AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF THE NEW ATHEISM THROUGH PLANTINGA AND MARITAIN

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From Disenchantment to Resentment

The *zeitgeist* that gained its prominence during the advent of the Enlightenment and heralded the era of modernity seeks to reinvent itself more forcefully during the world's transition into the second millennium. This *spirit* of 'disenchantment,' as Charles Taylor identifies it, came to announce the holding sway of our secular age. The prevalent worldview then was inclined to see everything as intertwined with the ultimate reality to which religion binds it, until a shift from the 'porosity' of individuals to the enchantments of a sacred-pervaded world took place. People became 'buffered-selves' resistant to the impinging of all kinds of forces and elements that invoke the spiritual, as previously experienced by those who lived within the context of an enchanted world.[1] Thus, while the divine and spiritual realities are not completely rejected by the disenchanted mind, these things have become completely "open to doubt, argument, mediating explanations, and the like," leading to the shattering of the naïve enchanted mind.[2]

One indication is that secularism ensures the proliferation of the characterization of religion as a "squalid tale of bigotry, superstition, wishful thinking, and oppressive ideology," responsible for "untold misery in human affairs"[3] – "violent, irrational, intolerant, allied to racism and tribalism and bigotry, invested in ignorance and hostile to free inquiry."[4] Despite the atrocities attached to religion, many maintain a kind of tolerance

apropos to it, on the condition of its relegation to the individual sphere; to "pass out of public ownership into private hands as the modern age unfolds," for it to be kept as a private affair.[5] On a similar note, as postmodern secularity gives way for an irreligious culture to hold sway, the pragmatic approach to religion as "a useful device for preserving morality, and to that extent social harmony," paves the way for the seeking of substitutes to fill its previous roles in morality and aesthetics.[6] In any case, as this perspective suggests, religion maintains a unique niche of influence, and this is what those who are interested in running society acknowledge and seek to harness. This presumption is not the case for the movement that can be deemed inevitable as an upshot of the surge of secularism for the past few decades – *the new atheism*.[7]

As it deliberately sets religion aside, even a 'forced' acknowledgment of religion's usefulness to some degree as mentioned is repulsive. The new atheism presents itself as the "voice of civilization in its polemic against barbarism." [8] Foremost among those who promulgate this purview are certain intellectuals from the fields where there are substantial debates on the relevance and repercussions of religious beliefs: neuroscience, cognitive science, and evolutionary biology, represented by Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, Richard Dawkins, and Christopher Hitchens.[9] Despite some minor differences in their stances, they are united in their crusade against the 'dangerousness' of religion, not only in its supposed tainted hold on the moral standards of the majority of the global population, but more so on the supposed irrationality of the beliefs in the face of scientific hypotheses, probabilities, and evidence arrived at by the human mind.

The New Atheism and the New Atheists

Daniel Dennett was right in affirming a statement that characterize, intuitively, the history of humanity in

relation to *that* which goes beyond the ordinary experience of nature: "Many people believe in God."[10] Regardless of how this proposition is attested to by the variety of beliefs of the religions that sprung forth across millennia, the fundamental assertion that gives meaning to it remains as a question that seeks an answer – whether God exists? It is possible, however, to separate the assent given to any kind of religious belief from the belief in the existence of God/s in that it can be assumed that there are views of what 'religion' is where religious beliefs are not contingent on the existence or non-existence of God/s.[11] To agree with this is to give credence to the fact that there are also religions that do not admit ties with a deity or deities, supernatural forces, or anything that assumes the role of 'otherness' in relation to the humanity of human beings.[12]

At this point, a historical exposition on the discourses of the aforementioned need not be given; suffice it to say that even until today, contemporary discussions on the preferability of one over the other options still proliferate, extending the discourse to include matters in particular fields such as science, psychology, and even politics. Atheism, in particular, seized the opportunity of the already secularized *zeitgeist* to enter public discourse and so gain more traction and following.[13] A close but brief analysis of the key arguments put forth by the new atheists in their principal works here follows, from which two neo-atheistic topoi will be culled out. Firstly, Harris' *The End of Faith* provides the most comprehensive account of the subject of *belief* central to this paper's epistemological thrust, defining it as a "*principles of action*...by which our understanding (and misunderstanding) of the world is represented and made available to guide our behavior."[14] Following the standard account of knowledge as a belief that is justified as true, Harris rightly asserts the propositional character of beliefs, and this means that their contents that are representational are either true or false.[15]

In this sense, to uphold the truth of certain beliefs is to affirm that such beliefs are "a consequence of the way the world is," and for Harris, it is evidence, empirical or logical, that confirms the correspondence of belief with reality.[16] On this premise, Harris builds an epistemological assault on religious belief, specifically on belief in God. It stems from how he conceptualizes 'faith' as "nothing more than a willingness to await the evidence," and so permitting "the unknown, the implausible, and the patently false to achieve primacy over the facts."[17] Harris builds up on this exposition to presumes the neo-atheistic view that "some of our most cherished beliefs about the world lead us to kill one another."[18] Without naïveté, the object of such description is obvious – to picture religious belief of any kind as something "antithetical to our survival."[19]

And so, the theme implied throughout is made clear – religious belief, contrary to its assumed role in promoting and making known the 'good,' is a leading cause of evil. To take up the task of rationalizing those things that were previously claimed by religions to be under their sole authority – purpose, morals, spirituality – essentially involves closing "the door to a certain style of irrationality" to usher in the paramount importance of our "better nature…reason, honesty, and love" and proclaim "the end of faith."[20] If Harris eagerly anticipates the downfall of religious enterprise as a whole upon the denigration of the beliefs in which it finds support, Hitchens' position seems to relinquish hope in such defeat on the part of religion in suggesting that "religious faith is…ineradicable" because of our nature as "still-evolving creatures."[21] Despite this apparent indelible stamp, however, Hitchens nonetheless declares religion to be 'poisonous,' menacing, and threatening to human survival:

> There still remain four irreducible objections to religious faith: that it wholly misrepresents the origins of man

> and the cosmos, that because of this original error it manages to combine the maximum of servility with the maximum of solipsism, that it is both the result and the cause of the dangerous sexual repression, and that it is ultimately grounded on wishful thinking.[22]

The first and fourth objections have everything to do with how he understands religious claims to knowledge and the justifications invoked for their believability, while the second and third can be seen as ethical points that are raised as reproaches against the authority adumbrated by religions when talking of morality. In our age when scientific discoveries and developments advance at an unprecedented rate, religion, and God/s ultimately, have no role to play in giving light to the nature of reality – "everything works without that assumption."[23] Hitchens recourses in the arguments laid down by other scientists, and announces that religion "has run out of justifications," for all the *raison d'être* previously attributed to it have been supplanted by science.[24] He shows the futility of the dynamics of faith when compared to the truth-attaining method of science: if faith, in the sense understood by religious believers is given only for those things that can be known yet transcend human reason, then the truth value of such object is diminished. Compared to the things that can be known by scientific demonstration, faith's claim to truth has lesser merit.

