



---

Properly Unargued Belief in God

Author(s): Bruce Langtry

Source: *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Dec., 1989), pp. 129-154

Published by: [Springer](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40036420>

Accessed: 04/08/2011 17:15

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



Springer is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

## Properly unargued belief in God

BRUCE LANGTRY

*Department of Philosophy, The University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria  
3052, Australia*

### 1. Some theses about justified belief that God exists

Evidentialists with respect to belief in God – below I call them simply “evidentialists” – hold that

- (1) A person S is epistemically justified in believing that God exists only if S has a good argument for the existence of God.

The content of this doctrine requires some explanation. Let us agree that a person is epistemically justified in holding a certain belief if and only if the person in virtue of holding the belief does not violate any epistemic duty or manifest any epistemic defect. The notion of a good argument I will take for granted. But what is it to *have* a good argument, in the sense involved in (1)? Surely a person who merely believes truly that there is a good argument for a certain conclusion on such-and-such a page of a textbook should not be said to have thereby the argument stated on that page. Furthermore the mere ability to construct an argument seems insufficient. Let us say that a person S *has* a good argument for a certain conclusion if and only if S knows some statement of the argument and truly believes that the argument so stated is a good argument for the conclusion. I shan't pause to say more about the nature of the knowledge and belief involved here, except to remark that they may be dispositional rather than occurrent. For yesterday I had a good argument for “394 is an even number” – viz. “any number ending in an even number is an even number; 394 ends in an even number”; therefore 394 is an even number” – even though before this morning I had never entertained that proposition. On the other hand S may have forgotten an argument, and so not have it, even though S can with a bit of effort reconstruct it.

It follows from (1) that

- (2) If on reflection you find that you do not have a good argument for the existence of God, then you should refrain from believing that God exists.

(In interpreting and applying (2) we must bear in mind the fact that believing and refraining from believing are not directly matters of choice; I do not think that there is a serious difficulty here.)

(1) and (2) have received the adherence of many philosophers, despite dissent from Kant, William James and Wittgenstein, and, recently, from a group of Reformed epistemologists.

In this paper I reject (1) and (2), without embracing Reformed epistemology. Let us say that a belief, or a proposition, is *properly unargued* for person S at time t if and only if S would be epistemically justified in holding it at t even if S did not at t have a good argument for its truth. My view can be summed up by the slogan

- (3) Belief in God is properly unargued.

Often the questions “Is it true that p?” and “Am I, or would I be, epistemically justified in believing that p?” are used interchangeably. In most contexts the kind of resolution of the second question that one expects consists in the production of an argument for the truth of p. But in our present context these questions are by no means interchangeable. There are two distinct projects: (a) Re-evaluating whether or not God exists (b) Re-evaluating whether one has recently been justified in believing that God exists, and would continue to be justified if one continued to believe that God exists. My thesis (3) is not a contribution to project (a), and should provide no reassurance to anyone undertaking project (a). This paper purports to be an essay in epistemology, and not metaphysics.

The Reformed epistemologists’ slogan is

- (4) Belief in God is properly basic.

A belief, or a proposition, is *properly basic* for a person S if and only if S would be justified in holding it even if S did not hold it on the basis of any other *belief*.<sup>1</sup> The notion *on the basis of* is far from clear, but I will here make only two points about it. Firstly, some philosophers write as if S holds p on the basis of q only if S consciously entertains each of p and q,

notices that  $q$  is a good reason for  $p$  and therefore accepts  $p$ . Surely this is a mistake. If you point to my sister and ask “Is that person’s name Helen?” I will confidently answer “No” even if for a few moments I am unable to recall my sister’s name. It seems plausible to suppose that my belief that the name is not “Helen” was based upon my belief that the name is “Marilyn”, even during the period in which I was searching around to unearth the latter belief. Secondly, not every cue for belief gives rise to a basis for belief in the relevant sense. Sometimes the visual experience I have when seeing my sister is best thought of as producing a basic belief that this person is my sister; and even if the visual experience happens simultaneously to produce the belief that this person has such-and-such an appearance, the latter belief need not be here functioning as a basis for the former.

As well as the notions of properly unargued belief and properly basic belief, I shall also need the notions of *unargued belief* and *basic belief*. Let us say that a belief is unargued for person  $S$  at time  $t$  if and only if there is no argument such that at time  $t$  both  $S$  knows some statement of the argument and  $S$  believes that the argument so stated is a good argument for the truth of the belief. A belief is basic for  $S$  if and only if  $S$  does not hold it on the basis of any other beliefs. Notice that a belief may be basic for  $S$  even though it is argued for  $S$ . For example, if  $S$  starts out with a basic belief that he or she has a headache, the belief will often remain basic even after someone else says, “I see that you have a headache”, thereby leading  $S$  to acquire an argument from testimony to the existence of the headache. Furthermore a belief may be unargued for  $S$  even though it is not basic for  $S$ . For example,  $S$  may not be aware of the basis of his or her belief.

In addition to (3), Reformed epistemologists make various other important claims, such as that God exists, which in this paper I want to bypass entirely. Alvin Plantinga, the leading Reformed epistemologist, accepts both (3) and (4).<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless many philosophers who accept (3) will reject (4). For example a philosopher holding a coherence theory of justification must reject (4), but might still accept (3).

Coherence theories say that the justification of  $S$ ’s believing that  $p$  depends upon two conditions:  $p$  must stand in appropriate inferential relations to other propositions that the agent believes, and its doing so must make an appropriate causal contribution to the agent’s believing that  $p$ . It is hard to see how  $S$ ’s believing that  $p$  could fulfill these conditions

without being based upon other beliefs, in the relevant sense of “based.” So according to coherence theories there are no properly basic beliefs.<sup>3</sup> However coherence theories might still admit the existence of properly unargued beliefs. Indeed, plausibility requires them to do so. Assume that I am justified in believing that I now feel an itch in my left foot. Conclude in accordance with coherence theories that this belief stands in appropriate inferential relations to other beliefs that I hold, and that its doing so makes an appropriate causal contribution to my believing. Nevertheless I do not know of any good argument for my belief. (“I think that I feel an itch; therefore I feel an itch” is a poor argument – e.g., in my present actual circumstances any doubt which I might raise about the conclusion would attach equally to the premise.) Coherence theorists should say that my belief is both non-basic and properly unargued.

