such as "defeaters."

So now it is imperative that Van Cleve weed out the value of an appeal to defeat in the EAAN. The first objection is, again, the "perspiration objection."

Accordingly, a low probability of X given Y does not serve as a defeater for belief in X even if one happens to believe in Y. For example, the probability that the function of perspiration is to cool the body, given (just) N & E is low. So is the probability that Holland, Michigan is thirty miles from Grand Rapids (given N & E). But how can the latter claims serve as defeaters for the former? Van Cleve offers a twist on the objection: rather than placing N & E (or some other cherished belief) in the “given that” slot, notice what happens when you place it in the other slot. In other words, *any* cherished belief suffers defeat in virtue of being probabilistically unlikely given some other belief.

Van Cleve conjectures that Plantinga must be assuming one of two principles. Either...

P1. “For any propositions A and B that I believe, if B is improbable or inscrutable with respect to A..., the A is a defeater is for B.”

...which the perspiration objection clearly refutes or...

P2. “For any propositions A and B that I believe, if B is improbable or inscrutable with respect to A, the A is a defeater for B *unless A derives its warrant from B.*”<sup>156</sup>

We saw in a previous chapter that Plantinga rejects both.

But why would it be alleged that Plantinga needed to appeal to these? Van Cleve suggests that Plantinga is covertly appealing to something called an *implicit premise thesis*. Accordingly, we know things only upon the basis of the implicit assumption that our cognitive faculties are working reliably. In the absence of this

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 117 and 118.

assumption or when in doubt of it, knowledge is impossible. Further, he thinks Plantinga is illicitly using one of the previous two possible assumptions in order to undermine reflective faith in R on the part of the naturalist. Then Plantinga allegedly employs the implicit premise thesis to show that a defeater for R is a defeater for every belief of an agent.

But suppose that at least the latter of these two charges is rejected; that Plantinga holds no such assumption regarding the relationship between probabilities and defeat. Van Cleve thinks (rightly on my view) that this rejection will simply throw weight onto the further objection: “Why can’t the naturalist add a little something?” to N & E to escape defeat. Van Cleve raises this second objection simply to point out how much more urgent it becomes given the success of the first. If low probabilities do not generate defeat by themselves, it must be that such considerations can be legitimately offset by the inclusion of additional information. But what additional information shall we include? Van Cleve attempts to answer this by looking at Plantinga’s reply to another popular objection.

Van Cleve thinks that Plantinga has misconstrued the “R beyond defeat” or “Maximal Warrant” objection. Plantinga takes the respondent to be assuming that R can never be defeated. Van Cleve takes the point of the objection to be that R has such a high degree of initial warrant that the simple fact that R is a part of the atheist’s noetic structure must be taken in to account when probabilities are

estimated. This is not circular, claims Van Cleve, and certainly not contrary to the method of true philosophy as Plantinga claims it is.

Van Cleve admits that if R faces a defeater (and of course he thinks it does not), then we cannot have knowledge of it. But does this destroy all knowledge? Van Cleve's answers "no": if a child may have knowledge in the absence of appeal to the *implicit premise thesis*, then so can anyone else. But Van Cleve is willing to consider another option: perhaps Plantinga merely means to maintain the deliverances of our cognitive faculties may be trusted only if it is not irrational to believe R. Van Cleve disputes even this negative condition for knowledge. Might we not, for instance, know R in virtue of its being certain in the same sense that the truth of Descartes "cogito" is certain?<sup>157</sup>

In summary then, Van Cleve believes that there are viable rejoinders to traditional skeptical arguments and that Plantinga's introduction of defeaters to make a stronger case against the naturalist than the theist with respect to skepticism fails. For the traditional skeptical arguments and the EAAN fail in virtue of making a mistake with respect to how we come to justifiably hold beliefs in the first place; i.e. on the basis of implicit premises subject themselves to skeptical attack..

Plantinga's first step, by way of rejoinder, is to point out that his argument is, in fact, significantly different from those of Descartes in virtue of the fact that he does not argue that the naturalist fails to know R or N & E, but rather that there

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid. p. 122.

is a defeater for naturalist for all of these. Of course, the argument, and Van Cleve's reply, rest vitally upon what is to be made of the perspiration objection to the claim that such defeat exists. Plantinga concedes that P1 and P2 mentioned above are demonstrably false. But this is of no consequence to the EAAN. The explication of a general principle of defeat is unnecessary. The EAAN argues that the probabilistic considerations raised serve to generate defeat *by appeal to an analogy*.<sup>158</sup> And why shouldn't an analogy work here? There are cases in which analogies do serve to generate defeaters (or at least they could legitimately do so). For example, if I come to believe that I am under the control of a powerful evil demon or that I have ingested hallucinatory agent XX, I might rightly come to doubt the deliverances of my cognitive faculties based on the fact that I would withhold faith in R on the part of other agents so situated. The fact that one cannot come up with a general theory of defeat would not disarm this consideration.

Given the foregoing consideration, the "Add a little something" objection seems to lose the force Van Cleve intended for it to have. Further, Plantinga has offered a general rejoinder to this objection in "Naturalism Defeated" (unpublished), his reply to O'Conner and his reply to Bergmann. These we examined in an earlier chapter.

Independent of these considerations, Van Cleve suggested that defeat of R might not be a defeater for all of one's other beliefs. Plantinga joins Van Cleve in rejecting the implicit premise thesis. However, the negative condition which Van

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<sup>158</sup> Plantinga, "Naturalism Defeated?", p. 240.

Cleve questions is true by Plantinga's lights. "In general, if you have considered the question whether a given source of information or belief is reliable and have an undefeated defeater for the belief that it is, then you have a defeater for any belief such that you think it originates (solely) from that source."<sup>159</sup> The child, in Van Cleve's example, is not deprived not knowledge. But this is not simply due to the fact that the implicit premise thesis is false. It is just as much due to the fact that they have no defeater for their beliefs and further, that even if they did, they have not reflected upon it so as to be aware of its implications. But generally, when those conditions are met, it becomes irrational to continue holding the defeated belief. And (as David Reiter points out) one may lose reflective knowledge of anything if one also endorses the claim that no one can know something that they hold it to be irrational for them to believe.

Bergmann and Van Cleve seem to have admitted something (at least implicitly) in the course of their arguments that another author, Sosa, does not. Specifically, they seem to take global skepticism as a threat to all of our knowledge claims. Sosa seems less convinced of this. For Sosa, the primary threat of the EAAN and the traditional global skeptical arguments lies in the threat they present to the *reflective* person; the person who seeks a higher level of knowledge. So Sosa intends to dispense with any threats that these two argument types offer for some lower form of knowledge that might threaten a graduation to any higher or reflective form of knowledge.

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

Like Van Cleve, Ernest Sosa attempts to take some of the bite out of the EAAN by placing in the context of other global skeptical arguments: those of Descartes and the Pyrrhonist skeptics such as Sextus Empiricus. Sosa has a unique perspective on what constitutes Descartes' answer to such forms of skepticism. If such an answer is tenable and if the EAAN is nothing more than a modern version of these skeptical arguments, the naturalist is in no worse condition after hearing the EAAN than before. Granted, (by me, not Sosa) this does nothing to take away a premise from the EAAN. But it does threaten to make the argument uninteresting in a significant way. Further, if successful, the reflective naturalist is licensed to dismiss the concerns raised by Plantinga and address the more traditional skeptical arguments instead. Still more, since the theist and theism are just as vulnerable to traditional skeptical attacks (on Sosa's view) as the naturalist, there is no principled way for the theist to claim that the EAAN preferences the rationality of theism to that of naturalism. Plantinga responds primarily by arguing not so much against Sosa's account of ancient skeptical arguments and replies thereto but rather arguing that the reduction of the EAAN to traditional skeptical worries is unsuccessful. With no success here, the rest of Sosa's argument falls short.

Since the reflective naturalist is the target of the EAAN, Sosa begins by explicating the notion of higher or reflective knowledge in terms of the principle PC:

PC: Knowledge is enhanced through justified trust in the reliability of its sources.<sup>160</sup>

Consequently:

PC2: High-level knowledge requires justifiably taking one's sources to be reliable.<sup>161</sup>

But in Descartes, we encounter a novel problem. Since all knowledge is subject to the method of doubt, our knowledge of mathematical and logical truths must not be taken for granted. Descartes, in the end, appeals to an argument for God's existence to solve the skeptical problem. But arguments require logic. This set up the problem of the "Cartesian Circle." Descartes needs God to validate the deliverances of his mind (including his logical intuitions) but simultaneously needs to trust his mind in order to accept his proof of God's existence.

Sosa's answer is that Descartes, in the end, is a reliabilist with respect to the issue of whether coherence justifies belief. Given reliabilism in this sense, he need merely find within his mind the most coherent account of his experiences and satisfy himself that our mind is reliable when such appeals to coherence are made. For Descartes, the most coherent account explaining the truth of most of his beliefs is that God Almighty has set him in an epistemically fortuitous world.

