

Religious Epistemology

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Religious epistemology is the study of how subjects' religious beliefs might have, or fail to have, some form of positive epistemic status (such as knowledge, justification, warrant, rationality, etc.). The current debate is focused upon the kind of basis upon which a religious believer might rationally hold certain beliefs about God (whether God exists, what attributes God has, what God is doing, etc.). Engaging this issue are three groups of people who call themselves "fideists," "reformed epistemologists," and "evidentialists." Each group has a position, but the positions are not mutually exclusive in every case, and in the debate, the names better describe the groups' *emphases* rather than mutually exclusive positions in the debate. This will become clear in what follows.

Fideism is difficult to define, because those who call themselves 'fideists' hold a variety of related but distinct positions. Fideists can be thought of as occupying positions along a spectrum. Fideism in its extreme form is the view that religious beliefs have a special status (as compared to ordinary evidential standards, e.g. the standards for scientific theories) so that someone can rationally hold some theistic beliefs contrary to what her evidence supports or without any supporting evidence. In a moderate form, it is the view that the evidence for theistic beliefs is ambiguous, and one can choose to hold theistic beliefs because of their special, morally-central nature. Fideism in a weak (but certainly not uncontroversial) form is the view that someone must have faith or trust in God in order to rationally hold a theistic belief. Reformed epistemologists hold that someone can rationally hold some theistic beliefs (including the belief that God exists) without any argument or inference. That is, some theistic beliefs are immediately justified or, more specifically, properly basic. Evidentialists hold that for any theistic belief someone rationally holds, she holds that belief on the basis of adequately supporting evidence she has. Sometimes 'evidentialism', especially as the target of reformed epistemologists' arguments, is used to refer to the conjunction of evidentialism and a couple more positions, namely that 1) evidence consists entirely of a certain kind of foundational beliefs and arguments from those

beliefs and 2) theistic beliefs (e.g. that God exists) are not among those foundational beliefs. We'll say more about this below.

The first section will contain a brief historical survey of evidentialism, fideism, and reformed epistemology. The second section will give the fideist's position. The third section will give the evidentialist's position. The fourth section will give the reformed epistemologist's position, and the final section will include some comments on the current state of the debate.

1 A brief history of faith and reason

Medieval theologians such as Boethius,¹ Augustine,² Anselm,³ Aquinas,⁴ and others all held that arguments can be given for theism and that these arguments do make it rational for someone to believe on the basis of these arguments. (According to Aquinas, we can believe theism without theistic proofs, but if we believe on the basis of proofs, we turn our belief into knowledge, which is a better epistemic condition to be in.)⁵ Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, and Berkeley all offered arguments for God's existence.⁶ By offering these arguments and devoting considerable time to them, they seem to indicate, sometimes in more explicit statements, that in ordinary circumstances a believer ought to base her belief on these arguments and that there is something intellectually amiss with those who do not. During the enlightenment, precipitated in part by Locke's philosophy, the thought seems to have been held

¹Boethius has certain beliefs about God but relies on philosophy to provide reasons for these beliefs. Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*.

²Augustine says that we ought to have faith seeking understanding (*fides quarens intellectum*). That is, we have beliefs that we turn into knowledge by understanding them. Augustine, *Sermon* 43.7, 9.

³Anselm also held that we should believe so that we might understand (*credo ut intelligam*), and to this end he gave an ontological argument for God's existence, argued for God having certain attributes, and argued that for someone's sins to be atoned for by God, God needed to have become a human. Anselm, *Proslogion* and *Monologion*, respectively, and Gilson (1955, 128–130)

⁴Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I.1.1 and *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.5. See also Gilson (1936, chs. 1 & 2) and Gilson (1955, 366–368).

⁵In fact, Aquinas held that it was fitting and necessary that we believe things provable by reason on the basis of revelation: "Even as regards those truths about God which human reason could have discovered, it was necessary that man should be taught by a divine revelation; because the truth about God such as reason could discover, would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors." Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I.1.1. See also *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.5.