Foundationalists also seem to be committed to the existence of properly unargued beliefs. According to foundationalists, a person S is justified in believing a proposition p at a time t only if either p is properly basic for S at t or else p is adequately supported (immediately or mediately) by propositions which are properly basic for S at t. If foundationalism is true, then if any of S’s beliefs are justified then there are some propositions which are properly basic for S. (Yet the doctrine that there are properly basic beliefs is not sufficient for foundationalism. As I pointed out above, a belief may be basic for S even though S has an argument for it. Nevertheless surely any foundationalist will say that the class of properly basic beliefs is coextensive with the class of properly unargued beliefs.)

Let us suppose that there are some beliefs which are properly unargued. Now why shouldn’t “God exists” be amongst those that are properly unargued for some person S now? If it is, S may be justified in believing that God exists even though S does not now have a good argument for the existence of God.

Some philosophers would object that “God exists” is the wrong sort of proposition to be properly unargued for anyone at any time. Classical foundationalists would say this. Let us, with Plantinga, call *classical foundationalism* the view that p is properly basic for person S at time t only if p is at t either self-evident to S or incorrigible for S or evident to S’s senses. (For example, Aquinas and Descartes are, in different ways, classical foundationalists.) Since “God exists” seems incapable of being self-evident, incorrigible or evident to the senses for anyone, classical foundationalists say that “God exists” can never be properly basic, and so can never be properly unargued. But even if we accepted foundationalism,

why should we go on to accept classical foundationalism? The arguments for this doctrine seem far from decisive. We have a strong motive for rejecting it, for it commits each of us to regarding most of his or her present beliefs as unjustified. Amazingly few of my present beliefs are well supported by premises stating only what is now self-evident or incorrigible or evident to the senses for me.

Suppose then that we were to accept foundationalism but reject classical foundationalism. It would now be plausible to suppose that a very wide range of propositions can be properly basic, and therefore properly unargued, for someone – e.g. “the chemical formula for sulphuric acid is  $H_2SO_4$ ”, “this chicken is female”, “this person is untrustworthy”, “I ate porridge at breakfast this morning”, “there are unicorns”, and even, *pace* Plantinga, “there is a Great Pumpkin”. Concerning the  $H_2SO_4$  example, I have forgotten whatever evidence I originally had for it. My present belief that this is what chemistry textbooks state is based upon, rather than a basis for, my belief about the formula. Even if I could now set about constructing a good argument for the truth of my belief – and I am not sure that I could – no such argument is now the basis of my belief; I simply remember the chemical formula for sulphuric acid.

I do not see why a coherence theorist should not admit a similarly wide range of propositions to be properly unargued for someone. A coherence theorist may think that the justification of my belief about sulphuric acid is a matter of the way my believing the proposition causally depends on the proposition’s cohering with other propositions I believe. Still, I do not have a good argument for the truth of my belief, and I do not decide to accept the proposition on the grounds that it is well supported by argument.

What about “God exists”? We can begin by considering the thesis

- (5) The epistemic justification of someone’s belief that God exists is consistent with that belief’s being unargued. That is, it is possible that there is some person for whom “God exists” is properly unargued at some time.

Anyone who concedes that there are properly unargued beliefs must either accept (5) or else provide some ground of discrimination between “God exists” and the propositions which *can* be properly unargued. The classical foundationalist does so, but we have seen that classical foundationalism itself lacks credibility. Showing that “God exists” is false, indeed necessarily false, would not suffice to show that “God exists” cannot be

properly unargued. Maybe showing that “God exists” is cognitively meaningless would suffice; but this cannot be shown.

Suppose that thesis (5) is true. This is a fairly weak supposition, unlikely to revolutionise the philosophy of religion. The following is a good deal stronger and more interesting, and is the thesis I intend my slogan (3) to abbreviate:

- (6) There are professional philosophers in our culture today who do not have and have never had a good argument for the existence of God, and who are nevertheless epistemically justified in believing that God exists.

Why do I consider the special case of professional philosophers in our culture today? Whether a certain belief is properly unargued for someone depends to some extent on what other beliefs that person holds and what sorts of investigation and reflection he or she can reasonably be expected to carry out. We are presumably especially interested in what beliefs could be properly unargued for persons aware of the philosophical and empirical considerations which *we* regard as bearing on the truth of the beliefs in question. What beliefs could be properly unargued for Cleopatra or Joan Sutherland is of secondary interest.

Unfortunately we lack a generally accepted criterion of being properly unargued which could be applied to the special case of the believers mentioned in (6). But there still can be arguments for and against (6). I am impressed by two interconnected lines of argument for (6), inspired by recent writings by Reformed epistemologists. Firstly, professional philosophers in our culture today have a wide variety of other beliefs which are properly unargued for them. No-one has succeeded in specifying a relevant difference between belief that God exists and these other beliefs, in virtue of which they differ with respect to being properly or improperly unargued. Secondly, (6) has so far survived all attempts to discredit it. This negative point should be regarded as providing a good reason for our accepting (6), since a similar negative point will have to play a very large role in our defence of the rationality of unargued beliefs in the past, the external world, etc.

Let us tackle the second line of argument by considering some attempts to discredit (6). The first line of argument will be treated incidentally, along the way.

## 2. Wishful thinking, arbitrariness, dogmatism

Does (6) legitimise wishful thinking or arbitrary choice of doctrinal commitment? It is hard to see how. Does (6) legitimise dogmatism? No. A holder of (6) can agree that the present justification of an unargued belief may be overthrown by new evidence against the truth of the belief. The people mentioned in (6) have no excuse for ignoring objections to the existence of God, or for treating “God exists” as in principle immune from revision. (This point recurs below.) Nor do they have any excuse for a smug satisfaction with unexamined traditions.

## 3. Dissenting epistemic peers

Gary Gutting<sup>4</sup> provides what amounts to another objection to (6). Gutting’s conclusion is that “because believers have many epistemic peers who do not share their belief in God, ... they have no right to maintain their belief without justification”.<sup>5</sup> One’s epistemic peers are one’s “equals in intelligence, perspicacity, honesty, thoroughness and other relevant epistemic virtues”.<sup>6</sup> By “without justification” Gutting obviously means “without a good argument”.

