

**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY**  
**SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY**  
**(GRADUATE PROGRAM)**

**THE EVIDENTIALIST OBJECTION AND REFORMED  
EPISTEMOLOGY: AN ANALYSIS**

**BY:**  
**DERARTU MERGA**

**JUNE, 2014**

**THE EVIDENTIALIST OBJECTION AND REFORMED  
EPISTEMOLOGY: AN ANALYSIS**

**BY:**

**DERARTU MERGA**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE  
STUDIES OF ADDISABABA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE  
OF MASTERS OF ARTS IN PHILOSOPHY**

**JUNE, 2014**

**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY**  
**SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY**

**THE EVIDENTIALIST OBJECTION AND REFORMED**  
**EPISTEMOLOGY: AN ANALYSIS**

**BY:**  
**DERARTU MERGA**

**Approved By the Board of Examiners**

_____	_____	_____
<b>Chairman, Department Graduate Committee</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
_____	_____	_____
<b>Advisor</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
_____	_____	_____
<b>Examiner</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
_____	_____	_____
<b>Examiner</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>

## **Acknowledgements**

First, and for most, I am very grateful to Almighty God for all His eternal mercy and for enabling me to achieve this educational level. Second, I am greatly indebted to my advisor and mentor Dr. Christopher Bernard for introducing me to the philosophical position of Reformed epistemology. It was his insightful epistemology and philosophy of science lectures and the personal conversations we had that I was able to gain insight into Reformed religious epistemology. I would also like to thank him for providing me with all the necessary materials and going through every part of this thesis. I would like to thank Dr. Dangachew Assefa for his constructive and intellectual advice starting from my time as an undergraduate up to today. I also wish to thank the department chairman, Dr. Tenna Dewo for his cooperation and contributions to my finishing the M.A. program.

My special thanks goes to my dad, Merga Ligdi, without his encouragement, support, help in editing the paper, this thesis would not have been a completed. Most of all, I would like thank my mom, Roza Faro, and my Grandmother, Digit Misikiya Aba Zinab. They are role models in my life, both in their high ethical standards and their amazing strength. This paper is dedicated to my mother and my Grandfather, Aba Faro Aba Dula. I would also like to thank my brothers, Mohammed Merga and Yasin Nazif, my sister, Ababo Merga, my cousin, Hindiya Mohammed, and my uncle, Fikadu Ligdi, who has given me all the moral and emotional support that one could offer.

Finally, I very grateful to my friends, Nehaab Abayneh and Derartu Bekele, for sharing the burdens of my life over the last two years. Last, but not least, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to my friends: Berhan Desta, Kirubel Tamarat, Adisalem Amare, Tafese Walea, and to all the members of the Christian fellowship.

## Table of Contents

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
Acknowledgments	
Table of Contents	
Introduction .....	1
<b>Chapter one:</b>	
Argument for the existence of God.....	4
1.1. Introduction .....	4
1.2 The ontological argument.....	5
1.3 Plantinga’s schematic form of ontological argument.....	6
1.4 The cosmological argument .....	8
1.5 The third way .....	10
1.6 Teleological argument.....	12
<b>Chapter Two:</b>	
Limitations of the arguments for the existence of God .....	16
2.1 Introduction .....	16
2.2 The “ordinary believer” objection to natural theology.....	17
2.3 Strong rationalism .....	20
2.4. Fideism.....	21
2.5 Wittgenstein’s view of the argument regarding religious belief .....	25
<b>Chapter three:</b>	
Belief in the existence of God without arguments or evidence .....	31
3.1 Introduction .....	31

3.2	Descartes' epistemology .....	32
3.3.	Cartesian epistemology .....	34
3.4	The concept of knowledge .....	35
3.4.1	The belief or acceptance condition .....	36
3.4.2	The truth condition .....	36
3.4.3	The reason or justification theory .....	36
3.5	Reformed epistemologists .....	39
3.6	The evidentialist objection .....	42
3.6.1	The nature of evidentialist Objection. ....	43
3.6.2	The evidentialists objection based on epistemic obligation .....	45
3.7	Classical foundationism .....	48
3.8	Conditions on proper basicity.....	50
3.9	The collapse of foundationism .....	52
3.10	The reformed objection to natural theologians .....	54
3.11	Rejecting classical foundationalism .....	58
3.12	Is belief in God properly Basic .....	59
3.13	Great pumpkin objection.....	59
3.14	The ground of belief in God.....	62
3.15	Fideism.....	64

**Chapter Four:**

	Reflection on Alvin Plantinga's belief in the Existence of God without evidence and critical analysis of the evidentialist objection .....	66
4.1	Introduction .....	66

4.2. The Nature of the begging question fallacy .....	66
4.3 Fallacy of begging the question committed in the evidentialists objection .....	67
Conclusion .....	77
References	

## Introduction

There are several views in religious epistemology that count belief in God as rationally justified, even without evidence. One such position is known as “Reformed epistemology.” It was in early 1980s that Reformed epistemology appeared on the philosophical scene. Historically speaking, one of the most important challenges to the rationality of religious belief is what is known as the “evidentialist objection.” It is a product of enlightenment thinking. The claim of evidentialists is that for religious beliefs to be epistemically justified they have to be rationally grounded in the deliverances of reason and experience. Religious believers have two options for responding to this objection. One response is the response of natural theology. Natural theology is the project of providing arguments for the existence of God. Natural theologians accept the same basic epistemological principle that the evidentialist objection is based on but they think there *is* sufficient evidence to meet its epistemic demands. If they succeeded in providing evidence, they will have successfully defended belief in the existence of God on the evidentialist’s own terms. Reformed epistemologists, on the other hand, choose a second kind of response. They challenge the underlying epistemological principle upon which the evidentialist objection is based. They challenge the assertion that belief in God can only be rational if there are sufficiently good arguments and propositional evidence to believe the claim is true. Historically, Reformed epistemologists stressed that many religious beliefs are not grounded in the deliverances of reason, experience, or the intellect but that religious belief can still be rational, nevertheless. They argue, further, that religious belief does not typically seem to depend on arguments or chains of other beliefs at all. One prominent Reformed epistemologist, Alvin Plantinga, argues that religious belief can be properly basic beliefs and hence, be rationally justified independently of arguments and propositional evidence. Properly basic beliefs are, according to epistemic

foundationalism, beliefs that are epistemically justified even if such belief is not grounded in arguments, propositional evidence, or any other kind of beliefs. (*Philosophy of Religion in the 21st Century*, 2001) My focus in this thesis will be on Alvin Plantinga's defense of the rationality of religious belief from the evidentialists objection. I will also examine Plantinga's objection to natural theology, which contends that the rationality of belief in God can be a properly basic belief and, so, does not require the traditional theistic arguments to be sound in order for it to be justified. Finally, I will give my own critical analysis of the evidentialist objection and of the response of Reformed epistemologists to it.

I have attempted to critically analyze the logical flow of the evidentialist objection. In order to furnish the ground to make my points clear, I have included four chapters in this thesis.

Chapter one is entitled "Arguments for the Existence of God." My discussion in this chapter gives the general background of philosophers' answers to the different philosophical questions that arise in course of life, particularly regarding belief in God. Even though the question about the rationality of belief in God has been raised, starting from the time of classical philosophers, my paper is limited to the three traditional, and well-known, theistic arguments of influential medieval philosophers: St. Anselm's ontological argument, Thomas Aquinas's cosmological argument, and William Paley's version of the design argument. The presentation of each argument gives an idea about how knowledge of the existence of God might possibly be achieved by way of rational argument. It furnishes some of the groundwork for one of my objectives in this paper, namely, to criticize natural theology. I do this in chapter three.

Chapter two is entitled “Limitation about Argument for the Existence of God.” This chapter presents and discusses two different views of the epistemology of religion, namely: fideism and strong rationalism. The position of strong rationalism, which serves as bench mark for the critics of Plantinga to the evidentialist objection, is taken up in the following chapter. The discussion of fideism has been included simply in order to supplement and complete the main purpose of the paper.

Chapter three is entitled; “Belief in the existence of God without arguments or evidences” is the largest chapter of the paper. One of my major objectives is to analyze the Reformed Epistemologist’s response to the evidentialist objection. I will accomplish this goal by examining Reformed epistemology as it is developed and laid out by Plantinga. In the course of examining of religious evidentialism (strong rationalism).I will also discuss whether Plantinga’s religious epistemology amounts to fideism.

Chapter four is entitled “Reflection and Critical analysis on the logical flow of the classical foundationalists proposition about basic belief.” This chapter is included to meet another objective of mine in this paper. Having in mind the crucial points of the whole chapters in this chapter, I have made an effort to evaluate the logical flow of the evidentialists objection and defense of the Reformed epistemologists against the evidentialist about the existence of God. As the view of fideism is supplementary content to the paper, I have not reflected up on it in chapter four.

## Chapter one:

### Argument for the existence of God

#### 1.1 Introduction

One of the important desires of human beings is to find answers to the “big questions” of human existence answers to important philosophical questions regarding the meaning of life that arise during the course of one’s life. The question whether belief in God is rational is a historically central question in the philosophy of religion. In the history of the philosophy of religion, religious philosophers have tried to establish the existence of God by means of providing rational arguments for the existence of God. Challenges to belief in God have played a significant historical role in the development of these theistic arguments.

Traditionally, the arguments about the existence of God are categorized into two broad categories: *a priori* arguments and *posterior arguments*. An argument about God is *a priori* when none of the premises are justified empirically. Conversely when at least one of the premises of an argument for the existence of God is justified empirically, then it is considered a *posterior* argument.(Michael Peterson W. H., 1996, p. 143). Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) categorized the moral argument and the ontological argument for God as *a priori* arguments and the cosmological and teleological arguments as *posterior arguments* (Plantinga A. , 1967, p. 4).

Basically the reason why I began my thesis with this chapter is to avoid possible confusion that might occur in the absence of presenting clear argument about the existence of God which is going to be evaluated in the following chapters. As a result among the different arguments formulated about the existence of God I have chosen the three classical arguments known as

*ontological, cosmological and teleological* arguments that have tried to give a response to the issue in question.

## **1.2 The ontological argument**

Before discussing the details of ontological argument, it is important to define the term *ontology*. “Ontology” is the Greek word being or existence. This means that the ontological argument is the argument for the existence of God based upon considerations of ultimate reality. The first, and best-known, version of the ontological argument was proposed by St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109 C.E.). During his lifetime, Anselm served the Catholic Church as priest and as the archbishop of the British city of Canterbury. He is famous for his formulation of ontological argument about the existence of God which is set out in his work *Proslogium*. Anselm suggests that those who hold to the Christian faith should be intellectually humble. At best, he contends, they can discover the reason why Christianity is true: “The thesis that if one knows the word God he cannot deny His existence without contradiction. God is that Being than which none greater can be conceived. The greatest Being must be a perfect Being, and perfection includes existence. Hence it is a contradiction to say God is the greatest perfect Being but does not exist” (Katen, 1973, pp. 359-400).

In one of his works, Plantinga presents the ontological argument from the time of Anselm until the present time. It is fascinating history. However, the ontological argument is neither clear nor convincing. Rather, it is famously difficult to understand the substance of the argument. Generally, Plantinga urges two reasons that explain philosophers’ fascination with the ontological argument (Plantinga A. , 1967, p. 27).

The first reason, according to Plantinga, is the thin definition of “God” that Anselm uses and the confusing nature of the various premises of the ontological argument. Nevertheless, he realizes that not all premises fail to connect the assertion about the existence of God to the greatness of God. The second reason is, according to Plantinga, that even if, at the first glance, the ontological argument is unconvincing, and it is extremely difficult to determine exactly where it goes wrong. Finally, Plantinga concludes that it is doubtful that any philosopher has provided really convincing refutation of the ontological argument (Plantinga A. , 1967, p. 27).

Anselm does not deny that some persons can fail to see that God, defined as the greatest conceivable being, exists. However, for him, this is because they have not properly understood the concept of God. Once one sees that God really is the greatest possible being, his existence is undeniable (Michael Peterson W. H., 1998, p. 86).

### 1.3 Plantinga’s schematic form of ontological argument

- (1) God is a being than which nothing greater can be conceived
- (2) We understand the words’ A being than which nothing greater can be conceived
- (3) Whatever is understood is in the understanding(mind)
- (4) Therefore; A being than which nothing greater can be conceived exists in the understanding (From 2 and 3).
- (5) Either a being than which nothing greater can be conceived exists in the understanding but not in reality or a being than which nothing greater can be conceived exists both in the understanding and in reality
- (6) Assume (in order to show false by *reduction*); A being than which none greater can be conceived exists in the understanding but not in reality.
  - (6a) A being than which nothing greater can be conceived can be thought to exist in reality.
  - (6b) Existing in reality and in the understanding is greater than existing in the understanding alone
  - (6c) A being than which nothing greater can be conceived (if it exist in the understanding alone ) is not a being than which nothing greater can be conceived, for another being greater than it can be conceived, namely, the same being that exists in reality ( a contradiction results from the original assumption, allowing us to conclude that it is false)
- (7) Therefore; A being than which nothing greater can be conceived (God) exists in the understanding and in reality (from 4, 5,6c) (Plantinga A. , 1967, p. 29).

In the above argument, from the first premise, we can see the kind of logical inference Anselm uses to make his argument. Premise (6c) is a contradiction. It intentionally involves a violation of the law of non-contradiction in order to infer God's existence by way of a *reduction ad absurdum* argument. So, the argument form that Anselm relies on is *reductio ad absurdum*. According to this rule of logic, if you make an assumption and the assumption results in a contradiction, then you are entitled to infer the negation of your original assumption.

If someone is justified in believing in God on the basis of the ontological argument, then he is justified *a priori* because the ontological is an *a priori* argument. A belief is justified *a priori* if, and only if, it is non-experientially justified. So, it is reasonable to interpret Anselm to hold the view that belief in God can be justified *a priori*, i.e. on the basis of pure reason alone and completely independent from experience. Additionally, premise (2, 3 and 4) show that, this justification is based in the understanding (i.e. the mind).

In the third chapter, I will discuss the concept of justification and the nature of knowledge, particularly as it relates to, the existence of God. Here, I only mentioned the idea of justification in order to explain a unique feature of Anselm's argument, that it is a *a priori* argument. Roughly, means to have good reason to hold a belief. If Anselm is right, if his ontological argument for God provides *a priori* justification for believing that God exists, then this conclusion will be succeed in showing that belief in God is justified and the evidentialist objection fails.

Premise (6c) shows why Anselm call the atheist "fool" it is because denying the ontological argument, if the argument is correct, violates the law of non-contradiction.

Even if the soundness of Anselm's ontological argument is criticized by many thinkers, such as Gaunilo (a contemporary of Anselm's and a monk at the monastery of Marmoutier), my primary purpose, in this thesis, is not to present the critics of these arguments but to focus on Kant,

Aquinas, and a few others, so I have not included detailed discuss of the critics of these figures. Rather, here my purpose is to present only the argument which is latter criticized for various reasons.

Thomas Aquinas is another well-known Christian medieval philosopher. He was not impressed with the ontological argument but saw another way of arguing for the existence of God in the cosmological argument.