⁶Descartes, *Meditations* 3 & 5, Leibniz, *Monadology*, Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 4.10, Berkeley, *Three Dialogues*, book 2.

my many that the *only* rational way to believe that God exists was via arguments. Locke held that we ought to proportion our belief according to the evidence, that evidence consists in a set of propositions that are directly seen to be true and which are indubitable or evident to the senses, and that the proposition that God exists is not in that set of propositions.⁷ Locke thought that God could enlighten people’s minds and directly reveal truths to them, but he didn’t think that it did in fact happen.⁸ Locke’s view, often called “the enlightenment view” or something similar, paired with the view that arguments for God’s existence are not strong enough to make the belief that God exists rational—or at least not strong enough to make it rational for someone believe with the conviction that faith requires—is what reformed epistemologists call “the evidentialist challenge” to religious belief.

Immanuel Kant argued that the traditional arguments for God’s existence all fail to be a basis for believing theism. Further, Kant’s philosophy appears to preclude someone from believing that God exists on epistemic grounds; if we believe God exists, it should be on practical grounds.⁹ Further, Kant’s philosophy appears to preclude someone from believing that God exists on epistemic grounds; if we believe God exists, it should be on practical grounds.¹⁰ Kierkegaard agreed that we should not base theistic belief on arguments. To Kierkegaard, true belief in God is faith, and faith is a belief that you have “in virtue of the absurd.”¹¹ Faith is above reason. If someone acts according to faith, they act either against or outside the jurisdiction of reason. That is, Kierkegaard is a proponent of fideism. Fideism was also held later by Wittgenstein and has been developed and modified since, especially by D.Z. Phillips (1963), (1971), (1976), C. Stephen Evans (1998), and John Bishop (2007), (2013).

Reformed epistemologists also believe, in response to the evidentialist challenge, that it is rational for someone to believe that God exists in the absence of arguments. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff published the *locus classicus* of reformed epistemology in 1983—*Faith and Rationality*—and reformed epistemology has developed over time into a mature view represented by Plantinga’s *Warranted Christian Belief* in 2000. Recently, many well-known philosophers have called themselves reformed epistemologists, including William Alston (1993), Michael Bergmann, Kelly James Clark (1990), C. Stephen Evans (1998), (2011), George Mavrodes (1970),

⁷For a good exposition of Locke’s view just given, see Wolterstorff (1996, 88-133).

⁸See Wolterstorff (1996, 126) and Locke’s *Essay*, IV, XVIII, 10.

⁹Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Dialectic Book 2, Ch. 3, Sec. 4. Though in his early works, he did allow for one possible kind of argument in support of theism. See Kant (1994).

¹⁰Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*.

¹¹Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (Hong translation), 35ff. See Evans (2009, esp. pg. 155).

Alvin Plantinga (1981), (1983), (2000), and Nicholas Wolterstorff (1976), (1983), (1986), (1988).¹²

Evidentialism also has contemporary adherents, including Richard Swinburne (2001), (2004), Stephen Wykstra (1989), William Lane Craig (2000), Trent Dougherty (2011a), (2011b), (forthcoming a), (forthcoming b), C. Stephen Evans (2010), 3–4, (2011), 39, and Paul Moser (2010). Swinburne, for example, has offered probabilistic and cumulative case arguments for the existence of God. Swinburne does acknowledge that we can justifiably believe that God exists without arguments, but he also holds that arguments for God’s existence make it rational for someone to believe that God exists. (See Swinburne 2004)

Given that the views in the debate aren’t mutually exclusive (in fact, C. Steven Evans occurs in each category at least once), it shouldn’t be surprising to find that many adherents of one side of the debate also hold to a position sufficient to put them on one of the other sides, too. Nevertheless, adherents to one side often disavow adherence to the others. This is often due to differences in emphases, which seem to stem from many different influences, sometimes including historical context and even personality type. In the next three sections, we’ll describe fideism, evidentialism, and reformed epistemology, respectively, in more detail, then we’ll say something about how the views interact in the last section.