Gutting generalises the issue of belief in God. Suppose that some proposition *p* seems to me obviously true, even though I do not have a good argument for *p* and there is equal division among my epistemic peers as to the obvious truth of *p*. Am I entitled to believe *p*? Gutting says:

One reason for thinking I am entitled to believe *p* in this situation might be that *p*’s seeming obvious to me counts in favour of its truth. To see if this might be so we need to distinguish two importantly different cases: one in which those epistemic peers who dissent from my view see *p* as obviously false and one in which they merely do not see *p* as obviously true. In the former case, there are two relevant considerations. First, believing *p* is arbitrary in the sense that there is no reason to think that my intuition (i.e., what seems obviously true to me) is more likely to be correct than that of those who disagree with me. Believing *p* because its truth is supported by *my* intuition is thus an *epistemological egoism* just as arbitrary and unjustifiable as ethical egoism is generally regarded to be ... A second consideration arises if we assess the situation from the standpoint of a neutral epistemic observer; that is, an observer who is as fully informed about the situation as I and my epistemic peers but who is not personally involved in any way that might improperly affect his judgement. In particular, the neutral epistemic observer has no intui-



tions pro or con about  $p$  and has not thought about  $p$  to an extent sufficient to make his not having any intuitions significant. From the point of view of such an observer, the facts are simply these (taking for simplicity the case of disagreement between two peers): (1) person A has an intuition that  $p$  is true; (2) person B has an intuition that  $p$  is false; (3) there is no reason to think that either A or B is more likely to be correct in his intuition. Surely the only proper attitude for such an observer is to withhold judgment on  $p$ . But even if I am A or B, should I not judge the situation in the same way as a neutral observer should? Surely it is wrong to prefer my intuition simply because it is mine.<sup>7</sup>

But what of the case in which A has an intuition that  $p$  is true, and his epistemic peer B, rather than having an intuition of  $p$ 's falsity, has, after careful reflection, no intuition at all about the truth or falsity of  $p$ ? ... The essential point can be put this way: whenever I claim that a proposition is properly basic for me because I find it obviously true, I must claim that I am in an epistemic situation that gives me a privileged access to its truth ... If we can show that in fact there is no good reason to think that a person's epistemic situation provides a privileged access to the truth of a given proposition, then we have undermined the claim that the proposition is properly basic for that person. Thus, if someone claims that "there is a tree in my front yard" is basic for him, that claim can be undermined by showing that there is no good reason to think that he is in a position to see the tree. Now one way of showing that there is no good reason to think that a person's epistemic situation provides a privileged access to the truth of a given proposition is to show that there are others in the same epistemic situation who do not have such access. Thus, if a trained microscope technician claims to see directly that a certain cell sample is cancerous, and another technician equally well trained and using the same equipment does not see this, then the first technician needs to offer further considerations, beyond his seeing that it is so, in support of the claim that the cells are cancerous. The thought is simply that the failure of an epistemic situation to provide privileged access to the truth of a proposition for some people raises doubts as to whether it provides such access for anyone. Applying these considerations to religious belief, we seem led to the conclusion that, because believers have many epistemic peers who do not share their belief in God (and even more who do not share their belief that "God exists" is properly basic), they have no right to maintain their belief without a justification. If they do so, they are guilty of epistemological egoism.<sup>8</sup>

Although my thesis (6) concerns properly unargued belief rather than properly basic belief (since I do not want to take a stand against coherence theories of justification), I can express my reply to Gutting most briefly if I undertake here to defend the thesis that belief in God is properly basic against his objections. Consider firstly Gutting's first argument, on his pp.

86–87. If a proposition is basic for me then I do not believe it on the grounds that its seeming obvious to me counts in favour of its truth. My standpoint is different from that of a neutral observer, for whom it is not basic, but for whom my having the basic belief may provide a premise of an argument for the truth of the proposition. No doubt if I believe a proposition then I am committed to the further proposition that I am entitled to believe the original proposition. But I do not need an *argument* for the truth of this further proposition in order to be entitled to believe the original one. Why then does Gutting say, “One reason for thinking that I am entitled to believe *p* in this situation might be that *p*’s seeming obvious to me counts in favour of its truth”? The issue is surely not whether I or anyone else have a reason for thinking that I am entitled to believe *p* in the situation supposed; Gutting’s task is to provide an argument for saying that I am not entitled to believe *p*.

Gutting holds that if there is equal division amongst my epistemic peers as to whether *p* is true then I am not entitled to believe *p* unless either my belief is based on argument for *p* or else my belief is basic and I have argument for the view that my intuition is more likely to be correct than that of those who disagree with me. Now presumably Gutting would admit that there are *some* properly basic beliefs. Why then does equal division amongst my epistemic peers create the need for argument? Why does equal division amongst my epistemic peers oblige me to judge in the same way that a neutral observer should?

“Because to continue to believe *p* without argument would be arbitrary, a piece of epistemological egoism.” Would it? Contrary to Gutting’s suggestion, if I continue to believe *p* I need not be preferring my intuition on the grounds that it is mine; I might simply continue to have a basic belief that *p*.

It might be objected: you cannot evade the challenge to reflect critically on the epistemological status of your intuitions. You are committed to maintaining that your intuitions are more likely to be correct than the intuitions of your dissenting epistemic peers.

I am committed to maintaining that my intuitions are correct and the contrary intuitions are incorrect. It is not at all clear that I am committed to maintaining that my intuitions are *more likely* to be correct than the contrary ones. What does “more likely” amount to here? Anyway, why do I need an *independent* argument for the truth of this proposition to which I am committed? Why shouldn’t my belief in this proposition be largely based on my original belief that *p*, or even be a basic belief?

It might be said: If half your epistemic peers believe that not- $p$ , this generates an argument against  $p$ . Given an argument against  $p$ , and no argument *for*  $p$ , you should not believe that  $p$ . So you will be justified in continuing to believe that  $p$  only if you discover an argument for  $p$ , i.e., only if your belief ceases to be basic. My reply to this objection is contained in the next section.

Consider now Gutting's second argument, on his pp. 87, 89–90. Gutting says, "If we can show that in fact there is no good reason to think that a person's epistemic situation provides a privileged access to the truth of a given proposition, then we have undermined the claim that the proposition is properly basic for that person." I'm not sure what Gutting means by "privileged access," but still his statement seems false. For example, surely "There is a chair in front of me" can be properly basic for a person even though there is no chair in front of him, and he is being tricked by an ingenious arrangement of mirrors. What may be true is that if you can show me that I have no good reason to think that I have some access to the truth of a proposition, then I should abandon my claim that the proposition is properly basic for me. But why need the good reason that I need be an *independent* reason? Why can't my belief that I have some access to the truth of "I ate porridge this morning" be properly based on my basic belief that I ate porridge this morning? In that case, to show me that I have no good reason to think that I have some access to the truth of the proposition, you must either argue against the truth of the proposition, or else argue that I have no access to its truth.