Pyrrhonic skepticism differs from this interpretation of Descartes in a few particularly important respects. Of course it is well known that the Pyrrhonics never doubted the actual existence of the external world. But more to the point,

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<sup>160</sup> Sosa, "Naturalism Defeated?", p. 91.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

they eschewed reliabilist answers to skeptical problems. Sextus Empiricus is quoted as saying:

Let us imagine that some people are looking for gold in a dark room full of treasures... (N)one of them will be persuaded that he has hit upon the gold even if he *has* in fact hit upon it. In the same way, the crowd of philosophers has come into the world, as into a vast house, in search of truth. But it is reasonable that the man who grasps the truth should doubt whether he has been successful.<sup>162</sup>

Sosa bears these comments in mind when raising the question “What is so good about reflective knowledge?” In other words, what is it that the naturalist (on Plantinga’s view), the atheist (on Descartes’ view) and pretty much everyone (on the Pyrrhonic view) are missing out on? Sosa’s answer is that what is missing is a *reason molded, well-earned, coherent* level of knowledge has not been achieved.

Fair enough. This higher level of knowledge (call it *sciencia*, ala Sosa) is out of bounds. But so what? Why does this mean that lower levels of knowledge do not count as knowledge at all? Sosa asks us to imagine the epistemic circumstances of a young child who is clearly unable to reach the lofty heights of *sciencia* due to the fact that they are incapable of the derivation of conclusions from premises such as “Explanatory coherence is truth tropic given reliabilism concerning such...” Does the child lack knowledge that they are, for example, currently sitting in a high chair? The skeptics might thus bar the door to *sciencia*, but not to knowledge in general. Derivations of this sort are not necessary for knowledge.

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 97, quoted from *Against the Mathematicians*, VII 562, in the Teubner text, ed. H. Mutschmann (Leipzig: n.p., 1914).

Of course the EAAN would still preference theism if the theist could claim to have achieved *sciencia* where the naturalist cannot make such a claim. But Sosa thinks that there can be no good grounds for such an assertion. For the naturalist and the supernaturalist will both reopen the door to *sciencia* (described as possibly closed above) in the same fashion. Each will construct a coherent account of their experiences in which turns out to be an “epistemically comforting view of one’s universe.”<sup>163</sup> The theist (like Descartes) will do this by appeal to some theological propositions whereas the naturalist might take some other route. Given reliabilism with respect to our intuition that coherence is a justifier of beliefs, *sciencia* is again a possibility.

But what if the theist agrees with Empiricus that this is not sufficient? Sosa argues that the only way that the theist could gain an epistemic upper hand on their naturalist rivals would be to adopt the *implicit premise thesis*. Accordingly, rational trust in the deliverances of our senses must be based upon the implicit premise that such faculties are reliable. Of course, this seems question begging. Further, any argument to underwrite such a premise would also beg the question in favor of the epistemic powers of our cognitive faculties. So the theist cannot gain an upper hand by appeal to the implicit premise thesis.

It follows then that answers to the ancient skeptical arguments are defensible. Further, by appeal thereto, the naturalist can rationally claim to have reflective knowledge. This knowledge will ultimately be generated by a thesis of

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p, 102.

reliabilism with respect to our intuitions regarding the epistemic power of coherence and the forming of an epistemically fortuitous worldview. If the theist is permitted to make such moves, why is the atheist not permitted such? Problems of circularity here, he claims, are not exclusive to naturalism.<sup>164</sup>

Plantinga offers four (essentially three I think) responses to this argument. First, Plantinga's argument does attack the claim that the reflective naturalist can justly claim to know anything. But this does not place them in the same epistemic position as the child to which Sosa draws an analogy. True, the child might know a great many things without actually deriving the claim that they know such things from the claim R or anything else. But this is because the child has never reflected on R (although an implicit assumption by the child needs to be held, Plantinga says. *Assumption* but not *premise in argument*). The naturalist is in no position similar to this one and cannot thus protect belief in R from defeat: here ignorance is no excuse precisely because ignorance of matters pertinent to the likelihood of R is no longer matters of which we are ignorant.<sup>165</sup> So the reflective naturalist can only hold on to R in perhaps "a sort of ironic and ambiguous way, the way in which Hume holds everyday beliefs."<sup>166</sup>

Second, Plantinga offers a reply to Sosa that is similar to his reply to Bergmann and Van Cleve on the issue of the "implicit premise thesis." Plantinga sees the issue developing thusly.

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>165</sup> Plantinga, "Naturalism Defeated?", p. 243.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 244.

1. Reject the implicit premise thesis (Sosa)
2. Claim that belief in R is underwritten, not by appeal to such premises, but in the same way that ordinary perceptual beliefs are (Van Cleve)
3. Maintain this on the grounds of having non-propositional evidence for R (Bergmann).<sup>167</sup>

All of these are true, but are irrelevant to the EAAN. They adequately explain the way in which proper function dictates that we have belief in R (at least implicit belief). But they in no way shield the belief from purely alethic defeat and consequently they do not shield the belief from Humean defeat.

Thirdly, can the naturalist attain reflective knowledge of R in virtue of constructing a coherent picture of their world in which R is true for them? The problem here is that the coherence in question must be more than simply a logical compatibility between the premises one espouses. One can construct a logically cohesive account of one's world in which one is under the rule of an evil demon yet R is true. Nonetheless, such a belief constitutes a defeater for R due to *evidential considerations* as opposed to sheer logical incompatibility of the two. The simple telling of a coherent story, in the face of a potential defeater, seems to amount to little more than "whistling in the dark."<sup>168</sup> The problem is not whether the EAAN deprives the naturalist of such a picture, but whether it provides a defeater for R.

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 246.

In conclusion, then, attempts to reduce the EAAN to some form of traditional skeptical argument have not been successful. Had Plantinga made some subtle confusion and mistaken such skeptical arguments as cases in which it was alleged that defeat occurs or simply introduced the concept of defeat when it was superfluous to the thrust of the EAAN, these objectors would have made a dent in the argument. But defeat of R plays a central role in the EAAN that it does not in the traditional skeptical arguments. Moreover, it seems that while all parties are threatened by skeptical arguments, the defeater in question is only an issue for the evolutionary naturalist. Some, however, have contended that theism suffers defeat by way of analogy: and to that subject I have devoted the chapter that follows.

## **Chapter 7: Tu Quoques On Theism**

### **A. Versions thereof**

One of the more challenging criticisms of the EAAN, is that it can defeat theistic belief just as easily as it can defeat belief in naturalism. Supposedly this can come about by some form of logical analogy or otherwise by using both an argument structurally similar to the EAAN plus employment of premises theists ought to be inclined to accept. In this section, I explore the various approaches to constructing such an argument and point out deficiencies of two sorts. Either the arguments in question do not bear sufficient resemblance to the structure of the EAAN or the theist ought to reject certain assumptions employed by each.

One author who claims that the theist will obtain a defeater for theism in tu quoque fashion is Thomas McHugh Reed. We will pause here to take a look at his attempt at a tu quoque so as to illustrate the general problems that will be encountered by any attempted tu quoque on theism. The reader should bear in mind, again, that there are two potential targets for defeat whenever such arguments are being offered. The first is the doctrine of theism, which is simply the belief in some perfect Being. The second target could be an augmented form of theism; sometimes this is alternately referred to as “varnished theism,” “traditional theism,” or “Christian theism.” This can take various forms but it is usually cashed out in terms of “theism plus something extra.” McHugh Reed

advances both types of tu quoques. With respect to the issue of whether an augmented form of theism faces defeat, he raises the particular issue of whether a theist who believes that we are made “in the image of God” still faces a defeater similar to that which the naturalist faces.

Plantinga argues that the probability of R given that we have been created by a perfect being (God) is high; he does not put the probability at 1. There is no straightforward entailment of R from the proposition that God exists. But the probability is sufficiently high that for the theist, R is never called into doubt as it is in the case of the evolutionary naturalist. It will be considered to be much higher than  $\frac{1}{2}$  on most views of traditional theism.<sup>169</sup>

Reed rightly points out that Plantinga could never advance the claim that our beliefs will be true all of the time given that God engineered our cognitive apparatus. So we must figure the probability of R given both that we have been created by a perfect being *and* that we sometimes have false beliefs. From this Plantinga would like to draw the conclusion that the probability of our faculties being reliable is high; but Reed contends that

...it is clear that from the propositions that we are created by a perfect being and that we sometimes form false beliefs nothing follows regarding the frequency with which we fall into error. Nothing follows, therefore, concerning the reliability of our cognitive faculties on the whole.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Reed, p. 85, citing Plantinga WPF, p. 228-229.

<sup>170</sup> Reed. P. 86.

Reed concludes then, that the probability of R is inscrutable on both these assumptions. Consequently, he takes the first stage of Plantinga's argument to have an analogue for the theist.

Reed supplements this stage of his argument with the claim that even if it were allowed that we were created in the image of God, nothing would follow regarding the reliability of our cognitive faculties. To be created in God's image is to share some reflection of his cognitive powers; it does not entail that we possess those powers in the same degree or exact similitude but merely that our knowledge bears an analogy to divine knowledge. The reflection could be quite imperfect then, and once more, the probability of R turns out to be inscrutable.

Finally, since the probability of the theist's having reliable faculties is inscrutable they have a defeater for all their beliefs. This includes their belief in theism. Consequently, theism is self-referentially incoherent.