2 Fideism

Fideism in its extreme form is the view that someone can rationally hold some theistic beliefs contrary to what her evidence supports or without any supporting evidence at all.¹³ This view is held by Wittgenstein and D.Z Phillips. D.Z. Phillips (1963), (1971), (1976), for example, holds that religious beliefs have criteria for acceptability that other kinds of beliefs don’t have. (See Wolterstorff 1998)

Bishop (2007), (2013) endorses a moderate version of fideism that he calls a “modest Jamesian fideism”, according to which it is sometimes morally (and perhaps “epistemically”¹⁴) permissible for someone to take a proposition to be true even

¹²William Abraham and Keith Yandell share some similarities and may be considered reformed epistemologists in some wider sense. Michael Bergmann endorsed the title in correspondence.

¹³See Popkin (1967, 201–202) and Helm (2008, 189). John Bishop suggested a definition of this kind in correspondence. Some (e.g Greco 2007, 632) define fideism as the view that faith opposes reason, but the nature of this opposition is unclear, and so defining fideism this way is unhelpful.

¹⁴It seems that Bishop holds that epistemic justification is subsumed under moral justification. “[T]he justifiability question as it applies to faith-beliefs is ultimately a question about moral justifiability...” This justifiability question is about epistemic justifiability. Bishop argues like this:

if she correctly judges that the proposition isn't adequately supported by her total evidence. (2007, 165) Bishop gives the conditions on which taking a not-adequately-supported proposition to be true is morally permissible. (2007, 165) One of these conditions is that the evidence for the proposition is ambiguous. Different gestalts of the same data may be available (2013, 177), and when this occurs (and the other conditions obtain) a person is morally permitted to adopt one of the gestalts and take the proposition to be true. Bishop's position is incompatible with evidentialism. According to standard evidentialism, the attitude that fits situations of evidential ambiguity is suspension of judgment or, on a more fine-grained model, a credence of approximately .5.¹⁵ So, although it is unclear whether Bishop takes himself to be opposing evidentialism, his position appears incompatible with standard evidentialism.¹⁶

C. Stephen Evans (1998) endorses a moderate version of fideism, a view he calls "responsible fideism." According to that view, human reasoning processes have the tendency to err in certain ways as a result of sin, and this error can be ameliorated only by faith. Someone who has faith may appropriately hold a belief that appears to be unreasonable by those who don't have faith, but that is to be expected, and the person who has faith is, in fact, reasonable.

Both Evans' and Bishop's views differ from the extreme form in the first paragraph of this section. That is, they are compatible with the denial of the view that someone can rationally hold some theistic beliefs contrary what her evidence supports or without any supporting evidence at all. Further, Evans' view is compatible with the denial of Bishop's view. Bishop's view, as we've shown, is incompatible with standard evidentialism, but it may be that some reformed epistemologists and evidentialists find themselves having the same commitments as fideists (like Evans) who hold to the weak form of fideism. We'll discuss the interaction between fideism, evidentialism, and reformed epistemology in the last section. In the next section, we'll describe evidentialism.

we care about epistemic justifiability of faith-beliefs because we "should intend, in all our believing, to grasp truth and avoid error," and we have this intention because of the practical consequences of our beliefs. (Bishop 2007, 33)

¹⁵There are ways for standard evidentialists to deal with vagueness that we've not covered here for brevity.

¹⁶Here's why Bishop may not be taking himself to oppose evidentialism. Bishop argues against "moral evidentialism" (2007, 62), which is the conjunction of evidentialism as stated above plus the moral-link principle: someone is morally permitted to take a belief to be true only if it is justified by her evidence. (2007, 62) Bishop seems to be denying the moral link principle, not evidentialism. Further, the evidential ambiguity of a proposition is compatible with evidentialism. (See Poston 2009)

3 Evidentialism

Evidentialism is the view that a subject is justified in believing¹⁷ a proposition at a time only if the subject's evidence supports that proposition at that time (and, of

