Thomistic Papers
IV

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PRELIMINARY STATEMENT OF APOLOGY, ANALYSIS, AND CRITIQUE

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I. Rationality as pertinent to the Faith

A. We begin with the Apology

Thomistic Papers--just what are these anyway? For, although for some years now the three small volumes of such papers have made their periodic appearance under the auspices of the Center for Thomistic Studies at the University of St. Thomas in Houston, it is perhaps to be doubted whether, in the academic profession of philosophy generally, these papers have so much as even been heard of, much less read. After all, significant contributions to Thomistic philosophy are not only in rather short supply these days, but they also, it must be conceded, are scarcely to be numbered among what might be called the really "hot items" in contemporary philosophy. Certainly, they are not in such long supply, nor are they such hot items, as might be contributions to so-called Analytic Philosophy, or to Post-Analytic Philosophy, or to Hermeneutical Philosophy, or to Linguistic Philosophy, or to Deconstruction, or, as Kierkegaard might say, to "astrology and the veterinary sciences or whatever it is that the age demands, all of which are aesthetically and intellectually a huge vulgarity"![1]

Be this, though, as it may, this present volume of *Thomistic Papers* should be noted as having a rather different point and purpose from the earlier ones. For the papers this time are quite consciously polemical in character, all of them being conceived as a rejoinder to an earlier set of essays that were no less polemical, and yet polemical, one might say, to the rather opposite intent. For those earlier essays appeared some four years ago under the title of *Faith and Philosophy*, and under the editorship no less of Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff.[2] Nor perhaps could one better characterize these two different sets of polemics--first the earlier one, and now this later one--than to say that, while the earlier volume was avowedly counter-Thomistic in its religious and philosophical thrust, this volume seeks to be no less avowedly pro-Thomistic.

"But why?", you might well ask. For are not Thomistic philosophers as eager and interested as others that questions having to do with faith and rationality be once again addressed seriously in these days, and made the object of a properly expert philosophical attention? Particularly, given the near total neglect by professional philosophers, for the greater part of the entire present century, of nearly any and all questions of how philosophy might in any way contribute to the strengthening and better understanding of our Christian religious faith--given such a background, why would not Thomists and Thomist philosophers be among the first to welcome, rather than to rebut, such high quality discussions as those contained in *Faith and Rationality?* Nor is that all. For the editors of *Faith and Rationality,* Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, are among America's most competent and outstanding Analytic Philosophers. Why, then, would anyone presume to take on opponents the like of these, least of all a somewhat motley and scattered crew of mere would-be Thomists such as ourselves!

Oh, it's true that neither Plantinga nor Wolterstorff, nor any of their confreres in the project of *Faith and Rationality*, could, by any stretch of reason or imagination, be reckoned as either Catholics in matters of faith, or Thomists in matters of philosophy. Instead, they wear it as their badge of honor (and perhaps even of

their divine election) that they are of the Reformed persuasion in religion and of the Analytic persuasion in philosophy. Still, why, for all of that, should we as Thomists want to take on in public debate those who, both professionally and privately, are some of them among our fast friends, Calvinist-Analysts though they be? Besides, when one reads the essays in *Faith and Rationality,* one might almost say--invoking a once fashionable, but now somewhat long-disused terminology--that what these Calvinist-Analysts are about in their cooperative volume resembles nothing quite so much as the once ancient and honorable undertaking of trying to make philosophy serve as the handmaid of theology! And how could Thomists, of all people, object to anything like that?

Or, if "handmaid" be a term that nowadays smacks too much of a reverse discriminatory kind of sexism, why not just say "manservant" instead? In any case, what Plantinga and Wolterstorff and their associates--call them P. W. and Co., if you will--are seeking to do is to put philosophy to use once more as an effective instrument for exhibiting and showing forth the rationality of our Christian faith. Yes, that is the very sense and aim of the title, *Faith and Rationality:* it seeks to point up the fact that the Christian faith is nothing if not rationally respectable, even by today's standards.