The key difficulty with this argument is that it is strictly disanalogous to the EAAN. Key to the argument against the naturalist was the claim that  $P(R/N\&E)$  was low or inscrutable. Now this can be confusing, but Plantinga has elsewhere made it quite clear that inscrutability alone was not the only issue involved in turning  $P(R/N\&E)$  into a defeater for naturalism. It is the fact that  $P(R/N\&E)$  is seemingly likely to be much less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  but not at all reasonably held to be high that is of importance. Reed initially moves from the claim that  $P(R/T)$  is less than one to the claim that it is inscrutable and from this to defeat for R for the theist. None of these moves is unjustified. Plantinga does not need to claim that P

(R/T and the fact that we are made in the image of God) is high. He need simply point to the fact that there is no apparent defeater for theist who holds this to be the case. The probability is inscrutable but reasonably held to be high.

McHugh Reed is a little more careful when it comes to his commentary on the probability of R given our being made in the “image of God.” There he points out that,

“...it is apparent that human beings fall far short of omniscience. The claim must therefore be reduced: being created in God’s image endows human beings with a ‘reflection’ of God’s powers as a knower, or offers knowledge over a ‘wide range’ of topics. Taken by itself, however, this claim seems perfectly consonant with our forming true beliefs on half of the time or less.”<sup>171</sup>

This seems true enough, given the range of topics humans could take an interest in (how many angels can dance on the head of a pin at once, for example), we could have less than an adequate endowment for the task. But what does this seemingly demonstrate? That our faculties are less than perfect? This is perhaps so. Does this show that the idea that we are designed in God’s image is “perfectly consonant” with our having true beliefs less than half the time? This is, I think, clearly so. But perfect consonance of a claim is not rational evidence for it. This does not give the theist any reason to think that they do in fact form beliefs that are false better than half the time. It is hard to see that Reeds points have any bearing here: if he wants to put the theist in a position like that of the evolutionary naturalist he cannot argue that mostly false beliefs are possible on the theist’s

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

view. The mere possibility of being wrong with respect to a certain belief might generate a sort of Cartesian skepticism with respect to that belief. But that is not the point of the EAAN; the point of the EAAN is that naturalists have a defeater. And defeaters are not generally had simply in virtue of admitting the merely possibility of error with respect to a certain belief. Defeaters are supposed to make continued belief in some proposition irrational. Mere possibility of error with respect to a proposition does not make continued belief in that proposition irrational.

Finally, Reed draws from these arguments yet another unwarranted conclusion. He has argued that the probability that we have true beliefs less than half the time is probable given our being made in God's image. From there he draws the conclusion that we have a defeater for *all* of our beliefs, including theism. But this is not warranted at all. We must first investigate as to exactly which rational faculties would be more likely unreliable than others given that God has made us in his image (assuming that Reed's Thomistic interpretation of this expression is correct). Our beliefs in speculative theological issues regarding angels or our scientific musings might outrun the constraints of our cognitive endowments. But why would belief in God be suspect in such cases? Wouldn't this be precisely the type of thing that a God concerned enough about our being made in his image would be interested in us knowing rightly? It seems so to me. Perhaps there are other things such a God would be interested in our knowing, but at the very least, I do not see a defeater for theism here. Again, the Fitelson and

Sober type of response seems to work here simply because there is no defeater for R with respect to our cognitive faculties generally in the case of the theist.

And the case is much different for the naturalist with respect to these deeper issues particularly. Speculative scientific and philosophical concerns do not seem to be the stuff for which naturalistic evolutionary processes would prepare our minds to address rightly. Hence naturalism is just the sort of thing that would seem not likely to be true to the reflective mind of a person who believed our universe had a naturalistic evolutionary history. This is not to say that Plantinga only targets the scientific and philosophical beliefs of the naturalist as candidates for defeat. But if the EAAN successfully accomplishes its goal of producing a defeater for even perceptual beliefs such as the belief that “This is a tiger in front of me” it, scientific and philosophical beliefs are not going to escape defeat either.

In summary, there is no obvious reason that the theist must admit defeat with respect to any of their beliefs given their belief in theism of either an augmented or unaugmented sort. This contrasts with the situation of the naturalist. A successful tu quoque would need to meet the following list of criteria:

1. Demonstrate that the conjunction of commitments of such a version of theism with respect to the origin of some or all of our rational faculties makes the proposition that those faculties are reliable with respect to some subject matter either low or inscrutable but not reasonably held to be high.

2. Demonstrate that a defeater for at least one of the original commitments of such a theistic view can be generated from considerations raised above (1).

I have argued that Reeds argument illustrates failures with respect to each project. He falls short of the first step by overlooking the crucial role that the “not reasonably held to be high” phrase plays in the original EAAN. He falls short of the second by not noticing that a theist might have a set of assumptions with respect to the origin of our cognitive faculties such that odds are high that some of these faculties are reliable whereas others are not so reliable. This contrasts with the naturalist, or so I have argued.

For his own part, Plantinga detects three versions of attempted tu quoques. In what follows, Austere Theism (AT) is simply the proposition that there exists an extremely powerful and knowledgeable being. Traditional theism (TS) entails AT as well as many other propositions; e.g. that God is good, God reveals Himself to the human race, God selected the children of Israel as his means for redeeming mankind, etc. Tu quoques can take any of the following forms although we will see that there are others..

Version A: P (TS/AT) is low or inscrutable. Every believer in TS is a believer in AT. Therefore, AT defeats TS for every believer in TS.

Furthermore, this defeater will be undefeatable for the same reasons expressed by Plantinga in his original argument against evolutionary naturalism.

Version B:  $P(R/AT)$  is low or inscrutable. Therefore, a belief in AT defeats R. So it is irrational to accept AT. But a defeater for one proposition is a defeater for any thing that entails that proposition. Therefore, AT defeats TS. Furthermore, this defeater will be undefeatable for the same reasons expressed by Plantinga in his original argument against evolutionary naturalism.

Something like this seems to constitute the reply of both Timothy O'Conner and Carl Ginet. Ginet argued that if the theist "adds a bit" to the doctrine of austere theism in order to save themselves from a defeater for R. So why shouldn't the naturalist do the same? Hence, I take him to claim that  $P(R/AT)$  is low or inscrutable and that the theist must take this as either a potential defeater for R or directly for TS although he might be imply that arguments of the form of version A and version B will work.

Version C:  $P(R/AT)$  is low or inscrutable. So R is defeated by AT just as in version B. But this *immediately* leads to the conclusion that any belief of the austere theist is defeated including belief in TS.

As we saw earlier, Thomas McHugh Reed has advanced some form of objection resembling either B or C, probably both. He notes that  $P(R/AT)$  is inscrutable, from there to the defeat of the idea that we are made in the image of God (one of the claims of TS) and thence to a defeat of TS. His arguments, I

pointed out, were weakened by the inclusion of argument for the claim that P (R/ TS) could be construed so as to render a defeater for theism and (a big surprise) from this point to the claim that TS defeated itself. Fortunately, none of the versions of the tu quoques mentioned above try to employ his more dubious maneuvers.

So the question is two-fold. If low or inscrutable probabilities can generate defeaters, why do these not do so? And if they don't, why does the low or inscrutable P (R/ N & E) generate a defeater?

Plantinga has made an attempt to answer these questions. I will explicate that answer in the following section. But suffice to say, Plantinga's answer has not ended the debate on this subject. Some authors such as O'Conner, Bergman, Fales, Fitelson and Sober, argue that Plantinga's attempts to rescue theism have offered the naturalist enough room to escape the EAAN by the same or similar replies. Therefore, in the remainder of this chapter, I argue that the theist can escape the tu quoque arguments offered above and in other revised forms that some of these authors suggest in a fashion unavailable to the naturalist.

## B. The Principles of Defeat and Uses Thereof

Plantinga employs his principles of defeat in order to demonstrate that the theist does not obtain a defeater for theism or for R in light of certain admittedly low probability assignments. Here we will explore the case he makes for this claim. However, Fitelson, Sober and Beilby have explored the possibility that these principles might give the naturalist grounds by which to escape the EAAN as well. Here I explicate Plantinga's uses of the principles in question and argue that there is no reason to think that they afford the reflective naturalist a means of escaping the EAAN.

Regarding the earlier "perspiration objection," Plantinga rightly admits that N & E are not *immediately or directly* defeaters for R. Low or inscrutable probability is not sufficient for defeat. For example,

(J) You own a Japanese car.

(ON) You own an old Nissan.

The probability of ON given J is low, but surely ON is not defeated thereby. And yet in other instances it is clear that low or inscrutable probabilities do generate defeat. Each of Plantinga's examples seems to buttress this intuition. So what exactly is the difference between cases in which such probabilities do generate defeat and cases in which they do not? Vital to demonstrating that defeat occurs for the naturalist position but not by analogy to for the theist, by Plantinga's lights, is showing that the situation of the theist is most closely analogous to cases in

which defeat in light of such a low probability does not occur but that the naturalist's position is similar to cases in which they clearly do.

Here Plantinga makes an attempt to distinguish the cases by appeal to "derivative warrant." Suppose that I believe J (above) only because I *either explicitly or implicitly* inferred it from ON. Then the warrant I have for J is derived from the warrant I have for ON on the condition that the agent rationally believe that this derivation holds. Therefore, Plantinga formulates the principle here thusly,

(First Principle of Defeat (FPD)) If S rationally believes that the warrant a belief B has for him is derivative from the warrant a belief A has for him, then B is not a defeater, for him, of A.