¹⁷Evidentialism is typically formulated in terms of *propositional justification*. This can be described by conditionals the antecedents of which describe the subject's experiences (broadly construed) and the consequents of which state that some proposition has some positive epistemic status for that person. (Chisholm 1989) Alternatively, it can be described by epistemic support relations bearing between a target proposition and a conjunctive proposition describing the subject's experiences or basic beliefs (Swinburne 2001) or knowledge (Williamson 2000). What is *not* included in propositional justification is that a subject actually believes the target proposition. Whereas propositional justification is a relation among propositions or a function from experiences to epistemic status, *doxastic justification* is a property of beliefs wherein the propositional content of the belief is justified by the subject's evidence and, in addition, the subject is appropriately attentive to and rightly responsive to that evidence. Evidentialism is first and foremost a theory of propositional justification.

course, *because* the evidence supports it¹⁸).¹⁹ Applied to beliefs about God, someone is justified in believing something about God only if her evidence supports what she believes. No one is justified in believing something about God without enough evidence to support that belief.

Theistic evidentialists often offer arguments for God's existence and for their beliefs about his attributes. Theistic proofs include cosmological, moral, ontological, teleological, and other kinds of arguments for God's existence. Most often today, these arguments are offered as parts of a cumulative case for theism. The accumulation of many independently plausible arguments for the same proposition gives that proposition a higher probability than any one of the arguments on its own. Theistic evidentialists also find it important to reply to arguments against the existence of God, primarily arguments from the magnitude, duration, and distribution of suffering in the world and arguments from divine hiddenness.²⁰

¹⁸This is not an official part of the definition of evidentialism, at least as defined by its main proponents, Conee and Feldman (Conee and Feldman 2004). However, they do endorse it as part of the broader project of evidentialism (2-4, 38, 93, 104).

¹⁹Conee and Feldman state evidentialism in three ways. Here are two:

EJ Doxastic attitude D toward proposition p is epistemically justified for S at t if and only if having D toward p fits the evidence S has at t. (Conee and Feldman 2004, 83)

E S is justified in believing p if and only if S's evidence on balance supports p. (Conee and Feldman 2008, 83)

E and (less clearly) EJ, however, have a problem with the right-to-left direction of the biconditional. If someone's evidence supports a proposition with only a .5001 probability, S is not justified in (fully) believing p (though the subject would be justified in holding a very tenuous partial belief to degree .5001). The justification threshold for (full) belief needs to be higher than merely being on balance supported by evidence. If there were a coin that had a .5001 probability of landing heads, I would not be justified in (fully) believing that on its next flip it would land heads. Conee and Feldman's next thesis precludes this objection.

ES The epistemic justification of anyone's doxastic attitude toward any proposition at any time strongly supervenes on the evidence that the person has at the time. (Conee and Feldman 2004, 101)

They summarize ES this way: someone's total body of evidence "entirely settles which doxastic attitudes toward which propositions are epistemically justified in any possible circumstance." (Conee and Feldman 2004, 101) We've tried to state this more succinctly and less technically. For further discussion, see Dougherty (2011a). Locke and others add a proportionality thesis: We should only believe a proposition to the degree that it is supported by our evidence. We've defined evidentialism without committing to the stronger proportionality thesis, but it is a natural extension, given the gradedness of belief.

²⁰For recent work on the problem of evil, see Dougherty (2011b) and Dougherty and Draper

4 Reformed epistemology

Reformed epistemologists argue that someone can rationally believe that God exists (and hold some other theistic beliefs) without any arguments or inferences. Some theistic beliefs are immediate or properly basic; that is, they are appropriately held but not on the basis of other beliefs. Beliefs that God exists (and others) are much like perceptual or memorial beliefs. According to William Alston (1993), for example, beliefs about God are justified on the basis of perceptions we have of God. According to Alvin Plantinga (2000), when religious belief is produced by God in a religious believer in the right kind of way, the result is faith, which is an immediately justified (even more, a warranted) religious belief. Some reformed epistemologists believe we have a special faculty, called the *sensus divinitatis*, by which we perceive or otherwise obtain immediately justified beliefs about God. Nevertheless, most reformed epistemologists also find it important to reply to arguments against the existence of God, primarily arguments from the magnitude, duration, and distribution of suffering in the world and arguments from divine hiddenness. We'll give Plantinga's and Alston's views in a little more detail.