Suppose that one of my basic beliefs is that the chemical formula for sulphuric acid is  $H_2SO_4$ ; one day a friend says "No, it is  $H_3SO_4$ "; her belief is basic too. My friend and I are epistemic peers. Are we in the same epistemic situation? Well we are alike in that neither of us has a good argument for our belief. But if the characterization of epistemic situation goes beyond epistemic virtues and the arguments one has, then for all we know there are big differences in our epistemic situation. For example, one of us may have been misinformed in the first place about sulphuric acid, or be misremembering, while the other is not. Gutting's "privileged access" argument does not show that the mere fact that my friend disagrees with me obliges me to abandon my belief that the chemical formula for sulphuric acid is  $H_2SO_4$ .

Similarly, suppose that my friend and I both hear a noise from a nearby room. I form the basic belief that it is a baby crying; my friend forms the basic belief that it is a squeaky door. Are we in the same epistemic

situation? Surely the “privileged access” argument does not show that I should abandon my basic belief that it is a baby crying.

Why should we suppose that theists for whom belief in God is basic are in the same epistemic situation as their epistemic peers who are non-theists? Is there some theory of epistemic situation which yields this result? If not then why should we abstract from the many cognitive differences between the basic believers and the disbelievers to say that nevertheless there is a sameness of epistemic situation?

Professional philosophers typically have unargued beliefs on many topics which they know to be controversial. Gutting’s arguments fail to show that such beliefs are not properly unargued. Our philosophers can be *self-critical* in that they realise that their hunches and gut feelings sometimes turn out to be wrong; they may be wrong with respect to *p*. They can *adopt a critical attitude towards p* by seeking arguments against *p*, and being prepared to abandon *p* if good arguments are found. If they can adopt such an attitude towards the law of excluded middle, and “All present and future versions of the ontological argument are fallacious” – as some do – then they can do so with respect to “God exists”.

I conclude that Gutting’s objection to (6) fails. However some of the themes that Gutting touches on will re-emerge in later sections.

#### 4. Arguments against the truth of one’s unargued beliefs

Obviously sometimes one ought to abandon an unargued belief in the light of objections to its truth. Maybe there are some beliefs which are in principle immune from revision, but it would require a lot of argument to justify treating “God exists” as of this kind. A belief can require defence by argument without thereby ceasing to be properly unargued, for if the role that the defending argument needs to play is merely to refute objections to the proposition believed, then that argument need not constitute a good argument for the truth of the belief. Are there in fact *prima facie* strong objections to the existence of God, of which a professional philosopher should be aware, and which is such that to be justified in continuing to believe that God exists despite these objections a professional philosopher would need strong arguments for the existence of God?

Do the great evils we find in the world constitute strong evidence against the existence of God? Philip Quinn thinks so, and he uses this claim to argue that belief in God is not properly basic.<sup>9</sup> But while there

have been many impressive arguments from evil against the existence of God, I think that they can all be shown to fail.

Try the following indirect objection to the existence of God: theism is theoretically inferior to atheism because it enlarges one's ontology without any apparent gain in simplicity or explanatory power. Now for someone to agree that theism is theoretically inferior to atheism but still to retain an unargued belief in God would be dogmatism, involving an absurd overconfidence in his or her intuitive judgment. (Although, *ex hypothesi*, the fact that the agent has this intuitive judgment is not evidence on which he or she bases the belief, the agent is committed to an estimate of the confidence-worthiness of the intuitive judgment.) Hence if the agent is rationally to retain belief in God, he or she must either undermine the claim that theism brings no apparent gain in simplicity or explanatory power, or else suggest other merits of theism which render it not theoretically inferior to atheism. But there is only the slightest of differences between doing this and arguing that theism is theoretically at least as good as atheism. Hence in practice a professional philosopher will be justified in believing that God exists only if he or she possesses good, though perhaps far from decisive, arguments for the existence of God.

Is the foregoing a good objection to (6)? Well, might someone be justified in retaining an unargued belief in God while conceding that theism is theoretically inferior to atheism? All that our theist means by the concession is this: if one is choosing between theism and atheism on the grounds of which hypothesis has the better mix of ontological economy, explanatory power etc. with respect to some agreed body of evidence, then one ought to choose atheism. (There are difficulties about specifying the content of the body of evidence; let us not dwell on these.) But, of course, our theist is not choosing between theism and atheism on these grounds. "God exists" is unargued for this theist.

There is an important distinction between an objection to our accepting a hypothesis and an argument against the truth of the hypothesis. For us today to accept that there is intelligent life in the Andromeda galaxy would be to enlarge our ontology without any apparent gain in simplicity or explanatory power. So we today ought not to accept the proposition. But the foregoing considerations do not constitute an argument against the existence of life in the Andromeda galaxy. Similarly if one retains an unargued belief in God while admitting that theism is theoretically inferior to atheism, in that theism has a larger ontology without greater simplicity or explanatory power, one is not retaining a

belief in the face of a *prima facie* good argument against, or strong evidence against, its truth. All that one is doing is holding a belief even though merely theoretical considerations, *viz.* an assessment of the arguments or evidence available, would not suffice to justify holding the belief.

We have been considering an objection to (6) relying on the claim that there are powerful arguments against the truth of “God exists”. I have pointed out that this claim may well be false. But suppose that we admit that the claim is true – e.g., because the great evils in the world do after all constitute strong evidence against the existence of God. Does it follow that for any person who is aware of this fact “God exists” cannot be properly unargued?

No: it does not follow. Why might anyone think that it did? Someone might claim that when an unargued belief conflicts with the available evidence, the rational way to resolve the problem involves adopting the standpoint of a neutral observer and treating the fact that one has acquired and retained the belief in question as a further item of evidence to be explained. But I don’t see compelling reasons for supposing that this is so. There is a strong reason for hoping that it is not so: it rules out too many of people’s present unargued beliefs as unjustified.