Even religion is aware of this, which is why it "corrupts faith and insults reason by offering evidence and pointing to confected 'proofs.'"[25] Now if faith's presumed prerogative in teaching 'truths' has been shown to be false, ethics still remains within religion's sphere – Hitchens shows how this is contrary to what religion gives. Religion requires its followers to act in accordance with "impossible tasks and rules" in view of obtaining an everlasting reward or avoiding eternal damnation.[26] These, along with religious doctrines on blood sacrifices and the

necessity of atonement, lead Hitchens to assume that religion is "not just amoral but positively immoral."[27] In addition, morally upright behaviors do not necessarily spring forth from religious beliefs and convictions for even non-believers can act according to the proper dictates of their consciences.

If this is the case, we can afford to remove them from the public sphere or even lose them, for they will then be "compensated by the newer and finer wonders that we have before us."[28] Parallel to Harris' treatment of 'belief,' Dennett dedicates a chapter scrutinizing the difference between 'belief' in the proposition of God and 'belief' in "belief in God," claiming that 'more than many' believe in such belief.[29] Similar to Hitchens' point that religion has relied on the propagation of 'impossible-to-believe-and-follow' doctrines for the incredulous to accept as true, Dennett asserts that the propositions religions usually implore are impenetrable so that they can assure their proliferation free from any kind of criticism. Dennett's approach, together with Dawkins whom he quotes in proposing religious belief's *meme* for adaptation, is thus anchored on an evolutionary understanding of religion.[30] To overcome this "belief in belief" – to "break the spell – is the underlying desire of Dennett's project, particularly regarding its foothold on the beliefs and morals of the people.

Foremost in Dennett's assessments is the rejoinder given for 'arguments from design' that require for the believers the existence of an intelligent mind capable of fashioning our complex reality. He resorts to Darwin's "strange inversion of reasoning" that elucidates the likelihood of intelligence such as ours emerging as "just one of the products of mindless, mechanistic processes."[31] The findings of researches on the history of evolution, among others where physics and astrochemistry are also included, show that such 'design' is but the outcome of

erratic yet efficient processes of the natural world. This brings believers to a crossroads where two exclusive alternatives are available: either "the richly detailed and ever-ramifying evolutionary story," or the "featureless mystery of God the creator of all creatures great and small," wherein the former gives a coherent and accurate explanation of this world's 'design,' confirmable by scientific discoveries, and non-reliant on the God assumed in the latter.[32] Dennett, however, admits the fact that "the Darwinian perspective doesn't prove that God…couldn't exist," but he does presume that rationally, in the face of all the explanations that we already have and will still arrive at in the near future, there is "no good reason to think God does exist."[33]

Dennett also gives an analysis of 'faith,' but careful that this strict reliance on science be interpreted as an adherence no different from what believers give for religion, he makes the distinction between religious faith and scientific faith where the latter is accepted only on the basis of "a tidal wave of exquisitely detailed positive results."[34] From the Darwinian purview, the primary reason why the former kind of faith maintains its relevance is because of its capacity to show "*frequency-dependent fitness*: it flourishes particularly in the company of rationalistic memes."[35] What is implied here is an epistemological assertion: without those memes that are accepted culturally because of their being rationally beneficial, religious faith would not have survived natural selection as something helpful to human survival. Returning to Dennett's emphasis on "belief in belief," it is not the content but rather the presumably beneficial act of believing that is favored by the evolutionary process. This implication extends to ethics when Dennett cites the human yearning to be 'good' as a driving factor of "belief in belief." He makes a case for faith by conceiving a persona – 'Professor Faith' – who represents 'faith' in the same light as the generally accepted kind of 'love' that is

'blind': "faith isn't like accepting a conclusion; it's like falling in love."[36] Paired with his supposition that "people in love often make it a point of honor to respond irrationally and violently" as being part "of the whole point of being in love," a demeaning parallelism between faith and love is thence created.[37]

This driving impetus, if not all the time, gives backbone to the moral absolutes from which zealotries, such as those which Harris and Hitchens have pointed out, arise. If what Hitchens says about religious faith being ineradicable is correct, then the appropriate treatment that would inhibit such undesirable results is to consider "the *substance* of any purported God-given moral edict… in the full light of reason, using all the evidence at our command."[38] The same reasoning as in the case of the world's being 'designed' holds here: if morals attain explicability even without God, then perhaps there is no need to bring up this hypothesis at all. This idea holds for Richard Dawkins too, together with all the arguments raised so far. An evolutionary biologist responsible for inspiring Dennett, among others, Dawkins' uncovering of "the God delusion" employs Darwinian reasoning as its principal tool in refuting the claims to prove God and the rationality of religious faith.

Disregarding his subjective condemnation of theistic tenets,[39] whether in polytheism or monotheism, his more salient contention is evident in his counter-argument for what he formulates as "the God hypothesis" – "*there exists a superhuman, supernatural intelligence who deliberately designed and created the universe and everything in it, including us*" – arguing that

> *Any creative intelligence, of sufficient complexity to design anything, comes into existence on as the end product of an extended process of gradual evolution.* Creative intelligences, being evolved, necessarily arrive

> late in the universe, and therefore cannot be responsible for designing it. God, in the sense defined, is a delusion.[40]

Dawkins is clear in emphasizing this as the central argument of his claim, and so it is fair to assume that all the points addressing the 'delusional' aspect of believing in God and professing religious faith boil down to this Darwinian critique.[41] His argument consists in refuting the 'argument for design' that rests on the assumption of 'irreducible complexity' and arguing for the probability of an unguided evolution over its being produced by intelligence. In the hindsight is Dawkins' agendum of promoting Darwinian natural selection as the consciousness-raiser of the changing *zeitgeist*, relegating to it the onus of explaining life itself, along with "the power of science to explain how organized complexity can emerge from simple beginnings without any deliberate guidance."[42] Detractors, according to Dawkins, are keen on making binary options in interpreting the complexity of nature – such an outcome is a product only of either 'chance' or 'design.' Chance is not the obvious solution in the face of the improbability of these complex ends coming about as a result of interactions among elements throughout eons: "the greater the statistical improbability, the less plausible is chance as a solution."[43]

Design is also problematic, even circuitous and question-begging. If 'design,' taken as complex and intricate, implies the necessary existence of a 'designer,' then a problem arises for Dawkins who puts it in this manner:

> A designer God cannot be used to explain organized complexity because any God capable of designing anything would have to be complex enough to demand the same kind of explanation in his own right. God presents an infinite regress from which he cannot help us to escape. Hence chance and design both fail as

> solutions to the problem of statistical improbability, because one of them is the problem, and the other one regresses to it.[44]

He then presents natural selection as the more probable explanation wherein complexity is attained, not by the spontaneous concatenations of elements that make up and define organisms and their features, but by an extremely slow process of "lucky random mutations… selectively, non-randomly, recorded in the genetic database of the species" throughout the history of life on earth.[45] The legitimate 'designer,' therefore, "in the case of living machinery…is unconscious natural selection, the blind watchmaker."[46] Reliance on the 'designability' of organisms is but a "superstitious notion," laboring under the "illusion of design and planning."[47]

Discussing the focal aspects of the Four Horsemen's neo-atheistic contentions, two themes particularly stand out in which their arguments can be condensed and classified: the requirement of evidence for beliefs and the integrity of the kind of morality upheld and 'monopolized' by religion. Regarding the first topos, four philosophical concepts immediately come to mind: verificationism, evidentialism, materialism and naturalism. While each can stand on its own as separate ontological or epistemological views, the new atheists employ them in a manner where they are mutually entailing and are implicative of one another. Firstly, the obligation posed by the new atheists to give meaning to any claim about the world through evidence is suggestive of the verification principle, whereas the emphasis is given, not to the analyticity of the claim but rather to its empirical verifiability.[48] If this is to be followed rigorously, what else can be subjected to empirical verification but only material objects, and so materialism is implored.