Plantinga pauses to note that this principle does not address cases in which an agent has not paused to do the necessary implicit or explicit logic described but leaves it to the reader to formulate stronger principles. Notice that the foregoing principle only spares an agent from defeat of a belief in, say, AT in light of the low or inscrutable  $P(AT/TS)$  if an agent implicitly notes that TS implies the existence of a God. Plantinga believes this will suffice and, after all, any rational agent is more likely to note this implication as they are that the fact having a Nissan implies owning a Japanese car.

Let's reconsider: Version A: *P(TS/AT) is low or inscrutable. Every believer in TS is a believer in AT. Therefore, AT defeats TS for every believer in TS.* Now suppose that the believer holds TS in virtue of their possession of

something like the *sensus divinitatus*. Then, if TS is true, it will have warrant. And FPD only requires that an agent *rationally* hold this to be true. Now if the believer in AS derives their warrant from such from their warrant for TS, then by FPD it cannot be the case that AS is a defeater for TS.

Plantinga has a different reply to the second objection, Version B: *P (R/AT) is low or inscrutable. Therefore, a belief in AT defeats R. So it is irrational to accept AT. But a defeater for one proposition is a defeater for any thing that entails that proposition. Therefore, AT defeats TS.* Plantinga faults the premise stating that a defeater for a belief is a defeater for anything that entails that belief. Most any of the propositions that we believe will entail propositions we find unacceptable. At best, this principle needs to be restricted to cases of *obvious* entailment.

Furthermore, Plantinga holds, we need specify the circumstances in which a person comes to believe alleged defeater. For example, is the person in question already a believer in TS? If a person holds TS in virtue of the *sensus divinitatus* or such then this has to be accounted for. As a consequence, Plantinga grants that this argument demonstrates that austere theism, in the absence of a belief in TS, might generate defeat for AT and thus make AT irrational.

Before proceeding, I must demur with Plantinga on the foregoing paragraph's points. First, it seems to me that his reply to the implicit premise of Version B is strong enough without the further commentary. Second, it seems that if the statements in the foregoing paragraph are true, then a person who realizes

that their belief in AT is so defeated (assuming they do not hold TS) gets a defeater for R: a defeater which in turn becomes *a Humean defeater*. Consequently, they could never rationally regain a belief in R unless they jettison AT from their belief system. This implies, paradoxically, that such a person could not rationally acquire a belief in traditional theism unless they first became an atheist. For only then would rational belief in R and its deliverances be reestablished.

But having dispensed with Version B nonetheless, we turn lastly to Version C: *P (R/AT) is low or inscrutable. So R is defeated by AT just as in version B. But this immediately leads to the conclusion that any belief of the austere theist is defeated including belief in TS.* There are no questionable claims about defeat of entailed propositions here. So if the objection is to be answered, Plantinga will need a different strategy. To answer this objection, Plantinga proposes a second principle of defeat bearing close similarity to his first.

(Second Principle of Defeat (SPD)) If S rationally believes that the warrant, for him, of a belief B is derivative from a belief A, then B won't be a defeater, for him, for any belief C unless he rationally believes that A is a defeater for C.

In a footnote, Plantinga credits Stephen Wykstra for this principle (via a correspondence) and admits that its relationship to the FPD is not straightforward. But its application to the present objection is straightforward. If we substitute TS for A, AS for B and R for C, AS cannot be a defeater for R unless TS is (where TS is believed in rationally). And, of course, TS is not directly a defeater for R. It is

interesting to note, however, that in keeping with the last paragraph Plantinga allows that the argument may defeat AS simpliciter.

Plantinga sees some connection between this reply and the “add a bit” objections. Is not this, in essence, the same move as that made by the theist simpliciter? Plantinga, responds that the moves here are not the same. “The point was that the warrant austere theism has for the theist is derivative from the warrant theism has for her; but it is not the case that the warrant N & E has for the naturalist is derivative from the warrant N+ has for him.”<sup>172</sup> But this is not the heart of his reply. The issue is not where the warrant came from, but why the naturalist cannot move (if they need move at all) to this position.

Plantinga’s point is that the three “add a bit” maneuvers suggested early on by Ginet, Perry and O’Conner seem to validate the dismissal of *any* defeater whatsoever. One can imagine analogous strategies employed by the widget watcher: dismissing the supervisors input by means of simply altering their noetic structure. But this is not, to quote Quine yet again, “the method of true philosophy.” “If you discover that you have a defeater D for one of your beliefs B, you can’t in general deliver B from defeat just by noting that you believe the conjunction of D with some other proposition D\* such that D & D\* entails B.”<sup>173</sup>

So we have seen so far that Version B is dubious and that Versions A and C can be handled if one affirms the two principles of defeat just mentioned. But the question remains; can the naturalist employ these principles to escape a defeat of

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<sup>172</sup> Plantinga, *Naturalism Defeated*, p. 43.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

naturalism? Most of the discussion on this point has centered upon the crucial first principle of defeat.

Fitelson and Sober<sup>174</sup> claim that the first principle of defeat actually defends the naturalist position. For the P (R/ N & E) might be low or inscrutable. But the first principle of defeat has the purpose of letting us know conditions under which defeat does not occur. In short, if I believe the warrant for A is derived from warrant an agent has for B, A is not a defeater for B for that agent; and this is so no matter what the odds of B given A. So, Fitelson and Sober suggest, the believer in evolutionary naturalist holds to N & E on the basis of a trust in R. They would not believe in N & E (and perhaps not in anything else) if they did not implicitly assume R to hold for them. Consequently, by the first principle of defeat, N & E cannot defeat R.

Plantinga relies that this misconstrues the principle. The cases in which the principle genuinely applies are when A is *inferred* from B. And no one infers the truth of naturalism from the fact that R holds for them: they infer it from facts about the fossil record or some such thing. And arguments based upon this premise do not (and need not) have R as a premise. Simply put, cases in which the principle applies are those in which warrant for A is inferred on the basis of warrant for B, not simply when the warrant for A *depends* upon having warrant for B.

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<sup>174</sup> Fitelson and Sober, p. 128.

This probably suffices to answer Fitelson and Sober. James Beilby, however, puts a new spin on this objection.<sup>175</sup> Consider the belief in (\*):

(\*)P (R / N & E) is low or inscrutable and this constitutes a defeater for me of R.

In the course of reading the EAAN, doesn't the naturalist come to infer this on the basis of implicit belief that R holds for them? Perhaps no one infers N & E using R as an implicit premise, but do we infer (\*) on the implicit premise R? If so, then belief in (\*) never constitutes a defeater for R in the first place according the first principle of defeat.

But here again, I think Plantinga's reply to Fitelson and Sober can meet Beilby's challenge. Plantinga allows that the naturalist must assume R when reading through his EAAN. Further, the warrant that they have for belief in the premises of the EAAN *depends* upon their having warrant for R. But there is no place in the EAAN where the proposition "R holds for the naturalist currently reading this argument" functions as a premise. Not even an implicit premise. Consequently, I think Plantinga's reply adequate to handle both objections. The naturalist cannot use the principles of defeat to escape.

But a separate question is whether these attempts on behalf of the theist to circumvent tu quoques such as versions A and C are convincing. Let us note some important points that all parties to the debate should concede. First, the low probability that someone owns a Nissan given that they own a Japanese car does not defeat my belief that the person in question owns a Nissan. Second, there

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<sup>175</sup> Beilby, James. "Is Evolutionary Naturalism Self-defeating?" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*. Vol. 42, 1997, pp. 69-78.

seems to be a curious analogy between this and the case of the theist who confesses that the probability of TS is low given just AT. So even in the absence of a formulation of a principle such as the first and second principles of defeat (which inform us of when defeat does not occur) Plantinga at least has an argument from analogy to work with. This argument supports the claim that the situation of the theist is one in which defeat in the light of a low probability does not occur.

By contrast, arguments from analogy seem to support the claim that the naturalist is in a poor reflective epistemic position. Plantinga, we have seen, makes use of several analogies in which low probability assignments generate a defeater for some agent; the case of the widget factory, the case of the agent believing themselves to have ingested XX, the case of the person who thinks they are a BIV. These will serve to argue a case against the naturalist even if the principles of defeat fail to make clear why the theist is not in the trouble that the naturalist is in due to reflection on something like the EAAN.

So why did Plantinga opt for formulating general principles of defeat? This is especially strange since these principles include a curious and potentially unclear concept such as “derivative warrant.” I suggest that he overlooked something about his EAAN; it does not simply move from the claim that  $P(R/N \ \& \ E)$  is low to the claim that the believer in  $N \ \& \ E$  has a defeater for  $R$ . There is an important step in between these two points; the reflection on analogies.

Consequently, I think that the formulation of principles of defeat on Plantinga's part was hasty. I suggest a different strategy. Since the tu quoque arguments are attempts at arguments from logical analogy, Plantinga should have opted to throw light on the crucial disanalogy between the arguments. And, I will point out, the crucial disanalogy lies specifically in the points that our explications of Versions A, B and C of the tu quoque hastily jumped over. If the reader is unconvinced, review the synopsis given of each and look for anything resembling a reference to a widget factory, or chemical XX...etc.