#### **1.4 The cosmological argument**

Even though this chapter only discusses one version of cosmological argument one that focuses on God as the cause of the universe, Allen Stairs states that the general notion of cosmological type arguments is that there must be some first uncaused cause of everything or some non-contingent being that the rest of the contingent universe depends on for its existence. The cosmological argument addresses an ultimate “why” question. It addresses ultimate questions like, “did the material world have a cause? If so, was the cause a divine one? Can causal chains stretch back forever?” These are some of the questions which we will have a look at in this section (Allen Stairs, 2007, p. 57)

My discussion will be based on the medieval Christian philosopher Thomas Aquinas’ version of the cosmological argument. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) was born in the city of Aquino near Naples in Italy. At the age of five, Thomas was offered (*oblatus*) by his parents to the Benedictine Abbey of Monte Cassino that was not far from the place of his birth in Aquino. Aquinas was sent to a school in Naples where he got his first exposure to the philosophy of Aristotle. (Verkamp, 1938, p. 199)

However, the historical roots of his cosmological argument go back much further than Aquinas to the Greek philosophers Plato and, particularly, Aristotle. Unlike Plato, the argument of Aquinas regarding the causal inference resembles Aristotle's first cause (1985, pp. 50-51).

One of the reasons that Aquinas came up with his cosmological argument is the problematic nature of the Anselm's ontological argument:

...Anselm's argument begins with the assumption that we have a grasp of what God is – of the "essence" of God, as Thomas would put it. But that is not something we can assume. What God is must be filled in by... revelation just as much as that God is. For we do not have an intuition of intelligible realities; we cannot just grasp concepts out of the air. Since we are rational animals, all our knowledge must start from-though it may lead us beyond- the senses. And the senses do not inform us directly about the nature of God (Melchert, 1995, p. 257)

What Melchert indicates is that even if Thomas Aquinas is an empiricist, he does believe one can know that God exists with his sense experience alone but Aquinas thinks that we can know that God exists from reasoning about nature and we can know a little basics about God's nature or essence from reasoning about nature (i.e. he is powerful, eternal, etc) but we can't know all of the details about God's existence independently of special revelation (like the Trinity, etc.).

The nature of God can be accessible only through the divine revelation. Aquinas gives the reason why God cannot be known by human reason as follows:

Our natural knowledge begins from sense. Hence our natural knowledge can go as far as it can be led by sensible things. But our intellect cannot be led by sense so far as to see the essence of God; because sensible creatures are effects of God which do not equal the power of God, their cause. Hence from the knowledge of sensible things the whole power of God cannot be known; nor therefore can His existence be seen. But because they are His effects and depend on their cause, we can be led from them so far as to know of God whether He exists, and to know of Him what must necessarily belong to Him, as the first cause of all things, exceeding all things caused by Him. (Pegis, 1945, pp. 257-258)

In general, Aquinas disagrees with the concept of God given by Anselm, i.e. the existence of a God who can be known simply by the definition of God because it would have to be known

self-evidently known and: "... Something is self-evident if all you need to do in order to see that it is true, is to understand it...[However, God's existence is not self-evident to us in the sense just expressed]... And the reason is that we get our concepts and our knowledge by abstraction from our experience, and experience does not contain any direct intuition of the existence of God. So we must go by another path" (Melchert, 1995, p. 257).

As Plantinga presents it, Aquinas next turns to argue about things found in nature so as to make an investigation that will lead him to develop comprehensive argument for the existence of God. In particular, he turns to consider the ideas of contingency, dependency, and necessity. Aquinas thinks about what is possible to be, not possible to be, and possible not to be (i.e. necessary). He notices that in nature some things come into existence, some are corrupted and eventually go out of existence. So it is possible for things to be and not to be. Things that are possible to be or not to be are contingent things. It is impossible for contingent things to always have existed for that cannot both exist and not exist at the same time (Plantinga A. , 1967, p. 4).

### **1.5 The third way**

We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated, and to be corrupted, and consequently, it is possible for them to be and not to be. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which cannot-be at sometime is not. Therefore if everything cannot-be, then at one time there was nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist begins to exist only through something already existing. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist, and thus even now nothing would be in existence which is absurd. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary. But every necessary thing either has its necessity caused by another, or not. Now it is impossible to go on to infinity in necessary things which have their necessity caused by another, as has been already proved in regard to efficient causes. Therefore we cannot but admit the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God (Martin, 1996, pp. 220-221).

Plantinga states that Aquinas' so called "third way" to prove that God exists is based on the phenomena of possibility and necessity as seen in nature .These ideas of possibility, or

contingency and dependency, and necessity can be understood by observing and analyzing nature and by reflecting on natural processes. From these observations one can determine the possibility that everything may come into existence and, as well, go out of existence (Plantinga A. , 1967, pp. 4-5).

The above quote stresses on the concept of necessity and possibility. Possible beings are things which are essentially able to change. Contingent beings have the potential to come into existence as well as go out of existence. These things, or “beings,” are not the efficient cause of their own existence. Their existence depends on other things, or “beings”. This is just another way of saying that something has to explain the existence of contingent beings because it is possible for them to both exist and not exist. The fact that they exist demands an explanation.

The existence of a contingent being cannot depend on an impossible being because there are no such things. So, that leaves two other options. One option is that contingent beings either depend on other contingent beings for their existence. Another option is that the existence of contingent beings depends on a necessary being. Aquinas argues that, ultimately, contingent beings must depend on a necessary being for their existence. Otherwise there would be an infinite regress of contingent beings causing other contingent beings to exist and Aquinas contends that it is absurd.

Therefore, Aquinas concludes that to avoid this absurd conclusion, it is necessary that any series of contingent beings, or thing, ultimately depend on a necessary being for their existence. This first and necessary being in the chain of contingent beings is the being on which all of the other beings, in the series of contingent beings, depend for their existence. What sort of thing is this necessary being? A thing, or being, which exists necessarily, is a being who by nature, cannot cease to exist or perish. According to Aquinas, the necessary being which has this quality in the

series of dependency is God. In other words, God exists and it a necessary being. This can be demonstrated by observing and carefully reasoning about the nature of possibility, impossibility, and necessity (Plantinga A. , 1967, pp. 4-5).

Plantinga shows the third way in schematic form as follows.

Premise #1: There are at present contingent beings/things that are possible to be and not to be.

Premise #2: Whatever can fail to exist, at some time does not exist.

Premise #3: Therefore if all beings are contingent, then at one time nothing existed.

Premise #4: Whatever begins to exist is caused to begin to exist by something else already existing.

Conclusion: Therefore, if at any time nothing existed, then at every subsequent time nothing would exist.

Premise #5: Hence if at any time nothing existed, then nothing exist now.

Premise #6: Therefore, not all beings are contingent.

Premise #7: Hence there is at least one necessary being.

Premise #8: Every necessary being either has its necessity caused by another being or has its necessity in itself.

Premise #9: It is impossible that there be an infinite series of necessary beings each of which has its necessity caused by another.

Conclusion: Therefore, the necessary being having of itself its own necessity and this all man speak of as God (Plantinga A. , 1967, pp. 5-6).

Thomas Aquinas discusses another argument for God, the teleological argument, in his fifth way to prove the existence of God .However, I will expound William Paley’s version of the design argument, rather than Aquinas’.

## **1.6 Teleological argument**

The fact that both the teleological and cosmological arguments start with, and are based on, observations about the natural world make them *a posteriori arguments*. Unlike the cosmological argument, the focus of the teleological argument is not based on the mere existence of the universe but also on its character as a complex and orderly universe. It is from this observation of complex order in the universe that design argument begins (*Philosophy of Religion:Thinking about Faith*, 1985).

Although the English theologian William Paley (1743-1805) is very famous for his particular version of the teleological argument in eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the historical roots of this argument goes back to the medieval period. The design argument is clearly presented in Aquinas' fifth way for proving the existence of God (Philosophy of Religion:Thinking about Faith, 1985).

Aquinas presents the teleological argument by using the analogy of an arrow aiming at a target, in his fifth way. The fifth way is based on observations about the way the natural world is governed. The line of the arrow indicates the redundancy. That is the move of people and other things on the same path to fill in or make up for the lack of knowledge to get to their end. Even if everything moves to fill in the gap of knowledge, it may not necessarily be the lack of the knowledge itself that makes a move rather it could be assumed there should be some other power endowed with knowledge and intelligence that moves things toward an end. So, deductively, Aquinas concludes that everything gets to its end by an intelligent being God (Philosophy of Religion:Thinking about Faith, 1985).

The deductive argument is made based on the two features found in nature (order and good value) that imply the design theory together. Things in nature always act in order and in the same way that result in good value. So the coming together of the good value and order will bring in turn another beneficial order. Therefore, for Thomas Aquinas this happens not by chance rather it happens on purpose. This argument of Aquinas is criticized and its scope is widened by many philosophers such as Richard Taylor and Richard Swinburne. However my aim is not to discuss the critics rather to present Paley's design argument (Philosophy of Religion:Thinking about Faith, 1985).

Paley used to defend the argument by appeal to experience of analogous entities. The analogy is made between the complex machines such as watch and camera with the natural object which is the result of beneficial order. The similarity between the machines and the natural objects and knowing the designer of the machines possibly explains the possible analogy. This was the base Paley used to formulate and develop his argument (Philosophy of Religion: Thinking about Faith, 1985).

Paley defended his teleological argument by bringing two scenarios: the first scenario is about a person walking through a field and come across a stone and a watch. The person obviously needs explanation why the watch is there, for the existence of the watch infer the existence of an intelligent being who designed it. On the other hand, the person himself does not bother about the existence of the stone for the stone exists there all the time. The second scenario is about the similarity between a camera and an eye, and which may be the more complex nature of an eye than camera (Allen Stairs, 2007, pp. 25-26).

It is briefly seen that Paley intentionally came up with different entities compared in the above scenario. The difference seen between the stone and the watch is teleological difference. The reason why one needs an explanation for the watch but not for stone is because the watch has different parts like wheels ,gears and springs and the coming together of these parts make a system with a purpose .This system with the purpose is called goal directed complexity. For the stone to fail to have the goal directed nature it could mean the stone has existed there always (Allen Stairs, 2007, p. 26).

In the second scenario the similarity between a camera and an eye can be seen in their function. Every major functions of camera like focus of an image which is managed by lens for camera is

managed by cornea for an eye, the regulated amount of light reaching sensor is controlled by aperture in camera while this is controlled by pupil in an eye. The light sensitive medium that registers light pattern is film in camera while it is Retina in eye (Allen Stairs, 2007, p. 27).

Even though it is undeniable that there is a difference between a camera and an eye, Paley argued that this difference shows the superiority of the eye over the camera for different reasons. Some of the reasons are, retina is more sensitive to light than film, the eye also functions over a much wider spectrum of light availability than a typical camera and the eye is extremely sensitive to touch; this sensitivity helps to protect it from damage (Allen Stairs, 2007, p. 27).

According to Paley's argument, the very nature of natural environment shows that some part of it needs information to survive and succeed. Animals, insects, plants and others can be taken as living watch, because they manifest at least as much theology as human made watches do. Eye is one of the ways through which animals gather information (Allen Stairs, 2007, p. 27).

His argument is, since an eye and camera have wide similarity and if necessarily camera has intelligent designer for its goal- directed complexity in nature his analogical argument led him to say that the human eye has super intelligent designer, too (Allen Stairs, 2007, p. 27) Based on the above argument he drew the conclusion all goal directed complexities have intelligent designer behind and the biological watch like an eye is goal directed complexity and from the part of the world the evidence can be best explanation that it is designed by super intelligent designer God (Allen Stairs, 2007, p. 27).

## Chapter Two:

### Limitations of the arguments for the existence of God

#### 2.1 Introduction

The major aim of this chapter is to critically discuss and assess the various traditional arguments for the existence of God. The point of this discussion is to help us get clear on the limitations of natural theology. Natural theology is the view that human reason alone is sufficient to establish the existence of God. Proponents of natural theology are called “natural theologians.” Natural theologians sometimes simply seem to *assume* that reason alone can prove the existence of God. However, critics of natural theology have offered insightful criticisms of natural theology, which highlight the weaknesses and limitations of trying to establish the existence of God by rational argumentation. I have chosen the following three perspectives as positions to act as foils to discuss natural theology: “the actual reason the ordinary person believes in God” objection, strong rationalism, and fideism. My hope is that by setting out and discussing these three positions we will acquire insight that will help us critically assess the natural theologian’s claim that reason alone can epistemically justify belief in God.

As already discussed in chapter one, natural theologians tend to focus on three particular arguments to justify belief in God: the cosmological, the ontological, and the teleological argument. As Plantinga, et al (1989) points out; the reason why natural theologians offer these “proofs” for God is in order to defend the thesis that there is sufficient epistemic justification for religious belief. With the motive of making their argument stronger, natural theologians have tried to show that what they believe by faith is sufficiently epistemically justified to count as knowledge. It is by contrast to this claim of natural theologians that opens the way for the

alternative, or competing, three positions that I mentioned earlier regarding the role that reason plays in justifying belief in God: ordinary believer, strong rationalism, and fideism. In this chapter, the discussion about strong rationalism has two purposes. The first is to show the limitations of the arguments for the existence of God. The second is to introduce the evidentialist objection. The rest of the discussions included in the chapter serve as supplementary material to round off and complete the discussion.

## **2.2 The “ordinary believer” objection to natural theology**

Despite theistic arguments for the existence of God, defenders of the ordinary believer objection to natural theology point out that the ordinary religious believer does not, in fact, believe in God on the basis of arguments. Some go further and argue that reason plays no role even in strengthening religious belief.

The point here is that even if the three traditional arguments for the existence of God were logically sound and succeeded in proving the existence of God, they would not provide the epistemic justification necessary to justify the belief of the ordinary religious believer. Most ordinary believer has probably never heard of the cosmological, ontological, and teleological argument. Most have never heard of Aquinas, Anselm, or Paley.

So, contrary to the claim of the natural theologian, the traditional theistic arguments do not typically justify belief in God. This is not to say that no religious believer has ever believed in God because of these arguments. Some may have but most haven't. This means that natural theology, even if it is successful is an extremely limited defense of religious belief limited to the very few who believe in God based on those arguments.

They contend that it is meaningless to defend the rationality of religious belief this way because almost no religious people believe in God for the reasons of natural theology (Geisler, *Philosophy of religion*, 1981, p. 88). In other words, one problem with natural theology is that it gets the *psychology* of religion wrong. Contrary to the natural theologian's claim, most people do not believe in God because of rational argumentation.

In the eyes of the proponents of the ordinary believer objection to natural theology belief in God cannot be defended by arguing that there are rational intellectual defenses for belief in God because rational argumentation is not the basis of their belief. It is far more plausible and realistic to think that most religious believers' justification for religious belief is based on something more subjective, like religious experience (Geisler, *Philosophy of religion*, 1981, p. 88).