This latter, often juxtaposed with a dualistic understanding of the world where non- material states exist, is further classified into either 'eliminative materialism,' where there are "no mental events…and all that is happening 'in our heads' are neurochemical events in our brains," or 'reductive materialism,' where mental events are allowed but are seen as "identical with a physical event type in the brain."[49] In any case, indications of this view are strongly present in the Darwinian inclinations of the new atheists; even Harris, despite his apparent proclivity for the "sacred dimension to our existence," embraces such in his advocacy for a scientific explanation of 'spiritual experiences' "at the level of the brain." Finally, naturalism, understood in its broadest sense, is most likely for the new atheists if defined as an "understanding of our world that makes no reference to a God or gods."[50] Even beyond this general understanding of the term, the kinds of naturalism still tend to give credence to what the new atheists hold. Methodological naturalism is committed to "always look for natural causes (or explanations) of phenomena" and avoid 'supernatural causes' for the reason that "scientific investigation of the world…would be rendered impossible by the admission of supernatural interventions."[51]

Side by side this method are ontological (or metaphysical) naturalism – denying "the existence of anything other than space, time, and matter," and where properties such as quanta are "posited by physics"– and epistemological naturalism – where "the supernatural if its existence, or at least the possibility of such, is admitted lies beyond the scope of what we can know," thus rejecting religious revelation and the attempts to interpret it through theology.[52] Naturalism, in any of the given senses, is characteristic of the neo-atheistic contentions and is embracing of the aforementioned two. Secondly, the neo-atheistic criticism of the presumed religious foundations of morality rests chiefly on the 'evils' done in the name of

religion which empowers the confidence of its adherents to an irrational and unfounded understanding of reality. Even if we disregard temporarily, the traditional challenge to the existence of God discussed in theodicies, what authority does religion still profess to have if, according to the neo- atheistic narrative, it has fueled much of humanity's irrational wickedness throughout the centuries? Religion, therefore, is questionable, even on account of the morality that it professes to uphold. On another note, the previous exposition of naturalism accounts for what Dawkins and Dennett emphasize in terms of the explicability of morality through Darwinian reasoning. The second neo-atheistic topos, thus, presents religion once more in relation to 'evil.'

Epistemological Critique of the New Atheism

It has been established that recurring themes can be found in the narrations of the new atheists in their primary works, recognizing that 'faith' is the cynosure of religious assertions, particularly the existence of God, and so acknowledge it as indispensable for any religious enterprise.[53] This falls within the realm of epistemology, constituted by the factors of belief and the claim to a kind of certainty that, if translated to the languages of the other sciences, would be said to present a claim to knowledge. We are thus presented with two different kinds of 'beliefs' that claim the allegiance of knowledge, and the matter at hand is to discern whether or not both can be kept. In the first place, must this dichotomy be necessary; can't both be held as equal suggestions to knowledge? Perhaps it would be alright to affirm instead that "belief has a wider sense in which it includes knowledge and a narrower sense in which it is contrasted with knowledge," for in this case, the quarrel ceases – both kinds of 'belief' can do.[54]

Yet this is what new atheism would refuse, given its view of faith' as a kind of 'belief' that can be classified in

the narrower sense just described. For Harris, it is but unjustified belief; for Hitchens, an anti-rational misrepresentation of the cosmos; for Dennett, a mere belief on 'belief' that is 'impossible-to-believe-and-follow' and thriving only as an adaptive meme, and; for Dawkins, a delusion. The point is that even the supposedly fundamental distinction between 'belief' and knowledge, the former being the requisite, can be muddled at the outset by the ambiguity of the term 'belief' and its possible referents in the system of thought or tradition that employ it. The task of one who accepts the validity of faith is to defend its plausibility against the charge that its lack of evidence fails "to compel the assent of every reasonable person."[55] Thus, the first point of the critique dispels the idea that 'religious belief' or 'faith' is irrational and so unfit for knowledge – what Plantinga identifies to be a *de jure* objection.

The proposition that warrant grants positive epistemic status to a belief serves as the foundation to Plantinga's claim that "faith (at least in paradigmatic instances) *is* knowledge…of a certain special kind."[56] This ought to justify its previous characterization as involving certitude apart from evidence, for it rests on the fact that 'faith' is "a cognitive activity…a matter of *believing* something or other."[57] Faith's distinguishing factor from a 'belief' that one would usually back up with evidence becomes apparent, for more than being a mere belief, it takes upon itself the very task of ascertaining beliefs. Plantinga describes faith to be a

> belief-producing process or activity…a cognitive device, a means by which belief, and belief on a certain specific set of topics, is regularly produced in regular ways.[58]
> In terms of gaining warrant so as to constitute knowledge, it would be sufficient for a belief, made in an appropriate epistemic environment, to be produced by "cognitive faculties working properly…according to

the design plan that is *aimed at producing true beliefs*." [59]

Faith, therefore, as a process, fits in this category wherein warrant is obtainable in that "it resembles memory, perception, reason, sympathy, induction, and other more standard belief-producing processes."[60] It remains distinct from them, however, because while the aforementioned are naturally part of our epistemic constitution as humans, faith, being aimed at the supernatural, is rightfully a supernatural equipment.[61] This resounds Maritain's description of 'faith' as a "suprahuman and supernatural mode of knowledge…that makes use of formal means proportional to our natural mode of knowing."[62] It is faith that is responsible for mediating *metaphysica*, the summit of rational knowledge albeit being the least wisdom, and the suprarational degrees of knowledge – theological wisdom and mystical theology. Because of this role, faith can assume in its processes of adjudging beliefs pertaining to its proper objects, the function of judgment that identifies the objects of thought "to an existence that is either necessarily material, or merely ideal, or (at least possibly) immaterial."[63]

It is also because of this same role that it suffices to serve its duty to knowledge without relying heavily, or not at all, on the data provided by the lower sciences; it essentially exceeds them and employs them only ananoetically. Whereas belief necessarily implores the kinds of evidence that should appeal to rationality, faith operates within a different cognitive process (while still resembling the other processes available to the formation of 'beliefs') and so arrives at knowledge by means of another mode – warrant. With this, it safely satisfies the demands of rationality and, more so, of suprarationality. The first pillar of the neo-atheistic contention on the ground of belief, therefore, fails to exclude 'faith' from the

realm of rationality and the constitution of knowledge. The impasse, however, still needs to be traversed, and so attention must be given to the 'necessity' of the requirement for evidence, given that it is only to this epistemic paradigm that the new atheists give credence.