Specifically for Plantinga (2000), many religious beliefs are properly basic; that is, they are proper and basic. A belief is basic for a subject just in case the subject holds the belief but not on the basis of other beliefs she holds. A belief is proper just in case the belief is justified, rational, and warranted. A belief is justified just in case the subject isn't violating any intellectual obligations by so believing. A belief is rational just in case the subject's cognitive system is functioning properly and she has done her best with respect to forming the belief. A belief is warranted just in case the subject's belief is produced by a belief-forming process (1) that is functioning properly (2) in an appropriate epistemic environment (3) designed to aim at truth, and (4) which is successfully aimed at truth. According to Plantinga, if Christianity is true, fundamental beliefs about Christianity, including theistic beliefs, meet these criteria and so are properly basic.

Specifically for Alston (1993), many people do perceive God (where perceiving something doesn't require that the thing perceived exists,²¹ and on the basis of their perception of God, people do form justified beliefs about God. Alston argues for this claim by first giving reports from people who have claimed to have perceived God. These perceptions are similar to paradigm perceptual experiences: awareness of the object, the object being presented to them, etc. Alston then argues that even though

(2013). For recent work on divine hiddenness, see Howard-Snyder and Moser (2001) and Dougherty and Parker (2013).

²¹Alston (1993, 1)

perception of God doesn't occur via the normal senses, there may be a different faculty responsible for delivering perceptions of God. We can't justify beliefs based on normal sense perception without arguing in a circle, so we need to start with our normally-accepted belief-producing practices based on the perceptions we have. The relevant beliefs about God that people who have perceived God have are justified on the basis of their normal practices of forming beliefs based on perceptions, as long as we don't have sufficient reasons for taking perceptions of God to be unreliable. But as with normal perceptions, we don't have a good reason to take perceptions of God to be unreliable. Even if there are contradictory reports about perceptions of God, each person who perceives God at least has a sufficient internal reason to engage in belief-forming practices using her perception(s) of God.

Reformed epistemology is motivated in at least three ways. First, reformed epistemology is partially motivated by a particular interpretation of Christian Scriptures.²² According to this interpretation, humans are cognitively defective due to sin. Cognitively defective humans aren't helped by believing the premises of a theistic argument. It would take a special act of God to get humans to have warranted beliefs about God.

The reformed epistemologist's view is also motivated by the fact that many people have believed theism without believing on the basis of arguments (sometimes misleadingly called "propositional evidence").²³ Plantinga says, for example, that if we needed to proportion our belief according to propositional evidence, or arguments, then only a few people would be justified in their beliefs about God, and only after much effort and time, and their belief would be uncertain and "shot through with falsehood."²⁴ If only a few people have justified religious beliefs, then theism is, as Stephen Wykstra says, in "big doxastic trouble."²⁵ Most believers would be acting contrary to their intellectual duties. But, so the argument goes, theism is not in this much trouble, so we need not proportion our beliefs according to our propositional evidence, or arguments.

Reformed epistemology also gets its motivation by arguing against Locke's view, which reformed epistemologists often simply call "evidentialism."²⁶ There are two kinds of arguments against this view.²⁷ The first is to show that there are many

²²See, e.g. Plantinga (2000), ch. 9 and pp. 269–270, where Plantinga gives his view influenced in part by John Calvin.

²³Plantinga (1991, 290), Alston (1993, 305-306)

²⁴Plantinga (2000, 270). Here Plantinga is clearly echoing the language of Aquinas in *ST* I.1.1.

²⁵Quoted in Plantinga (1991, 290)

²⁶See, e.g. Bergmann (2011), Clark (2004), Plantinga (1998), (2000). Bergmann calls the opposing view "theistic evidentialism" in his 2010.