The Reformed epistemologists' example of belief in God as being properly basic illustrated by Allen Stairs (et.al.2007) highlighting this example, "Grandma believes in God, but not because she has read St. Thomas Aquinas, William Paley or St. Anselm of Canterbury. Most theists are like Grandma. They believe God exists and may even live lives of great faith without ever being exposed to theistic arguments, let alone convinced by them." If the belief of the ordinary believer is justified, then this implies that religious belief need not necessarily be supported by argumentation in order to be epistemically justified that in order to be justified religious belief does not have to be based on inferential reasoning. The other point that this example clarifies about theistic arguments is that the ordinary believer strengthen their belief in God, not with the support of theistic arguments or by searching for a place that reason has in faith; rather it is based on sets of different explanations of various modes of religious experience that can include praying, reading the bible, and singing. As a result, the coming together of these activities

triggers their belief in God and strengthening their faith (Allen Stairs, 2007, pp. 161-162). As it is indicated by Norman Geisler (et.al, 1975), William James gives psychological explanation for why the typical rational proofs for the existence of God are unpersuasive to ordinary believers. According to him, the reason for this is that human needs go deeper than the rational. This is due to the rational nature of man is impressed with arguments after his feeling have been impressed (Geisler, Philosophy of religion, 1981, pp. 88-89).

According to James's suggestion, reason is the only applied to beliefs that one already affirms. In other words, we typically engage in reasoning about beliefs that we already hold. Furthermore, when the reverse occurs, when we try to use reason to generate and justify new beliefs, ones that we do not yet hold, this tends to psychological inconvenience. . (Geisler, Philosophy of religion, 1981, pp. 88-89)

To Norman the reasons why proofs are psychologically unconvincing are because they tend to be academic and formal or do not touch man's existential needs. Norman explains with John Dewey comments on theistic proof; "the cause of dissatisfaction is that .... That they are too formal to offer any support to religion in action". He comments the theistic proof for its being formal to meet the inner part of man. Even the valid argument that shows the rationality of believing in God can't support religion in action or meet man's existential needs.

Following Norman puts his critics of arguments for God as follows "in brief even if rational "proofs" for God were valid, they seem not to be vital: they seem too speculative to mean much for man's practical life. And even if the arguments could "prove", God, they leave many un-persuaded." (Geisler, Philosophy of religion, 1981, p. 89).

### **2.3 Strong rationalism**

Strong rationalism is a belief system which argues accurate use of reason in making propositional argument. The basic idea of strong rationalism can be seen in the work of W.K.Clifford. According to Clifford, every action and belief should be proved based on the propositional argument method. This is possible for reason neutrally exists in human faculty between conflicting worldviews so that everyone can have pure assumption about everything around (*Michael Peterson W. H., 1998, p. 45*).

The position of the strong rationalism is another view that emphasizes the limitation of the natural theologian's arguments. However, the limitations the strong rationalist sees in these arguments are quite different than the limitations discussed in connection with the previous positions. The strong rationalist sees the arguments offered by the natural theologian as unsuccessful arguments. They fail to establish their intended conclusion, namely, that God exists. So, the limitation that the strong rationalist sees in the natural theologian's arguments is their short-comings in terms of reason and evidence. The arguments fail to be deductively sound or instances of good inductive reasoning. According to the strong rationalists' argument, the natural theologian tries to use reason in order to prove what they believe but their efforts ultimately fail. This problem happens because of seldom peaceful relation between faith and reason. As it is pointed out by Michael Peterson (et.al.1998) the early Christian writer Tertullian expresses his rejection for the role of philosophy in religious belief as follows "what has Athens to do with Jerusalem". This implies that reason and faith are two distinct worlds of which differences can never be reconciled. The tool to know once religious belief is faith while the tool for knowing other world is reason, (*Michael Peterson W. H., 1998, p. 45*).

In view of Peterson, (et. al, 1998) regarding thinking about the place reason has in religion; there are points which are controversial and uncontroversial. This thesis is generally committed to the former one. Using reason and explaining one's belief system to children or new believers is relatively uncontroversial but, the controversy happens when people try to understand their faith through reason (Michael Peterson W. H., 1998, p. 45). The controversy is basically related to the reason why the argument of strong rationalism is against the natural theologians.

Based on the strong rationalist view there is no any propositional argument which could not be seen without the evaluation of reason, for reason is found in human faculty as determining tool all world view could be determined as pseudo and rational. So in the evaluation of strong rationalist the natural theologian's argument is an argument that pretends to be intelligent since the religious belief has some sort of faith that leaves gaps of strength of the theologians' argument.

## **2.4 Fideism**

Peterson Michael (et. al, 1998) indicated fideism can be defined for this purpose as follows. "The religious belief systems which are not subject to rational evaluation." (Michael Peterson W. H., 1998, p. 50). This section will take in the argument of the existentialist Soren Kierkegaard who is known for his pure position of fideism. By "pure fideism," I mean the position that religious beliefs are only legitimately held by faith and, further, any beliefs held by faith are not justified by reason, arguments, or evidence. Wittgenstein also seems to stake out a fideistic position, even though not all interpreters of Wittgenstein agree that his position amount to fideism.

Peterson Michael (et. al, 1989) insist that Kierkegaard's argument shows the relation between faith and reason as follows: believing on some objective way or through rational inquiry is likely

to avoid faith because if one gives a reason for the existence of God or his love having an objective knowledge about it, there is no need for faith even it frustrates the goal that we have to know God. (Michael Peterson W. H., 1998, p. 50)

Michael Peterson (et.al,1998) indicate that the basic concern regarding religious belief is not that there be sufficient propositional evidence which helps to justify belief in God, rather for philosophers like Kierkegaard there is insufficient evidence which requires a leap of faith. Kierkegaard's objection is more than an objection to the epistemology underlying natural theology. It is fundamentally a *religious* objection. Kierkegaard's points is that even if one could know for certain that God exists, by way of arguments and propositional evidence, and that seems unlikely, such a God would be difficult to worship. Kierkegaard's point is that the kind God that is proved at the end of a syllogism is not a God anyone should want to worship. Such a God is an artificial construct the God of the logician, not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. A mathematician might appreciate the kind of God one gets at the end of a deductively valid syllogism but religion is not math and logic. Religion is about worship and inspiration. So, natural theology, he argues actually makes practicing religion more difficult. It makes the conditions worse for worshipping something which could be proved with arguments and propositional evidence and this frustrates the goal of coming to know God because there is no religious element in the natural theologian's project, there is no faith in this process, there is only cold, precise logic. (Michael Peterson W. H., 1998, p. 50)

As it is concluded by Michael (et. al, 1989) Kierkegaard's suggestion concerning checking and evaluating ones religious belief with different standards and logic is not considered as making sure the validity of the belief system. For him this is worshipping logic and science itself than worshipping God. Since Kierkegaard is the proponents of fideism he argues the central point of

fideism lies on the fundamental assumption found within the religious belief itself. The fundamental assumption regarding legitimate religious belief is faith and the evaluation of its legitimacy is also made only based on faith. In this regard, looking for a religiously external reference, like an intellectual apparatus for judging the legitimacy of religious belief is considered by Kierkegaard as worshiping the intellectual standard used to judge the legitimacy of belief rather than worshiping God (Michael Peterson W. H., 1998, p. 49).

Additionally, Kierkegaard shows his disapproval of the existentialist perspective that the truth of religion could not be seen in an objective way by making propositional argument about it. He explains this by referring the existence of human being illustrated with the following example. “One cannot select his spouse on the basis of points scored in a beauty or body building contest.” Moreover, the writer argues that rational inquiry has always the component of faith. According to Kierkegaard, the rational inquiry is “approximation-process” one always comes closer and closer to the ultimate answer but never quite reaches it. So, there are always more bits of evidences to consider one more book or article to read and evaluate and this implies that faith is important to making decisions. In this process, if one could proof God it frustrate rather than the goal of coming to know God (Michael Peterson W. H., 1998).

Generally, the following summary indicates the limitations of theistic argument from the Kierkegaard point of view. For the reason that the natural theologian’s evaluation system is external to the religious system of thinking and belief, it is open to various criticisms. As discussed above, using logic or science as tool to measure, or determine, the legitimacy of religious belief is, in view of Kierkegaard, tantamount to worshiping the measurement, or standard of legitimacy, itself instead of God. So, from this perspective, I argue that natural theologian’s rub related ideas together instead of showing clearly what the rational of believing

in God really is; they use inappropriate tools to evaluate religious belief because of their wrong assumption about the nature of religious belief. They consider science and logic as standard tools to evaluate every worldview, including religious ones. This can be seen in the discussions of other philosophers', like Thomas Aquinas' cosmological argument for the existence of a first uncaused cause compared with Aristotle argument of the first cause (*ousia*) for logic is used in both cases as evaluation tool. For Kierkegaard the fundamental assumption could not be found with science or logic. As a result, the argument for the legitimacy of religious belief should be based on having a good look at the various underlying assumptions about the fundamental nature of religion and religious belief. One assumption is of the one Kierkegaard criticizes, which we discussed earlier. The assumption is that the religious beliefs can be judged to be legitimate or illegitimate by a standard that is external to religious thinking, like logic and propositional evidence. Kierkegaard's basic argument against the natural theologians, therefore, is that they worship reason and logic, instead of God. In addition, Kierkegaard shows the argument in essence does not keep the existential nature of human beings by failing to genuinely understand our religious nature. They try to make objective arguments for God but by doing so; they detach these reasons for believing in God from nature of human being. The natural theologian's thought the objective argument about the nature of man can be achieved through deductive or inductive argument. From my point of view detaching the argument about the rational of believing in the existence of God should be considered from the existing nature of man either the idea will be very ideal for it did not reach the existing nature of man. As it is pointed out by Peterson (et.al, 1998), Kierkegaard shows the limitation of the natural theologians' argument with the following analogy that is the criteria that the natural theologians set to know the rational of believing in God is like the criteria one uses to choose one's spouse. In fact, to me these criteria cannot be

completely external and set by certain individuals for the others, rather they exist inside the chooser. In other words, there is no science or logic for choosing once spouse, if that is standard to love one's spouse the one loved is not a person rather it is logic or science.

Finally, my conclusion regarding the argument of the natural theologians from Kierkegaard point of view is that, the natural theologians failed to notice the space left in the approximation process by which the space is not filled with a reason or rational inquiry. So without taking into consideration the classical theistic argument put their evidences in the premise with the assumption it can reach the conclusion with certainty. As it is pointed out by Peterson (et.al, 1998) for Kierkegaard there is always one more book to read. Therefore to fill that gap it needs leap of faith which is the fundamental assumption of religious belief.

## **2.5 Wittgenstein's view of the argument regarding religious belief**

The fact that Wittgenstein does not explicitly endorse fideism has led some philosophers to doubt whether his views on religious belief really amount to fideism. On some definitions of fideism, faith is believing in the irrational. Harriet A. Harris (et.al, 1988) for example, in her work on Cyril Barrette, contends that Wittgenstein is not fidiest because he does not consider religious believers to be irrational or unreasonable in their belief. Rather she endorses the kind of reasoning described by Barrette himself, i.e. to Wittgenstein religious reasoning is based on the accumulation of pieces of evidence that are not sufficient to support a convincing argument but which supports beliefs that are too big to be blunder(J.Insole, 1988, p. 6) In view of Barrette, Wittgenstein is known for his logical propositions and, at least in early Wittgenstein his logical atomism. Later, he is concerned perhaps a little more sentimentally but certainly more pragmatically, with what he calls the "problem of life". By saying "the problem of life" he meant

to say the problems of life which involve normative judgments and are value laden. These problems demand accurate philosophical description and clear philosophical thinking. These problems include issues in the following areas of philosophy: aesthetics, ethics, and religious belief. My thesis dwells on the rational of religious belief among the problems of life discussed by Wittgenstein religious belief. The accumulation of pieces of evidence which is not enough for getting convincing argument but supporting ones belief makes the judgments subjective; the judgments are not made based on empirical facts. It passes the boundary of language. Since the values given to these problems are not based on empirical facts the result in subjective judgment makes it less verifiable.(J.Insole, 1988)

According to Charles Taliaferro (et. al. 2010) John Hyman clarifies the logical proposition of Wittgenstein, for there are sayable things with logical propositions and unsayable things. Problems regarding empirical facts are categorized under sayable problems. They are cognitively meaningful problems. The meaning of the sentence in the logical propositions depends on the meaning of the words that the language contains. If a proposition says anything at all, it means that that there is a such and such object arranged in such and such away. So, the role of the word is describing the facts. What always makes true or false the sentence is the combination of the word that describe the fact. The meaning that the word in the sentence gives in certain language makes a possible state of affairs in the world, or form of a picture or mode of possible state of affairs (Charles Taliaferro, 2010, p. 77).

In some cases, languages never cross the boundary and pass to say anything about the problem of life. Words are incapable to say anything about this meaning of life or God. So, it categorizes the problem of life to mysticisms and since the problem of life can't be put to word and neither can the question be put into words.

According to the writer, Wittgenstein defends two principal doctrines: the first is semantic doctrine, about the meaning of religion discourse and the second one is epistemological doctrine, and the second is epistemic doctrine regarding the justification of religion (Charles Taliaferro, 2010, p. 77).

The doctrine of attempting to prove religious beliefs like one does in cases of straightforward empirical disputes, using the same expressions that advances hypothesis is called “the semantic doctrine.” So, based on this idea Wittgenstein proved the epistemological doctrine that religious beliefs are immune from falsification and verification. The difference lies on the system of reference (Charles Taliaferro, 2010).

By the system of reference he means a system of concepts. Unlike the reference used for the empirical facts, the reference for the expression of religious belief in words is not an intellectual apparatus, like that of mathematical terms which enables one to think and talk about location; rather a religious belief are expressed as passionate commitment to conceptual structure. Whereas statements used in natural sciences or historical events refer to the system to predict or advance in the talk of mundane things (Charles Taliaferro, 2010).

Generally the systems of concepts cannot be verified or justified by reference to empirical facts. This suggests that natural theologian’s argument cannot be said as being reasonable or unreasonable.

The system of reference used in the religious belief does not allow one to say reasonable or unreasonable because it is a “language game.” Literally, everyone’s argument is “locked in it” because the meanings of the terms are depending, holistically, on the meaning of the entire language system. The reality of things cannot be known independently of the language game as

every problem is settled internally, within the language system's boundaries. Religious language communications, alike that of others, can be understood only by the users. They are immune to external criticism (J.Wainwright, 2007, p. 388).

