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### CATHOLICS VS. CALVINISTS ON RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

Alvin Plantinga has defended the position that religious beliefs can be properly basic, meaning that religious beliefs can be rational or reasonable even if they are not inferred from other beliefs that serve as their evidence.<sup>1</sup> Plantinga traces his position to Calvin, who held that there is a divine sense that makes us aware of God immediately rather than through the mediation of some inference, as would be the case if belief were grounded in an argument from natural theology. On Calvin's and Plantinga's model, religious beliefs are more like perceptual beliefs grounded in sensory experience than like geometrical theorems inferred from more basic axioms. More recently, Plantinga has developed a general theory of knowledge that supports his position on religious beliefs in particular. Plantinga argues that, in general, knowledge is belief that is caused by properly functioning cognitive faculties.<sup>2</sup> In particular, knowledge of God is the result of a properly functioning *sensus divinitatis*.

Linda Zagzebski has responded critically, tracing her views on religious belief and knowledge to the Catholic tradition.<sup>3</sup> Out of this tradition comes her virtue theory of knowledge, which holds that knowledge is grounded in intellectual virtue. Zagzebski claims that her Catholic inspired epistemology is person-based, internalist and social, whereas Plantinga's Reformed position is belief-based, externalist and individualistic. Although Zagzebski herself is not explicit on this matter, someone might think that appropriate corrections to Plantinga's position on knowledge in general would have consequences for his views on religious knowledge as well. One might conclude that religious belief could not be properly basic, and that natural theology would be required for justified belief and for knowledge in the religious realm.<sup>4</sup>

Of course Plantinga is not the only Calvinist practicing epistemology, and Zagzebski is not the only Catholic. But various authors from each camp have endorsed important theses of our two main characters. Thus George Mavrodes and Nicholas Wolterstorff share important theses with Plantinga in their own essays.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, various contributors to Zagzebski's anthology criticize the Reformed views on proper basicity and on the role of natural theology, and do so from an explicitly Catholic perspective.<sup>6</sup>

In this paper I will take it for granted that Zagzebski's position articulates a broadly Catholic perspective, and that Plantinga's position accurately represents a broadly Calvinist one. But I will argue that so construed, the Catholic and the Calvinist are much closer than Zagzebski implies: both views are person-based in an important sense of that term; both are internalist on Zagzebski's usage and externalist on the standard usage; and Plantinga's position is consistent with the social elements that Zagzebski stresses in her view.

In the second part of the paper I will identify what I think is the real issue between Zagzebski and Plantinga. Namely, Zagzebski thinks that knowledge requires epistemic responsibility, in the sense that instances of knowledge must be appropriately praiseworthy. Plantinga thinks that no such condition is required for knowledge or warranted belief. I will argue that on this issue Zagzebski is right, and that her virtue approach gives us resources for seeing why.

Finally, I will look at the consequences for religious knowledge. Here I will argue that the consequences are minimal. Even if knowledge requires responsibility, Plantinga can still make a good case that religious belief is properly basic. And even if religious belief is properly basic, natural theology can still have an important role in the justification of religious belief.

### **1. Zagzebski and Plantinga on knowledge in general.**

Plantinga thinks that knowledge has a normative dimension, and that it is the task of the epistemologist to investigate what kind of normative property converts mere true belief into

knowledge. But Plantinga dislikes terms such as "justified" and "reasonable" to denote this property, since these terms have connotations that might obscure substantive points at issue. Thus "justified" has a deontological ring to it, and therefore implies that knowledge has to do with doing one's epistemic duty. To say that knowledge must be "reasonable" suggests that knowledge must be based on good reasons, or that one must have reasoned to it. If philosophers want to investigate the kind of normativity involved in knowledge, it is best to avoid these loaded terms so as not to stack the deck in favor a particular view. Plantinga's preferred terms for the job are "positive epistemic status" and "warrant." His substantive position is that what gives a belief positive epistemic status, and therefore converts it into knowledge, is that it is the result of one's cognitive faculties functioning properly. Furthermore, the degree of positive status that such a belief enjoys is in proportion to the strength with which the belief is held.

In a nutshell, a belief B has positive epistemic status for S if and only if that belief is produced in S by his epistemic faculties working properly; and B has more positive epistemic status than B\* for S iff B has positive epistemic status for S and either B\* does not or else S is more strongly inclined to believe B than B\*.<sup>7</sup>

Plantinga refines this basic position in several ways. But first we should clarify one issue so as to avoid unnecessary confusion. Many philosophers shudder at the suggestion that knowledge involves belief, thinking that this is conceptually impossible. But I think that the disagreement here is only terminological. My dictionary gives several senses of the word "belief." The first definition given is "an acceptance of something as true." The last is "an opinion; expectation; judgement; as, my *belief* is that he'll come."<sup>8</sup> In this last sense it is clear that belief is incompatible with knowledge; we oppose knowledge to opinion, and distinguish it from mere expectation. But it is also clear that in the first sense belief is not incompatible with knowledge, but is rather a necessary condition of it. I cannot know that something is true unless I accept that it is true, and so knowledge involves belief in this sense. The definition of belief as acceptance of something as true corresponds to Augustine's and Aquinas' notion of assent. For these philosophers both belief and knowledge involve assent,

although in different ways. But if we define belief as assent, then both will agree that knowledge involves belief. This is the sense of belief intended by Plantinga, and I will follow his usage below.