²⁷An objection to "evidentialism" similar to the reformed epistemologist's objection to "eviden-

beliefs that we're justified in holding but which we don't hold on the basis of any propositional evidence, or arguments: the belief that there are other minds, beliefs based on memory, the belief that you should shun gratuitous cruelty, and the belief that the world was not created five minutes ago. Further, we believe things about God upon seeing a beautiful sunset without any evidence to offer, and presumably those beliefs are justified.

The second argument against Locke's view is a reaction to the evidential argument against religious belief, namely that the view sets the standards for justified belief about God way too high: by Locke's standards, there cannot be sufficient evidence for the existence of God. The standards go something like this: the evidence you need to base your belief on in order for it to be justified must be beliefs you have²⁸ that are either self-evident, certain, indefeasible, etc. For an argument against an opponent's view that foundational beliefs must be certain, see Plantinga (1998). For an argument against the view that foundational beliefs must be self-evident is from Plantinga (1991). The argument in this paragraph is also given by Clark (2004). No theistic proof has premises that are self-evident, certain, or indefeasible. Further, even theistic proofs that are probabilistic involve many premises whose probabilities need to be multiplied to yield the probability of the conclusion. Multiplying the probabilities of the premises results in a very low probability for the conclusion, a probability that is not sufficient to justify belief in the conclusion.²⁹ So if Locke's view is true, the bar for justification is set way too high and, as a result, many theistic beliefs are unjustified.

5 The current state of the debate

Fideism and reformed epistemology are both reactions to the "enlightenment view" closely associated with Locke's views. This view has at least three premises:

epistemology" occurs outside religious epistemology, too. Here's Dougherty (2011a):

Other challenges to [evidentialism] come from examples of justified belief that seem to lack any evidence... However, one way to frame these debates is not about whether evidentialism is true but rather how it is to be understood, how we are to understand the nature of evidence, having it, and its supporting a proposition or attitude.

²⁸To see that the target of this kind of argument is the view that evidence consists entirely of propositions or arguments or beliefs, see Plantinga (1984), (?), 290-295, 298, 305, 310, (1993), 95, (1998), and Clark (2004). Swinburne holds the view that evidence consists in beliefs (2001), 137, but these beliefs are about experiences.

²⁹See Plantinga (2000), 271-280, for an example. For discussion, see McGrew (2006), Plantinga (2006), and McGrew and McGrew (2006).

1. **Evidentialism:** It is rational for a subject to believe a proposition at a time if and only if the subject's evidence supports that proposition at that time (where the general criteria for what counts as evidence for religious beliefs are the same as the criteria for what counts as evidence for non-religious beliefs).³⁰
2. **Classical Foundations:** Ultimately, evidence consists entirely in (i) foundational beliefs, which are seen directly to be true because they are (ii) certain, self-evident, indefeasible, etc.
3. **Particular theological thesis:** That God exists is not directly seen to be true and (therefore) not certain, self-evident, indefeasible, etc.

From these it follows that

4. That God exists is neither a foundational belief nor is it an item of our evidence. (from 2 & 3)

and

5. It is rational for someone to believe that God exists only if there are arguments from her evidence to her belief that God exists. (from 1 & 4)

Fideism in its extreme and moderate forms entails the denial of 1. Fideists of the extreme type hold either that someone can rationally hold a belief contrary to her evidence or without any supporting evidence, or that the criteria for what counts as evidence differs from religious beliefs to non-religious beliefs. Fideists of the moderate type hold that it is sometimes rational to hold a theistic belief even if it is ambiguous as to whether it supports that belief. If someone were to deny 1, she would, of course, not need to deny any other premises to deny 5, and she would think that it is irrelevant to the rationality of theistic beliefs if 4 were true. On the other hand, fideists of the weak type can endorse 1 (Evans' view is compatible with it—see the section on fideism above) while denying another premise. As the remaining discussion of reformed epistemology will make clear, an endorsement of a weak type of fideism is compatible with an endorsement of reformed epistemology.