Along this line, the rationality of warranted faith which grants it positive epistemic status can be restated: while in some cases, it is possible to support it with evidence, it need not be so.[64] Before proceeding any further, the concept of 'evidence' must first be made clear in such a way that both camps are considering the same notion as the point of significant difference. Following the description of 'faith' as a suprarational cognitive process, it cannot be denied that more often than not, evidences (that is, those that can be obtained for us by *physica*, and in some cases that concern probability, *mathematica*) are not given to justify the claims that people have faith in. Still, other faith-related matters have been supported by so-called 'miracles' that presumably involve the supernatural suspension of the order of nature as a manifestation of divine power. It would help to distinguish between the types of religious propositions in view of the kind of evidence that would likely suffice for their justification, given that "different kinds of propositions require different kinds and quantities of evidence."[65]

First, we have historical statements like the one which would claim the historicity of the persona of Jesus of Nazareth or Mohammed, and as elucidated already in an earlier footnote, such propositions can be unproblematically supported by the usual evidences that even the new atheists should consider. For these evidences, actual studies in various fields, especially in archaeology and history, abound. The second type, the one that can be related to the epistemic validity of faith, deals with speculative propositions that require "corroboration or refutation of a kind different from that appropriate for

generalization or historic statements."[66] It is this kind that receives most neo-atheistic flak on account of the absence of evidence. For Hitchens, "faith…discredits itself by proving to be insufficient to satisfy the faithful because actual events are still required to impress the credulous such as miracles," so much so that he proceeds to sarcastically posit that "no God that was pleased by displays of unreasoning love would be worthy of worship."[67] For Harris, our natural inclination to genuine knowledge has always posed "a special problem for religion because every religion preaches the truth of propositions for which it has no evidence and for which no evidence is even conceivable," thus deeming what "cannot be supported by empirical evidence" as irrational.[68]

———For Dawkins, the religious are only keen in suggesting the *non-overlapping magisteria* (NOMA) of science and religion "because there is no evidence to favour the God Hypothesis along with other matters of faith," proceeding to claim that should "the smallest suggestion of any evidence in favour of religious belief be available, religious apologists would lose no time in throwing NOMA out of the window."[69] For Dennett, "the idea that we prove our faith by one extravagant act or another…permits us to draw a strong distinction between religious faith and the sort of faith that one can have in science," wherein compared to the former, the latter is backed by "a tidal wave of exquisitely detailed positive results."[70] He is also indignant of the possibility of something being rational *per se* when he dares the faith-sympathizer to put up a "defense of faith as a path to truth" that does not "appeal to the very dispensation that one is supposedly trying to justify."[71] It is now more apparent that "religious language is entirely different in character from scientific language, for while the latter is precise, the former is allegorical,"[72] or ananoetic in Maritain's parlance. Nevertheless, such is not

insurmountable because "the distinctions are not as absolute as had been asserted," given that in the theoretics of science that analyzes data and evidences, "analogies and models often play a role that…help us to imagine what is not directly observable"; the case of astrophysical theorizations, for instance.[73] And although "religious beliefs are not amenable to strict empirical testing…the scientific criteria of coherence, comprehensiveness, and fruitfulness have their parallels in religious thought."[74]

It comes to the point that to force the neo-atheistic stance – that is, to subject "religious ideas and imageries to the rigorous standard of scientific exactitude" – would be "wrong and unfair in a philosophical disquisition."[75] The central point, thus, is to assert that in utilizing the aforementioned parallelism in considering the 'evidence' that support religious beliefs and faith, it will be realized that only is *doxastic* or *impulsional* evidence is proper.[76] Although non-empirical, it satisfies the epistemic requirement demanded by the new atheists for the warranted faith demonstrable through Plantinga's A/C Model. Consider how we accept the information given by our memory and some *a priori* beliefs, like the general principles of thought examined by Bertrand Russell,[77] even without "detailed phenomenological basis and…highly articulated sensuous imagery that is involved in perception."[78] For example, my belief that I wrote the previous paragraph of this chapter yesterday is aptly intuited by my mind through the cognitive faculty of the memory, hence already justified; the same goes for my belief that 3+4 equals 7.

In both cases, sensuous imagery, empirical evidence, or propositional arguments would not be required for the beliefs to possess positive epistemic status.[79] For Plantinga, it is not the case that no more evidence can be provided for a belief wherein doxastic evidence is already involved, but that "you don't need anything else to go on."[80] When

it comes to faith, "the beliefs are none of the worse, epistemically speaking," and it is in this that they possess "much more firmness and stability than they could sensibly have if accepted on the basis of rational argument."[81] Faith is not only presented as possessing warrant enough for it to constitute knowledge but more so as being grounded in the kind of 'evidence' proper to its very nature. The same can be observed in Maritain's analysis, for in distinguishing the degrees of knowledge, it becomes apparent that there is a disparity in the ways through which rational knowledge and suprarational knowledge are obtained.

Dealing with the 'pragmatist tenet' of his time that "the knowledge of the existence of God requires *experimental verification*," one that is parallel to the evidentialist demand of the new atheists, Maritain implies a clear difference between "'experimental verification' of the proofs of the existence of God," and the "knowledge of God that tends to that higher knowledge in which divine reality is 'known as unknown.'"[82] The Scholastic tradition followed by Maritain emphasizes the need for demonstrating rationally what can be known by reason, but it also acknowledges its limits when it employs other means to achieve this demonstration. So just as how in Plantinga the nature of faith is considered when the kind of 'evidence' properly sought is doxastic, hence, experiential, so too, in Maritain, the objects attained to by faith are "more experienced than known, and which is peculiar to contemplative or 'mystical' wisdom (here we are far removed from Pragmatic verification)."[83] Moreover, Maritain's distinction between the sciences of observation and the sciences of explanation further shows the need to appropriate the 'evidence' apt for the realm of experimental sciences in the former, and the realm of essences as formal objects of knowledge in the latter. While the neo-atheistic demand is justifiable for the sciences of observation, "intuitive perception of the

essentially analogical content of the first concept…Being" is what properly suits the demand of faith as suprarational knowledge.[84]

This same is what Maritain means when he pertains to the philosophical proofs for God's existence, perhaps including those rational arguments adduced for the other objects of faith, as

> a decisive unfolding or development, on the level of 'scientific' or 'perfect' rational knowledge, of the natural prephilosophic knowledge implied in the primitive intuition of the act of being.[85]

So now, the critique raises a second point against the neo-atheistic presumption on faith's lack of what is deemed to be required evidence when through Plantinga and Maritain, doxastic evidence can be shown to fortify warrant, and certitude assured in "a prephilosophic level whereon it bathes in an intuitive experience."[86]

This critique further evaluates the more specific neo-atheistic requirement that ultimately gives ground to the new atheists' evidentialist attitude – naturalism. Naturalism *per se* presupposes that there are no supernatural causes or anything whatsoever that can affect the workings and affairs of the world. This confidence finds support in "proposing evolution as an absolutely naturalistic process."[87] This can be stated the other way around if "naturalism…leads to acceptance of evolutionary theory."[88] For Hitchens, he claims that "never was it attempted to show how one single piece of the natural world is explained better by 'design' than by evolutionary competition."[89] For Dennett, "the Darwinian perspective…as a rational challenge…reduces the believer's options to an absurdly minimalist base."[90]
For Dawkins, because evolution is "such a neat theory… that it explains how organized complexity can arise out of

primeval simplicity,"[91] it follows that "in any of its forms the God Hypothesis is unnecessary."[92] Thus, when it comes to our biological constitution, if naturalistic evolution is true, then everything becomes completely subject to natural selection and its sole tendency for survival. Given this, Plantinga's *evolutionary argument against naturalism* (EAAN) derives from the reliability of our cognitive faculties through which beliefs are produced. It is this very reliability that guarantees one's cognitive faculties and their conduciveness to truth, especially those that do not rely on empirical evidences and propositional arguments.[93] This aspect of our cognitive functioning, however, becomes questionable from a naturalist perspective.