Now for Plantinga's refinements. First, a faculty functions properly to the extent that it functions as it was designed to function. From a theistic point of view such design will be by God, but non-theists can also make use of the concept of design. Even non-theists think that, in some sense, a bird's wings are designed for flying. Second, what is important for the evaluation of cognitive faculties is their functioning so as to produce true belief and avoid false belief. Even if our cognitive faculties are to some extent designed for purposes other than truth, that part of the design plan is not at issue in epistemic evaluation. Third, whether a faculty functions properly partly depends on the appropriateness of the environment. And finally, a cognitive faculty might be functioning properly even if does not function infallibly. In other words, on Plantinga's view a belief might have positive epistemic status even if it is false, since the belief might be produced by a cognitive faculty that is generally reliable although the faculty has given rise to a false belief in the particular case. Of course such a belief would not constitute knowledge, since knowledge is *true* belief (assent) with positive epistemic status. These refinements are captured in the following passage.

. . . a belief has warrant for me only if (1) it has been produced in me by cognitive faculties that are working properly (functioning as they ought to, subject to no cognitive dysfunction) in a cognitive environment that is appropriate for my kinds of cognitive faculties, (2) the segment of the design plan governing the production of that belief is aimed at the production of true beliefs, and (3) there is a high statistical probability that a belief produced under those conditions will be true. Under those conditions, furthermore, the degree of warrant is an increasing function of degree of belief.<sup>9</sup>

Zagzebski's position on knowledge is that "knowledge is true belief grounded in epistemic virtue."<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, "we may think of epistemic virtue, like moral virtue, as a habit, enough within our voluntary control to be subject to praise and blame, and which is admirable. . . ." And

"epistemic virtues are habitual processes that reliably lead to the formation of true beliefs and that are consciously motivated by a love of the truth."<sup>11</sup>

From these passages we see that, unlike Plantinga, Zagzebski requires that knowledge be epistemically praiseworthy. Zagzebski also departs from Plantinga by requiring a motivational component, perhaps because she thinks that an attitude of assent which is not motivated by a love of truth would not be appropriately praiseworthy. But in common with Plantinga, Zagzebski places a reliability requirement on knowledge. Whereas Plantinga requires that knowledge be produced by cognitive faculties that give rise to true belief with high statistical probability, Zagzebski requires that knowledge be grounded in virtues that reliably lead to the formation of true beliefs.

The above will serve as sufficient introductions to the two positions on knowledge and positive epistemic status. I now want to turn to Zagzebski's claims that her position is person-based, internalist and social, whereas Plantinga's is belief-based, externalist and individualistic.

#### **a. Belief-based theories vs. person- or virtue-based theories.**

Zagzebski claims that her virtue theory is person-based or virtue-based, while Plantinga's Reformed view is belief-based. But what does Zagzebski mean by "person-based" and "belief-based"? I find that her usage is in fact ambiguous. In one sense, a theory of knowledge is belief-based if it focuses on the evaluative properties of beliefs, or particular instances of assent. Such a theory tries to define or give criteria for such properties of belief as justifiedness, reasonableness or positive epistemic status. Such a theory "searches for the properties of belief that convert it into knowledge."<sup>12</sup>

Contemporary discussions of justification and knowledge almost always focus on particular instances of beliefs, just as most modern ethical theory until recently has focused on the morality of particular acts. The epistemologist assumes that the normative concepts of interest to their inquiry are properties of beliefs. . . . Contemporary epistemology, then, is belief-based. . .<sup>13</sup>

In the second sense a theory is belief-based just in case it makes the evaluative properties of belief conceptually prior to the evaluative properties of believers. Opposing this is the person-based or virtue-based view, or that which makes the evaluative properties of persons conceptually prior to the evaluative properties of beliefs.

The mark of a virtue theory of morality is that the primary object of evaluation is persons rather than acts. To describe a good person is to describe that person's virtues, and these theories maintain that a virtue is not reducible to the performance of acts independently identified as right nor to a disposition to perform such acts.<sup>14</sup>

Epistemic virtue. . . is a quality of persons, and I believe it cannot be reduced to a disposition to have justified beliefs any more than moral virtue can be reduced to a disposition to perform right acts. The concept of justification is derivative from the concept of epistemic virtue. . . ."<sup>15</sup>

Accordingly we can distinguish two senses of "belief-based," each with a corresponding sense of "person-based."

BB1. Belief-based = focused on evaluative properties of belief .

PB1. Person-based = focused on the evaluative properties of persons (believers).

BB2. Belief-based = the evaluative properties of beliefs are conceptually prior to evaluative properties of persons (believers).

PB2. Person-based = the evaluative properties of persons are conceptually prior to evaluative properties of beliefs.

But once we have noted this ambiguity it is apparent that both Zagzebski's theory and Plantinga's are belief-based in the first sense and person-based in the second sense. First, both Zagzebski and Plantinga are interested in defining positive epistemic status, or that property *of belief* which turns true belief into knowledge. Likewise, Zagzebski is concerned to know what makes a belief epistemically praiseworthy, and so again is concerned with evaluative properties attaching to beliefs, or instances of assent. But second, both Zagzebski and Plantinga defend views that are person-based in the sense of PB2. Zagzebski defines the positive epistemic status of beliefs in terms

of intellectual virtue, and intellectual virtues are dispositional properties of persons. Plantinga defines positive epistemic status in terms of the proper functioning of cognitive faculties, but cognitive faculties are likewise dispositional properties of persons. Put another way, to say that a cognitive faculty is functioning properly is to say that the person is, and so Plantinga makes the evaluative properties of persons conceptually prior to the evaluative properties of beliefs.