Reformed epistemologists deny 5, and they deny 5 precisely because they deny 4: reformed epistemologists hold that the existence of God is a foundational belief.

³⁰Enlightenment evidentialism also contains the view that evidential support for a proposition can obtain only if the proposition is foundational or is sufficiently probable on the foundational propositions. This addition, however, is unnecessary for the above argument. Further, contemporary epistemological evidentialism doesn't contain the addition. There are coherentist evidentialists.

If reformed epistemologists deny 4, it is because they deny 2 or 3. Thus, reformed epistemology is completely consistent with 1, which is evidentialism (Note: this is evidentialism as it appears as a view in epistemology, as opposed to what ‘evidentialism’ has been used to refer to in the reformed epistemology tradition). 1 is irrelevant to whether someone is a reformed epistemologist. Further, as was shown in the previous paragraph, if someone were to deny 1, she wouldn’t need to deny 2 or 3. Extreme and moderate fideists deny 1, and reformed epistemologists do not endorse extreme or moderate fideism.³¹ But reformed epistemologists *do* think they need to deny 2 or 3. The reformed epistemologist’s need to deny 2 or 3 is motivated by their maintaining of 1. So it seems that reformed epistemology as a view is not only compatible with 1; it is motivated by the maintaining of 1. So, reformed epistemology is motivated by evidentialism. In fact, Plantinga even seems to espouse evidentialism. In his 1993, 193, Plantinga says that warrant requires evidence, so a subject cannot warrantably believe God exists without evidence. Further, in his 2000, 262, Plantinga agrees with John Calvin that some Christian truths are evident in themselves, so they are evidence for themselves but do not get their evidence from other propositions.³²

Reformed epistemologists argue against 2. For example, Kelly James Clark (1990), (2004), Michael Bergmann (2006), William Alston (1993), and Alvin Plantinga (2000), all reformed epistemologists, explicitly argue against 2.³³ Further, Paul Moser (2010) and C. Stephen Evans (2011), who might be called reformed epistemologists, but who also endorse a form of evidentialism (again, as we have it above—as a general epistemological approach), also deny 2. Even further, Richard Swinburne, an evidentialist who some reformed epistemologists say has carried on the enlightenment project,³⁴ denies 2 and endorses the view that it is rational to believe that God exists on the basis of religious experiences without arguments or inferences (2004, chap. 13). So, denying 2 is not unique to those who call themselves “reformed epistemologists”. It is endorsed by many who call themselves “evidentialists” too.

Not only do many reformed epistemologists hold to evidentialism, but many evidentialists hold to reformed epistemology, too, as long as reformed epistemology is

³¹See, e.g. Wolterstorff (1998).

³²See also Evans (2011, 38–39) for cases where Plantinga says belief in God has grounds, which, according to the evidentialist, count as evidence.

³³One way to characterize reformed epistemology, as in ?, is opposition to the idea that beliefs about God need to be based on a “particular sort of grounds—the sort involved in giving reasons or arguments for one’s beliefs.” (629, see also premise 2 on the bottom of 630) But the reasons referred to are (as Greco makes clear on 631) based on self-evident or incorrigible beliefs (and similarly for the premises of the arguments referred to).

³⁴See, e.g. Wolterstorff (1998).

just the view that the existence of God can be rationally held without argument. Any evidentialist who holds that religious experience provides a rational basis upon which to believe that God exists endorses the view that someone can rationally believe that God exists without being able to argue from other beliefs she has. To that person, the existence of God is immediate and basic. So anyone who thinks that religious experience provides evidence on the basis of which someone can rationally believe that God exists (or hold other theistic beliefs) is both an evidentialist and a reformed epistemologist.