For example: Annette has a pain in her hand, and so forms the unargued belief that she has a pain in her hand, although she previously had good reasons for believing that she would not have any pain in her hand now – namely, that her hand is quite healthy and undamaged, and she has recently swallowed a powerful analgesic which has just removed an even worse pain in her foot. Surely Annette is justified in believing that she has a pain in her hand, even though she does not adopt the standpoint of a neutral observer, treat her present sensation and her acquisition of belief as data to be explained, and construct a good argument for the hypothesis that she has a pain in her foot. She is justified even though, being unskilled at epistemology, she *could* not do this.

As I pointed out in introducing thesis (6), whether a proposition is properly unargued for a person S depends partly on what other beliefs S has, and what can reasonably be expected of S by way of reflection and investigation. This thought suggests the following modified evidentialist position. Maybe there are lots of people, like Annette, of whom it would be unreasonable to demand arguments in support of various of their beliefs, even when those beliefs conflict with their evidence. Such people’s intellectual resources are *limited*, but not necessarily defective.

However of professional philosophers we expect more. A professional philosopher may properly hold a wide variety of unargued beliefs. But it does not follow that a professional philosopher may properly hold beliefs for which he or she cannot construct good arguments. If one of a professional philosopher's beliefs is challenged – by the production of counter-evidence or by mere dissent – then standards of epistemic justification applying to professional philosophers require him or her either to construct arguments in favour of its truth or else to suspend it pending further enquiry. Now theism is certainly under challenge. Therefore (6) is false.

The modified evidentialist demand on professional philosophers is either too weak to refute (6) or so strong as to be implausible. Need the argument that one must construct be sufficiently good that one would be justified in believing the conclusion *on the basis of this argument*? If not, then the theist may well be able to supply such an argument. There is no conflict with (6), since (6), I stipulate, involved the higher standard for being a “good” argument. If on the other hand the evidentialist's demand is that the argument be sufficiently good to justify believing the conclusion, then too many beliefs are classified as improperly unargued.

Suppose that I am aware of no reason why my friend Margaret should be unhappy, and that when I saw her an hour ago she seemed to be in good spirits. I have evidence against the conjecture that she is very upset. However I now receive a phone call from her, inviting me to lunch tomorrow, and I acquire the unargued belief that Margaret is very upset. Can I construct an argument for the truth of my belief? My acquisition of belief was, no doubt, prompted by various auditory cues, but I do not know what these were. I don't have any track record on detecting people's emotional states over the telephone. The best I can come up with is: “I have an unargued belief that Margaret is very upset; most of my unargued beliefs are true; therefore probably Margaret is very upset”. But I don't really know how to defend the second premise: everything I can think of is either circular or hopelessly vague; moreover I realise that my present belief differs in many possibly relevant respects from most of my other unargued beliefs. Surely my argument is not good enough to justify my belief. I am a professional philosopher. Does it follow that my unargued belief is unjustified?

Consider A: “There are people who can walk in bare feet over red-hot coals without injury.” I am a professional philosopher. I can construct an argument in support of A: “I seem to remember that A; I probably would not seem to remember that A unless A were true; so probably A is true”.

But once again I really don't know how to defend the second premise. Moreover all the other evidence I can think of bearing on A – e.g., my own experience of burns – militates against A. So far as I can see my total body of evidence supports not-A rather than A. But I do not on these grounds abandon my belief that A. What is true is that if I were choosing between A and not-A on the grounds of which was better supported by argument, I would choose not-A. But in fact I am not choosing between A and not-A on these grounds. I do not adopt the standpoint of a neutral observer. A is properly unargued for me: it was properly unargued for me a few minutes ago, before I constructed the argument sketched above, and it is still properly unargued for me, because my present believing is justified even though the only argument that I can think of in support of A is not sufficiently good to sustain the burden of justifying my believing.

A great many of my present unargued beliefs are relevantly similar to A. For example: “Nothing can travel faster than about 300,000 k.p.s.”; “Physicists believe that not only the physical universe but time itself began a finite time ago”. With respect to such beliefs, even a professional philosopher such as me may properly adopt an epistemic stance essentially different from Gutting's neutral observer. The evidentialist's contrary opinion requires drastic revisions in our present cognitive practices. We therefore have good reason to reject that opinion.

It might be claimed that the present justification of unargued memory beliefs like A is dependent upon my having had in the past some good argument for their truth. Maybe. But even if this is true, it does not affect the pertinence of belief A as a counter-example to the evidentialist objection stated above. Moreover other examples given above – e.g., the one about Margaret's emotional state – were not such that the present justification of my belief depended on my having formerly had a good argument for its truth.

The upshot of the foregoing discussion is that sometimes professional philosophers are justified in holding an unargued belief that p despite the fact that the balance of the arguments they have supports not-p. Hence even if one admits that evil constitutes strong evidence against the existence of God, it does not follow that “God exists” is not properly unargued for one. Of course it is also true that sometimes one ought to abandon an unargued belief in the light of contrary evidence. When?

Plantinga offers a partial answer. (For the next few paragraphs I'll follow him in talking of “basic” rather than “unargued” beliefs.) Let us consider the special case of basic memory beliefs; the discussion can later



be generalised if necessary. If I hold a basic belief of this kind then my memory does not provide me with doxastic evidence but nevertheless confers on my belief some degree of “positive epistemic status” or “warrant”. (Plantinga’s notion of positive epistemic status is not quite the same as the notion of justification, but the difference does not matter much here.) My belief will have various defeaters – in particular, propositions incompatible with it. Let us concentrate on one of these defeaters, the negation of the proposition believed, and suppose that I acquire some evidence for this defeater. According to Plantinga, I am rational in retaining my basic belief if the positive epistemic status conferred on it by my memory is greater than that conferred on its negation by the evidence I have acquired. (Plantinga does not commit himself with respect to “only if”.)<sup>10</sup>

This account is incorrect. Assume for the moment, with Plantinga, that whether I am justified in holding my basic belief is determined by the relation between two factors: the positive epistemic status conferred on the belief by my memory, and the positive epistemic status conferred on its negation by the evidence. Then am I justified in retaining my basic belief whenever the former exceeds the latter? Surely not. Whatever philosophical arguments can be found to support the assumption are highly likely to suggest that if the former factor just barely exceeds the latter then I will not be justified in retaining belief, but only in holding some lesser state such as suspecting that such-and-such.