To take the present point a bit further, there is an important way of distinguishing epistemic theories so that Zagzebski and Plantinga end up in the same camp. Both can be seen as defending virtue theories of knowledge, where a virtue theory holds that i) the evaluative properties of persons are conceptually prior to the evaluative properties of beliefs, and ii) the relevant properties of persons are stable and successful dispositions for arriving at truth and avoiding error. This is what Ernest Sosa means by a virtue approach to knowledge, or virtue epistemology.<sup>16</sup>

For example, it may be one's faculty of sight operating in good light that generates one's belief in the whiteness and roundness of a facing snowball. Is possession of such a faculty a "virtue"? Not in the narrow Aristotelian sense, of course, since it is no disposition to make deliberate choices. But there is a broader sense of "virtue," still Greek, in which anything with a function-- natural or artificial-- does have virtues. The eye does, after all, have its virtues, and so does a knife. And if we include grasping the truth about one's environment among the proper ends of a human being, then the faculty of sight would seem in a broad sense a virtue in human beings; and if grasping the truth is an intellectual matter then that virtue is also in a straightforward sense an intellectual virtue.<sup>17</sup>

On this understanding both Zagzebski and Plantinga defend virtue theories, since both define positive epistemic status in terms of the stable and reliable dispositions of persons. Where the two differ is that they give different accounts of the intellectual virtues. Zagzebski gives a broadly Aristotelian account, where virtues are considered to have both a voluntaristic and a motivational component. I will call her account "neo-Aristotelian," since on her view the intellectual as well as the moral virtues have a voluntaristic and motivational nature. Plantinga's cognitive faculties are also virtues in the sense of being stable and successful dispositions of believers, but his account emphasizes neither a voluntaristic nor a motivational component. Notice that in the passage quoted

Sosa agrees with Plantinga on this point. Zagzebski can be seen as challenging the Sosa-Plantinga account of our intellectual virtues, claiming that they are closer to the moral virtues than Sosa and Plantinga (or even Aristotle) allow.<sup>18</sup>

Another way to see the affinities between Zagzebski and Plantinga is by comparing their common approach with alternatives. As in ethics, virtue theories in epistemology compete with purely consequentialist and purely deontological approaches. Thus until recently almost all of contemporary epistemology took a deontological approach, making justified belief depend on doing one's epistemic duty, or perhaps following the right epistemic norms. But certain examples show that this kind of normativity will not turn true belief into knowledge. Consider the case of a meticulously dutiful believer who is also the victim of a Cartesian deceiver. Suppose that as a result of her predicament her beliefs about the world are massively false, but that she occasionally forms a true belief purely by accident. Such a person has true belief that is justified in the deontological sense, and yet still does not have knowledge. Virtue theory, of course, requires more than deontological justification, and therefore can avoid this particular kind of problem.

An example of a purely consequentialist theory is process reliabilism, or the theory that a belief is justified just in case it is formed by a reliable process. But process theories are hampered by counter-examples involving strange and fleeting reliable processes. Thus consider a person who has been given a clean bill of health but who suffers from a brain tumor, one effect of which is to reliably cause the belief that he has a brain tumor. By hypothesis, the belief in question is true and has been formed by a reliable process, and yet it is obvious that the belief fails to qualify as knowledge. The problem, according to virtue theory, is that not all reliable processes are epistemically significant. But if we stipulate that knowledge must arise from the stable dispositions (or virtues) of the believer, then the counter-example is avoided.



Notice that both of the problems above are avoided by making the move that Zagzebski and Plantinga share in common. Namely, both understand the epistemic status of belief in terms of the stable and reliable dispositions of believers. The reliability does the work in the first case, the stability does the work in the second.

### **b. Externalism vs. Internalism.**

Consider two characterizations of internalism, the first by Zagzebski and the second by Plantinga.

The basic idea is that a theory is internalist as long as the criteria for justification or warrant are accessible to the consciousness of the believer.<sup>19</sup>

The basic thrust of internalism. . . is that the properties that confer warrant upon a belief are properties to which the believer has some sort of special epistemic access.<sup>20</sup>

It will be noticed that both characterizations are ambiguous regarding the quantification that is intended. Thus a strong version of the claim is that *all* the criteria relevant for justification must be accessible to the believer, whereas a weaker version would require only that *some* are accessible. Accordingly we get two versions of internalism and two corresponding versions of externalism, where externalism is just the denial of internalism.

I1. Internalism = all of the criteria for justification or warrant are accessible to the consciousness of the believer.

E1. Externalism = some of the criteria for justification or warrant are not accessible to the consciousness of the believer.

I2. Internalism = some of the criteria for justification or warrant are accessible to the consciousness of the believer.

E2. Externalism = None of the criteria for justification or warrant are accessible to the consciousness of the believer.

It should be noted that I1 and E1 capture the standard uses of the terms. These are the meanings intended by Goldman, Bonjour and Alston in the papers that introduced the terminology into contemporary epistemology.<sup>21</sup> They are also the meanings that Plantinga has in mind in the

passage above. Zagzebski, however, tends to use the terms in the sense of I2 and E2. Thus she characterizes externalism as holding that none of the criteria for justification need be accessible to the believer. "On externalist theories the believer will often have no awareness of those properties of the belief that make it justified. . . ."22

My point here is not to chastise Zagzebski for deviating from standard usage. We are dealing with terms of art whose meanings are necessarily stipulative, and Zagzebski can stipulate however she wishes. The point I do want to make is that on either use of the terms Zagzebski and Plantinga end up on the same side of the distinction. First, if we understand internalism in the strong sense of I1, then neither Zagzebski nor Plantinga are internalists. Both make positive epistemic status depend on the *de facto* reliability of the believer's stable dispositions, and such objective reliability is not accessible to the believer's consciousness in the relevant sense. Zagzebski clearly realizes this about her own view. "Truth is an external component as long as we think that the world must be a certain way for a belief to be true and that the truth of a belief is not necessarily guaranteed by the phenomenological qualities of the mental state of believing itself."23