So why exactly does the low or inscrutable P (R/ N & E) generate a defeater for R for the naturalist while, for example, the low or inscrutable P (TS/ AT) does not defeat theistic belief? Two points are of importance, I think. The first insight I owe to David Silver.<sup>176</sup> If our cognitive faculties arose via the workings of N & E, then it has been argued that this gives us no reason to regard the source of our beliefs as reliable, in fact it might imply the opposite. We would have what David Silver refers to as a problem of an "Unsubstantiated Source." Now the theist's predicament is similar. AT claims that there is an all-powerful being in the universe; doubtless the theist thinks there is just one of these Beings and that He is ultimately responsible for our cognitive machinery being in the shape it is in. So Version C of the tu quoque, which claims that the low or

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<sup>176</sup> Silver, David. "Evolutionary Naturalism and the Reliability of our Cognitive Faculties." *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 20, No. 1, Jan. 2003, pp. 50-63.

inscrutable P (R/ AT) defeats R directly, has not yet been averted. For all we have seen, the believer in AT has an unsubstantiated source for their faith in R.

But this brings us to the second important point I mentioned. In some sense, both N & E and AT are negative universals. That is N & E consists, in part, of the claim that *only* naturalistic forces were at work in the universe when our cognitive machinery developed and that these forces consisted of the evolutionary pressures that select *only* for behavior (as opposed to true belief). So evolutionary naturalism is a negative universal in at least two senses. First, it tells us first what forces alone were at work and gives a characterization of the only things such forces could be thought to likely bring about.

AT, arguably, is a negative universal in the first sense. After all, theists tend to be monotheists. It would be an exhaustive claim as to the force ultimately responsible for our cognitive faculties being as they are. But it does not characterize the concerns or interests of such a being in any exclusive way. By contrast, N & E implies that only adaptive behavior can be reasonably regarded as a likely outcome of the workings of the forces that gave rise to our cognitive machinery. This is, I think, the crucial difference: *the believer in AT has no reason to think that the forces ultimately responsible for their cognitive faculties being as they are lacked characteristics such that this forces did not purpose to make us reliable cognitive agents..* And without reason to doubt that the God in question had this sort of interest, where is the theist (austere or otherwise) to get a defeater for R?

Now I wish to raise a couple of points of objection before proceeding on this point. First, the naturalist may object that this distinction is useless for the austere theist. AT tells us nothing of whether its God is interested in creating us as such rational creature or not. Therefore, if one is inclined to doubt that we are reliable cognitive agents, AT will provide no solace. AT does not rule out the possibility that we are unreliable agents.

I answer by granting the point that AT does not rule out such a possibility, but that the objection misses the point. True, there is a possibility remaining of our being unreliable agents. Global skepticism is a threat. But this is simply in virtue of the fact that traditional global skeptical arguments have always threatened the theist and naturalist alike. If one is inclined to doubt that R holds for them, they will have a hard time alleviating that doubt. Perhaps some standard replies to this old form of skepticism will work. But the purpose of my points was not to rescue the believing in AT from the threat of traditional skepticism. It was to demonstrate that AT does not present a defeater for R because it does not present believers in it with an exhaustive list of both the forces at work in generating our cognitive machinery and a pessimistic appraisal of what these forces could likely bring about. In short, this objection misconstrues traditional global skeptical arguments with arguments in which an agent has a defeater for R. And we have seen in other chapters that this is a fatal mistake.

Secondly, I have been assuming through the course of the last few pages that AT includes the claim that whatever all-powerful being exists, He created us.

Perhaps this is a mistake. A thesis about who created us might rightly be said to belong to TS instead.

I reply that this is inconsequential as well. If AT includes the claim that the all-powerful being it mentions is our creator. My former points hold up against version C of the tu quoque. If not, AT will still not contain within it a negative universal claim with respect to the forces that gave rise to our cognitive faculties. And *a fortiori* it will not contain such a claim that will lead us to despair upon reflection of the likelihood of R with respect to ourselves.

Now the question is, what difference do these distinctions make such that we can explain why the naturalist's situation bears so strong a similarity to cases in which defeat of a belief (R or otherwise) occurs while the austere theist faces no such difficulties? Let's look at Plantinga's cases one more time:

- 1.) One may trust their faculty of perception while in a widget factory and consequently believe the widgets produced there to be red. But if a reliable source, or at least a source you deem honest, informs you that the owner of the factory sometimes uses special lights to make the widgets appear a color other than what they are. You then come to believe that the odds of your perceptual faculties yielding trustworthy appraisals of the color of the widgets to be inscrutable. If this is the case, then you have a reason to not trust your faculty of perception while in the factory and consequently you have a defeater for these deliverances thereof.

- 2.) Suppose you come to think that you have been created by a deceiving Cartesian demon that takes pleasure in luring you into false beliefs. In such a case, you might believe the demon to be indulging in this pleasure or you might remain agnostic. But it seems that you have a defeater for any belief you hold; that is, you have a reason to abstain from holding the belief in question.
- 3.) A subject comes to believe that their faith in God is the result of *only* Freudian Wish Fulfillment (perhaps having read Freud in an injudicious frame of mind). Further, they hold that the probability of beliefs generated by Wish Fulfillment being true is low or inscrutable. Consequently, they have a defeater for their belief in God.
- 4.) A subject believes that they have ingested a hallucinatory chemical XX. Such a chemical is believed to render the deliverances of the five senses unreliable in 90% of cases. Consequently, the subject when reflecting on this fact obtains a defeater for the belief that their sense data is reliable.

Cases 1 and 3 are different from cases 2 and 4. In cases 1 and 3, an agent comes to believe certain negative universals with respect to the sources of their belief, but the sources in question and beliefs threatened with defeat are more local in nature than in cases 2 and 4. Nonetheless, all the cases have the similar quality of an agent at least implicitly coming to hold a negative universal that bears a strong analogy to that which the believer in N & E, according to Plantinga, should come to hold. First, in the cases of the widget factory and Freudian Wish-Fulfillment, the agents in question come to hold that only a select group of factors could affect

their reliability as cognitive agents on some issue. Crucially, the agent in the widget factory does not think that open windows have thrown off the potentially deceptive effects of the indoor lighting of the factory. Nor does the agent in the Wish-Fulfillment example think that there are other sources for their belief in God such as the *sensus divinitatus* that are responsible for their holding to a faith. Then, secondly, after the agents have examined *all* the factors that have *brought it about* that they were cognitive agents of the sort they are with respect to these issues, they make an assessment as to whether *any* of these factors considered singularly or together underwrites confidence that they are reliable cognizers on the subject at hand. If not, the second negative universal judgment leads to defeat of the belief in question.

The cases of 2 and 4 are different in two respects. First, a scenario is introduced in which the domain of factors that could have brought it about that an agent was a reliable cognizer is limited. For example, it does not matter under the circumstances described whether God created you or naturalistic evolutionary forces did; if you have taken XX or are a BIV, you not likely a reliable cognitive agent. Secondly, again, the agent in question makes the judgment as to whether *any* of these factors underwrites the belief that they are reliable cognizers on certain subjects. And essentially this step consists in noting that drugs and brain-keeping scientists cannot reasonably be regarded as factors that might reasonably be held to promote the agenda of making sure we had more true beliefs than false

ones. At this second step, the contrast with cases 1 and 3 lies in the global nature of the discrediting that will take place.

So the case of the evolutionary naturalist, it is argued, bears strong similarity to these cases. First, there is a negative universal claim with respect to what factors would have brought it about that an agent was or was not reliable with respect to a subject. Secondly, there is the negative universal assessment as to whether any such factors underwrite confidence in certain belief mechanisms being reliable.

I have argued that it is not so for the case of the believer in AT. The second negative universal assessment never occurs. Therefore, the situation for the believer in AT is neither similar to that of the believer in N & E and furthermore *is relevantly dissimilar to all of the analogies to which Plantinga likened the situation of the believer in N & E*. So Version C of the tu quoque fails. The low or inscrutable P (R/ AT) has no analogy to cases in which defeat clearly occurs from which it can make an argument against the theist.

But what are we to make of the other challenging version of the tu quoque? What do we make of Version A? This challenges that the low or inscrutable P (TS/ AT) provides a defeater for the traditional theist's belief. But again, this overlooks any appeal to analogy in which to show that the low probability in question generates a defeater. Plantinga helps the situation by offering a case analogous to this in which a low probability does not generate defeat. That is the case in which I believe that Jones owns a Nissan and that he owns a Japanese car.

I think Plantinga is on the right track here. But he moves on to formulate cumbersome principles of defeat that I would like to avoid. The real reason that AT does not defeat TS is not because the analogy to the Nissan/Japanese car case is so strong. Rather, it is because the analogy to cases in which defeat occurs (and the situation of the evolutionary naturalist) is so weak. AT, for example, does not give an exhaustive list of considerations that would bring about or suppress TS. And consequently, there are no grounds for moving on to make an assessment whether this list of considerations renders it irrational to hold the likelihood of TS high. This, it seems to me, is the right way for Plantinga to go in defending against tu quoques of this type.

Therefore, I conclude that tu quoque arguments in general fail primarily because they do not pay attention to the steps in Plantinga's argument that employ analogies. Plantinga has a few principles which, though dubious to my mind, stand up to his critics thus far. But they also employ the rather unclear notion of "derivative warrant." I have suggested that that is worth avoiding both in light of the fact that it is imprecise and unnecessary for the defense in question.