Moreover, the assumption made a moment ago looks very dubious. Just what is the first factor mentioned in the assumption? We can hardly take it as the positive epistemic status that was conferred on my belief by my memory before I acquired the evidence. Even if this did exceed the positive epistemic status conferred on its negation by the evidence, the justification-conferring capacity of my memory may have been largely undermined in its new context, in the presence of the evidence, so that I would not be justified in retaining my belief. (For example: I have an ostensible memory of seeing Clair enter the room a minute ago. My ostensible memory confers a high epistemic status on my basic belief that Clair entered the room a minute ago. I then acquire information, about the arrival of a previously unknown twin sister, which is only moderately strong evidence against the belief, but which undermines the capacity of my present ostensible memory to confer a high epistemic status upon the belief.) But we will not get anywhere by taking the first factor as the positive epistemic status that is conferred on my belief by my memory in

its new context after the acquisition of the evidence. What needs to be decided is whether my overall cognitive circumstances confer justification on my basic belief. Can one isolate such a thing as the contribution to the justification-conferring activity of my overall cognitive circumstances which is made by my-memory-in-its-new-context? One might try to do so by calculating the degree of justification conferred by my overall cognitive circumstances and then subtracting the degree of justification that the proposition believed would have if I lacked the ostensible memory but still possessed the evidence. But doing this presupposes that one had already calculated the degree of justification conferred by my overall cognitive circumstances, which is what we are seeking.

We need a theory of properly basic, or at least properly unargued, belief and its sensitivity to evidence. Plantinga's partial account fails, and I myself lack one. Hence all that I can say at the moment is that the present objection to (6) is not clearly a sound one.

Consider a professional philosopher who has so far been an atheist but who is suddenly seized by the conviction that God exists. Persisting in the new belief would require revision of many other well-entrenched beliefs. However there are principles of belief adjustment which enjoin the conservative policy of preserving as much of one's belief system as possible. These might suggest that what should be abandoned is the newly acquired and so far isolated conviction that God exists. Are there correct principles which yield this result? I doubt it. In any case, (6) itself does not imply that in the foregoing circumstances one should retain the belief that God exists.

## **5. The causal origins of unargued beliefs**

Consider another objection to (6). An otherwise properly unargued belief would be rendered improperly unargued if the person possesses, or would possess were it not for epistemic negligence, sufficiently strong and undefeated reasons for supposing that the belief would be held even if it were in fact false. For example, at one time the belief that there is a chair in front of S may be properly unargued for person S; but if S is then told that experimenters have arranged mirrors around S in a way that they calculated would produce the belief whether or not there was actually a chair in front of S, then the belief would no longer be properly unargued for S. Now professional philosophers for whom belief in God is unargued

are in just this position. So belief in God is not *properly* unargued for them.

One way of developing this objection involves appeal to grand psychological and sociological theories such as Freudianism and Marxism. But of course these theories are highly suspect. A more convincing exposition is as follows: The vast majority of professional philosophers for whom belief in God is unargued are adherents of some theistic religion, and are members of religious communities (churches, synagogues, missionary societies, etc.) whose activities play central roles in the believers' lives. Their belief in God is supported by the consensus of others whom they respect. Abandoning belief in God would involve massive personal costs. Such circumstances have a strong tendency to sustain a belief in God quite independently of the truth of theism. Professional philosophers for whom belief in God is unargued would be quite epistemically negligent unless they were both aware of these facts and prompted by them to critical reflection on their own religious beliefs. "Ought I to trust my own judgement in these matters? Is the way things now seem to me a good guide to the truth? Are things as they seem to me?" Once such self-critical questions have been raised, what the believers need is argument for the truth of their religious beliefs.

How strong is this objection? The philosopher-theists must admit that, given the role of the religious community in their lives, and given that they possess no strong arguments against the existence of God, there is a significant likelihood that they would hold their belief in God whether or not it is true. (But need they admit that this likelihood is very high? After all, they may also be aware of psychological and social pressures against their continuing to believe in God.) Moreover they must admit that similar social circumstances are capable of producing similar beliefs, whether or not those beliefs are true – think about Buddhism. Nevertheless our philosopher-theists might maintain, on the basis of their unargued belief in God, that God's activity made an essential contribution to the actual causal history of their theistic beliefs. They might maintain that the religious community's playing the role in their lives that it in fact plays is not independent of whether God exists: the community would not have come to play this role if God had not existed. If they would be justified in holding this position, then maybe "God exists" can be properly unargued for them after all.

Consider the analogous case in which I have an unargued belief that the chemical formula for sulphuric acid is  $H_2SO_4$  while my friend has an

unargued belief that it is  $\text{H}_2\text{SO}_4$ . My belief issues from my store of memories and ostensible memories. Given that my store contains the relevant content, I would be likely to hold the belief whether or not it is true. Moreover I must admit that my friend's store has produced a similar belief even though that belief is not true. Nevertheless I maintain, on the basis of my belief that the formula *is*  $\text{H}_2\text{SO}_4$ , that the truth of the matter made an essential contribution to the actual causal history of my belief. I maintain that my store's containing the relevant content is not independent of whether the formula is  $\text{H}_2\text{SO}_4$ : my store would not have come to contain this item if the formula had been otherwise. To be sure, I have little or no independent evidence for the latter claims; but this does not make it irrational for me to advance them. Hence "The chemical formula for sulphuric acid is  $\text{H}_2\text{SO}_4$ " can be properly unargued for me after all.

Furthermore the major premise of the objection is false. This major premise was:

- (7) An otherwise properly unargued belief would be rendered improperly unargued if the person possesses, or would possess were it not for epistemic negligence, sufficiently strong and undefeated reasons for supposing that the belief would be held even if it were in fact false.

I have an unargued belief that all copper conducts electricity. I do not remember how I acquired the belief, but I assume, partly on the basis of the belief itself, that I did so in about 1960 as a result of reading a physics textbook written before then. Now if it were false that all copper conducts electricity, what would the world be like? The closest possible world to the actual world in which it is false that all copper conducts electricity is a world in which almost all copper – all copper except copper under certain very rare or remote conditions – conducts electricity. If this were the case then the physics textbooks on which I assume I relied would probably have been written in ignorance of the exceptional cases. So probably even if it were false that all copper conducts electricity, I would still now believe that it did. Since I realise this, (7) commits me to saying that my unargued belief that all copper conducts electricity is unjustified. This result suggests that (7) is too strong. Far too many of our unargued memory beliefs about the world at large will be classified as unjustified.