If natural selection is directed only to survival and preservation of species, then "it seems doubtful that among their functions…would be the production of true beliefs,"[94] and if the truth of naturalist evolution is granted, "it is at best inscrutable how reliably truth-conducive our cognitive mechanisms may be."[95] The question that must be raised for the naturalists is this: "Can you then sensibly think that our cognitive faculties are for the most part reliable?"[96] The response that he considers can be summarily stated in this way:

> If the naturalistic theory of evolution only accounts for survival value as the only standard of cognition in such a way that our cognitive faculty only evolves because of it, then our cognition's capability of providing us with true beliefs is incredibly low, thus unreliable.[97]

This suggests that the neo-atheistic naturalist commitment becomes detrimental to its worldview and epistemological position. The evolutionary process also takes into account, for the most part, "the circumstances in which our ancestors found themselves," wherein

"mostly true or verisimilitudinous beliefs" are not at all guaranteed.[98]

The survival needs of the earlier stages of Homo sapiens in the evolutionary time scale, considering their relatively underdeveloped brain as well, further strengthens the idea that the cognition's proclivity for the formation of true beliefs is of no great importance evolution-wise: "natural selection is interested, not in truth, but in appropriate behavior."[99] Plantinga's conclusion that still fuels philosophic-scientific debates until now is that

> the conditional probability that our cognitive faculties are reliable, given naturalism together with the proposition that we have come to be by way of evolution, is low.[100]

More critical than this for the new atheists is the supposition that follows from this: "there can be no true belief, including belief in naturalism itself,"[101] whereas if naturalism is even granted to be true, "it is irrational to believe it for…it cannot accommodate belief."[102] Darwin himself did not fail to recognize this, and so too should the new atheists if they wish to utilize his brainchild to provide an epistemic denigration of the rationality of faith, for even their stance is found lacking by this Plantingan critique.[103]

The second half of the critique is directed toward the ever-pressing concern on various evils, emphasizing the role of religious beliefs in causing and perpetuating them. For Hitchens, "religion is – because it claims a special divine exemption for its practices and beliefs – not just amoral but immoral."[104] For Harris, "certain beliefs are intrinsically dangerous," referring to the immoral nature of religious beliefs and amplified by the assumption that this very nature "serves as an impediment to further

inquiry."[105] For Dennett, "it is commonly supposed that it is entirely exemplary to adopt the moral teaching of one's own religion without question," so much so that many people tend to "slack off on the sacrifice and good works and hide behind their unutterably sacred…mask of piety and moral depth."[106] For Dawkins, "we should blame religion itself...because as long as we accept the principle that religious faith must be respected simply because it is religious faith, it is hard to withhold respect from the faith of Osama bin Laden and the suicide bombers," thus declaratively stating that "faith is an evil precisely because it requires no justification and brooks no argument."[107]

Apparent in these statements is the causal connection between religious beliefs and the evil done for the sake of such beliefs. It can be inferred that the abrogation of such beliefs would lead to the disappearance of undesired evils performed under the guise of religiosity. While such appeals are ultimately undergirded by the existence of evil constituting "a difficulty for the theist that makes belief in God unreasonable or rationally unacceptable," they are directed more toward the rationality of holding such beliefs on account of the 'immoral' tendencies that ensue from them.[108] The response, therefore, is "*epistemological*," constituted by the answer to the question of whether "knowledge of the facts of evil provide a defeater for religious belief?"[109] The Plantingan resolution, as in the cases in the first topos, relies on the security that warrant provides for rationality.

As long as the conditions for it obtain, everything should go well for it and the belief warranted. Only a defeater, which, in turn, relies on a person's other beliefs, is a positive threat against warrant. The contention of the new atheists assumed as a defeater for religious beliefs can be framed in this way. Because of the irrational nature of religious beliefs, they are impotent in providing a reliable picture of the world, including whatever concerns

morality. It follows that evils stemming from religious beliefs are outcomes of an irrational understanding of the way things are. Religious beliefs, therefore, are inevitably accountable for the evils they justify.

In response, the first thing to be noted is that belief, including religious ones, "as an inherent feature of human nature, is liable to be abused or misused."[110] Maritain examines this when he distinguishes between the active role of the will in human actions and its *nihilation* in relation to reason. His position on our capacity to intuit 'being' through our very existence, in a prephilosophic manner, leads us to the insight that even in the Scholastic conception of 'evil' as 'nonbeing,' our rationality still plays a significant part. Since human morality depends on freedom, "for the free act is a part of the universe of freedom," and freedom is governed by rationality, the corruption of rationality depends on freedom's non-adherence to the rule of reason.[111] While freedom is still present in the commission of an act that goes against reason, its relationship with 'being,' with the way things are supposed to be, it becomes an "initiative of non-being wherein the will nihilates; it is an initiative of non-action."[112] Its implication to the neo-atheistic contention, although not apparent, easily dispels the connection that has been made between irrationality and immorality.

This does not imply, however, that religious beliefs are acceptably irrational, but only that the neo-atheistic contention makes an unnecessary connection between them. To rationally consider an act as moral or immoral is different from willing it (or nihilating from 'being,' from the option that takes things according to their true nature which is good), and even doing it. "The source of moral evil, then, is non-acting with respect to the consideration of what is morally right," that is, according to the rule of reason, and not the mere holding of a belief itself.[113] The irrational approximation of things or acts, then, does not

necessarily lead to the 'initiative of non-action' that deviates from what is supposedly rational – the neo-atheistic contention is a hasty epistemic generalization that the presumed 'irrational' nature of religious beliefs leads to 'evil' acts. New atheists can retort that a believer would not be led to this nihilation of the will if not for the false certainty that religious beliefs grant to those who act them out.

A general remark must be made: not all religions agree on the standards of morality in such a way that while there may be religions that take specific personas or scriptures as their sole moral authorities, Christian theism draws both from revelation and the human capacity for reason (i.e., the deliverances of the Natural Law). The follow-up retort, then, can be addressed in this way. Suppose a Christian **P** holds a belief **f**, "that in Old Testament, killing was justifiable under divine command," as well as belief **g**, "that moral imperatives are to be understood both in the light of reason and the hermeneutics of faith." It can be safely assumed that no Christian, with reason's proper function in a congenial environment, would aimlessly kill anyone, having the words of the bible as justification for such an act, understanding that the rationality of **f** takes **g** into account, and so realizing that the case for **f** involves a thorough understanding of the Old Testament milieu and would be immoral in present-day circumstances. Should **P** still proceed to kill on account of **f**, however, it is not **f** itself that should be faulted but **P** himself whose will has nihilated from the right rule of reason and the teachings of Christian morality. It becomes clear that while the neo-atheistic contention is sensible in view of the unjustifiable extremist terrors, it still is epistemically improper to sweepingly claim religious beliefs to be 'irrational,' alongside the incorrect establishing of a necessary connection between irrationality and immorality.