### C. New Version of Tu Quoques

Plantinga seems to have rejoinders to the tu quoque arguments that do not seemingly afford the naturalist a means of escaping the EAAN. This does not, however, mean that Plantinga's position with respect defeaters is immune from tu quoques. For Plantinga and traditional theists in general believe a great many things. Commitments to other propositions might make it difficult to pull of the task of denying an escape to the naturalist that they would like to employ to get out of some other argument. In this section, I will explore whether Plantinga or other traditional theists are threatened by some argument analogous to the EAAN-plus-other-commitments. If so, the naturalist might rightly raise questions as to why such a theist can escape defeat without abandoning the EAAN or these commitments while the naturalist cannot. In this section, I examine those renewed attempts and argue that they fail due to

In the book "Naturalism Defeated," Evan Fales presents a response to Plantinga's EAAN which is by his own description "a substantial revision of 'Plantinga's Case against Naturalistic Epistemology,'" <sup>177</sup> an earlier paper. Among the important additions to this revision is an extensive footnote intended to update the arguments in light of Plantinga's unpublished manuscript "Naturalism Defeated." Here Plantinga replies to tu quoque arguments intended to demonstrate that a defeat of theism can be generated from an argument analogous to his case against naturalism. This said, Fales spends the second portion of his paper

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<sup>177</sup> Fales, "Naturalism Defeated?" p. 43.

developing this argument. By contrast, the first part of his paper was intended to undermine the EAAN itself.

Fales begins by examining the possibility of the naturalist tacking on “something extra” to the conjunction of N & E (or “D” as he calls it, standing for “neo-Darwinism”) in order to raise the probability of R. There are a couple of criteria that this something must meet. First, Fales claims that it must be probabilistically independent of D. However, a “clear constraint is that this prior must be *enough* lower than the probability of R relative to naturalism cannot be raised by such a maneuver. Failure to observe such a constraint would be to license cheating, by means of the most question-begging sort of ad-hocery.”<sup>178</sup> Here Fales concedes a point to Plantinga which Plantinga raised against Dretske, Ginet, O’Connor, Otte, Perry, Sosa and Wykstra. In short, Fales argues that it is better to push a tu quoque on theism rather than attempt to “add a bit.”

Unvarnished theism (roughly AT above) provides little support for R, claims Fales. Therefore, it must be supplemented by an independent claim for which there is also independent evidence. I argued above that the low P (R/ AT) does not alone defeat R for the theist and Fales seems to recognize this fact. Consequently, the theist can legitimately probabilize R on the basis of additional factors relevant to whether R holds for us. The claim that we are made in the image of God would do the trick, but what evidence do we have for that, asks

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid. p. 54.

Fales. In footnote 19 and in two pages of text, Fales argues that we don't have much. There are several points he raises:

- 1.) Even if Biblical claims are admitted as evidence, it is unclear that the phrase "image of God" in the book of Genesis bears reference to our cognitive capacities.
- 2.) Even if such a passage did bear some reference to our cognitive capacities, this insight might provide no support for the theists' belief in R when coupled with a Biblical doctrine of the fall of man. The noetic portion of our image of God may be fallen as well and to an extent that should lead us to regard P (R) as high when we probabilize on the fact that we are fallen creatures.
- 3.) Even if our noetic image survives the fall, *how good* of an image were we in the first place? Without a clear answer to this, the question of the reliability of our cognitive faculties in general will still be in question by the lights of TNE. Could not the problem of evil extend to not only the problems of pervasive physical disorders but universal cognitive malfunction as well?
- 4.) Even if we accept the claim that our cognitive faculties are reliable given the input of the *sensus divinitatus* or something like it, there are legitimate questions about the justification that can be gathered from mystical experiences in general. In other words, it is worth questioning the source of

this additional pertinent information before we conditionalize R on the basis of it.<sup>179</sup>

So there is precious little *independent* evidence for the claim that whatever God exists has made us in his image so as to spare R.

With respect to the purported defeat of theistic epistemology, Plantinga confesses that he cannot give the objection the space warranted it. But he does intend to carve the problem in two and deal with half of the difficulty (perhaps the more important half) directly. There are two questions. First, does the reflective *theist* have a defeater for *R*? Second, does the reflective *Christian* theist have a defeater for *theism*? Obviously this is not an exhaustive list of ways in which to reconstruct the tu quoques employed against the EAAN, but Plantinga apparently feels that Fales points bear most strongly in the direction of the second of these concerns and so he answers these directly. I will try to approach his reply in terms of each of the concerns raised by Fales.

It is interesting that in his response, Plantinga does not appeal to the “image of God” at all. Perhaps he feels this talk superfluous, but he offers another way around Fales’ concern that the image of God might not involve much in the way of cognitive success-orientation. First, on the Christian view, salvation depends upon some types of right belief. These beliefs are efficacious in the course of our salvation and consequently the Christian God would wish for us to get many of them right. Take for example the belief that God was in the historical person of

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid. p. 54-55, esp. ft. 19.

Jesus redeeming us to Himself through suffering, death and resurrection. So at least a subset of our belief producing mechanisms, those most relevant in the context of a discussion of whether specifically Christian theistic beliefs are likely to be true, are not going to suffer defeat in virtue of any low probability granted the truth of Christian theism.

Fales also raises concerns about the noetic effects of the Fall on this Christian worldview. Plantinga seems to reply to this in his footnote 65: the Christian worldview countenances the fact that our beliefs might be skewed by sin. For example, we might believe our neighbor unworthy of our love when in fact he is not. However, it is also part of the Christian worldview that God is engaged in the task of rehabilitating us with respect to even this cognitive shortcoming. The assumption on Plantinga's part is, I think, that we can count on God having overcome a great deal of our shortcomings in this area.

Despite Fales' concerns regarding the reliability of mystical experience, Plantinga points out that the Christian faith seems to underwrite their veracity in many cases i.e. the case of the deliverances of the *sensus divinitatus*. As long as trust in this source constitutes a member of a subject's belief system, the system as a whole is in no danger of probabilistic incoherence. It might face defeat in another way, just not this one. So at least it may be said that *Christian* theistic faith can resist the charges of Fales. However, it is worth noting that elsewhere Plantinga has conceded that AT when believed in the absence of any other

theological commitments may be as irrational as naturalism and face the same sort of defeat.

I see Plantinga's strategy then as this: don't defend the theist from defeat by appeal to a doctrine of man (that we are made in the image of God and suffered only a minor fall or some such...) but rather a doctrine of God. I mentioned in chapter 1 that this strategy would work for the theist and gave a reason for it. Although the naturalist will have difficulty explaining why *any* of their beliefs would likely be true given N & E, the theist might claim that only certain specific sections of their belief forming apparatus might fall under the shadow of suspicion. The God of the theist might not be thought of as caring, for example, whether we have true scientific beliefs. He might very well care, on the theists view, whether the theist has certain true theological beliefs. So I regard Plantinga's reply as successful

But issues of success aside, I fear that Plantinga committed a slip in reasoning that led him to concede too much to his opponent. Fales points out that the theist might have trouble adducing independent evidence for their faith that R holds for them, at least with respect to being reliable cognizers on a large domain of subjects. But what does this prove? It does not, in fact, provide a defeater for any theist's belief that they are reliable cognizers in any given domain of subjects. Granted by the theist, we are fallen creatures. Fales has failed to adduce one point of importance and consequently failed to draw a legitimate logical analogy to the EAAN: he did not demonstrate that the probability of R given all

of the theists beliefs regarding factors that would bring about or suppress R (including the consideration of the fall of man) it could not reasonably be held to be high. Consequently, he capitulated to something like a traditional global skeptical argument; it is possible for all the theist claims to know that the fall could have had such drastic consequences for R. Therefore, since we could not tell the difference between a situation in which it did or didn't by appeal to independent evidence, R should be held in doubt. I do not know why any theist, Christian or otherwise, should draw such a "therefore" from a doctrine of man's fall or the existence of evil unless one of two things were the case. Either they already found skepticism with respect to R tempting, or they assumed what Fales did not prove, namely, that the likelihood of R cannot reasonably be held high given such a fall.

Fales is not alone in bringing up other popular theistic beliefs to bolster the attempt at a tu quoque on theism. In his article "A House Divided Against Itself Cannot Stand," O'Conner attempts a tu quoque on Plantinga's EAAN that also appeals to the theistic belief in the existence of evil. It is argued that Plantinga has placed strictures upon the naturalist with respect to how they may reflectively continue to hold R that he will not place upon the theist with respect to continued acceptance of AT in light of the problem of evil generally.

It may be recalled that O'Conner believes that Plantinga is not being fair to the naturalist when he does not allow them to probabilize R on the basis of some basic belief. For example, O'Conner argued that just as a person accused of

stealing a letter may adduce evidence in the form of their memories so as to convince themselves that the public evidence against them is not such that they should believe themselves to be the thief, so also the naturalist should employ such basically held beliefs as evidence for or against R. Plantinga (with Fales!) thinks this is cheating.

Now if Plantinga intends to deny the coherence of this line of response, O'Conner proposes that Theism will also face defeat in light of the existence of horrendous evils. Let it be admitted that P (God exists/ Evil such as this exist) is inscrutable. What should the theist do?

- 1.) Conditionalize on such ignorance and withhold belief in T (and consequently R if Plantinga thinks that only T can underwrite R!).
- 2.) Conditionalize on his ignorance but affirm the existence of independent evidence (sensus divinitatus perhaps) just as the naturalist would adduce tenacious belief in R as evidence.
- 3.) Neither conditionalizes in such a fashion nor modifies any beliefs...just what naturalists do in the light of EAAN typically.
- 4.) Readjust the probabilities assigned to P (God/ Evil)...by parity the naturalist may adjust P (R/ N&E).