But second, both Zagzebski and Plantinga make some parts of the criteria for epistemic status accessible to the believer's consciousness, and so both are internalists in the sense of I2. Zagzebski has a motivational component that is typically considered to be accessible, and she also requires that virtuous believers be sufficiently self-reflective.<sup>24</sup> But Plantinga also makes some of the factors relevant for epistemic status accessible to the believer. Thus Plantinga ties the degree of positive status to the degree of belief. Another internalist aspect of Plantinga's position is that he requires belief to be well-grounded in experience. The paradigm case is perceptual belief, but Plantinga thinks that religious beliefs and even memory beliefs and mathematical intuitions have their appropriate phenomenologies, and that these phenomenologies are crucial to their positive epistemic status.

According to our design plan, obviously enough, experience plays a crucial role in belief formation-- both sensuous experience, such as **being appeared to greenly**, and the sort of experience involved in feeling impelled or disposed to accept a given belief. *A priori* beliefs, for example, are not, as this denomination mistakenly suggests, formed prior to or in absence of experience. Thinking of **modus ponens** *feels* different from thinking of, say, the corresponding conditional of **affirming the consequent**. . . .<sup>25</sup>

Before ending this section we should look at one more issue. Zagzebski argues that there is a close association between internalism and voluntarism, calling her position "internalist and voluntarist" and Plantinga's "externalist and nonvoluntarist." But it seems to me that this is misleading in several ways. First, although Plantinga clearly rejects some theories because he thinks they are too strongly internalist, he never rejects a theory because it implies cognitive voluntarism. Second, in several places Plantinga accepts that we have at least indirect control over many of our beliefs. "It is within my power to adopt policies that influence and modify my propensities to believe; I can adopt such policies as paying careful attention to evidence, avoiding wishful thinking . . . and the like."<sup>26</sup> Finally, in his most recent work Plantinga explicitly denies that internalism entails a problematic voluntarism in the cognitive realm.<sup>27</sup>

It is true that Plantinga's account of positive epistemic status does not require that belief be voluntary, and his account of our cognitive faculties does not emphasize a voluntary dimension. In this weak sense Plantinga's position is non-voluntarist. But this should not be taken to mean that he denies a voluntarist dimension to the cognitive, for it is clear that he does not.

I conclude that Zagzebski's and Plantinga's theories are both internalist or both externalist, depending on the sense of the terms, and that Plantinga's position is non-voluntarist only in the sense that it does not require voluntariness for positive epistemic status.

### c. Individualism vs. Socialism.

The final way in which Zagzebski contrasts her view with Plantinga's is with the claim that on her view knowledge has a social dimension. Zagzebski seems to hold that knowledge is social in two ways. First, individual knowers rely on other knowers in the group, both as sources of information and as teachers of good epistemic practices.

[S]o often our own beliefs depend upon those of others. The justifiability of my beliefs often depends on the procedures other people use, so someone else's using bad procedures can affect the justifiability of my beliefs.<sup>28</sup>

[Phronesis] is acquired by imitating those who have it . . . . So our epistemic virtuousness is dependent on other people-- the people who raise us and teach us.<sup>29</sup>

But Zagzebski thinks that knowledge is social in a second and more fundamental sense as well. At least with regard to some knowledge, the knowledge is more appropriately the possession of the group than of the individual.

The possessor of warrant is fundamentally the Church, not the individual, so the conditions for justification of a belief are conditions that the Church must satisfy, not Francis or Jane or Edward.<sup>30</sup>

But suppose, as Catholics have traditionally believed, that the primary recipient of revelation is the Church rather than, say, Abraham or Moses or Paul. If so, it would be a mistake to look for warrant as a property of belief of a particular person.<sup>31</sup>

Accordingly, we have two senses in which knowledge is social.

- S1. Warrant and knowledge of the individual importantly depends on the individual's relationship to others in the group.
- S2. Warrant and knowledge are primarily possessions of the group rather than the individual.

It seems to me that Plantinga would happily agree that knowledge is social in the sense of S1. It is true that he does not emphasize this aspect of knowledge, but nothing about it is inconsistent with his view. On the contrary, it would seem to be uncontroversial that human cognitive faculties function properly only when they function socially in the sense of S1. In any case, S1 is a thesis

about how human cognitive faculties develop and function. And as such, that thesis is consistent with Plantinga's view that knowledge arises out of properly functioning cognitive faculties.

What about the second sense in which Zagzebski holds that knowledge is social? I am not clear on what this second sense amounts to, but one way to interpret S2 is to say that, at least in some cases, the group provides a check on what individuals in the group can properly believe. This interpretation is suggested by the following passage.

Catholics are much more inclined to evaluate [beliefs based on revelation] communally rather than individually since the primary recipient of revelation in the Catholic tradition is the Church, and the validity of revelation does not depend on the validity of any particular case of personal revelation or religious experience.<sup>32</sup>

For example, in the case where an individual believes that God is telling him to murder non-Christians, the tradition of the Church plays an important part in the story why that belief is not reasonable. Using Zagzebski's view, one could cash this out in terms of the intellectual virtues of the believer in question, the claim being that a believer who disregards the group in this way is lacking some important virtue, and perhaps displaying some intellectual vice. The lacking virtue might be appropriate respect for authority and the vice might be hubris. But it seems to me that Plantinga could tell a similar story. He could say that appropriate respect for authority is a consequence of properly functioning cognitive faculties, and that the display of such hubris points to some cognitive dysfunction. I do not want to argue that Plantinga would respond this way. My point is that he could respond this way, and that such a response would be consistent with his stated position.