Therefore, the implicit neo-atheistic claim to the incongruence of religious beliefs and rationality and morality is of no serious avail to the epistemic validity of religious beliefs. In Plantinga's scheme, evil is not a defeater for religious belief, wherein "for any serious Christian with a little epistemology, the facts of evil, appalling as they are, offer no obstacle to warranted Christian belief."[114] While the root claim is more of a concern of theodicy, that the existence of God is rendered problematic by the presence of evil, it also presents the epistemic problem that if this is so, then the beliefs that Christians hold are logically inconsistent with one another. Plantinga's response is simple. Consider for instance Christian **P** who, along with beliefs **h**, "God is wholly good, powerful, and knowing," belief **j**, "evil exists abundantly in the world, and more so, evils that seem pointless (e.g., the suffering of the innocent), also holds that **k**, "that God has a reason beyond her ken."[115] As long as **h**, **j**, and **k** are held by proper functioning cognitive faculties, there is no reason to think that in favor of religious beliefs' inconsistency with one another, evil constitutes a defeater for them.

Contrarywise, the stability of a Christian's set of religious beliefs dispels the possibility of 'evil' as suggesting the idea that "there isn't any such person as God." Even **k** would be more rational for her to uphold, reminiscing the kind of epistemic limitation that Maritain suggests. Considering the neo-atheistic argument alongside the Maritainian and Plantingan solutions, the former fails to provide a convincing claim that leads to the conclusion that religious beliefs are irrational and immoral on account of such unreasonableness.

End notes

[1] Charles Taylor, A Secular Age (Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 29.

[2] Ibid., 31.

[3] Terry Eagleton, Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2009), xi.

[4] Christopher Hitchens, God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything (New York/Boston: Twelve of Grand Central Publishing, 2007), 56.

[5] Terry Eagleton, Culture and the Death of God (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2014), 2.

[6] Ibid., 24.

[7] "The term 'New Atheism' emerged between late summer and autumn of 2006. During this time,
the three individual authors Dawkins, Dennett, and Harris – though not yet Hitchens – were grouped together, and thereby identified as one phenomenon" (Thomas Zenk, "New Atheism," in The Oxford Handbook of Atheism, edited by Stephen Bullivant & Michael Ruse, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 217, Kindle).

[8] Ibid., 202.

[9] "The most prominent neo-atheistic authors, and their books, are: Richard Dawkins (The God Delusion, 2006), Daniel Dennett (Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon, 2006), Sam Harris (The End of Faith: Terror and the Future of Reason, 2004; Letter to a Christian Nation, 2006), and Christopher Hitchens (God Is Not Great: Religion Poisons Everything, 2007)" (Zenk, "New Atheism," 213). Their collective name as the 'Four Horsemen' – an allusion to the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse in the Book of Revelation – derives from the title of their released recording of a two-hour discussion when they gathered together on September 30, 2007 (Ibid., 219).

[10] Daniel C. Dennett, Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon, (London: Viking by Penguin Books, 2006), 222.

[11] Although he does not provide an analytical delineation between the two, Reza Aslan accounts for an adequate

movement of the mind, from merely believing in the existence of God/s to the realm of religion and religious beliefs: "You either choose to believe that there is something beyond the material realm – something real, something knowable – or you don't. If…you do, then you must ask yourself another question: Do you wish to experience this thing? Do you wish to commune with it? To know it? If so, then it may help to have a language with which to express what is fundamentally an inexpressible experience. That is where religion comes in" (God: A Human History, New York: Random House, 2017, xiv).

[12] In understanding 'religion' as "diagnosis (an account of what it takes the basic problem facing human beings to be) and a cure (a way of permanently and desirably solving that problem)," it must be pointed out that "religions differ insofar as their diagnoses and cures differ; some… are offered in terms of alienation from God and cures are presented that concern removing that alienation, while other diagnoses and cures make no reference to God" (Keith E. Yandell, Philosophy of Religion: A contemporary introduction, London/New York: Routledge, 1999, 17).

[13] Despite Harris' tentativeness on the possibility of coming "change in the Zeitgeist" (Cf. The End of Faith, 286), others have suggested that it has been ushered in already. Secularization in the twentieth century has had the greatest impact on the surge of the population who identify as 'atheists' (in the general sense). In the 1970s when visual media was beginning to gain ever-increasing prominence, it was already "affirming rather than instigating individuals' atheism." Aside from Carl Sagan, "the work of Bronowski on 'The Ascent of Man' acted in the same way, whilst later the books of the new atheists—Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris—are cited by many on both sides of the English-speaking Atlantic, usually cited in that order as a triumvirate" emphasis added as chief promulgators of atheism (Callum Brown, "The Twentieth Century," in The Oxford Handbook of

Atheism, edited by Stephen Bullivant & Michael Ruse, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 209, Kindle).

[14] Sam Harris, The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason (London: The Free Press by Simon and Schuster UK, 2006), 50.

[15] Notwithstanding contemporary epistemology's qualms with the traditional JTB (justified true belief) account of knowledge due to Edmund Gettier's challenge, it remains "widely accepted by many" (Cf. Joshua Jose Ocon, "Foundations and Justification," TALISIK: An Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy 8 (2021): 32).

[16] Harris, The End of Faith, 63. In this way, parallelism can be made between Harris' account and Thomas Aquinas' understanding of truth as adaequatio rei et intellectus – "the equation of thought and thing" (Summa Theologiae, I, q. 16, a. 1 in Anton C. Pegis (ed.) Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas, New York: The Modern Library, 1948, 170).

[17] Harris, The End of Faith, 66, 165. In a similar vein, he pronounces that "religious faith represents so uncompromising a misuse of the power of our minds that it forms…a vanishing point beyond which rational discourse proves impossible" (Ibid., 25).

[18] The end of faith.

[19] Ibid., 13.

[20] Ibid., 222-6.

[21] Hitchens, God is not Great, 12. Hitchens draws this assumption from Freud's observation in The Future of an Illusion that "religious impulse…is essentially ineradicable until or unless the human species can conquer its fear of death and its tendency to wish-thinking" (Ibid., 247).

[22] Ibid., 4 emphases added.

[23] Ibid., 107.

[24] Ibid., 282. This follows from his claim that "the sciences of textual criticism, archaeology, physics, and molecular biology have shown religious myths to be false and man-made and have also succeeded in evolving better and more enlightened explanations" (Ibid., 151).

[25] Ibid., 71.

[26] Ibid., 205.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid., 151.

[29] Cf. Dennett, Breaking the Spell, 222. Hitchens recognizes this distinction by pointing out that psychologically, religion might have made people 'better' in believing in 'something' rather than in 'nothing,' and so question whether "preachers and prophets also believe, or…just "believe in belief" (Hitchens, God is not Great, 165).