As it is discussed by different philosophers earlier, for Wittgenstein language is only capable to explain empirical facts. The exercise with language shows the coming together of the word for its representation of an empirical facts or reflection of certain arrangement of objects. Even if the two theistic arguments (cosmological and teleological argument) discussed in chapter one basically begun from empirical observation seeing from Wittgenstein point of view about problems of life the conclusion that goes beyond the empirical facts can be taken as a limitations of theologians arguments. In this regard, on one hand, it can be argued that Wittgenstein is right for saying religious belief could not be said reasonable or unreasonable for it is beyond the reflection given by language on the other hand approving of theistic argument as reasonable is making the argument invalid since the tool that functions for evaluating empirical facts cannot be applied for evaluating the religious belief. Different philosophers acknowledge Wittgenstein view of keeping silent about religious belief is more appropriate because it goes beyond the potential of language to express it. So in this regard, the rational of the silence about the religious belief about the existence of God can be argued for two reasons. The first reason is that since the essential idea of religious belief is thinking about super natural being it has an implication that the argument cannot be made with ordinary language for the issues rose in the argument is not simply ordinary or empirical facts. So if human language is only applicable for empirical facts and religious belief is something beyond human language expression, keeping silent may be the way of giving expression for religious belief. The second reason based on Wittgenstein argument of the two distinctive systems by which religious belief and empirical facts are justified, if one

disregards the systems of reference presented in the argument of Wittgenstein like the natural theologians about these it is better to keep silent about it rather than making justification. The reason is that the system for justifying religious belief and empirical facts has already determined differently.

Based on the above discussions, Stephen Muhiwa analysis shows, Anselm and Aquinas, and their followers, attempted to justify the religious beliefs based on an empirical hypothesis that indeed accounts for beliefs which have false notion (Tessin D. P., 2001, p. 95).

Generally all the various analyses that have been discussed above by different philosophers, give us an idea about Wittgenstein view. He disapproves of apologetics, or attempts to defend the rationality of religious beliefs on intellectual grounds as well as the atheist view that religious can be disproved on intellectual grounds. This is contrary to empirical facts and any meaning of words in the proposition is incapable to say anything about God. So from Wittgenstein perspective these two reasons are the inescapable limitation of classical theistic argument.

In addition the above discussion of Wittgenstein argument about problem of life (ethics aesthetics and religious belief) shows related limitation of the theistic argument. The argument of Wittgenstein gives us an idea regarding the failures of the natural theologian in knowing how far language could explain different phenomena in life. The other limitation of the natural theologians that could be raised from Wittgenstein point of view is confusing the systems of references with each other.

From this it can be inferred that the limitations of the natural theologian's argument are connected to one another. From Wittgenstein point of view as it is indicated by different philosophers in the above discussion this is due to the key problem of natural theologians is

using inappropriate usage of language that open away for the inappropriate use of system of reference. As it has been seen in the first limitation of the natural theologians the reason why the system of reference differed gives an idea that the religious belief is distinct from the empirical facts. For religious belief is immune from falsification and verification it cannot be justified with the intellectual apparatus made for empirical observable facts. From Wittgenstein conclusion on the matter of religious belief one can understand that the aim is not to make clear the irrationality of religious belief but to show that the rationality of the argument could be seen within the scope of the system of reference found in the religious belief and clarifying the mistake of natural theologians in their trial to make the argument reasonable for the religious belief cannot be neither reasonable nor unreasonable in this regard. Finally, from this perspective it can be concluded that the theistic argument is very limited for it justifies religious belief as rational without identifying first the system of reference.

## **Chapter three**

### **Belief in the existence of God without arguments or evidences**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

My focus, in this chapter, will be on presenting Alvin Plantinga's position defending the rationality of belief in the existence of God by contending that it is a properly basic belief. In order to sufficiently understand Plantinga's point, we must first understand two important pieces of philosophical background information. Each of these two important elements of philosophical background plays necessary role in understanding the landscape on which Plantinga's epistemology of religion developed. Understanding them is necessary to get a clear idea of why he thinks that belief in the existence of God can be justified without it being justified on the basis of arguments or propositional evidence. So, the first part of this chapter seeks to layout some of this necessary background by giving a general picture of modern and contemporary epistemology and traditional account of knowledge. The first section of this chapter is intended to fulfill this purpose. Since Descartes epistemology is needed here just to depict a general idea of foundationalism, there is a reservation from going in to the details of the method of doubt and my emphasis will be on its general concept.

In the second section, various aspects, competing views to, an elements of Plantinga's religious epistemology will be presented, particularly evidentialism. The other topic that I will discuss is Plantinga's objection to natural theology. The response of Reformed epistemologists to fideism is included as part of this chapter as well.

Generally I have included this chapter to be part of the whole thesis for two reasons. First, I want to show Plantinga's new version of foundationalism. Second, this will set the stage for me to set out and reflect on my own position.

## **Part I**

### **3.2 Descartes' epistemology**

As Bonjour points out, the reason that initially Rene Descartes (1596–1650) decides to build his epistemology from newly formulated basic principles is his doubt about the genuineness of the knowledge he previously acquired. Descartes wants to build a sure foundation for knowledge. At the beginning of building his epistemology, he first focuses on finding a genuine knowledge about his own existence and then of the external world. Descartes uses doubt as a methodological tool to deconstruct his existing knowledge and to build everything again from the beginning on a new foundation (Bonjour, 2009, p. 6)

According to John Veitch, the two reasons for Descartes to doubt his previous knowledge is: his doubt of knowledge acquired merely through senses as it can err sometimes and can lead to deception; and, secondly, there the possibility that one's experiences of material objects could be merely the result of perpetually dreaming (John Veitch, 2002, p. 10).

The other possibility that makes Descartes doubt his previous belief is the existence of evil genius. He is worried about the possibility that the evil genius might implant false sense experience in his mind or cause him to have false memories so that he believes that some true proposition is false. He even considers the possibility that the evil genius might cause him to make mistakes of pure reason (i.e. like arithmetic or geometry). Therefore, he tentatively rejects his previous foundation for knowledge (John Veitch, 2002, p. 10)

Bonjour points out that, Descartes rejects every view which is not “completely certain and indubitable.” His standard for knowledge is indubitableness, or certainty. The basic reason that let him make this decision is the ambition he has in finding an absolutely certain grounding of knowledge. On this ground, Descartes begins constructing his epistemology (Bonjour, 2009, p. 9).

As Descartes is quote by Bonjour:

But doubtless I did exist, if I persuaded myself of something. But there is some deceiver or other who is supremely powerful and supremely sly and who is always deliberately deceiving me. Then too there is no doubt that I exist, if he is deceiving me. And let him do his best at deception, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I shall think that I am something. Thus... I am, I exist" is necessarily true every time I utter it or conceive it in my mind. (Bonjour, 2009, p. 11)

As Bonjour states, Descartes reached a point that he is able to know that he exists. This stems from his famous line *Cogito ergo sum* or “I think therefore I am.” The reason why Descartes came up with the famous line is his belief that the possibility of being deceived is proof for one’s own existence. That is why Descartes says, “I am, I exist is necessarily true every time I utter it or conceive of it in my mind.” To him, his knowledge of his own existence expressed in the phrase “a thinking thing” is indubitable and hence, he proposed to make it the foundation of the structure of knowledge (Bonjour, 2009, p. 12).

After Descartes attains the indubitable foundation of knowledge in his famous line “I think therefore I am,” he attempts to make a valid inference between the foundation of the structure of knowledge and the external world. The fact that he is able to think means there is certain kind of thing that explains the thinking a thinking thing, or a mind. In other words, from the thinking he assured of his very existence. He also thought that from this foundation of indubitable knowledge he was eventually able to prove the existence of the external world.

In this connection, according to Veitch, Descartes notices that what determines the quality of true proposition is that it is “clear and distinct.” He likely borrowed this concept of clear and distinct ideas from the mathematics of his time. He believed his *cogito* argument, like true mathematics, makes a natural impression as being true on the mind. So, the *cogito* argument is not determined to be a good argument in virtue of some external criterion. The *cogito* argument is seen clearly and distinctly and, thus, clearness and distinctness is what Descartes uses as the distinctive feature of true propositions. Part of his reason for seeing clearness and distinctness and a criterion for truth was his view that God exists and is not a deceiver. He would not have made us with cognitive faculties that are systematically misleading (John Veitch, 2002, pp. 10-12).

Bonjour’s presentation of Descartes epistemology makes it clear that Descartes believes that humans have special cognitive faculty, given by God, which involves some sort of causal relation between the truth in the mind-independent world and our epistemic intuition that some particular proposition is true *a priori*. Descartes calls this cognitive faculty, or epistemic causal mechanism, the “light of nature.” He contends that knowledge formed by this principle is always indubitable. The light of nature is a cognitive faculty of the mind that produces beliefs which are self-evident, manifestly true, and known *a priori*. Self-evident truths are propositions that can be seen to be true simply by thinking about their content. One virtue of knowing self-evident beliefs *a priori* is that they are justified independently of both sensory experience and introspective experience and, thus, are immune from some of the weaknesses inherent in *a posteriori* knowledge (Bonjour, 2009, p. 20).

### **3.3. Cartesian epistemology**

The above brief epistemological discussion of Descartes can be summarized as the principles of Cartesian epistemology. According to Bonjour these principles have largely shaped the

subsequent 300-plus years of epistemological discussion and debate. Descartes counted a belief as knowledge only if it is infallible and guaranteed to be true. He also suggests that, psychologically, beliefs that count as knowledge are those that are held strongly. By way of summary, knowledge, according to Descartes, is defined as a belief held without doubt for which the person has a reason that guarantees the truth of the belief (Bonjour, 2009, p. 21).

As Bonjour points out, according to Descartes' view of knowledge, is held without doubt and is rationally self-evident. This is the kind of knowledge that Descartes thinks is in the foundation of our epistemic belief system. These kinds of beliefs, or initial knowledge, are a *priori* for they do not depend on either sensory or introspective experience in the way that the empirical knowledge does. Descartes suggested that the material world can, perhaps, be inferred from this kind of knowledge. Just as he knows his own existence, Descartes thinks internal mental states like: desires, sensory states, and beliefs are also known with this same certainty. Descartes contends that this knowledge, i.e. knowledge of our internal mental states based on immediate introspective experience, provides a second "brick" in the foundation of our epistemic system (Bonjour, 2009, pp. 21-22).

### **3.4 The concept of knowledge**

Descartes' epistemology has been historically influential in the later development of epistemology. His view provides a basic backdrop to epistemology in both the modern and contemporary period. Descartes *general* concept of knowledge, however, is not entirely original and can be traced back to Plato. According to this view, knowledge is justified, true, belief. Thus there are three sub-concepts that compose the classical concept of knowledge; the general concept of knowledge requires these three conditions which at least roughly parallel to

Descartes'. These are the belief, or the acceptance condition, the truth condition, and the reason, or justification condition. To reiterate again, according to the traditional account knowledge, knowledge is justified true belief (Bonjour, 2009, p. 24).

### **3.4.1 The belief or acceptance condition**

As Bonjour indicates, in the traditional conception of knowledge, belief is defined as an attitude of assent towards a proposition. First, he explains how one can have an attitude of assent regarding. He distinguished between two distinct kinds of beliefs: dispositional beliefs and the occurrent beliefs. Dispositional belief means, for example, believing whether Barack Obama is the current president of the U.S.A. and occurrent belief is like believing the fact that one is a human being (Bonjour, 2009, p. 25).

### **3.4.2 The truth condition**

According to Bonjour, truth is the second component that makes up the traditional conception of knowledge (JTB). To explain this condition, Bonjour gives an example of shooting an arrow with an intention of hitting the target: in this example the aim of shooting is to hit the target and that is the success. This implies that a belief succeeds at being knowledge if it achieves the goal of believing the truth for a good reason (i.e. justification). Truth is a necessary condition of knowledge in that it makes no sense to say that John knows that  $2+2=4$  if it is not true. (Bonjour, 2009, p. 30)

### **3.4.3 The reason or justification theory**

The traditional conception of knowledge is important for understanding both the history of epistemology and the discussion of Plantinga and Reformed epistemology. As Bonjour

explains2009), this conception originated at the time of Plato. In this tradition of epistemology, lucky guesses do not count as knowledge even if they happen to produce true belief. Knowledge requires reasons which are truth-conducive reasons that make it sufficiently likely the relevant proposition is true. It is not epistemically sufficient to believe a proposition for non-truth-conducive reasons like when somebody might believe something out of loyalty to friend or out of loyalty to religious tradition but these kinds of beliefs do not constitute knowledge, even if they happen to be true. Therefore, to say that someone has a justified, true belief that  $p$  means that person has evidence, or a reason, that makes  $p$  sufficiently likely to be true so as to make his true belief count as knowledge. So, when reasons or justifications are presented in standard form it is called epistemic reason or epistemic justification, as opposed to practical or pragmatic reasons. Pragmatic reasons give one a reason to *do* something which helps the person obtain some practical goal but pragmatic reasons do not provide reason to think a proposition  $p$  is true. Since pragmatic reasons are not truth-conducive but merely good reason to engage in a certain action, they are not epistemic reasons (Bonjour, 2009, p. 35).

Bonjour states that having epistemic justification means having certain evidence in favor of the truth of the proposition in question. Evidence gives some further information of some appropriate sort in light of which it becomes evident that the proposition is true. So, the concept in which the evidence used can vary from field of study to the field of study. For example, the evidence that the policeman uses in his investigation could be fingerprints, eyewitness testimony, and surveillance photography. They can point out that a person is guilty of the crime for which he is being investigated. For the scientist, the appropriate evidence for a certain scientific theory is a particular reading on the relevant instruments and other scientific laboratory findings. And it is the same for the other practical sciences (Bonjour, 2009, p. 36).

But in the case of epistemic reason, or justification, the concept of evidence is less clear. What kind of evidence is needed for epistemic justification? Epistemic justifications for mathematical reasoning, for example, on the surface seem that we have evidence e.g.  $2+2=4$ . The evidence, however, is strongly based on the intuitive standpoint but questions like: “what really supports the proposition in question?” and “what exactly the questions are?” remain unanswered. Some of these points could be raised for epistemic justification for other particular domains of knowledge as well. It could be argued that what justifies mathematical propositions of the sort above is that they are self-evident. Bonjour shows that some philosophers do indeed affirm that propositions justified in this way have no separate information as evidence, rather the content of the proposition has its own evidence because it self-evident. There are also other areas of knowledge, like ordinary sensory perception, like, for example, a person having the sensory experience of a green tree in front of him who, thereby, comes to believe that there is a tree in front of him. Ought this person to give evidence for the existence of the tree and that he is seeing it? If so, philosophers call such evidence of senses. Additionally, there is another type of knowledge for which it is less clear what kind of evidence we have to justify it, namely, memory knowledge. For example, that one had breakfast this morning is justified, we typically think, based on the experience one has when he simply remembers having it (Bonjour, 2009, pp. 36-37). He also gives an example of the fact that he believes, and seems to know, that he is currently thinking about the concept of knowledge and also that there is *a large patch of dark green in his visual field, that he has a pitch in his left elbow, and that he is determined to finish this chapter today*, but he asks if he has sufficient evidence for any of these claims. In this last sort of case, philosophers have also sometimes appealed to the idea of self-evident propositions. These sorts

of questions are the central ideas by which the Reformed epistemologists make their case. I will explain how in the second part of this chapter.

## **Part II**

The discussion in part one of this chapter indicates Descartes has tried to find out the genuine foundation of knowledge from the point of view of his own existence as well as that of his surroundings. According to Bonjour, foundationalist view of knowledge and its justification depend on a set of basic or foundational elements. In general, for Descartes, as for many other foundationlists, the foundation of knowledge and justification consists of (i) a person's immediate awareness of his or her own conscious states of mind, together with (ii) his or her a priori grasp of self-evidently true propositions.(Bonjour, 2009, p. 117)

In this part of the chapter, I will present the work of Reformed epistemologists, particularly the work of the Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga. I will present his criticism of what he calls “the evidentialists objection” and its roots in epistemic foundationalism.