## **2. The real issue between Zagzebski and Plantinga on knowledge.**

So what is the real issue between Zagzebski and Plantinga? I think that we have already hinted at it in Section 1a, when we said that Zagzebski and Plantinga give different accounts of our intellectual virtues. More specifically, and I think more fundamentally, the two disagree over whether

knowledge requires epistemic responsibility, or whether instances of knowledge are appropriate objects of praise. Zagzebski says knowledge does require responsibility, and her voluntaristic account of the intellectual virtues reflects this. Plantinga thinks that knowledge requires no such thing, and his account of our cognitive faculties reflects that. Plantinga emphasizes reliability rather than responsibility, and as such is concerned with neither the motivation nor the voluntariness of our beliefs.

I think that on this issue Zagzebski is right, and that her neo-Aristotelian account of the virtues gives us important resources for seeing why. Specifically, the account allows her to answer two important objections against a responsibilist condition on knowledge. The first objection is raised by Plantinga, and charges that a responsibilist condition on knowledge entails strong internalism, or internalism in the sense of I1. The second objection, not raised by Plantinga, is that such a condition entails an implausible voluntarism in the cognitive realm.

The reason Plantinga thinks responsibilism entails strong internalism goes something like this. To say that someone is responsible for something is to say that the thing is within that person's control. But something is within a person's control only if the conditions for its occurrence or non-occurrence are, at some time or another, accessible to the person's consciousness. Therefore, to say that knowledge is praiseworthy implies that all of the conditions for having knowledge are, at some time or another, accessible to the knower's consciousness. But then this is the basis for an objection to a responsibilist condition on knowledge. Since not all of the conditions for having knowledge are so accessible, knowledge cannot require praiseworthiness.<sup>33</sup>

I said that her neo-Aristotelian account of the virtues allows Zagzebski to avoid the present objection. More exactly, her Aristotelian account of responsibility and praiseworthiness does. We may begin by noting that on Aristotle's account it is possible for a person to be praiseworthy for things that are not presently under the person's control. The most relevant case for present

purposes is that a person can be praiseworthy for habits and for actions that arise from habit, and even if neither the habit nor the action is presently under the person's control. Second, there will be conditions for habits and habitual actions that were *never* under the person's control and never accessible to the person's consciousness, since the habits we have are partly a matter of unchosen constitution and upbringing. What is important for Aristotle is that the habit and the action are in the realm of the voluntary, meaning that they are things that can be affected by choices in the long run, and at least to some extent.

And now it is easy to see how this model of responsibility allows Zagzebski to avoid Plantinga's objection. Applying the Aristotelian account to the cognitive realm, responsibility for having knowledge does not require that the person have control over all the conditions necessary for her having knowledge, nor does it require that those conditions were accessible to her consciousness at one time or another. But then the requirement of accessibility cannot be tied to the requirement of responsibility, and so the charge that praiseworthiness implies strong internalism is refuted.

The second objection that might be raised against a responsibilist condition on knowledge is that it entails an implausible voluntarism with respect to belief.<sup>34</sup> But we have already gone a long way toward answering this objection. If the requirement that knowledge be praiseworthy entailed that we have present and direct control over our believing then that would amount to a devastating objection to such a requirement. It is just a psychological fact that we do not exercise that kind of control over what we believe. But on an Aristotelian account a thing is an appropriate object of praise and blame so long as it is in the realm of the voluntary. In other words, so long as our believing can be affected by choices to some extent and over the long run, then believing can be blameworthy or praiseworthy. But we do have *that* kind of control over our beliefs. We can, for example, make effective choices regarding our intellectual habits. If this is right, then our

intellectual habits and the beliefs they give rise to are appropriate objects of praise and blame, but not in a way that implies an implausible voluntarism with respect to belief.

We have seen that Zagzebski can use Aristotle to defend a responsibilist condition on knowledge against certain objections. But there are also positive reasons for endorsing such a requirement. First, there are examples where we want to deny knowledge just because the believer seems irresponsible, or seems to lack appropriate praiseworthiness. Consider a person who has a strong belief that there is a ghost in the house, and whose belief is entirely based on an eerie feeling she has. She has no other grounds for the belief, and in fact has powerful evidence that ghosts do not exist. Add that there are many other people in the house who do not share her feeling and testify to this. But suppose also that her belief is the result of a highly accurate ghost-detecting faculty, one that gives rise to the feeling and the belief whenever a ghost is present, and with nearly infallible accuracy. The faculty also has the property that it overrides attention to counter-evidence when a ghost is present, disposing the believer to ignore that evidence entirely. It is my intuition that the person does not know that there is a ghost in the house, and precisely because her cognitive activity is not praiseworthy. She ought to take the other evidence she has into account, and she ought to take the testimony of others seriously.

That is not to say that all things considered she ought not to have the belief. Maybe she cannot help it, or maybe it is so overwhelming that it would be rational for her to accept it, all things considered. My point is that not all things have been considered. In the example the believer simply ignores the counter-evidence and the testimony of others, giving it no account whatsoever. And that is what seems irresponsible, and seems to disqualify her as a knower in this case.