It seems, on O'Conner's view, that no move is open to the theist that would not simultaneously exonerate the reflective naturalist.

First, Plantinga questions whether P (God/ Evil) actually *is* low. After all, evil is prerequisite to such goods as the Atonement of Christ. But then if evil is

not a defeater for Christian theistic belief, then by Plantinga's lights it is not a defeater for belief in AT for the Christian.

However, conceding that the probability in question is in fact low and that no propositional evidence for God's existence is available can non-propositional evidence tip the scales back in favor of TS? Here Plantinga seems to explicitly deny that the second of O'Conner's four options outlined above. Such things as memory and the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit might be rightly adduced as independent non-propositional evidence in such cases...but "tenacious belief" cannot be. Further, the naturalist would not adduce the latter of these as evidence for R nor can they adduce the former without begging questions. It is our trust in the reliability of our cognitive faculties that is being called into question by the EAAN. So appeal to analogies with the case of the Purloined Letter will not help the naturalist. To adduce "tenacious belief" as evidence assumes that our minds are functioning properly (in an alethic fashion) and that memory and perception are working in accord with this proper function. The reasoning is circular.

In fairness, O'Conner did not adduce "tenacious belief" as evidence for R. Rather, he merely introduced this as evidence (the only evidence available to the naturalist) that belief in R was warranted in virtue of being the deliverance of proper function. This is just a quibble on my part however, since Plantinga has already challenged O'Conner on the inference from proper function rationality to warrant.

But Plantinga's defense of the theist seems to be the same here as in other places. For the theist, the initial worries about the reliability of our cognitive faculties, included their response to the instigation of the Holy Spirit or their "natural" deliverances of the *sensus divinitatus* never get off the ground. Therefore,  $P(\text{God/evil})$  may be low, but  $P(\text{Our faculties being reliable/ horrendous evils exist})$  might not be called into question. Consequently, there is no difficulty on Plantinga's view of introducing non-propositional evidence of the form he mentions into consideration when determining the former probability.

So, in essence, O'Conner misses the point that Fales was careful to note in his own revised *tu quoque*. The theist does not introduce additional beliefs regarding the origins of their faculties in order to defeat a defeater. There is simply nothing in the theists background set of beliefs to make them suspect that the odds of R holding for them are not high. O'Conner's appeal to an analogy to the theist reply to the problem of evil fails for similar reasons. The theist does not accept the claim that the existence of evil defeats a belief in God and that a subsequently a defeater-defeater is necessary.

But why would O'Conner have thought otherwise? Here I am willing to offer a conjecture. O'Conner thinks that the theist and the naturalist are in a similar crux. In other words, he thinks that the situation of the naturalist who is challenged with the EAAN is somehow analogous to the situation of the theist who is confronted with the problem of evil. But exactly *how* are these cases similar? Well, for one thing evidence of some sort is presented such that allegedly

some agent is obligated to adjust their beliefs. And in each case, agents are depicted as attempting to offer some sort of non-propositional evidence to counter the challenge.

But this strikes me as a pretty weak analogy. For one thing, having evidence presented against one's belief is not the same thing as having a defeater for that belief. Take Plantinga's example involving a person in a widget factory. No evidence is presented in that case to the conclusion that the widgets are some other color than they seem to be. But the agent in that scenario has a defeater, an undercutting defeater, nonetheless. A close inspection of the definition of "defeater" reveals why this is the case: to have a defeater is to have some belief, perception, memory or some such mental state that renders it irrational to continue to remain in the same noetic state. And having evidence against a certain belief one holds does not necessarily render it irrational to continue in that belief. Hence, the theist might allow that the existence of horrendous evils constitutes some evidence against God's existence (although Plantinga will not even grant that much), but maintain that this does not constitute a defeater for belief in God.

A second relevant point of dissimilarity can be found in the fact that the EAAN and the argument from evil lies in the fact that the former tries to present an undercutting defeater and that latter does not. If the problem of evil were construed as an argument that a defeater for theism exists, this defeater would no doubt be a rebutting defeater. For the problem of evil constitutes an argument that theism is false. It does not simply try to undermine all of the evidence for God's

existence. By contrast, the EAAN does not attempt to provide evidence for the falsity of the doctrine of naturalism nor for the claim that R fails to hold for the naturalist.

Now it seems to me that there is a way to make sense of O'Conner's strategy. First, in his earliest article against the EAAN, O'Conner asserts that only "direct" evidence against R could possibly count as evidence against R.<sup>180</sup> I take him to be writing off all undercutting defeaters for R. I think that the reason that he sees such a similarity between the problem of evil and the EAAN lies in a belief on his part that the only way to make sense of the EAAN is to take it as attempting to provide a rebutting defeater for R for the naturalist. Consequently, he rightly takes note that if a certain belief B rebuts B\* when B alone is considered, one need not jettison B\* from their noetic structure. One might believe other things that directly support or even entail the truth of B\*. For example, the existence of evil provides evidence for the falsity of theism, but other non-propositional sources of evidence support it. Belief in N & E gives evidence that R does not hold with respect to us. But other sources of evidence support R, and strongly at that.

But undercutting defeaters work in a different way and demand a different response. They make it irrational to hold a belief due to the fact that the grounds for holding it are somehow deficient. It becomes epistemically irresponsible for

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<sup>180</sup>O'Connor, Timothy. "An Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism?" *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 24, No. 4, Dec. 1994, pp. 527-540.

an agent to hold the belief in the sense that the workings of those cognitive mechanisms whose function is to promote the acquisition of true beliefs and avoidance of false ones would have to be overridden in order to believe it. When one has a defeater of this sort, the proper response is not simply to show that the item believed has some countervailing evidence for it. Rather, one must demonstrate that the holding of this belief is a result of the proper functioning of those mechanisms just mentioned. For example, if stranger (an adult) tells me that they have a cousin and I form the belief that this cousin is also an adult, odds are that I am correct. Most people are over 18 years old. So there is evidence that I am correct, but upon reflection it was probably epistemically irresponsible for me to form this belief. A person interested in forming only true beliefs and avoiding false ones would have not been so hasty.

So if a person thinks that they are a BIV or that they have ingested XX as Plantinga described, what is the proper response for them to make? Let us grant that they might adduce some evidence in favor of R. But the question remains; is it epistemically responsible to consider this evidence as sufficient to believe R with respect to themselves? If their concern were simply to promote true beliefs and avoid false ones, would they do this? I think not. In their reflective moments they should realize that agnosticism seems to be in order. And this situation, Plantinga has argued, is strongly analogous to that of the reflective naturalist.

In conclusion then, these versions of tu quoque arguments do not seem to succeed any more than the earlier ones. There is a seeming similarity between the

case made by Fales and that made by O'Conner. Both think that headway against the theist can be made by pointing out that there is some evidence against either R or the existence of God given the truth of certain theistic beliefs and that this is grounds for thinking that the theist is in a position similar to that of the naturalist who is aware of the EAAN. But it seems to me that attempts such as these are bound to fail so long as it is admitted that persons who think that they are BIVs or some such thing should not regard themselves as reliable cognitive agents and that the naturalist is in a similar situation. To regard one's self as reliable even in those circumstances runs contrary to the workings of those mechanisms whose function it is to promote true beliefs. But what the theist lacks here is sufficient grounds for thinking that they are in any such circumstances. And until the cumulative evidence garnered from other theistic commitments convinces the theist that they are so, no tu quoque of this form will succeed.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion: How *Not* to Attack the EAAN

It has been the thesis of this dissertation to defend the claim that the EAAN stands unbeaten in the face of all current objections. It will be impossible to give a complete summary of all of the objections and responses offered in the course of this dissertation. But it would no doubt be helpful to give a brief synopsis of *types* of attacks generally brought against the argument and to offer the guidelines by which they can be anticipated and rebutted.

In chapter 1, a potentially devastating objection to the argument was presented in the fact that the argument seemed to be couched in the language of defeat. On the one hand, there has been little work in this area of epistemology as of yet. On the other, the characterizations of defeat offered so far, notably those of Pollock and Plantinga, seem hazardous to the EAAN. Pollock does not provide the resources necessary to directly get a defeater for R itself (as opposed to a defeater for the reasons one has for holding R). And Plantinga's account of defeat is cashed out in terms of proper function; and it is hard to see how a person who functioned properly would ever come to jettison R from their noetic structure.

In response, I have argued that this objection is more likely to cause trouble for Plantinga and other person's account of defeat than it is to harm the EAAN. The EAAN simply points out that the situation of the reflective naturalist bears a strong analogy to those situations in which defeat occurs. It ought to be a criterion of adequacy on any theory of defeat that it correctly diagnoses these situations as

ones in which defeat occurs. The EAAN, therefore, does not require any theory of defeat any more than empiricism required a definition of knowledge.