### **3.5 Reformed epistemologists**

Reformed epistemology is the view that belief in God can be rational and epistemically justified without being based on arguments or even evidence more broadly conceived. The Reformed epistemologists emerge out of the protestant reformism in which John Calvin can be cited as prominent figure (Allen Stairs, 2007, p. 49).

As it is stated by D.Z. Philip (et.al, 2001) the developmental stage of the Reformed epistemology can be put in terms of three different stages. The collection of essays in the book, *Faith and Rationality*, published in 1983, subtitled *Reason and Belief in God*, edited by Alvin Plantinga

and Nicholas Wolterstorff is the first systematic presentation of Reformed epistemology on philosophical scene (D.Z. Phillips, 2001, p. 40).

Up until the publication of *Faith and Rationality*, the only work that even hinted at what would later become Reformed epistemology was 1967 book written by Plantinga entitled *God and Other Minds: A Study of Rational Justification for Belief in God* and a book by Nicholas Wolterstorff entitled *Reason within the Bound of Religion Alone* (a pun on Kant's *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*). In these proto-Reformed epistemology works, i.e. prehistory, classical foundationalism was not really mentioned. It was mentioned for the first time in an essay published in 1964, in the journal *Faith and Philosophy*. Nicholas Wolterstorff, who besides Plantinga was the other early influential formulator of the Reformed epistemology position, clearly recognized the relationship between the evidentialist objection and classical foundationalism in the 1970s. The emergence of the relationship between the evidentialist objection and classical foundationalism is what made it possible for the Reformed epistemology to appear on the scene.(D.Z. Phillips, 2001, p. 41)

These publications mark the time at which the Reformed epistemologist emerges from what D.Z. Philip pointed called its “prehistory” out (et. al, 2001) Wolterstorff explains:“I suggested that what distinguished the first stage of Reformed Epistemology from its pre-history was the explicit use of the concepts of classical foundationalism and evidentialist challenge. ” In the first stage, new and different epistemic principles relevant to religious knowledge began to emerge with the motto of faith seeking understanding. In the second stage, the articulation and elaboration of these principles were made. In general, the first and second stages area brush-clearing operation, designed to dispose of the evidentialist challenge to theistic belief based in classical foundationalism. The third stage is a time when work was done on *Faith and Rationality*, the

book I have been using to present Alvin Plantinga's view about belief in God as being properly basic (D.Z. Phillips, 2001, p. 49).

D.Z. Philip (et. al, 2001) indicates to Wolterstroff Reformed epistemology is based another version of foundationalism, a version more generous and expansive as to what it allows to count as properly basic than in classical foundationalism.(D.Z. Phillips, 2001)

In my thesis I will expound the view of the best known proponent of Reformed Epistemologist, namely, Alvin Plantinga. He is one of the major Reformed epistemologists from his school days as a student of Calvin College. In the task of justifying belief in God without argument, Plantinga (et.al, 1991) made his first duty evaluating the epistemological structure of foundationalism. First, he makes determination distinction between the belief that God exists and belief in God. The former one has a certain existential feature. It affirms an assertion about existence what kind of thing, in this case God, exists. The latter proposition claims assumes that God exists but also has a personal or existential component. One does not merely believe a fact about the existence of God, rather one also has some sort of personal trust *in* this God. Belief about the existence of God is rationally acceptable as it makes an assertion of a certain sort of an ontological assertion about what exists (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 19).

Moreover, Plantinga, et.al (1991) points out, unlike Kant and other philosophers with similar arguments, that the justification of belief in God is not mental construction rather it is believing in a person of certain sort being who acts, perfect in goodness of wisdom knowledge up on whom the world depends (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 20).

Plantinga, et al (1991) justifies belief in the existence of God and explains that it is not mental construction both epistemologically and metaphysically. However, my focus in here is only expounding his way of justification about believing in the existence of God without an argument.

Since the line between epistemology and metaphysics is very thin for they are the two side of the same coin, to avoid confusion made by the evidentialists objection (strong rationalist whom I have discussed in chapter two) regarding the theistic assertion, Reformed epistemologists focus their critique on one particular premise of the evidentialist objection.

### **3.6 The evidentialist objection**

Plantinga's criticism is focused on the claim that the evidentialist objection assumes that it is necessary to have an argument or evidence for every belief. The evidential objection depends on this epistemic claim and, so, this is where much of the Reformed epistemologist critique is centered on objection (Allen Stairs, 2007, p. 149). One of the atheists who pushes the evidentialist objection is W.K. Clifford. I discussed his religious epistemology in chapter 2 where I described it as strong rationalism.

Having already discussed Clifford's strong rationalism, in this part of the thesis I will only discuss his views as they directly relate to the evidentialist objection. For the sake of clarity and to facilitate analyzing the evidentialist objection, I will layout the evidentialist objection in schematic form:

Premise #1: If there is insufficient evidence that God exists, then belief in God is epistemically unjustified.

Premise #2: There is insufficient evidence that God exists.

Conclusion: Therefore, belief in God is epistemically unjustified. (Allen Stairs, 2007, p. 149)

As Stairs et al (2007) points out in responding to the atheist or the evidentialist objection, different theists take different approaches to defending belief in God from the evidentialist objection. The natural theologian, whose thought I have discussed in chapter one, agree with the first premise of the evidentialist objection but disagree with the second premise. They think they can, in fact, prove or demonstrate the existence of God from nature and make good arguments. Therefore, they reject the second premise which states the evidence for the existence of God is insufficient. (Allen Stairs, 2007, p. 150)

Reformed epistemologists defend against the evidentialist objection using a different strategy than the natural theologian. Rather than disputing the second premise, they focus their critique on the first premise. They do not agree with the first premise in that they don't think that belief in God is unjustified if it lacks sufficient arguments or propositional evidence in its favor. To them, belief in the existence God can be justified without any arguments or propositional evidence. (Allen Stairs, 2007, p. 150)

### **3.6.1 The nature of evidentialist Objection.**

As Stairs explains, the nature of the atheist objection of the theistic argument is categorized into two: *de facto* and *de jure* objection. The kind of objection presented by the evidentialist is a *de-jure* objection. The *de jure* objection to belief in God is an objection, not about whether God does exist but it is about whether the belief in the existence of God is epistemically justified. The other kind of objection atheists raise against theistic belief is *de facto* objection. The *de facto* objection focused on showing that God does not exist and it is metaphysical objection. Its concern is all about what is actually true. So, the *de facto* objection is a metaphysical objection

which denies the ontological claim that actually God exists. The *de jure* objection is an epistemic objection which claims that belief in God is not epistemically justified.

Generally Allen Stairs (et. al, 2007) put their difference as in the following table:

*De facto* objection

*De jure* objection

<i>The argument from evil:</i> God Does not exist because evil does	<i>The Evidentialist Objection:</i> Belief in God Is unjustified because it lack evidence
<i>Contradictory Attributes:</i> God Doesn't exist because some divine Attributes, like mercy and justice, are inconsistent with each other	<i>Freud's Complaints:</i> Belief in God is irrational that results from wish fulfillment
<i>Divine Attributes incoherent:</i> God does not exist because some divine attributes, like omnipotence, are incoherent and unintelligible.	<i>Marx's complaints:</i> Belief in God is rational because it results from perverted and unhealthy social order. <i>Nietzsches's Complaint:</i> Belief in God irrational because originates in slaves morality and the resentment of the oppressed.

The natural theologian attacks the second premise of the evidentialist objection by presenting evidence for God in order to avoid the conclusion. But the Reformed epistemologists attack the first premise. The first premise makes an epistemological claim. It assumes an epistemological principle. The criticism of the evidentialist objection raises the following sorts of questions: Why is the first premise of the argument just assumed to be true? Why is having evidence seen as a necessary condition for theist's belief to be rationally justified? Why can one not within his epistemic right in believing God exists without evidence and argument?(Allen Stairs, 2007, p. 152)

In order to furnish the ground for arguing about belief in God without argument, Plantinga starts his project by first investigating what it means to be rational. He does this by exploring the view of epistemic justification that amounts to intellectual obligations and it is this epistemological view that is assumed in the evidentialist objection (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 30).

### **3.6.2 The evidentialists objection based on epistemic obligation**

In investigating the rationality of the evidentialist objection Plantinga et al (1991) first states the nature of evidentialist objection. The nature of evidentialist objection has normative character, i.e. it is a normative objection because it sets out principles for a belief to be judged to an appropriate or inappropriate belief. While some of the epistemic principles are based on the concept of obligation, the others are based on the concept of responsibilities in holding these beliefs. Therefore, holding beliefs that conform to the set of principles is taken to be rational. While beliefs that don't conform to these principles of epistemic obligation and responsibility are judged to be irrational; this judgment to be rational or irrational according to an obligation sense of epistemic justification is what makes the terms "rational" and "irrational" evaluative terms (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 30).

In view of Plantinga et al (1991) these principles of duties and obligations with the respect to belief can be called as intellectual duties. Intellectual duties may be looked at from the point of view of the activities of obtaining belief in a normatively appropriate way; duties as regards perpetuating belief and having duties in strengthening ones belief so that it makes an influence on intellectuals (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 31).

According to Plantinga (et. al, 1991) epistemic, or intellectual, obligation or duty is a *prima facie* obligation. It is an obligation which can be ridden by some other obligation in different

circumstances. Perhaps one can have *prima facie* obligation to believe what seems to himself-evident and what seems to follow self-evidently from what seems evident to himself. Plantinga shows here that the problem could be raised using Russell's paradox, named after the British philosopher Bertrand Russell. What if something is self-evidently false follow from what seem self-evidently true? This is Russell's question. So, in this case *prima facie* conflict happened or *prima facie* might be violated (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 33).

This implies *prima facie* intellectual obligation is a central standard of evaluation for the evidentialist objection. The evidentialist's claim is that having evidence is a *prima facie* intellectual obligation for believing a proposition to be true. To them the traditional theistic arguments fail to fulfill this *prima facie* obligation and, therefore, belief in God is not justified. According to Plantinga et al (1991) perhaps the evidentialists think anyone who believes in God without evidence is violating his own intellectual duty that results in epistemic violation (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 33).

Following this, perhaps the objector claims *prima facie* intellectual duty for not believing in God without evidence. On the contrary Plantinga et al (1991) also shows there is the possibility for the theist to say that he cannot obey this obligation. The connection between duties and obligations, the one hand, and ability to fulfill those duties, on the other, is very important. It is commonly held that one is not obligated to do something that he lacks the ability to do. This connection between ability and obligation is often described using the phrase: "ought to imply can." One might not have an obligation, to refrain from believing in God because of lack of evidence due to the fact that one does not know any way of acquiring evidence for this proposition, even if the objector is right that there is insufficient evidence to justify the proposition. He might also add that refraining from believing this proposition is not something

under his control. Plantinga illustrated the idea as in the following,” If you order me now, for example, to cease believing that the earth is very old, there is no way I can comply with your order. But in the same way it is not now within my power to cease believing in God.” Now generally Plantinga’s illustration explains if the intellectual obligation is the way the evidentialists do about God the atheist may state that there is no obligation to refrain from believing in God in the absence of evidence (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 34). In other words, if someone lacks the ability to stop believing in God, then he has no obligation to only believe based on sufficient evidence because, again, it is commonly accepted that one is only obligated to do what he has the ability to do.

Even if there is an option for the theist to respond this way, Plantinga et al ( 1991) does not accept the response sufficient enough to challenge the evidentialists objection. Before explaining the reason why it could not be sufficient, he clearly shows the difference between acceptance and belief. He clarifies it further for a Christian; maybe it is difficult or lifeless to believe that the teaching, for example, that God was in Christ reconciling the world with himself. But one is as committed to the belief as one endorses it unhesitatingly. The implication, to him, is that the believer accepts this proposition even though they are overwhelmed by doubt compared to the occurrent belief and the explicit degree of the commitment to the belief is very high (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 37).

To Plantinga, even though believing everything is not within one’s control, being in the state of believing by itself implies accepting the belief. What Plantinga wants to show is even if one can argue that he cannot refrain from believing because either accepting or not accepting is within one’s control, indirectly making the decision about one’s believe can be within one’s control as well. So, based on this he argues that to refrain from believe in God is under one’s control. Their

claim can be restated as follows: The objector's claim that there are duties with respect to our beliefs which may be reconstructed such that when it comes to a person such as God, we have *prima facie* duty to not accept such propositions as there is such a person as God the absence as God, in the absence of evidence. (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 38)

Following this, presumably, the objector concludes that we at least have some control over our belief in God. Hence the evidentialist could hold, contrary to Plantinga do suggestions, that it is *prima facie* duty not to accept believe in God without sufficient evidence (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 38).

As Plantinga, et al (1991) explains the basic reason why the objectors need the *prima facie* intellectual obligation is presumably in order to avoid the situation described above. People may believe a proposition without evidence for the proposition. They may believe infinitely many propositions without evidence but the objectors do not mean that there are no propositions that can be accepted or admitted without evidence. So, Plantinga's point is why belief in the existence of God cannot be categorized among these as being reasonable to believe in God without an argument.(Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 39)

### **3.7 Classical foundationlism**

Plantinga et al (1991) continued investigating the evidentialists objection and the epistemic rationale for it because he did not get an answer to the above question. So, after further investigation, he thinks he discovered the rationale for the first premise of the evidentialist objection in classical foundationlism. He wants to investigate classical foundationlism since the evidentialist epistemology seems to assume the truth of classical foundationalism. Classical foundationalism is the view that a series of justified beliefs rests on a foundation of justified

belief but these beliefs are not justified by argument or evidence. It is the dominant way of looking at different topics like faith, knowledge, rationality, and other similar topics. It was very dominant in the Western world. So, according to foundationalism some beliefs are basic and some others are not. Those beliefs that are justified beliefs but cannot be shown to be justified based on arguments and propositional evidence are considered to be properly basic beliefs. Even if the evidentialists objector identify the distinction between belief and basic belief they don't categorize belief in God as basic belief. They need an evidence for theistic belief to be justified. (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 48)

To Plantinga et al (1991) the basic relationship between the foundationalism and the evidentialism is that evidentialism is deep rooted in the foundationism. According to the foundationalists, there is obligation duty and responsibilities to follow in order to confirm that one really exercises one's epistemic power. Therefore, to be rational is, according to the foundationalism, to go contrary to none these norms (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 48).

In giving a full account of the foundationalism, Plantinga, et al (1991) explains that foundationalism is a view about the structure of the noetic, or belief, structure. Noetic structure means a set of belief one holds together with certain epistemic relation that holds among these propositions. An account of noetic structure holds both basic and non-basic belief between those who hold the propositions and the propositions themselves. Hence, basic belief and non-basic beliefs are determined based on the noetic structure of a person (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 48).