A second reason for recognizing a responsibilist condition on knowledge is that it makes sense of our practices. First, we often blame people for not knowing what they ought to have known. In our legal system and in everyday life we recognize the category of culpable ignorance. Second, we



deny credit for true belief that does not arise in the right sort of way. Consider the example of someone who bets on a horse and wins. If that person brags that he knew all along that the horse would win, we may rightfully challenge his claim. My interpretation is that he means to reap praise for his cognitive feat and we mean to deny it to him. Or consider two students who do well on an exam, one because she studied and the other because he makes lucky guesses. Obviously we are inclined to praise the former student but not the latter. These practices make good sense if knowledge is praiseworthy in a way that mere true belief is not, and if ignorance in some cases is blameworthy. Of course that is not the only way to make sense of these practices, but I think it is a plausible one.

### **3. Consequences for religious belief.**

So far I have argued that Zagzebski's Catholic inspired general theory of knowledge has important affinities with Plantinga's Calvinist approach, both being versions of what Sosa calls a virtue approach to knowledge. I have also argued that the real issue between Zagzebski and Plantinga is whether knowledge is epistemically responsible cognition, or in other words, whether knowledge is an appropriate object of epistemic praise. Zagzebski thinks that it is, and her neo-Aristotelian account of the intellectual virtues reflects this. I have also argued that Zagzebski is correct on this point.

In this final section of the paper I want to consider the consequences of all this for religious knowledge. Both of the issues I will consider are raised in seminal papers by Plantinga.<sup>35</sup> The first is whether religious belief is properly basic. The second is whether natural theology is necessary to give religious belief positive epistemic status. I will argue that the consequences of the above discussion for these issues are in fact minimal. Even if knowledge requires responsibility, Plantinga can still make a good case that religious belief is properly basic. And even if religious belief is

properly basic, natural theology might still be required to give religious belief positive epistemic status.

It is important to realize that this last claim is not inconsistent. Someone might hold that religious belief is properly basic in the sense that it gets an initial positive epistemic status directly from experience rather than indirectly via some inference from prior premises. But the same person might also hold that natural theology arguments are necessary to convert that initial positive status into an all things considered positive status. In the lingo of contemporary analytic epistemology, someone might think that natural theology is needed to convert *prima facie* justification into *ultima facie* justification. Alternatively, one might think that religious experience confers positive epistemic status on religious belief, but only a low degree. The same person might hold that natural theology is needed to boost warrant to a degree high enough for knowledge. Plantinga himself has argued that natural theology can play these roles, although he does not think that it is always needed to do so.<sup>36</sup>

Let us turn to the first issue. Is religious belief, at least in some cases, properly basic? In other words, can religious belief have positive epistemic status, at least of an initial sort, even if it is not based on any good arguments? Rather than trying to answer this question from scratch, let us start by agreeing with Plantinga that some religious beliefs satisfy the conditions that he puts on basic warrant. In other words, let us agree that we are designed with the *sensus divinitatis* that Calvin describes, and that as a result of the proper functioning of that cognitive faculty we form beliefs about God directly on the basis of experience. The question then becomes whether such beliefs could be responsible or praiseworthy. And it seems to me that the answer is yes. The persons described would be perfectly responsible when forming beliefs about God that way.

The point can be pressed if we continue the analogy with sensory perception. If people have a Calvinist divine sense then they form religious beliefs much the way they form beliefs about

empirical objects. Just as beliefs about empirical objects are formed on the basis of sensory experience via the faculty of vision, beliefs about God would be formed on the basis of non-sensory experience via the faculty for experiencing God. But now the relevant question is this. Aren't perceptual beliefs about empirical objects perfectly responsible? Remember that that does not require any kind of strong control over such beliefs. All that matters is that perceptual beliefs are in the realm of the voluntary. They seem to be in the relevant sense, and as such they are appropriate objects of praise and blame. For example, if I believe that I see a flying saucer on the basis of an unclear and fleeting experience then I can be blamed for my credulity. On the other hand, if I am careful not to believe everything I seem to see then I am praiseworthy, although that minimal kind of praiseworthiness does not usually evoke praise.

These last remarks suggest that the distinction between *prima facie* and *ultima facie* justification is an important one. Someone might object that belief in God is not properly basic just because believers have reasons to doubt the validity of their religious experience. Such doubts might take the form of an argument from evil, or they might be grounded in the observation that not everyone senses God's existence in the world, or in the observation that beliefs about God often conflict. But even if such grounds for doubt are powerful, that would only count against religious belief being *ultima facie* basic. In the case of perceptual beliefs initial justification can be thwarted by sufficient grounds for doubt. But that means that *prima facie* justification can fail to be turned into *ultima facie* justification, and not that a belief did not have *prima facie* justification in the first place. The same should be said about religious beliefs.

So let us agree that Calvin's divine sense could give rise to *prima facie* positive epistemic status, and even if such status includes a condition requiring epistemic praiseworthiness. This brings us to the second issue we raised for this section, i.e. the issue whether natural theology is necessary for positive epistemic status. That question has undergone some transformation, and is now the

following. Is natural theology necessary to turn *prima facie* positive epistemic status into *ultima facie* positive epistemic status, or could a Calvinist divine sense do the job alone? But this question should itself be split in two. First, is natural theology needed in principle to turn *prima facie* positive status into *ultima facie* positive status? And second, is natural theology needed in actual cases involving typical believers?

Regarding the first of these questions, I think we should say that natural theology is not needed in principle. Remember, the present question is not whether we have such a divine sense, nor whether religious belief ever arises without grounds for doubt. The point at issue is whether religious belief would have positive epistemic status, in an all things considered sense, if it did issue from a divine sense and in a context where there were no grounds for doubt. If we allow that empirical perception can give rise to knowledge then I think that we have to say that a divine sense would as well. Such a sense in such a context would satisfy all the relevant conditions that empirical perception often does, and so both would be equally virtuous. But since empirical perception is virtuous, so would such a divine sense be.