Very well, such being the intended purport of *Faith and Rationality,* the question returns once more: what could Thomists possibly find wrong with such a project? To which the answer is that, initially and on the surface, they find nothing wrong with it. The only trouble is that, no sooner do our Calvinist-Analyst friends begin to get down to the details of their own project of seeking to demonstrate the rationality of our Christian faith, than they forthwith cite the case of St. Thomas Aquinas as being the prime example of how *not* to go about any such business as that of a faith seeking understanding. Is it any wonder, then, that, to Thomist readers, the volume *Faith and Ratitionality* should come off as being like nothing quite so much as a throwing down of the gauntlet!

Yes, for what Plantinga, Wolterstorff, and Co. would offer in their volume is a basic reading and interpretation of the entire history of Western religio-philosophical thought from the Middle Ages right down to the present. And what that reading, they think, discloses is that the dominant tradition in that history--at least so far as the business of exhibiting the rationality of our Christian faith is concerned--has been the tradition of so-called "natural theology." Moreover, that same tradition, as P. W. and Co. read it, is a tradition that, both in its origins and in its major articulation, is largely the work of St. Thomas Aquinas. The only trouble is--and here our Calvinist-Analyst friends move to their attack--this entire, elaborate enterprise of natural theology can be shown to have been basically wrong-headed in its origins, and to have now become demonstrably bankrupt in its consequences--no less philosophicaly than theologically. In other words, what P. W. and Co. are concerned to do is to shed a new light on the ancient and honorable tradition of natural theology, a light that will expose it both for its initial wrong-headedness and for its present irrelevance. And where does this new light come from that has thus been vouchsafed to our Calvinist-Analyst antagonists? Well, doubtless they would say that the new light, like all light, must of course come from the Lord. The only thing is that in this case the light from the Lord has not been without mediation. For in theology, they tell us, the light first began to shine forth in the persons of the Reformers in the 16th century, and particularly of their Dutch successors in the ensuing centuries; and in philosophy it would seem that the new light has only recently begun to shine, and this time in the persons of our more brilliant and up-to-the-minute Analytic Philosophers of the present day.

B. The Attack on Natural Theology: the Twin Errors of Evidentialism and Foundationalism

All right, then, as latter-day Thomists, how do we propose to go about defending our master, Thomas, and upholding the honor of his now seemingly largely discredited enterprise of a natural theology? To begin with, though, we still need to get somewhat clearer as to just what it is that is thought to be so wrong with

natural theology as this now comes to be seen through the eyes of P. W. and Co. For certainly, insofar as such natural theology has for its aim the exhibition of the rationality of the Christian faith, this objective, so far from being opposed to what the contributors to *Faith and Rationality* have in mind, is an objective that is entirely at one with their own.

Accordingly, it is not so much the objective that St. Thomas and the Thomists have in mind in their project of a natural theology that P. W. and Co. are objecting to, as rather the means and method whereby that objective is supposedly to be carried out. For the way, it would seem, that has been chosen by St. Thomas to carry out this objective is the way of strict logical demonstration--a way that involves a reliance upon self-evident truths at the outset, followed by strict demonstration of such truths as may be demonstrated to follow from the truths that are thus self-evident. Hence, P. W. and Co. take it to be the very hallmark of Thomistic natural theology that in such a theology the attempt is made actually to prove God's existence, as well as to prove that He has certain distinctive attributes--simplicity, unity, goodness, omniscience, omnipotence, *et al.*--all of this supposedly demonstrable in accordance with recognized canons of logical deduction.

In contrast, John Calvin, our Calvinist-Analyst friends remind us, is one who, it seems, just never really concerned himself with all this elaborate logical apparatus of proofs for God's existence and for the divine attributes. Nor did the Reformers generally bother with such things either. It's as if they thought that things of this sort were simply irrelevant, so far as our lives as Christians were concerned. Moreover, when one moves from Reformed theologians to modern and contemporary philosophers, the consensus there seems to be that such proofs are not just irrelevant, but no good. Indeed, ever since Kant, any kind of enterprise that might in any way be thought to be directed toward actually proving the existence of God has been very much under a cloud. Add to this all the new techniques of linguistic and logical analysis that have been developed within Analytic Philosophy in the last several years, and it begins to look as if all of the old

proofs and arguments for God's existence not only had not a leg to stand on; in addition, they scarcely seem even to make sense.

Yes, it is the firm consensus of all participants in P. W. and Co.'s enterprise that, if one's concern be that of trying to exhibit the rationality of our Christian faith, resorting to the old proofs for God's existence is just not the way to do it. Yes, one is tempted here to recall Paul Tillich's emphatic and very Germanic outburst of some years ago: "They are not proofs; and it is not Gott!"