Finally he defines noetic structure as complete picture of the structure of a rational system of beliefs. To Plantinga, et al (1991) rationality is not to be uninfluenced by emotion in forming belief. Rather noetic structure means doing the right thing with respect to one's belief unless it is

violating epistemic duties. For being rational there are standards to be met. So, when a person's belief is criticized for being irrational that would mean the person failed to fulfill this duties and responsibilities. Based on this, he draws boundaries for the rationally permissible beliefs and rationally non-permissible beliefs. Thus, it follows rationality can be thought of as an epistemic excellence, i.e. avoidance of epistemic defects as well as duty of fulfilling the epistemic properties (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 52).

Now the definition and the characters of the noetic structure help us to get a complete picture of the foundationism. According to foundationalism, every rational belief has a foundational noetic structure. This implies that the definition of foundationism is a set of beliefs accepted on the basis of that others, except for the foundational beliefs. (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 52)

The first main thesis of foundationalism is the basic relation within the noetic structure, which means a belief will often be based up on several beliefs  $B_1 \dots B_n$ . In foundationalnoetic structure this relationship is usually asymmetric (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 52)

Since my focus in this thesis is to investigate Plantinga's argument about belief in God, which he thought of as basic belief I would also discuss about basic belief focusing on how Plantinga defends belief in God as basic belief in the noetic structure.

### **3.8 Conditions on proper basicity**

There are different varieties of foundationalism, and they all lay down different conditions of proper basicity. From the foundationlistpoint of view, not just any belief is foundational. Rather a foundational be, but these beliefs are not justified by argument or evidence. Belief should be *properly* basic. A properly basic belief is a belief that is both foundational and

justified. To count as properly basic a belief must meet certain conditions. This can be evaluated based on the functioning of the belief and the weight it has in the whole noetic structure.

In the view of Plantinga, et al (1991) but these beliefs are not justified by argument or evidence. Thomas Aquinas, was a classical foundationlists and Aquinas held that belief is properly basic if it is self-evident to the senses. Plantinga explains what self-evident is using the following examples:

Self-evident propositions of simple arithmetic truth like:  $2+1=3$

Simple logic, like:

*No man is both married and unmarried;*

An example of the generalizations of simple truths of logic, or tautologies, such as:*for any propositions p the conjunction of P with its denial is false*

From these propositions Plantinga et al (1991) sees self-evident beliefs as beliefs that are understandable by themselves, as far as to accept that such propositions are true it only takes understanding the propositions. Therefore, understanding self-evident belief is enough to grasp the truth of the propositions since it might vary from person to person. One can know that it is self-evident if one can grasp it. Nevertheless, the propositions will not be self-evident to those who don't apprehend the concepts involved (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 56).

Different foundationalists say different things about what legitimately counts as a basic belief. For Aquinas, a proposition is basic belief if it is only either self-evident. Plantinga et al (1991) explains in his own words what Aquinas meant by *self-evident to the sense is properly basic* "perceptual propositions."It is a proposition whose truth of falseness can be determined by

employing our senses. Consider these two examples: *there is a tree before me* or *that tree's leaves are yellow*. Descartes conceptualizes *self-evident* differently. To him, the foundation of a rational noetic structure does not include such proposition like *there is a tree before me* or *that tree's leaves are yellow*. But rather the more cautious claim about one's mental life. For example, *it seems to me that I see a tree* or *I seem to see something green* or as Plantinga, et al (1991) pointed out what Professor Chisholm puts *I am appeared greenly too*. So, to Descartes a proposition can be self-evident if it is properly basic for S only if it is either self-evident or incorrigible (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 58).

In general, it could be said there are different characteristics within the thought of foundationalism. Ancient and medieval foundationalists tended to hold that a proposition is properly basic for a person if it is either self-evident or evident to the senses: the modern foundationist like Descartes tended to hold that a proposition is properly basic for S only if it is either self-evident or incorrigible. The fact that there exist similarities within foundationalists (Thomas Aquinas ,Descartes... ) who appeared in different periods, Plantinga calls anyone who is ancient, modern, or medieval classical foundationlists. (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, pp. 58-59)

### **3.9 The collapse of foundationism**

So far I have been expounding the background and furnishing the ground for the points of Plantinga's argument, *why could not belief in God be among the foundations in one's noetic structure*. According to the classical foundationalist, belief in God has no any characteristic that label it in the structure. The fact that there is no room for it the propositions cannot be believed based on other propositions. Moreover, to the classical foundationlists belief in God is not self-

evident as well as incorrigible; as result, that it is not properly basic, neither is it well formed, in the rational noetic structure. (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 59)

In his discussion about the collapse of foundationlism before defending belief in the existence of God as basic belief in the noetic structure, first he shows the defect in the structure of evidentialist objection. This can be seen in the following two claims of foundationalism:

A propositions p is properly basic for a person S if and only if P is either self-evident to S or incorrigible for S or evident to the senses for S (Alvin Plantinga N. W., 1991, p. 75)

The first of it is criteria set out for a proposition to be basic that it is self-evident, incorrigible or evident to the senses. The question of Plantinga is even if the first proposition seems to be right he concede but raises the question as regards whether or not the second one is acceptable and why do the foundationlists accepts and think the theist ought to (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 59).

Plantinga, et al (1991) said if the second claim of foundationlist is right the belief he adhered to so far will turn out to be irrational. His argument that (a) *A is properly basic for me only if A is self-evident or incorrigible or evident to the senses for me*. He accepted many proposition which do not feet this one or a propositions which feet neither the first claim nor the second one but he strongly believes that they are basic (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 60).

Plantinga, et al (1991) has shown that the classical foundationlists argument is self-referentially inconsistent in accepting the above argument as basic. Despite the fact that the proposition does not meet the condition for basicity that the arguer him-self lays down. This is due to the nature of their argument that emphasizes that for accepting the proposition as basic it should be self-evident and incorrigible or it should be properly basic and has to support the above argument. Plantinga suggests if an argument really is basic for oneself and supported by the argument as

being basic but for him classical foundationlists did not have such an argument for the above argument. They did not show any argument that supports for the argument is basic or self-evident. They only accept the propositions as basic without fulfilling the criterion. (Alvin Plantinga N. W., 1991, pp. 60-61)

If the classical foundationalst are not going to take the argument as false they will be considered as violating the epistemic responsibility or accepting an argument without considering its violation of the noetic structure. The argument of Plantinga is if the acceptance of such an argument by the classical evidentialist is not violating the epistemic responsibility, he thinks that there will not be any reason that he would accept their objection.

Even if the above argument does not fulfill the criterion that the classical foundationalist themselves set out, it is accepted nearly by everyone while the proposition that belief in God can be taken as basic belief is not taken as basic. So far the basic reason why Plantinga has been investigating the classical foundationalist is to find out the mistake committed by the evidentialists objection. (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 62)

### **3.10 The reformed objection to natural theologians**

The history of the natural theologians is traced back to the Anselm, Aquinas Descartes...Up to the time of Kant. In the days of Kant the history of the natural theologians was not as overwhelming as it would be. (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 63)

So Plantinga started his objection by considering, as he stated, three representative Reformed thinkers. The first one he has discussed about is the nineteenth-century Dutch theologian, Herman Bavink. According to person the proof for God should not start from argument to go but

it should start from God Himself. His main reason for this is the scripture. (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 64)

So according to Bavink the kind of proof presented by natural theologians and others can't be a proof for the existence of God and never depends on it. So for him Christian does not need proof to believe that God exists. To Plantinga this happened to be a matter of investigation. (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 64)

In fact, Bavink presents two basic factors for his assertion. For one thing the confidence of a Christian to believe that God exists never depends on the natural theologians argument or he never believes that God created the world based on the basis of arguments. His second reason is that an argument is not needed to believe in the existence of God. Because one's belief is justified within one's epistemic right to believe that God created the world even if he/she has no argument for that conclusion at all (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, pp. 64-65).

Generally, Bavink showed three points. One is that the argument of natural theologians has got confusion. He derived this from the traditional refute of Kant's fashionable confusion about the ontological argument. The other one that he is based on the scripture, for in the bible there is no place by which the proof or arguments for God is seen. Following this he suggested that Christians should do the same in their justification for belief in the existence of God. He should start from the belief in God rather than from the premises of some arguments whose conclusion is that God exists. Thirdly Bavink shows that there is resemblance between belief in the existence of self and of the external world (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 65).

The other person Plantinga presents (Alvin Plantinga, 1991) for not having evidence to believe in the existence of God is John Calvin. His argument is based on the belief that God has

implanted in us all as an innate tendency or *nisus*, or disposition to believe in Him. He believes that human beings have natural instinct in which they gain awareness of divinity. God Himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of His divine majesty (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 66).

But Calvin has put that this tendency of knowing God as an inborn behavior in us has been overlaid or suppressed by sin. Before sin evolved, prior to birth the natural behavior of human beings existed from the day birth have the same degree of believing in God like the natural spontaneity that we believe in the existence of other persons, an external world, or the past. But it is our present condition which is unnatural sinful that makes it difficult to believe in God (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 66).

Calvin believes that, the design seen in the world is very impressive that can strengthen your belief about God but not really it can proof for the existence of God. His belief is never based on any propositions at all. He believes he is perfectly rational for believing in God without any argument (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 67).

To Calvin belief in the existence of God on the basis of argument is like belief in the existence of one's spouse on the basis of the analogical argument for other minds. (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 67)

Karl Barth is a twentieth century theologian who came with disapproval of the natural theologians. To him it is improper or dishonesty to try to prove God's existence. Barth explains as to how do so in his Barthian Dilemma which confronts with the natural theologians. Plantinga states this dilemma has having *horns* (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 69).

The natural theologians would fail on to these horns. In this condition the natural theologians either will have the stand point of unbeliever or pretend to be believer. If they happen to be unbeliever they desert their Christianity; if they demonstrate pretentious position, which would mean committing dishonesty. However, how likely a person can demonstrate an alternative circumstance of belief would remain questionable (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 69).

To Barth, this stance implicitly shows the inquiry presupposes that whether or not God exists. In adapting this stance, furthermore, the natural theologians implicitly agreed that what one ought to believe here depends on the result of the inquiry. So, the strength of the argument matters whether one is believer or unbeliever if there is a good argument one will readily accept the belief in the existence of God or otherwise. If the arguments on both sides are equally strong then perhaps the right thing to do is to remain agnostic (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 69).

This shows belief in God depends on the strength of the inquiry. And in this inquiry the premises that both the atheist and the natural theologians used in the propositions is from the same set of propositions accepted by all or nearly all rational persons. Plantinga calls these premises *deliverance of reason*. The proof for the existence of God is based on this deliverance reason to make deductive or inductive argument. Aquinas third way argument discussed in chapter one would be attempts to demonstrate the existence of God in just this sense (Alvin Plantinga, 1991).

To Barth, as Plantinga pointed out, the natural theologians (Aquinas and Paley) whose argument I have discussed about in chapter one is based on the deliverance of reason. This standpoint for Barth is unbelief standpoint or it is rejecting belief in God. Plantinga explains “to be in the standpoint of unbelief is to hold that belief in God is rationally acceptable only if it is more likely

than not with respect to the deliverance of reason.” In view of Plantinga, Barth shows that the ultimate commitment is to the deliverance of reason rather than to God or reason is judge over Christ or over Christian faith.(Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 70) In general the horn of Bartherian dilemma is bad faith or dishonesty on one hand and the standpoint of unbelief on the other; the natural theologians either accept the standpoint of unbelief or that of the pretentious. (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 71)

### **3.11 Rejecting classical foundationalism**

The Reformed epistemologist rejects the natural theologians because of their position that the believer is entirely rational, within his epistemic right in accepting belief in God as being basic (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 72). Rejecting the natural theologians’ argument their first claim is that the rightness of belief in God in no way depends upon the success of that sort of theistic arguments.

The following three important points remind us of the classical foundationalism stated earlier:

- (1) *In every rational noetic structure there is a set of beliefs taken as basic that is not accepted on the basis of any other beliefs,*
- (2) *In a rational noetic structure non-basic beliefs have proposition support from the foundations, and*
- (3) *In a rational noetic structure basic beliefs will be self-evident or incorrigible or evident to the senses.*

Thus the Reformed epistemologist tend to incline to accept the first and have no objection to the second and but they were utterly odd with the third idea. Their intention was to underline belief in God as being basic belief in irrational noetic structure. The above three Reformed

epistemologists share in common that the justification about belief in God should start from the premise that belief in God is as basic belief (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 72).

### **3.12 Is belief in God properly Basic**

In order to prove that belief in God is basic Plantinga has put the following points of argument. These are: On the great pumpkin objection that if belief in God is basic everything can be basic; he argued that believing in the existence of God is not groundless; thirdly he argues that one who accepts belief in God as basic may nonetheless be open to arguments against that belief and finally he argues the view that he is defending is not plausibly thought of as species of fideism (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 73).

### **3.13 Great pumpkin objection**

Plantinga strongly argues that belief in God is not like the belief that peoples may have about different bizarre aberration we can think of. These are like voodoo or astrology, the belief about the return of great pumpkin every Halloween. He explains that different basic beliefs could differ contextually. For more clarification he presents this example. *Someone could believe that he see a tree in some circumstance* and seeing a tree in this context also presupposes the presence of the person somewhere around the tree and Plantinga argues that *even if this is basic it is not same to the person sitting in the living room having closed eyes and listening to music*. To Plantinga the Reformed epistemologists recognized there are different contexts in which belief in God can be basic; he asks “Why should that be thought to commit him to the idea that just about any belief is properly basic in any circumstances or even to the vastly weaker claim that for any belief their circumstances in which it is properly basic” (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 74).

With the intension of explaining what is meant by properly *basic beliefs* Plantinga considered important the question *what is the status of criteria for knowledge or proper basicity, or justified beliefs?* Raised by Roderick Chisholm (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 75).

Even though the modern foundationlists statements are universal, Plantinga raised question for its credibility of the argument that for any proposition

- (a) *A and person S, A is properly basic for S if and only if A is incorrigible for S or self-evident to S. is not self-evident but just obviously true* (Alvin Plantinga N. W., 1991, p. 75)

This happens because the foundation alists can't give any argument for how it is self-evident. This results in the foundationlists accepting the proposition as being true which makes their argument self-referentially incoherent in the noetic structure. Proposition is neither self-evident nor incorrigible. To let a proposition be accepted as basic the modern foundationalists themselves violate the condition set for the proper basic belief. According to Plantinga, in the preceding propositions nothing is shown that the argument is self-evident and incorrigible: no condition is stated or no premise is seen that there is premise that it follows self-evident or incorrigibly derived (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 76).

The fact that there is no any premise for self-evident/incorrigible belief to derive from the best way to make an argument is an in inductive way, but there are some circumstances by which basic beliefs cannot be self-evident or incorrigible e.g. in case of justifying one's memory (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 76).

In this case making inductive argument in part of (AB) A is justified in B which in fact is not exactly right for Plantinga. Because at times the proposition could not work, when it is not clear

A is not justified in B. For instance, Plantinga pointed out, in some contexts there is no necessary and sufficient condition for the proposition (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 77) .