That leaves us with one more question. Is natural theology needed for religious knowledge in actual cases? Plantinga has an interesting argument for saying no. Continuing the analogy with empirical perception, Plantinga notes that sensory experience can be so overwhelming as to override grounds for doubt all by itself. And his point here is that sensory experience can be properly overwhelming. Imagine for example that you have all kinds of evidence that your uncle died in a plane crash. Certainly such evidence would constitute grounds for doubting that your uncle is alive. But suppose that the evidence was misleading and that one day you *see* your uncle crossing the street. Couldn't the sensory experience be so convincing that you rationally believe that your uncle is alive? Suppose you have a conversation with him and he tells you that he is alive and well. Would that be

enough to override all grounds for doubt? Of course it would, and Plantinga argues that religious experience can be equally sufficient to override grounds for doubting the existence of God.<sup>37</sup>

I find that argument to be somewhat persuasive, although I still have some lingering doubts. My main concern is that the grounds for doubting our religious beliefs are of a different kind than the grounds described in the example. It seems to me that we are more like the girl who senses the presence of a ghost than like the person who meets her uncle. There are people who seem to be similarly situated but who testify that they have no such experience, and there are competing explanations for the nature and source of our experience. Moreover, there are people claiming to have good arguments that God does not exist at all. In light of these considerations, we and the girl have grounds for doubting the general reliability of the cognitive faculties in question, whereas in the case of sensory perception no such general doubts arise. And perhaps that is a relevant difference; in cases where we have grounds for doubting the general reliability of a cognitive faculty, responsibility requires that we address those grounds by invoking something other than the very faculty in question. Whereas in cases where no such general grounds for doubting exist, it is not necessary to go outside the faculty in question.

Now I do not want to argue that grounds for doubting the general reliability of a *sensus divinitatis* cannot be overcome, or even that religious experience does not play an important role in overcoming them. My point is rather that we need to engage such doubts, and that we need to use our reasoning faculties to do so. This is what epistemic responsibility requires and so it is what knowledge requires. On the other hand, I am not sure I could persuade someone who disagrees on this point. It might come down to intuitions about what responsibility requires, and it seems to me that intuitions can conflict here.

Leaving aside these intuitions about epistemic responsibility, the case for the importance of natural theology might be made from the point of view of reliability. It might be that in actual cases

believers with cognitive faculties like ours just are not very reliable when relying on religious experience alone. It might be that properly functioning human beings need to employ their reason as well as their experience to achieve the kind of statistical reliability that both Plantinga and Zagzebski require for knowledge. This kind of thesis might be partially confirmed (or disconfirmed) by empirical investigation. The thesis would be at least partially confirmed if it were found that people who rely only on religious experience tend to form mutually conflicting beliefs, whereas people who employ reason with experience tend to converge in their beliefs.

In any case, I conclude that our final question has not been adequately answered. It is not clear whether natural theology is necessary for religious knowledge in actual cases. What *has* been shown is that the question is not answered simply by answering the question whether knowledge requires responsibility. Even if knowledge does require responsibility, the question remains whether natural theology is needed to achieve that responsibility. And even if it does not, the question remains whether natural theology is needed for reliability.

And now for some final conclusions. First, I have argued that Zagzebski and Plantinga are much closer on the question of knowledge than Zagzebski implies. Both authors defend a virtue theory of knowledge, although they disagree over the nature of the intellectual virtues. Since Zagzebski thinks that knowledge requires praiseworthiness, she defends an account of the virtues that emphasizes the voluntary and the motivational aspects of cognition. Plantinga does not think that knowledge requires responsibility, and so his account of the intellectual virtues emphasizes neither of these.

I have also argued that Plantinga should accept Zagzebski's claim that knowledge requires praiseworthiness. By adopting an Aristotelian account of praiseworthiness Plantinga's most important objection against such a requirement is avoided. Moreover, adopting the requirement of

praiseworthiness allows us to handle certain counterexamples, and to make sense of our practice of praising knowledge and blaming ignorance.

Finally, I have argued that the consequences of the above dispute for questions of religious knowledge are minimal. Even if knowledge requires responsibility, Plantinga can still make a good case that religious belief can be properly basic, at least in the *prima facie* sense. And even if religious belief is properly basic in that sense, there will be important roles for natural theology.

If all this is right then contemporary Catholics and Calvinists can be a lot closer on issues of knowledge and religious knowledge than the recent literature implies. The resulting position, in fact, might be close to one that Aquinas and Calvin shared. Aquinas is notorious for requiring natural theology for knowledge of God, but it seems to me that Aquinas' "*scientia*" is very poorly translated as "knowledge." What we mean by knowledge today is, very roughly, true belief that is both responsibly and reliably formed. Aquinas accepted that beliefs about God often have this status, and even for the faithful who do not ground such beliefs in the arguments of natural theology. On the other hand, Calvin analyzed unbelief in terms of cognitive sin, and therefore clearly held that the failure to know God can be blameworthy. Moreover, both philosophers acknowledged uses of natural theology similar to ones suggested above. In short, both Aquinas and Calvin held that we are creatures of God, who in a healthy state enjoy a natural awareness of our Creator. In the context of this shared faith, it might be expected that the rest turns out to be details.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Alvin Plantinga, "The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 54 (1980): 49-63; "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?," *Nous* 15 (1981): 41-51; and "Reason and Belief in God," in Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, eds., *Faith and Rationality* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

<sup>2</sup>"Positive Epistemic Status and Proper Function," in James Tomberlin, ed., *Philosophical Perspectives*, vol. 2: *Epistemology* (Atascadero: Ridgeview Press, 1988); and *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup>Linda Zagzebski, "Religious Knowledge and the Virtues of the Mind," in Linda Zagzebski, ed., *Rational Faith: Catholic Responses to Reformed Epistemology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993); and

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"Intellectual Virtue in Religious Epistemology," in Elizabeth Radcliffe and Carol White, eds., (La Salle: Open Court, 1993). Also see Zagzebski's introduction to her *Rational Faith* volume.