It might be replied: It has just been conceded that I have strong and undefeated reasons for supposing that probably the pre-1960 physics textbook would have said that all copper conducted electricity even if this

were false. Anyone who possessed these reasons and today formed the belief that all copper conducts electricity on the basis of reading this pre-1960 book would be epistemically negligent. Since I realise this, I would be epistemically negligent if I continued to hold an unargued belief that all copper conducts electricity. What I ought to do is suspend judgment on the strictly universal proposition, until I have checked recent physics books.

The reply is mistaken. Let us make the assumption – call it “the inductive assumption” – that it was highly likely, relative to the evidence available when the pre-1960 book was written, that all copper conducts electricity. In that case it was highly likely, relative to the evidence available when the pre-1960 book was written, that no new exceptions to the generalisation would be discovered in the period 1960–1988. Anyone who realised this and today formed the belief that all copper conducts electricity on the basis of reading the pre-1960 book would be non-negligent.<sup>11</sup> Should one reject the legitimacy of relying on the pre-1960 book on the grounds that the inductive assumption is doubtful? In the absence of any information about *specific* sloppiness prevalent before 1960, doing so would commit one to refraining from forming a belief that all copper conducts electricity on the basis of reading a 1988 physics textbook. Any problem is an overarching one.

The objector might try replacing (7) by

- (8) An otherwise properly unargued belief would be rendered improperly unargued if the person possesses, or would possess were it not for epistemic negligence, sufficiently strong and undefeated reasons for supposing that the belief would be held even if it were neither true nor reasonably close to the truth.

While (8) avoids the counter-example raised against (7), it is still highly controversial. Suppose that Eileen possesses an unargued belief that she is not being deceived by a demon with respect to all or most of her beliefs about the physical world. Eileen realises that if she were being deceived by a demon she would still believe that she was not. Yet surely her unargued belief might be properly unargued?

## 6. Is unargued knowledge that God exists possible?

A person S may be justified in holding an unargued belief that p even though S does not know that p. Nevertheless professional philosophers

who declare that they have a never-argued belief in God are committed to saying that they have never-argued knowledge that God exists. Earlier sections of this paper have touched on aspects of the question whether people do have such knowledge. Now consider: how *can* they have such knowledge? Reformed epistemologists have made various suggestions, which I do not wish to discuss here. An evidentialist might claim that not only do these suggestions fail, but any professional philosopher should realise that there are strong reasons for supposing that there is no way that a person could acquire and continue to possess unargued knowledge that God exists. Of course if these allegedly strong reasons rest on the explicit or implicit premise that God does not exist then the believers mentioned in (6) need hardly feel threatened. But maybe there are strong reasons which do not rest on this premise.

An evidentialist might argue: unargued knowledge that God exists is inconsistent with a naturalistic account of human cognitive capacities; but a naturalistic account is well-supported by argument. There are two lines of reply open to the believers mentioned in (6). Firstly, such a believer might say: "I now hold a partly non-naturalistic account of human cognitive capacities – e.g., one involving a special faculty of "perception" of the divine. I hold it on the basis of my unargued belief that God exists and is able to impart unargued knowledge to human beings. I admit that in the absence of this unargued belief my remaining evidence would support a naturalistic account. But I am not going solely by this remaining evidence." Secondly, the believer might say: "Of course in asserting that God exists I am committed to a partly non-naturalistic metaphysics. Still, it is not clear that unargued knowledge that God exists requires non-natural human cognitive capacities. Maybe people can obtain unargued knowledge that God exists via entirely natural cues. Admittedly I have no independent reason to suppose that they can, but this is not a strong objection to my believing that they can."

The evidentialist may reply: It is unreasonable to rely on the premise that God exists, itself unsupported by argument, in order to defend the existence of human cognitive capacities which might issue in unargued knowledge that God exists. Suppose that Robert claims to have unargued knowledge that:

(B) The first woman to climb Mount Wellington was left-handed.

We would ask how he could know such a thing. Presumably not by his

own present clairvoyance or present sensory observation of some physical trace of the ascent – an event which occurred many thousands of years ago. Suppose that Robert claims simply to remember that B. How did he originally learn that B? Presumably not by his own past sensory observation of the event itself or past clairvoyance or past sensory observation of some physical trace of the event. By a chain of testimony? The chain must begin with someone who learned that B other than by testimony. How did that person do so? Presumably either by his or her own sensory observation of the event itself, or clairvoyance, or sensory observation of some physical trace of the event. But surely we would object that there is not in fact any chain of testimony which begins in any of these ways. Robert might reply: “You cannot *disprove* that there is some unknown appropriate route by which my original knowledge that B was acquired. I maintain, on the basis of my unargued belief that B, that there is some such appropriate route.” But obviously Robert’s stance would be unreasonable. Now a professional philosopher should be aware of these considerations. So for a professional philosopher B would not be properly unargued. Similarly there is a desperate ad hocness about what the philosopher-theist needs to say to defend his or her claim to unargued knowledge that God exists.

However the evidentialist’s argument fails. Compare the questions:

- (C) Assuming that B is true, and that someone holds an unargued belief that B, might that person have unargued knowledge that B?
- (D) Assuming that God does indeed exist, and that some professional philosopher holds an unargued belief that God exists, might he or she have unargued knowledge that God exists?

Surely the answers are, respectively, “As far as we know, no” and “For all we know, yes”. Even though a person holding an unargued belief that B is committed to the thesis that unargued knowledge that B is possible, the premise B is not a reason for the truth of the conclusion “Unargued knowledge that B is possible”. The belief that there is some appropriate causal connection between the ascent of Mt Wellington and Robert’s present cognitive state, in virtue of which the latter constitutes knowledge of the former, is genuinely ad hoc. By contrast, the premise that God exists is a reason for supposing that unargued knowledge that God exists is possible. The belief that there is some appropriate causal connection between God and the theistic unargued believer’s present cognitive state is not ad hoc: there are good arguments for saying that God, if he exists, could induce unargued knowledge of his existence in many ways. The

evidentialist's analogy between the two cases breaks down at a crucial point.

The evidentialist has a rejoinder: Suppose that we replace (B) by

(B') The first woman to climb Mt Wellington was left handed and possessed the desire and power to telepathically convey information about herself to Robert.

Assuming that (B') is true, and that Robert holds an unargued belief that (B'), then Robert might well have unargued knowledge that (B'). Hence your defence of the possibility of unargued knowledge that God exists would apply equally well to the possibility of Robert's having unargued knowledge that (B'). This is a *reductio* of your defence.