Memory belief:

Premise #1: I seem remember p

Conclusion: I do remember that p

*Even if I seem that P can be right it is not sufficient to justify that P.* In this case even if there is no necessary and sufficient condition in the above argument yet it is justifiable. The sufficient condition will fall on to the *prima facie* justification. The person who sees a tree has *prima facie* justification but when he is told that there are other fake trees around he no longer has *prima facie* justification. As a result, the circumstances of appearance the person in a certain way confirm *prima facie* not *ultima facie* justification up on the belief that he seems to see a tree. (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 77)

In the case of setting belief to proper basicity there is neither rule to decide it nor reason to make. So the Christian can make decision without having any propositions but taking his belief as basic and quite properly so. The Christian community is responsible to its set of examples not to theirs (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 77).

This kind of justifying belief differently will lead to particularism for the two positions give the justification for the proper basicity differently. Plantinga believes it does not end with giving different truth about the same matter, rather it shows one of the positions is mistaken; even they could not agree by further position. This shows that particularism does not imply subjectivism (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 78).

Finally even if the Reformed epistemologists could not come with full-flagged criterion of proper basicity, they believe that they hold the belief that the great pumpkin objection is not basic. So he shows that there are elements that show the former is basic while the latter is not and this is going to be seen in the subtitle “the ground belief in God” below (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 78).

### **3.14 The ground of belief in God**

In his argument about the fact that belief in God is basic, Plantinga showed that it is a mistake to consider belief in God - including beliefs such as perceptual belief, memory belief, and beliefs ascribing mental states to other persons-groundlessness. The following propositions illustrate the argument. (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 78)

(1) *I see a tree*

(2) *I had breakfast this morning.*

(3) *That person is in pain.*

To Plantinga et al (1991) the justification given about the person that he sees a tree should consider two things at time: *it should not violate epistemic duties and he in his epistemic rights in accepting it. His noetic structure is not defective by virtue of his then accepting it.* Moreover he cites Professor Chisholm’s expressions *my being appeared treely plays a crucial role in the formation of that belief.* So, being appeared in these characteristics is a way that confers the right to belief in question. This is what justifies the belief. And it is a ground of justification and the belief (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 79).

To Plantinga, et al (1991) the analogies of pain and eating breakfast are explained similarly to the preceding proposition. If one is seen with displaying typical pain behavior, the condition cannot be taken as an evidence for there is no inferential relation that proves it and the third justification, the memory about eating breakfast, cannot be justified with inference too (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 79).

In each type of the basic belief explained above the respective justifications is found in some circumstances or condition that confers justification. The corresponding circumstances serve as ground of justification that in each case there will be some true propositions of certain sort:

- (1) In condition C, S is justified in taking p as basic of course C will vary with p.
- (2) For a perceptual judgments such as, I see a rose-colored wall before me.
- (3) In this case if C is not appeared to the rose wall appropriately for example because of wearing rose-colored glasses or the suffering from a disease that causes me to be appeared to no matter what the color of the nearby objects, then he is not justified in taking it the above C as basic. (Alvin Plantinga N. W., 1991, p. 79)

The sufficient condition in justification that appears properties is not still sufficient by itself. Plantinga, et al (1991) explains it as being difficult to explain; however, he explains that justification needs some certain conditions. These conditions are, we might say, the ground of justification and by extension, the ground of the belief in this case is basic belief are not necessarily grounding belief (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 80).

Plantinga, et al (1991) argued similarly for belief in God. When the reformers claim that belief in God is basic they mean that the belief has justified ground in certain circumstances. Plantinga explains these circumstances using Calvin's explanation of the disposition that human beings have to believe things such as flowers or this vast or intricate world is created by God when one contemplates these things. According to Plantinga Calvin holds that God reveals himself in the

workmanship of the universe as well as the divine art reveals itself in the amazing host of the universe (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 80).

Calvin recognizes in activities such as reading the Bible, one may be impressed with a deep sense that God is speaking to him, up on having done what I know is cheap or wrong or wicked, I may feel guilty in God's sight and form of the belief God disapproves of what I have done and the other plenty conditions and circumstances that call forth belief In God: guilt, gratitude, danger ,a sense of God's presence ,a sense that he speaks that he speaks, perception of various parts of the universe (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 81).

The fact that circumstances where belief in God is acknowledged in general do not necessarily mean belief in God is basic; rather it is the specific circumstance in which self-evident proposition entails that God exists is basic. Plantinga, et al (1991) illustrates *God is speaking to me* is basic than *God has created all this*. As whole it is not general propositions which explains belief in the existence of God is properly basic, instead it is some detail of its attributes or action of proposition.(Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 81)

The belief in God or the proposition such as *God is speaking to me* and *God is to be thanked and praised* are properly basic: however the propositions do not deny, that there are justifying conditions for these beliefs. In other words, these beliefs or condition that confers justification to those who accept is basic. Therefore these beliefs are not groundless (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 81).

### **3.15. Fideism**

Before showing the position that Reformed epistemologists have in their view of fideism Plantinga pointed out (et. al, 1991) the two position of fideism, the extremist and the moderate, and tried to search their position (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 87).

The extremists rely upon faith rather than reason in religious matters. To Plantinga, et al (1991) presents the Russian theologian, by name Shestov, as an example of extremist. Fideism rejects  $2+2=4$  and instead promotes ideas like  $2+2$  as being 5. It follows that, the Reformed epistemologists are not extreme fideists. The rationalist is that the proper basicity of belief in the existence of God never commits this since there is no point of clash between faith and reason (Alvin Plantinga N. W., 1991, p. 87)

Having realized that the Reformed epistemologists are not extremists, Plantinga (et. al, 1991) further had to have a look at the circumstances whether or not the Reformed epistemologists belong to moderate fideism. The other author Plantinga referred to is Abraham Kuyper whose work he investigated as moderate fideism. Unlike the exponents of extreme fideism Kuyper did not see any conflict between the lines of faith and reason. As far as the view of Plantinga goes, Kuyper believes that there are beliefs taken on faith as well as on reason. He gives an example for the things based on faith are like  $2 \text{ plus } 2 \text{ equals } 4$  taken as self-evident based on faith while  $21 \text{ times } 45 \text{ equals } 945$  is based on reason because the latter is accepted based on calculation. (Alvin Plantinga, 1991, p. 88)

In general, what Abraham Kuyper takes as basic is everything taken by faith which Plantinga finds to be of no relevance for the Reformed epistemologist because what the fideists take on faith is not simply what the Reformed epistemologists have taken basic. The Reformed epistemologists do not accept basic beliefs based on deliverance of faith merely; they defend it as being basic based on the deliverance of reason. The Reformed epistemologists do not rely on the fundamental truth by reason but they believe that it is held by the deliverance of reason. The deliverance of reason includes the existence of God just as much as perceptual truths, self-evident truths, memory truths and the like (Alvin Plantinga N. W., 1991, p. 90).

## Chapter Four:

### Reflection on Alvin Plantinga's belief in the Existence of God without evidence and critical analysis of the evidentialist objection

#### 4.1 Introduction

As we have seen so far Plantinga has presented objection to the evidentialists objection, the natural theologians' arguments, and both extreme and moderate fideism. I am now in a position to offer my own critical reflection.. The focus of my reflection will be evaluating the logical flow of the evidentialist objection and presenting my support about the existence of God can only be known in the circumstance within the specific context that one can understand. For the idea of fideism is not the main point of the thesis but included only to show that Reformed epistemologist are not fideists It will, therefore, not be the part of my reflection. This reflection will show the position I have taken on this topic.

#### 4.2. The Nature of the begging question fallacy

Since the fallacy of begging the question is one of my major tools by which I will present my criticism of the evidentialist objection, I will briefly explain what it is. Begging the question is a logical fallacy of presumption. This fallacy, in general, is committed because the premise presumes what they are supposed to prove. *Begging the question* presumes that the premises provide adequate support for the conclusion when, in fact, they do not. The fallacy of the begging the question is committed when an illusion is created by the arguer that inadequate premises provide adequate support for the conclusion by assuming the conclusion in the premise, i.e. reasoning in a circle. The Latin name for this fallacy, *petitio principii*, means "request for

the source.” The actual source of support for the conclusion is not apparent, and so the argument is said to beg the question. After reading or hearing the argument, the observer is inclined to ask, “But how do you know *X*?” where *X* is then needed support. (Hurely, p. 156)

Example:

- (1) Murder is morally wrong. This being the case, it follows that abortion is morally wrong.
- (2) Of course humans and apes evolved from common ancestors. Just look how similar they are.

In the above examples, the first argument begs the question because it raises the question how one can know abortion is murder and it fails to answer the basic question of an argument that needs answer for what is murder? The second argument also begs the question examine the sentence: “does the mere fact that humans and apes look similar imply that they evolved from common ancestors?” What are the common ancestors does the sentence refer to? How does one know? What type of definition is given for them and does it also illegitimately imply support for the conclusion? (Hurely, p. 156)

### 4.3

### Fallacy of begging the

#### question committed in the evidentialists objection

Before I present my reflection on the evidentialists, it is important to keep in mind the related points of my prior discussion of Plantinga’s criticism of the evidentialists objection.

Plantinga defined classical foundationalism as follows:

P is rationally acceptable for S only if either (1) p is self-evident or evident to the senses or incorrigible for S, or (2) there are paths in S’s noetic structure from p to propositions  $q_1 \dots q_n$  that (a) are basic for S, (b) are self-evident to the senses, or incorrigible for S, and (c) support p (Alvin Plantinga N. W., 1991, p. 61).

To find out the points of critics in the above proposition I will stress the key terms; self-evident or incorrigible and (c) supports P. According to classical foundationalists, *it is incorrigible or*

*self-evident* means the proposition is self-evident such as it is in  $2+2 = 4$ . In other words, *incorrigible or self-evident* means a belief held by an individual and it cannot be false such as if I *seem to see a tree* or evident to the sense it follows *there is a tree in front of me*. The last “logical” term / (c) supports P/ depicts a noetic structure that non-basic beliefs have support from foundational beliefs, Here Plantinga advances his objection against of the evidentialist objection because they did not present any type of deductive or inductive argument for the claim that the evidentialist objection, of the classical foundationalism in which it is rooted, are properly basic and legitimately belong in the foundation. As result, Plantinga rejects the evidentialist objection on the grounds that it is self-referentially incoherent, or inconsistent. In general, according to Plantinga the evidentialists believe that their argument can be rational and the belief can be basic if and only if they can meet the essence of the preceding proposition.

Plantinga’s criticism of the evidentialist objection, it seems to me, is a case of committing fallacy of begging the question.

P is rationally acceptable for S only if either (1) p is self-evident or evident to the senses or incorrigible for S, or (2) there are paths in S’s noetic structure from p to propositions  $q_1 \dots q_n$  that ( a) are basic for S, (b) are self-evident to the senses, or Incorrigible for S, and (c) support p. (Alvin Plantinga N. W., 1991)

For S to be rationally justified in believing P as being basic, S should fulfill the relevant intellectual obligations. One of these intellectual obligations that should be fulfilled by the above argument is identifying whether the belief is properly basic or non-basic. Another intellectual duty should be fulfilled in the above proposition is ascertaining if premises are rational in supporting each other.

There are two conditions for P to be rationally acceptable in foundationism. Either the proposition should be justified inductively based on the chain of beliefs that goes from b1. b2 .b3

...or the rationality of a belief is justified without evidence as self-evident or incorrigible and it shows that the proposition is supported for it is self-evident or incorrigible or evident to the sense.

To me the last concept in the second alternative premise, that is, whether the proposition (c) supports P is questionable for it commits epistemic violation. For the proposition to be rational it needs to fulfill the Intellectual duties within itself.

In order to find out where the epistemic violation happened in the proposition I will investigate it. The epistemic violation seen in the above argument of the foundationlists is not with premise that states S is entitled in believing p as basic belief for it is self-evident or incorrigible or self-evident to the senses. The epistemic violation has not happened in the second premise either. Even if the chief purpose of the third premise is to strengthen the proposition, it in the same premise that S knows that C support P commits epistemic violation. Because it appears to have no ground. This can be clarified in the following argument.

P is rationally acceptable for S only if either (1) p is self-evident or evident to the senses or incorrigible for S, or (2) there are paths in S's noetic structure from p to propositions  $q_1 \dots q_n$  that (a) are basic for S, (b) are self-evident to the senses, or incorrigible for S, and (c) support p (Alvin Plantinga N. W., 1991, p. 61).

This can be illustrated further as follows:

Premise #1: If seeming to see a tree to Mr. Abebe is self-evident or incorrigible then he can grasp the truth found in the proposition.

Premise #2: Basic beliefs are self-evident or incorrigible to the sense.

Premise #3: The fact that Abebe grasped the truth in premise (1) is proved in his noetic structure

Premise #4: Abebe knows the support for the proposition is self-evident or incorrigible or evident to the sense.

Conclusion: Therefore: It is true that the proposition is basic belief.

In premise (3), the premise is not only self-referentially inconsistent as Plantinga said but it also commits begging the question fallacy. Premise (3) support p or the premise tells us that Abebe knows support that  $2+2 = 4$  is self-evident is presumed or shaky premise.

Even if one of the aims of the foundationlist in including the last premise is to make the argument strong, the premise in support of the conclusion is in question. This is due to the premise that supports the proposition in question fails to actually present evidence. In the premise that states Abebe knows to support the basic belief is self-evident or incorrigible or evident to the sense, he did not show any evidence that he knows he seems to see a tree. As result, since the premise does not present evidence or the premise is shaky it commits fallacy of begging the question. As result in my view the evidentialists' objection is fallacious for one of the premises is not well defined and shaky.

According to Plantinga, the nature of evidentialists' objection has normative character, i.e. they made normative objection setting principles to label a belief as wrong or right. While some of the principles are obligation the rest are identified as responsibilities. Therefore conforming to the set of principles is taken to be rationality while being against them is irrationality.

The evidentialists claim the theistic argument is failed to fulfill this. According to Plantinga, perhaps the evidentialists think anyone who believes in God without evidence is violating his/her own intellectual duty that results in epistemic violation.

In my view, one of the duties which must be fulfilled to maintain the rationality of one's belief is keeping to the rule of logic. The evidentialists break the rule that they themselves set out failing to keep to the logical flow of an argument and commit begging the question fallacy.

In this section, my objective is to evaluate the definition of *basic belief* as key term in the argument of foundationalists. As it has discussed so far, basic beliefs are defined as basic on condition that they are self-evident and incorrigible to the sense. Every variety of foundationalism has similar stance in the criterion set for proper basicity .This can be put in schematic form as follows

Premise #1: Beliefs are properly basic if it is only self-evident or incorrigible to the senses.

Premise #2: Basic beliefs are rationally justified without evidence.

Premise #3: Basic beliefs are rationally held if it does not violate the noetic structure.

Premise #4: Basic beliefs held the foundation in the noetic structure.

Conclusion: Thus, basic beliefs are rationally justified without evidence if and only if they do not violate the noetic structure and is self-evident or incorrigible to the sense

According to the classical foundationalism, a belief is rationally justified in the noetic structure.