<sup>4</sup>Zagzebski suggests that her view entails a more sympathetic stance toward natural theology, but she stops short of saying that it makes natural theology necessary for the rationality of religious belief. See her "Introduction" to *Rational Faith*, pp. 3-4; and "Religious Knowledge and the Virtues of the Mind," p. 207.

<sup>5</sup>For example see Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Once again Evidentialism-- This time Social," *Philosophical Topics* 16 (1988): 53-74; and George Mavrodes, "Enthusiasm," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 25 (1989): 171-186, and "Jerusalem and Athens Revisited" in Plantinga and Wolterstorff.

<sup>6</sup>Zagzebski, *Rational Faith*.. See especially Zagzebski's "Introduction."

<sup>7</sup>Plantinga, "Positive Epistemic Status and Proper Function," 46-47

<sup>8</sup>*Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, second edition (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983).

<sup>9</sup>Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 46-47.

<sup>10</sup>Zagzebski, "Religious Knowledge and the Virtues of the Mind," 209.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>13</sup>Zagzebski, "Intellectual Virtue in Religious Epistemology," 172-173.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>15</sup>Zagzebski, "Religious Knowledge and the Virtues of the Mind," 211.

<sup>16</sup>Sosa proposes such an approach in "The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence Versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5 (1980): 3-25, and develops it in *Knowledge in Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). For an informative exposition and critique of virtue epistemology see Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Intellectual Virtues and the Life of the Mind: On the Place of the Virtues in Epistemology* (Lanham, Md.:Rowman and Littlefield, 1992).

<sup>17</sup>Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective*, 271. In this regard Sosa cites Plato's *Republic*, Book I, 352. See also I, 342, where Plato says that vision is the virtue of the eyes and hearing the virtue of the ears.

<sup>18</sup>Zagzebski seems to recognize the present point herself in two passages, the first from "Religious Knowledge" and the second from "Intellectual Virtue."

In what way does Plantinga's idea of proper functioning differ from my idea of epistemic virtue? After all, in classical Greek philosophy, virtue is actually *defined* in terms of the function of beings of a kind. If so, Plantinga's theory may not be very far removed from mine. (p. 221)

It is interesting that in ancient Greek philosophy a virtue is a quality that permits a creature to perform properly those functions specific to its nature. Those qualities of a person which permit the proper functioning of faculties designed for the obtaining of truth would



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therefore be what I call virtues. If so, my virtue approach and Planting's proper-functioning approach should yield the same results. (p. 184)

But after each passage Zagzebski again distances herself from Plantinga, distinguishing their positions with the terminology we have seen above.

<sup>19</sup>Zagzebski, "Religious Knowledge and the Virtues of the Mind," 201.

<sup>20</sup>Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 5.

<sup>21</sup>William Alston, "Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology," *Philosophical Topics* XIV (1986): 179-221; Laurence Bonjour, "Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge" and Alvin Goldman, "The Internalist Conception of Justification," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* V(1980): 27-73.

<sup>22</sup>Zagzebski, "Religious Knowledge and the Virtues of the Mind," 201.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 212.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 210.

<sup>25</sup>Plantinga, "Positive Epistemic Status and Proper Function," 38.

<sup>26</sup>Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, 24; See also "Positive Epistemic Status and Proper Function," 12; and "Reason and Belief in God," 34-39.

<sup>27</sup>Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, 24.

<sup>28</sup>Zagzebski, "Religious Knowledge and the Virtues of the Mind," 215.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 216.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 208.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 220. Zagzebski has told me in conversation that she does not think that this second social dimension applies to all cases of reasonable belief and knowledge.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 208.

<sup>33</sup>Plantinga, "Positive Epistemic Status and Proper Function," 3-4; *Warrant: The Current Debate*, 15-25.

<sup>34</sup> Zagzebski attributes the objection to Plantinga but I think that is a mistake. As I argued above, Plantinga recognizes that cognition is voluntary in the relevant sense.

<sup>35</sup>Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?" and "The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology."

<sup>36</sup>Plantinga, "The Prospects for Natural Theology," in James Tomberlin, ed., *Philosophical Perspectives*, vol. 5: *Philosophy of Religion* (Atascadero: Ridgeview Press, 1991). See also "Reason and Belief in God," 82-87.

<sup>37</sup>Plantinga makes this reply in response to a similar question by Quinn. For an excellent discussion of the present issue see Philip L. Quinn, "In Search of the Foundations of Theism," *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985); Alvin Plantinga, "The Foundations of Theism: A Reply," *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986); Philip L. Quinn, "The

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Foundations of Theism Again: A Rejoinder to Plantinga," in Zagzebski, *Rational Faith*. The example I use here is mine.

<sup>38</sup>For persuasive arguments that Aquinas and Calvin share close affinities on questions of faith and rationality, see Kenneth Konyndyk, "Faith and Evidentialism" and Nicholas Wolterstorff, "The Migration of the Theistic Arguments: From Natural Theology to Evidentialist Apologetics," both in Robert Audi and William Wainwright, eds., *Rationality, Religious Belief and Moral Commitment* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1986).

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