The evidentialist and reformed epistemologist can agree, contrary to Locke's view, that it is rational to have as a basic belief that there are other minds, that we should shun gratuitous cruelty, and that the world was not created five minutes ago. The evidentialist maintains that it is rational for a subject to believe these things on the basis of her evidence. If evidence isn't restricted to beliefs or arguments, the evidentialist can take evidence (in some cases, at least) to be intuitions, experiences, or seeming states.³⁵ In this way, the evidentialist can also affirm that it is rational to have as basic beliefs that there are other minds, that we should shun gratuitous cruelty, and that the world was not created five minutes ago.

Here's just one example of how this might be done. Evidentialists can maintain evidentialism and hold that someone can rationally believe that God exists without argument by holding to phenomenal conservatism.³⁶ One way to formulate phenomenal conservatism is this: if it seems to a subject S that a proposition p holds, then S thereby has a (defeasible) reason to believe p.³⁷ If the seeming state is sufficiently strong, then S thereby has a strong enough reason to believe p so that S is justified in believing p. These seeming states are not beliefs, they're not self-evident, and they're not certain, but they do constitute evidence. Thus, like Plantinga's proper functionalism, phenomenal conservatism is (or could at least be easily embodied in) a form of non-classical foundationalism. Further, it can seem to us sufficiently

³⁵In fact, leading epistemological evidentialists, e.g. Conee and Feldman (2004), (2008), do not hold propositional theories of evidence, but, rather, hold that ultimate evidence consists in experiences.

³⁶Dougherty (2011a) gives a brief history of experience in evidence related to phenomenal conservatism. Conee gives his 'Seeming Evidentialism' in Conee and Feldman (2004, ch. 1): seemings that p provide reasons for believing that p. This view has its predecessors. Chisholm calls his view 'commonsensism' (1989, 63). Swinburne centers his epistemology on a 'principle of credulity' (2001, 135-141), and Huemer calls his view 'phenomenal conservatism' (2001, 99). See Tucker (forthcoming) for the most recent work to date on phenomenal conservatism. For a new formulation and the most recent application to religious belief, see Dougherty (forthcoming a).

³⁷This is not quite Swinburne's principle of credulity or Huemer's phenomenal conservatism, which are both too strong. The seemings can be quite weak so not make p probable or justified (even *prima facie*), respectively.

strongly that there are other minds, that we should shun gratuitous cruelty, and that the world was not created five minutes ago. To the phenomenal conservative evidentialist who accepts that religious experiences make it seem that there is a God, beliefs (non-deviantly) resulting from these experiences will be properly based on evidence.³⁸ Thus, one can be both an epistemological evidentialist and a reformed epistemologist.³⁹

Furthermore, someone who holds to both evidentialism and reformed epistemology can also consistently be a fideist of the weak type. This person can hold that there are conditions for adequately acquiring evidence, and one of these conditions is faith. Perhaps this evidence is an experience or seeming or some other ground, and upon getting this evidence, the person is immediately justified in believing that God exists.

6 Conclusion

Perhaps it is useful for someone to call herself an “evidentialist” (to show her opposition to extreme or moderate fideism) or a “reformed epistemologist” (to show her opposition to “the enlightenment view”) or a (weak) “fideist” (to show her opposition to the view that sin or faith isn’t relevant to rational belief formation). These titles are useful as a means of identifying with a particular community with particular historical distinctive. Nevertheless, it should be clear that when someone says they belong to one of these three views, they’re not necessarily opposing each other. They can, in fact, all get along.

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³⁸Compare the perception talk Alston gives—an awareness of something’s appearing to one as such-and such (p. 5)—with a seeming, which is “a kind of experience with propositional content.” (Tucker 2011, 55-56) If Alston’s perceptions don’t match seeming states, perhaps it matches a seeming-as-though state, which is non-propositional and which causally precedes seeming states. For an account of these states, see Huemer (2007).

³⁹Chris Tucker (2011) has even made an attempt to reconcile phenomenal conservatist evidentialism with account of warrant (not merely justification; warrant is whatever is added to true belief to make it knowledge) and a place for what some reformed epistemologists believe to be a special faculty for perceiving God: the *sensus divinitatis*.

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