An account of noetic structure holds both basic and non-basic belief between those who hold the propositions and the propositions themselves. Non-basic beliefs are justified on the chain of inferences while basic belief is justified without reference. Belief is basic if it is either self-evident or incorrigible. This leads to the question whether self-evident or incorrigible beliefs are only included in basic beliefs. It is this very point that let Plantinga add additional elements to basic beliefs in the foundationlism.

To Plantinga, unlike bizarre beliefs like astrology and the great pumpkin objection, some kinds of beliefs grounded in specific circumstances and have epistemic justification to be basic. These are propositions like I ate my breakfast, memory beliefs. I am justified that I ate my breakfast in my noetic structure but I can't justify my belief that I ate my breakfast based on inference since no evidence can be given for it. Memory belief can be justified in the same way. This can be clarified in schematic form as follows:

Premise #1: Beliefs justified without evidence are called basic beliefs

Premise #2: Beliefs are properly basic if it is only self-evident or incorrigible to the senses.

Premise #3: Memory belief and some other sort of beliefs are justified without evidence

Premise #4: Memory belief is not either self-evident or incorrigible. Memory belief is basic (from 1 and 3).

Premise #5: Basic beliefs are rationally held if it does not violate the noetic structure

Conclusion: Therefore properly basic beliefs include self-evident belief, incorrigible belief and memory belief.

Even if basic beliefs include some other sorts of beliefs in addition to those known as self-evident and incorrigible belief, the foundationlists do not accept the belief as being basic and justified in similar context with incorrigible belief. I suppose self-evident beliefs such as  $2+2=4$  is justified with *ultmafacie* justification. This is due to the fact that its justification never changes from context to context while like in some other beliefs which do not belong to that of self-evident or incorrigible belief which is justified with the intellectual obligation of *prima facie* (the belief that can be over ridden with different circumstance.) Varieties of basic beliefs which are not self-evident and incorrigible are guided by *prima facie intellectual* duty and obligation. These duties and obligation serve as the boundary between irrationality and rationality.

As it is stated in the preceding chapter the intellectual obligation maintain the line between rationality and irrationality, to my opinion, for reservation from arbitrary definition. I believe the evidentialists objection is incorrect for two reasons. On one hand the intellectual obligation set by the foundationlist themselves did not take into consideration the rule of lexical definition and on the other hand even if the motive of the classical foundationlists of limiting basic beliefs to self-evident and incorrigible belief is to avoid infinite arbitrary beliefs, the fact that there are some beliefs justified with *prima facie*, let them to fail in the condition that they denied some sort of basic belief

Since intellectual obligation is a set of rules by which a proposition is evaluated as being rational and irrational, I believe it should include all the rules that make the argument valid. The rule of lexical definition is one of the rules by which the rationality of proposition is evaluated.

Out of the rules of lexical definition I only focus on one of them that help me to evaluate the mistake the foundationlists commit in defining the term *basic belief* as only self-evident or incorrigible proposition. This rule of lexical definition states that, definition should not be too narrow neither should it be too broad. If a definition is too broad, it will include too much meaning; if it is too narrow, it will include too little meaning.

A propositions P is properly basic for a person S if and only if P is either self-evident to S or incorrigible for S or evident to the senses for S (Alvin Plantinga N. W., 1991)

The above argument excludes some beliefs which are justified without evidence from being basic. As it is discussed in the preceding paragraph some beliefs are justified without evidence differently in a different context or *prima facie* justification while some other are justified similarly in every circumstance or *ultima facie* justification. Plantinga calls both types of justification basic.

The foundationalists rejection of the other type of belief is denial of facts leading the definition given to the term basic belief as only *incorrigible and self-evident to the sense* to be narrow which results in invalid argument.

Even if the intellectual obligation is the standard by which the evidentialists evaluate the rationality of belief explained in the proposition they failed to obey it. One of the principles that prevent any proposition from irrationality is keeping the definition logical. Therefore the evidentialists objection is not tough enough to avoid other beliefs such as memory belief, propositions like I ate my breakfast, belief in the existence of God from the set of basic beliefs.

- Premise#1: Intellectual obligation is standard by which rationality from irrationality is determined
- Premise#2: Intellectual obligation consists of principles by which duties and obligations are fulfilled to keep the rationality of proposition.
- Premise#3: The proper definition of lexical definition keeps any proposition or argument from invalidity or irrationality.
- Premise#4: One of the rules of lexical definition is that the definition should not be either too broad or too narrow.
- Premise#5: Lexical definition is one of the principles of intellectual obligation.
- Premise#6: Basic beliefs are justified without evidence
- Premise#7: According to foundationlists belief is basic if and only if it is self-evident or incorrigible to the sense.
- Premise #8: Basic beliefs are not only self-evident or incorrigible to the sense.
- Premise#9: Since the foundationalists definition of basic belief denies the fact that there are other basic beliefs without self-evident or incorrigible to the sense it is said to be narrowly defined from premise (4) ( 7) (8)
- Conclusion: Therefore, the evidentialists' objection is irrational / invalid.

I will make my last reflection about the natural theologians misunderstanding of the concept of evidence. As Allen stairs stated the concept *evidence*: “In philosophy evidence has both broad and narrow sense. In the broad sense, evidence has both a broad and narrow sense. In the truth of some propositions .this includes sense experience, memory, testimony, arguments, and inference. In the narrow sense, evidence is propositional- a matter of statements and arguments”

Unlike the self-evident and incorrigible belief, as Plantinga discussed earlier some beliefs could only be known in specific circumstances. If one wants to drink water and obtains it and says I ‘am satisfied now’, what will be the evidence for his justification whether he is really satisfied? By similar analogy if one needs rest for his soul and read the Bible and pray and become happy and comes to believe that God exists what will be an evidence for proving that God exists in his belief? Is he authorized to use evidence in broad sense for his justification? Since no evidence to be derived from an argument in the deductive or inductive form one is not authorized to use evidence in a broad sense it needs to be selective in a kind of evidence one uses. As Stairs stated

Reformed epistemologists used the narrow sense of justification for different belief like the example given.

One of the problems that the natural theologians commit is not identifying appropriate evidence to prove the existence of God. Proof ought to be made by keeping the nature of the thing which is proved. God is the thing which is proved in the natural theologian's argument. In my understanding the natural theologians miss what they have to do in justifying about the existence of God. Identifying what kind of evidence can justify the existence of God was supposed to be the question raised than just involving oneself in the proof. Though the natural theologians had great commitment to know God without any religious reference and the ambition they have in tackling the objection of atheist came from philosophical inquiries, they made mistake of using evidence in broad sense.

The natural theologians make their proof in broad sense of using evidence. The aim of the proof is bringing together evidences to justify the conclusion. The justification used in the proof is a type of proof applicable for contingent things, experiment and mathematical operation. Peoples believe in God not because they see the coming together of premise that justify His existences in the conclusion. As Stairs stated the Reformed epistemologists explain that proving the existence of God this way is very ambitious.

As one can understand from Plantinga discussion in previous chapter the justification of different beliefs like God speaks to me, I was thirsty but now I have quenched my thirst and the others are knowledge one can get in certain circumstance. I believe the existence of God could be known through one's belief in different circumstance and specific context. The nature of God is something we can understand as Calvin said in reading the Bible and praying or singing. When

one is found immediately in such circumstances his/ her belief concerning the situation lets him/her say he/she knows that he/she believes that God is speaking to him. It is undeniable that circumstance is a ground of his belief. In general I support the idea that the belief in the existence of God cannot be known rather the existence of God can be known in specific belief in circumstances and rooted in it. So I believe if the natural theologians had identified the nature of God, they would not have been involved in such proof.

## Conclusion

By examining the foundationlists theory of knowledge, I have made an attempt to expose how knowledge about the existence of God can be acquired from the perspectives of the natural theologians and Reformed epistemologists. I realize that even if both the natural theologian's view of how we acquire knowledge about the existence of God is good and Reformed epistemology also makes its case that belief in God can be properly basic, the ways each justify belief in God completely differ. The former justifies the rationality about the existence of God through argument while the latter one justifies it without evidence based on the epistemological view of foundationalism.

In the proofs of the existence of God the arguments of three medieval philosophers are prominent in the history of natural theologians. These arguments are the ontological, the cosmological, and the design arguments. Each philosopher presents his argument purely philosophically, without employing religious reasoning. Of these three arguments, the first argument is *a priori* justified while the last two are justified *a posteriori*.

The Christian theologian, Saint Anselm (1033-1109), makes his argument based on the very concept, or idea, of a being than which none greater can be conceived. This being which nothing greater can be conceived exists as an idea in mind. So, he argues, this does exist not only in mind but also in reality. For nothing greater conceived being exist both in mind and reality rather than God, this being is God.

The second argument for the existence of God that we examined, the cosmological argument, was set out by Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274). Unlike Anselm, Aquinas was an empiricist. He rejected Anselm's argument for the existence God because he denies that God's existence can be

based solely on the definition of “God.” The source of justification for Aquinas was his investigation of his surroundings. Through his argument called third way he investigate contingent and necessary being. He found out that the contingent things cannot be the efficient cause of themselves for anything cannot be efficient cause of itself. As a result, it needs another efficient cause. He also made an effort to discover that causes cannot be infinite and finally understood that there is an efficient, cause of everything which is God.

The other argument is the design argument of William Paley (1743-1805). The input for the argument is the orderly universe. Paley used to defend the argument by appeal to experience of analogous entities. The analogy was between machine and natural objects i.e. a watch and a stone on one hand and an eye and a camera on the other hand. From this he derived that if one finds a stone and a watch on his way out he/she cannot overlook the watch unlike the stone as the former is more goal directed and complex entity and has an implication that there is an intelligent designer behind it. Analogy of the eye and camera showed to Paley that the sophistication of the camera and its similarity and the quality of an eye over camera let him conclude that if camera has an intelligent designer there was no reason that an eye cannot have. So this lead him to conclude the designer for an eye is a super intelligent being because the goal directed complexity entity of an eye greater than that of the camera that he calls this very super intelligent designer God.

The above arguments, if successful, justify belief in God, given the truth of classical foundationism. Classical foundationism is the view that a series of justified beliefs that rests on a foundation of unjustified belief. During the period of enlightenment this argument strictly challenged theism by its proponents, evidentialists or strong rationalists, to bring evidence for the justification of their religious belief. They were given just two options, either bringing evidence

or keeping to one's belief or quit to believe in God for believing without evidence is considered as irrationality.

Unlike the natural theologians, during this time the other group of the theist but still foundationlist challenged evidentialism for they are justified in believing in the existence of God without evidence. This group of foundationalist is called Reformed epistemologist.

One of the leading Reformed epistemologist is Alvin Plantinga insists on belief in the existence of God is not irrational and shows the belief in the existence of God can be justified in the foundation as being basic belief. According to classical foundationism, some beliefs are basic and some others are not. In the series of justified beliefs those that are not rationally accepted without evidence are accepted by tracing the basic belief.

The evidentialists present the following argument and argue:

P is rationally acceptable for S only if either (1) p is self-evident or evident to the senses or incorrigible for S, or (2) there are paths in S's noetic structure from p to propositions  $q_1 \dots q_n$  that (a) are basic for S, (b) are self-evident to the senses, or incorrigible for S, and (c) support p (Alvin Plantinga N. W., 1991, p. 61)

Plantinga states that the above argument is self-referentially inconsistency. Evidentialists argue that this proposition is supported for basic belief if and only if self-evident or incorrigible to the sense but they fail to give justification deductively or inductively.

Having reviewed the evidentialists claim about basic belief Plantinga justified belief in the existence of God as being basic. Plantinga makes clarification about basic belief that ought to be included in the foundation of knowledge. These are basic belief justified with *ultima facie* such as  $2+2=4$  and belief justified differently in different circumstance with *prima facie* such as *God is*

*speaking to me* through reading the Bible. So belief that God exists is rationally justified by *prima facie* justification.

The fact that Plantinga rejects the evidentialists objection because it is self-referentially inconsistent, by the same token I also argue that evidentialists commit a logical fallacy. The position that evidentialists insist on is that a belief is basic if and only if it is self-evident and incorrigible to the sense is supported. In fact, their proposition is not supported by any evidence and commits begging the question fallacy.

The evidentialist's claim consists of a limitation regarding the definition of basic belief. This is due to the fact that the proposition denies a variety of beliefs which are justified without evidence for still basic belief results in breaking the rule that underlines that definition should not be too narrow.

## References

- Allen Stairs, C. B. (2007). In A Thinker's Guide to the Philosophy of Religion (p. 149). New York: Pearson Longman.
- Alvin Plantinga, N. W. (Ed.). (1991). Faith and Rationality. London: University of Notre Dame press.
- Alvin Plantinga, (1967). God and other mind. New York: Cornell University press.
- Alvin Plantinga, N. W. (1991). Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God (3 ed.). (A. Plantinga, Ed.) U.S.A: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Bonjour, L. (2009). Epistemology 'Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses' (2 ed.). Lanham • Boulder • New York : Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, inc.
- Charles Taliaferro, P. D. (2010). A Companion to Philosophy of Religion. (P. D. Charles Taliaferro, Ed.) UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- D.Z. Phillips, T. T. (2001). Philosophy of Religion in the 21st Century. In D. Phillips (Ed.). Great Britain: Palgrave.
- Geisler, N. (1981). Philosophy of religion. U.S.A.
- J.Insole, H. A. (Ed.). (1988). Faith and Philosophical Analysis:the Impact of Analytic Philosophy on Philosophy of Religion. U.S.A: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Katen, T. E. (1973). Diong Philosophy. New York: Prentice- Hall, Inco., Englewood Cliffs.
- Martin, D. K. (Ed.). (1996). The Experience of Philosophy (3rd ed.). New York: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Melchert, N. (1995). *The Great Conversation: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy* (2nd ed.).  
Mayfield Publishing Company.

Michael Peterson, W. H. (1996). *Philosophy of Religion*. In P. Michael (Ed.). New York, U.S.A:  
Oxford University Press.

Michael Peterson, W. H. (1998). *Reason & Religious Belief, An Introductory to the Philosophy  
of Religion*. In M. Peterson (Ed.). New York, U.S.A: Oxford University press.

Pegis, A. C. (Ed.). (1945). *The Summa Theologica in Basic Writings of Saint Thomas* (Vol. I).  
New york: Random House.

(1985). *Philosophy of Religion: Thinking about Faith*. In C. S. Evans (Ed.). U.S.A: Inter Varsity  
press.

Swinburne, R. (2005). *Faith AND Reason* . New york: Oxford university .

Tessin, D. P. (Ed.). (2001). *Philosophy of Religion in the 21 First Century*. Great Britain: Antony  
Rowe Ltd, Chippenham, Wiltshire .

Tooley, A. p. (2008). *Knowledge of God*. (E. Sosa, Ed.) New york: Blackwell.

I. Mavrodes, G. (1970). *Belief in God ' A study in the Epistemology of religion'* . Newyork:  
Random house.

Verkamp, B. J. (1938). *Encyclopedia of Philosophers on Religion*. Jefferson, North Carolina, and  
London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.

Wainwright, W. J. (Ed.).(2007) U.SA:OUP.

### **Internet Citation**

<http://www.blackmask.com>