[30] Dennett agrees with Dawkins' position that throughout the history of evolution, not only biological but also cultural, there are replicators that transmit survival-favoring designs along their respective evolutionary ancestries: "When copies are made with variation, and some variations are in some tiny way 'better' (just better enough so that more copies of them get made in the next batch), this will lead inexorably to the ratcheting process of design improvement Darwin called evolution by natural selection." Dawkins referred to such replicators as "memes" (Dennett, Breaking the Spell, 78).

[31] Daniel C. Dennett, "Atheism and Evolution," in Martin, M. (ed.) The Cambridge Companion to Atheism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 136.

[32] Ibid., 138.

[33] Ibid., 147.

[34] Dennett, Breaking the Spell, 233.

[35] Ibid., 231.

[36] Ibid., 255.

[37] Ibid., 254-5.

[38] Ibid., 298.

[39] For instance, this is how Dawkins depicts and describes the Jewish God: "The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully" (The God Delusion, Black Swan by Transworld Publishers, 2007, 51).

[40] Ibid., 52.

[41] In the fourth chapter of his work where he argues "why there almost certainly is no God," he creates multiple

digressions where he cites relevant scientific hypotheses from the fields of physics and astrophysics, concluding them with six summarizing points and a conditional premise: "This chapter has contained the central argument of my book and if the argument of this chapter is accepted, the factual premise of religion - the God Hypothesis - is untenable. God almost certainly does not exist. This is the main conclusion of the book so far" (Ibid., 187, 189).

[42] Ibid., 141.

[43] Ibid., 145.

[44] Ibid., 136, 147.

[45] Richard Dawkins, Climbing Mount Improbable (New York/ London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 90.

[46] Richard Dawkins, The Blind Watchmaker: Why the evidence of evolution reveals a universe without design (London: Norton Press, 1986), 37.

[47] Ibid., 21, 43.

[48] It is usually taken that David Hume's distinction between 'relations of ideas' and 'matter of fact' serves as the inspiration for the verificationism of logical positivists like A.J. Ayer and Rudolf Carnap (Cf. Paul Russell, "Hume's Legacy and the Idea of British Empiricism," in A. Bailey & D. O'Brien (eds.) The Continuum Companion to Hume (London/New York: Continuum, 2012), 381). And so for Hume, "the utmost effort of human reason is to reduce the principles, productive of natural phenomena, to a greater simplicity, and to resolve the many particular effects into a few general causes, by means of reasoning from analogy, experience, and observation. As for ultimate principles these…are totally shut up from human curiosity and enquiry" (An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1977, 19).

[49] Evan Fales, "Naturalism and Physicalism," in Martin, M. (ed.) The Cambridge Companion to Atheism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 118.

[50] Michael Ruse, "Naturalism and the Scientific Method," in Bullivant, S. & Ruse, M. (eds.) The Oxford Handbook of Atheism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 321, Kindle.

[51] Fales, "Naturalism and Physicalism," 124.

[52] Ibid., 125-7.

[53] Hitchens himself affirms this when he considers he says that "the argument with faith is the foundation and origin of all arguments, because it is the beginning – but not the end – of all arguments about philosophy, science, history, and human nature. It is also the beginning – but by no means the end – of all disputes about the good life and the just city" (God is not Great, 12). His emphases on 'faith' as 'not-being- the-end' hint at its non-finality contra the religious assertion of its certainty. At this point and in order to avoid confusion, it should be noted that following the interchanging references of the new atheists to 'faith' and 'religious belief,' as the preceding chapters may have shown, the discussion goes along with the same usage of the terminologies as well. It may be raised that while 'faith' may be exclusive to things that are said to be hinging totally on spiritual truths (e.g., the Immaculate Conception of Mary or the forgiveness of sins through the Sacrament of Reconciliation), 'religious belief' may admit such matters of 'faith' with the admixture of claims that may be verified or affirmed by evidences (e.g., the historicity of the Resurrection or the authenticity of Scriptures).

[54] Walter Kaufmann, Critique of Religion and Philosophy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 112.

[55] Ibid., 113.

[56] Alvin Plantinga, Warranted Christian Belief (New York/ Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 256.

[57] Ibid., 247.

[58] Ibid., 256.

[59] Alvin Plantinga, Warrant and Proper Function (New York/ Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 16.

[60] Alvin Plantinga, Knowledge and Christian Belief (Michigan/ Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2015), 60. At this point, it must be noted that both Plantinga and Maritain believe that 'faith' is still beyond these functions, although these are available to it, given that 'faith,' insofar as it concerns the divine, "has as its cause God, moving us inwardly through grace" (Summa Theologiae II-II, q.6, a.1, resp.), and so is "a work – the

main work, according to Calvin – of the Holy Spirit" (Plantinga, Warranted Christian Belief, 249). In short, faith for both of them remains a divine activity shared by our human nature through grace but for current purposes, these rather theological themes shall be set aside for the meantime.

[61] Concordant with this is Josef Pieper's view that "when we speak of 'faith' and 'knowledge,' despite the literal meaning of these words we are not speaking of two different acts or approaches of the human mind, but of two realms of reality which we touch upon when we believe or know" (Josef Pieper, Scholasticism: Personalities and Problems of Medieval Philosophy, New York: Pantheon Books, 1960, 118).

[62] Jacques Maritain, The Degrees of Knowledge, trans. Gerald Phelan, The Collected Works of Jacques Maritain (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 276.

[63] Jacques Maritain, Existence and the Existent, in J.C. Swindall & H.J. Gensler (eds.) The Sheed & Ward Anthology of Catholic Philosophy (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 334

[64] In a way, this restates what some critics of religion have already said concerning the standard response of the proponents of faith when confronted on account of evidence; they intimate 'faith' to be defined as "belief which rests on no evidence whatsoever" (Kaufmann, Critique of Religion and Philosophy, 114). However, even when some sort of 'evidence' is proposed in accordance with their standards (e.g., miracles that can be explained by the physical sciences), they still deem it to be "insufficient to compel assent by every reasonable person" (Ibid.). Plantinga states contrarily: "I've heard it argued that if I have no evidence for the existence of God, then if I accept that proposition, my belief will be groundless, or gratuitous, or arbitrary. I think this is an error," as shall be demonstrated onwards (Alvin Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?", Noûs 15, 1 (1981): 44).

[65] Ibid., 120.

[66] Ibid., 124. This is why Kaufmann rightly realizes that when "confronted by a religious statement, we must determine in which category it is…to tell us what kind of evidence is relevant for deciding whether the proposition is true, probably true, probably false, or certainly false" (Ibid.).

[67] Hitchens, God is not Great, 140, 298.

[68] Harris, The End of Faith, 23.

[69] Dawkins, The God Delusion, 83.

[70] It must be said here that Dennett uses the term 'faith,' not in the more technical philosophical- theological language, but in its usual sense often synonymous with 'trust' (Dennett, Breaking the Spell, 233).

[71] Daniel Dennett, Darwin's Dangerous Idea (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1995), 154.

[72] Raymun J. Festin, Beliefs and Certitudes (Manila: Logos Publications, 2008), 75.