In chapter 2 we examined whether or not Plantinga's argument depended upon controversial assumptions regarding justification, truth or belief. Regarding justification, questions were raised as to whether Plantinga illicitly assumed that either justification for R or at least likelihood of R given the truth of one's other beliefs was necessary in order for an agent to rationally hold it. So the response here is two fold. First, Plantinga can deny that one needs independent evidence for R before they can rationally accept it. One does not begin the dialectic of the EAAN by holding R in doubt; that is the finish line of the argument, not the starting line. Of course, between the start and the finish, the probability of R given evolutionary naturalism is a vital consideration. But that does not suffice to demonstrate that an appeal to some general principle regarding defeat and its relationship to probability against a set of background beliefs has to be employed. There is nothing that forbids a more plausible argument from analogy if that suffices.

In the remainder of that chapter we looked at attempts to define "belief" and "truth" so that either evolutionary naturalism or R turned out true by definition. Attempts to do this will typically founder on one of two difficulties. First, if the EAAN succeeds at undermining the claim that evolutionary naturalism is true, it can be simply reemployed to defeat any theory of truth that entails evolutionary naturalism. For although it is not an epistemic principle that a

defeater for B is a defeater for anything entailing it, there seem to be epistemic contexts (most likely the reflective ones) in which this principle holds. By contrast, if one takes the route of describing beliefs in such a fashion that they must mostly be true, they must take notice of whether such an effort will be consistent with naturalism in the first place. Davidson's attempts, for example, seem not to be.

In chapter 3 we examined whether or not Plantinga's assessment of P (R/N&E) was correct. The most ambitious efforts directed against Plantinga have tried to demonstrate that this probability is high. Any such attempt will have to do at least one of the following:

- a.) Show that the P (R/N & E & epiphenomenalism of some sort) is high.
- b.) Show that the P (epiphenomenalism/ N & E) is low.

Neither of these is promising. Epiphenomenalism would render the content of our beliefs invisible to natural selection such that even if (quite controversially) true beliefs would have selective advantage had they caused behavior, the likelihood of R will be weighed down.

So step number 1 here will be to answer the bugaboo of epiphenomenalism, if indeed that can be done for the naturalist. But even if this is successful, another claim will have to be defended.

- c.) Creatures who have belief content causing behavior and who survive are highly likely to have mostly true beliefs.

Now many authors are tempted to think that the simple fact that survival in these circumstances can be explained by the presence of true beliefs on the part of the creature constitutes a point in favor of *c*. But *c*. faces a large objection; evolutionary naturalism is incapable of two things.

- 1.) It is incapable of distinguishing between belief contents that give rise to identical behaviors.
- 2.) Or of biasing the variants which arise in a population so that reliable cognizers at least have an equal chance of getting into the selective race as their unreliable competitors.

It seems to me that no argument has been made for *c* that reduces the threat of 1 and 2 such that *c* seems more likely true than false. Given these considerations, I do not see how any force will be accrued to attempts to stall the EAAN with respect to regarding *P* (*R*/*N* & *E*) as low or inscrutable. On the other hand, it seems that if these challenges could be met, the EAAN would clearly be in trouble.

In chapter 4 we examined the alleged relationship between the *P* (*R*/*N* & *E*) and the issue of whether this consideration defeated *R* for the evolutionary naturalist. Now one objection that clearly seems to not work is the “perspiration objection”: this objection alleges that Plantinga illicitly appeals to a general principle regarding the relationship of probabilities and defeat that is demonstrably false. So long as Plantinga avoids formulating general principles of defeat (as well

as avoiding committing the EAAN to a certain definition of a defeater) this issue can be handled. Plantinga argues simply that

1. Sometimes low probabilities generate defeaters.
2. The situation of the reflective naturalist bears a strong analogy to those cases.

As long as these points hold, it seems Plantinga will not need the general principles that would make the EAAN an easier target.

Now one means of getting around this purported relationship between  $P(R/N \& E)$  and defeat is to “add a little”: that is, to claim that defeat must be generated from another probability, say  $P(R/N \& E \& \text{our winning the evolutionary lottery})$ , or not at all. Sometimes this is taken to be an appeal to the principle of total evidence. There is one general reply to these sorts of maneuvers. Again, the point can be made by analogy. This sort of maneuvering, if employed by agents in Plantinga’s analogies, would rescue agents from defeat where it seems no such rescue should be possible. Consequently, to make this sort of reply to Plantinga, the objector needs to fulfill two tasks. First, to demonstrate that there is something rationally believed by the evolutionary naturalist such that it plausibly renders the likelihood of  $R$  somewhat high. And second, to demonstrate that determining whether or not one has a defeater on grounds of this probability to the exclusion of considering another does not justify an overly lenient maneuver in analogous cases. I have noticed plenty of writers attempting the first of these, but not much work on the second.

In chapter 4, I went so far as to advance a principle regarding what an alleged defeatee can and cannot be probabalized upon in all these cases. There I suggested that the group of items upon which the defeatee is probabalized should not contain both a defeater and a defeatee within itself. But this perhaps goes farther than necessary. So long as the analogies in question hold, this rejoinder seems sufficient to meet the “add a bit” objection and will further buttress the EAAN against appeals to epistemically circular evidence for R and the maximal warrant that R has. For maximally warranted beliefs are defeated in these examples in such a fashion that epistemically circular evidence cannot be reasonably advanced by the agents depicted.

Clearly then, a great deal of weight falls upon the issue of whether or not Plantinga’s analogy arguments are fair, a topic discussed in chapter 5. The only apparent means of determining this consists in presenting an analogy in which an agent escapes defeat in the light of some probability assignment. For example, O’Conner seems to suggest that the case of the Purloined Letter is a closer analogy to the case of the naturalist. But there are a few criteria needed to make this sort of move work. Essentially, the situation described must not overlook any features pertinent to the case of the naturalist unless it is also the case that Plantinga’s analogies also overlook these. For example, the majority of Plantinga’s analogies focused on cases in which an agent considers only items that would *bring about* the truth or falsity of the proposition in which they believe. Now, it is not a general rule that only these sorts of things can be considered. Sometimes

evidential considerations can be included in addition to causal ones. But exactly whether these should legitimately be employed in the present context is a subject to be determined by whether it gives the right result in analogous cases, hence facing the objections raised in the previous two paragraphs. In short, I think that there are respondents to Plantinga who are trying to employ two objections at once in order to circumvent a key objection to each. This sort of move has dubious merits.

If the EAAN is successful to this point, the naturalist might wish to dismiss it as inconsequential on grounds of the similarity between the EAAN and traditional skeptical arguments. In chapter 6, we examined several such attempts and noted that misunderstandings of global skeptical arguments and of the EAAN vitiated these to a large degree. With respect to the latter complaint, I think the key point to note is that the EAAN crucially depends upon an argument *to defeat from analogy*. So first, the naturalist respondent needs to successfully couch the traditional global skeptical arguments in the language of defeat. But then a second project must be undertaken. For even if the global skeptical argument provides a defeater for the naturalist, it does not follow that some other source of defeat fails to exist for them for the same belief. One can have two very distinct defeaters for one and the same belief. So can any reduction of one of these alleged defeaters to the other be successful? The point to consider here is the distinction between the epistemic situation of an agent who obtains a defeater for most of their beliefs in virtue of thinking the BIV hypothesis is possibly true (though they think it not

actually so) and one who thinks it actually is true and consequently also possibly so. What the objector needs to show is not merely that each defeater would defeat all of the same beliefs. Rather the objector needs to show is that success of a defeater of one of these types entails the success of a defeater of the other type. I see no hope of making this charge stick. So long as we can conceive of cases each defeater exists without the other, I predict that these efforts will fall flat.

Now there is a curious connection between the objections based on such alleged reductions and those based on tu quoque arguments. If tu quoques are not successful, it is hard to see how the reduction of the EAAN to global skepticism can be possible. For atheists and theists alike share the global skeptical problem. How can this be if it is not the case that both share an EAAN-type problem?

But tu quoques have their own distinct problems. I suggest that the main difficulties with these attacks can be reduced to two. First, the objector must make the case that there is some belief or other state in the theist's noetic structure (traditional theist or otherwise) such that it renders it impossible for the theist to regard the P (R) as high any longer. Significantly, simply pointing out that the theist has some evidence against R (their belief in the Fall, for example) will not suffice for this task. Then secondly, some argument by analogy is needed to show that cases in which agents have noetic structures of this sort are like cases in which defeat occurs. I think that I have yet to see any attempted tu quoque in which the importance of such an analogy is highlighted. But how can such arguments be genuinely analogous to the EAAN if not analogous at this crucial point?

Consequently then, I conclude that the major objections to the EAAN have been found lacking. Typically this occurs due to a misunderstanding of the EAAN and typically this misunderstanding lies in overlooking the crucial role of the argument Plantinga makes by analogy. There is perhaps still the hope that better objections will be raised. Perhaps then, the general reliability of the naturalist's cognitive faculties can safely be affirmed. Then perhaps the naturalist can move on to the more daunting task of explaining why evolutionary naturalistic processes would have given them reliable *philosophical faculties for abstract thoughts on the nature of the universe*.<sup>181</sup> In short, maybe then the naturalist can move on to dealing with another candidate defeater.

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<sup>181</sup> In fact, Angus J.L. Menuge has already taken Plantinga's argument (which he characterizes as an update of the arguments of C.S. Lewis) in this direction. See Menuge, Angus J. L., "Beyond Skinnerian Creatures: A Defense of the Lewis and Plantinga Critiques of Evolutionary Naturalism." *Philosophia Christi*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2003, pp. 143-166.

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