Not at all. The evidentialist argument advanced earlier in this section cannot be used to show that (B') is not properly unargued. Whether it is properly unargued or not depends on other considerations. I regard (B') as being in a similar position to "There is a Great Pumpkin", which I deal with in the next section.

Professional philosophers who believe that God exists without ever having a good argument for the existence of God are not obliged to produce a theory of how unargued knowledge of God's existence occurs. But they are obliged to defend the possibility of unargued knowledge of God's existence against objections. So far they seem to be able to do so. Hence (6) survives.

## 7. Other conditions on proper basicity

So far in this paper I have spent a lot of space arguing that professional philosophers who hold an unargued belief that God exists need not be thereby violating any epistemic duties. But I cannot be sure that I have covered all candidate epistemic duties. It might turn out that unargued belief in God always involves certain epistemic defects, not considered in this paper, which are such that professional philosophers should be aware of their occurrence, and are such that there is an epistemic duty to refrain from holding beliefs found to have them. If so, then unargued belief in God would not be properly unargued for professional philosophers. In the absence of a general theory pertaining the foregoing conjecture, my defence of (6) must remain piecemeal and incomplete.

It might be thought that Plantinga imposes a further condition on



properly unargued believing in his discussion of the Great Pumpkin objection, i.e., the charge that if belief in God is properly basic then far too many beliefs are properly basic. Plantinga comments:

Of course [the Reformed epistemologist], is committed to supposing that there is a relevant *difference* between belief in God and belief in the Great Pumpkin if he holds that the former but not the latter is properly basic. But this should prove no great embarrassment: there are plenty of candidates. These candidates are to be found in the neighbourhood of the conditions that justify and ground belief in God ... Thus, for example, the Reformed epistemologist may concur with Calvin in holding that God has implanted in us a natural tendency to see his hand in the world around us; the same cannot be said for the Great Pumpkin, there being no Great Pumpkin and no natural tendency to accept beliefs about the Great Pumpkin.<sup>12</sup>

Plantinga does not here say that the nonexistence of the Great Pumpkin and the absence of a natural tendency to accept beliefs about the Great Pumpkin preclude belief in the Great Pumpkin from being properly basic. To have done so would have been to confuse necessary conditions for justified basic belief with necessary conditions for basic knowledge, but Plantinga is well aware of the difference. Rather Plantinga's view is as follows. If a belief is properly basic then there is some circumstance that serves as the ground of its justification. Any given belief could be grounded in several alternative ways. Typically the grounds of properly basic belief in God include the fact that God exists and has implanted in human beings a natural tendency to see his hand in the world around them. No similar fact holds with respect to the Great Pumpkin. So here is a difference between basic belief in God and basic belief in the Great Pumpkin, relevant to their different status with respect to justification. Plantinga is committed to adding that there is no other fact about basic belief in the Great Pumpkin which serves as the grounds of its justification. He does not argue for this claim; I think that he has simply inferred it from the *premise* that belief in the Great Pumpkin is not properly basic.

Plantinga's requirement of appropriate grounds for a basic belief might be understood as including a condition that the belief have some suitable phenomenological prompting. But it is not clear to me that this is what Plantinga intends; and in any case the condition would be implausible. (There is, of course, no reason why belief in the Great Pumpkin should not have some rich phenomenological prompting.)

No-one need deny that if a belief is properly basic then there is some

circumstance which confers justification on the belief. But this circumstance might simply be that the belief is free from the candidate violations of epistemic duty which have been discussed or alluded to earlier in this article. The requirement of appropriate grounds is not an *additional* hurdle to be cleared.

Coherence theorists will say that if a belief is properly unargued then it is linked in the right kind of way to other beliefs of the agent. But we have encountered no reason for supposing that unargued belief in God cannot be so linked.

Could there be a professional philosopher in our culture today for whom belief that there is a Great Pumpkin was properly unargued? And what about belief that God does not exist? It comes down to whether belief that there is a Great Pumpkin, or that God does not exist, could be free from the candidate epistemic defects and violations of epistemic duty discussed earlier in this paper. I need not take a stance either way. If my defence of properly unargued belief in God turns out to provide materials for a tight defence of properly unargued belief in the Great Pumpkin, then that is not a good objection to my project.

## 8. Conclusion

A strong defence of (6) can be mounted. It is a pity that this truth will be of so little help to theists re-evaluating not their recent rationality but the question whether God does indeed exist.<sup>13</sup>

## Notes

1. Alvin Plantinga identifies properly basic belief with belief that is basic in a rational noetic structure. But surely one might be justified in holding a basic belief even though one's noetic structure as a whole falls well short of rationality – e.g., because of inconsistencies in some remote part of the structure. Plantinga also holds that one's belief may constitute *knowledge* even though one is violating an epistemic duty in the process of forming and holding it. If Plantinga's argument for this claim is sound, it shows that one's belief may constitute knowledge even though one is not justified in holding it. Cf. Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Rationality*, ed. A. Plantinga and N. Wolterstorff (University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p. 55, and "Justification and Theism," in *Faith and Philosophy* 4 (1987): 412.
2. Plantinga says that, strictly speaking, it is not "God exists" but such proposi-

tions as “God is speaking to me” and “God has created all this” which are properly basic. Cf. “Reason and Belief in God”, op.cit., pp. 71–73, 81–82.

3. This conclusion conflicts with Plantinga’s account in his “Coherentism and the Evidentialist Objection to Belief in God”, in *Rationality, Religious Belief and Moral Commitment*, ed. R. Audi and W. Wainwright (Cornell University Press, 1986).
4. G. Gutting, *Religious Belief and Religious Skepticism* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1982).
5. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 86–87.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 87, 89–90.
9. Philip L. Quinn, “In Search of the Foundations of Theism,” *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985): 481, 483.
10. I ascribe the foregoing account to Plantinga on the basis of some remarks in his “The Foundations of Theism: A Reply,” *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986): 311.
11. Notice that the probability of a hypothesis relative to one’s evidence may be high even though the probability of receiving that evidence even if the hypothesis is false is also high. For example, let  $k$  be “There is a fair lottery with one million tickets and Smith intended to buy one ticket”, let  $e$  be “Smith held one ticket”, and let  $h$  be “Smith did not win the lottery”; then  $p(h/e \& k)$  and  $p(e/\sim h \& k)$  are both high.
12. Plantinga, “Reason and Belief in God,” op.cit., p. 78.
13. I would like to thank C.A.J. Coady, J.R. Howes and L.J. O’Neill for helpful discussion.