[73] Ian G. Barbour, Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 93.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Festin, Beliefs and Certitudes, 75. Also, "if [natural science] is declared to be the absolute and unsurpassable form of human thought, then the basis of science itself becomes contradictory; for it is both proclaiming and denying the power of reason. But above all, a self-limiting reason of that kind is an amputated reason" (Joseph Ratzinger, Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions, trans. H. Taylor, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004, 157-8).

[76] Speaking of the warrant-giving property of our cognitive faculties, especially the memory, Plantinga that impulsional evidence does provide for the evidentialist need for such albeit still insufficient for warrant without the aspect of proper function. This holds, all the same, for perception, testimony, and even faith – "Having this evidence…or having this evidence and forming belief on the basis of it, is not sufficient for warrant; proper function is also required. And given proper function, we also have evidence: impulsional evidence, to be sure, but also whatever sort is required, in the situation at hand, by the design plan; and that will be the evidence that

confers warrant" (Plantinga, Warrant and Proper Function, 193).

[77] Three of these general principles, "for no very good reason," have been referred to as the "Laws of Thought": i) law of identity: "Whatever is, is;" ii) law of contradiction: "Nothing can both be and not be," and; iii) law of excluded middle: "Everything must either be or not be." For Russell, each principle "is constantly used in our reasoning, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, insofar as their truth is evident to us, and we employ them in constructing demonstrations; but they themselves…are incapable of demonstration" (Bertrand Russell, The Problems of Philosophy, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, 64).

[78] Plantinga, Warranted Christian Belief, 264.

[79] In support of this, it can moreover be said that "the reality of religion is not an intellectual issue because it does not stem from the rational part of human nature [which should not imply its irrationality.] It is a phenomenon which is intuitive in character" (Festin, Beliefs and Certitudes, 82).

[80] Plantinga, Warranted Christian Belief, 264. Moreover, such beliefs are considerably 'basic' in the non-necessity of providing more beliefs in support of them, but this does not imply, as already stated, that no further support can be given – "it would be a mistake to describe them as groundless" (Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?", 44).

[81] Plantinga, Warranted Christian Belief, 264.

[82] Jacques Maritain, The Range of Reason (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), 32.

[83] Ibid., 32-3.

[84] Jacques Maritain, Approaches to God, trans. Peter O'Reilly (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 19.

[85] Ibid., 31.

[86] Ibid., 69.

[87] Joshua Jose Ocon, "Concord or Conflict? A Teilhardian-Plantingan Analysis of the Relationship between Christianity and Evolution," PHAVISMINDA Journal 20, (2020): 146. This point of view, at its base, asks

"whether the theory of evolution can be presented as a universal theory concerning all reality, beyond which further questions about the origin and the nature of things are no longer admissible and indeed no longer necessary" (Ratzinger, Truth and Tolerance, 180).

[88] Ernest Sosa, "Natural Theology and Naturalist Atheology: Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism," in D.P. Baker (ed.) Alvin Plantinga (Contemporary Philosophy in Focus) (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 100.

[89] Hitchens, God is not Great, 86.

[90] Dennett, "Atheism and Evolution," 147.

[91] Dawkins, The Blind Watchmaker, 316.

[92] Dawkins, The God Delusion, 68.

[93] Also included in this list of faculties, with 'faith' being one of them, are those which Thomas Reid identified: "sympathy, which enables us to know the thoughts and feelings of other people, introspection (reflection), whereby we know about our own mental life, testimony whereby we can learn from others, and induction, whereby we can learn from experience" (Alvin Plantinga, Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, 312).

[94] Alvin Plantinga, "Is Naturalism Irrational?", in Sennett, J. The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader (Michigan/Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 90. Patricia Churchland further expounds on this point: "Boiled down to essentials, a nervous system enables the organism to succeed in the four F's: feeding, fleeing, fighting and reproducing. The principal 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. Truth, whatever that is, definitely takes the hindmost" (Journal of Philosophy 84 (October 1987): 548, cited by Plantinga in ibid.).

[95] Sosa, "Natural Theology and Naturalist Atheology," 100.

[96] Plantinga, Where the Conflict Really Lies, 313.

[97] Ocon, "Concord or Conflict?", 150.

[98] Plantinga, Where the Conflict Really Lies, 316. Parallel to this is Plantinga's requirement of a 'congenial environment' for the formation of beliefs in the obtainment of 'warrant.'

[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid., 317. Plantinga further explicates this contention employing probabilistic statistics and analytic philosophy (abbreviating the statement as "P(R/N&E) is low," where R stands for the reliability of faculties, N for naturalism, and E for the proposition that our faculties were produced by evolution), but for current purposes, these need not be expounded here.

[101] Ocon, "Concord or Conflict?", 150.

[102] Alvin Plantinga, "Against Naturalism," in Alvin Plantinga and Michael Tooley, Knowledge of God (MA/Oxford/Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 19. Moreover, while the detractors of religious beliefs, especially the new atheists, cannot accuse them of being self-defeating (in fact, religious beliefs are almost always self-assuring and ascertaining), "Plantinga, by contrast, does take his reasoning to convict naturalism of self-defeat, since he does draw his premises from naturalism itself" (Sosa, "Natural Theology and Naturalist Atheology," 101). Plantinga also acknowledges that C.S. Lewis already advanced a critique of naturalism similar to his: "Naturalism, even if it is not purely materialistic, seems to me to involve the same difficulty, though in a somewhat less obvious form. It discredits our processes of reasoning or at least reduces their credit to such a humble level that it can no longer support Naturalism itself" (C.S. Lewis, Miracles: A Preliminary Study, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009, 17, Adobe Digital Edition). See also how this concern can be construed in another way: "The question is whether reason, or rationality, stands at the beginning of all things and is grounded in the basis of all things or not. The question is whether reality originated on the basis of chance and necessity…and, thus, from what is irrational" (Ratzinger, Truth and Tolerance, 181).

[103] Plantinga cites Darwin: "With me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man's mind, which has been developed from the mind of the 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?" (Letter to William Graham, Down, July 3rd, 1881, in The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin Including an Autobiographical Chapter, Darwin, F. (ed.) (London: John Murray, Albermarle Street, 1887), vol. 1, 315–16, cited by Plantinga, Where The Conflict Really Lies, 316).

[104] Hitchens, God is not Great, 52.

[105] Harris, *The End of Faith*, 44, 45-6.

[106] Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 295, 305-6.

[107] Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 347.

[108] Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 7.

[109] Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 460.

[110] Festin, *Beliefs and Certitudes*, 89.

[111] Jacques Maritain, *God and the Permission of Evil, trans. J. Evans* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1966), 10. "For Maritain, to sin [i.e., to do what is contrary to what is held to be moral] is to act while the will is not adhering to the rule of reason of divine law" (David Higgins, "Evil in Maritain and Lonergan: The Emerging Possibility of a Synthesis," in J. F.X. Knasas (ed.) Jacques Maritain: The Man and His Metaphysics Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 237).

[112] Jacques Maritain, St. Thomas and the Problem of Evil (The Aquinas Lecture, 1942) (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1942), 33.

[113] John C. Cahalan, "Making Something Out of Nihilation," in J.F.X. Knasas (ed.) Jacques Maritain: The Man and His Metaphysics (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 193.

[114] Plantinga, Warranted Christian Belief, 460.

[115] Plantinga, Knowledge and Christian Belief, 106.

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