Be that as it may, though, one still asks, "But just what is it that is so wrong with this ancient, and one-time honorable, natural-theological enterprise of trying to demonstrate the existence and attributes of God?" To which the specific answer that P. W. and Co. give is that any natural theology of such a sort is vitiated by a twofold fallacy or error--the error of *Foundationalism* and the error of *Evidentialism.*

Nevertheless, to see just what P. W. and Co. mean by these resounding and yet rather opaque terms that serve as their labels for their strictures on natural theology, it might be wise if we were to reproduce, just as a kind of Exhibit A, a highly simplified and even inadequate version of one of the stock arguments that has been put forward as a supposed proof of God's existence.[3] For it is just this sort, or these sorts, of argument that P. W. and Co. would insist are irremediably vitiated by the fact that such arguments, all of them, rely uncritically on the *Foundationalist Principle,* and it is this principle, in turn, that underlies the basic error of Foundationalism that characterizes St. Thomas' entire venture in natural theology. And what, then, is this Foundationalist Principle exactly? Stating it first just in our own terms, it might be said that the principle amounts to little more than one to the effect that if the truth of any proposition is ever to be made evident to us-"rationally evident," as one might say--then it can only be made evident by being *either* seen to be evident just in itself (i.e., self-evident, or *per se notum,* this latter being Thomas' own term for it) *or* by being shown to be derivable from other propositions that themselves ultimately would need to be *per se nota.*[4]

Such, then, is the Foundationalist Principle. And next let us consider briefly just how such a principle comes to be operative in various of the stock arguments or proofs for God's existence. Thus, for example, suppose we develop an argument along the following lines: May it not be taken to be nothing if not self-evident (or *per se notum*) that any being whose existence is contingent cannot be other than a being that is dependent for its existence upon causes outside itself? What's more, should any of these causes of a contingent being's existence--say, of my existence right here and now--be, in turn, dependent upon still other causes for their existence, and these in turn upon still others, then can it be anything but a still further self-evident truth that such a regress of causes could not possibly be a regress *ad infinitum.* For surely, if the regress were infinite, that would mean that, however far one carried the regress back, one would still never have reached the end or terminus of such a series. But, if the regress were thus in itself literally without end, that would mean that, however far back one had traced the regress, one still would not have found sufficient causes to account for even the most petty of contingent facts from which one would have started--e.g., my humble existence right here and now. Accordingly, by the principle of sufficient reason, given that I do in fact exist right here and now, there have to be, concurrently and also right here and now, sufficient causes, or sufficient reasons, to account for this undeniable present existence of mine. Therefore, to obviate such a problem as would be generated by an infinite regress of causes, there has to be an ultimate cause, or an uncaused cause, existing right here and now. Otherwise, there would not be a sufficient reason even for my own puny existence.[5] And, as St. Thomas might have remarked, any such ultimate or uncaused cause "all men would call 'God'."

Surely, we need not bother further with examples and illustrations. For why may we not say that just such a purported proof as the one just cited could suffice as our Exhibit A of how it should be possible to show that our belief in God is indeed a rational belief? So far from God's existence being anything that we simply had to take on faith, it is rather something that we can actually prove and demonstrate--or at least such is the way P. W.

and Co. say that we Thomists view the matter. Not only that, but it should now also be clear how and why such proofs of God and of the divine attributes presuppose the kind of thing that P. W. and Co. call Foundationalism. Thus the Foundationalist Principle specifies that there is no other way in which the truth of a proposition can ever be seen to be rationally evident, unless it be either evident just in itself or else derived from other propositions that are thus immediately evident or self-evident. And so, sure enough, in our Exhibit A, God's existence is made evident in the light of such supposedly self-evident principles as the one to the effect that any being whose existence is contingent must be dependent for its existence on causes outside itself, or the other to the effect that it is impossible for a regress of causes to be infinite.

All right, but now just what is so wrong with all of this? And why, more precisely, do P. W. and Co. seem to think that they need do no more than exhibit or expose this Foundationalist Principle, seemingly so inescapably involved in any and all manifestations of a Thomistic natural theology, in order to condemn such proofs of God's existence simply out of hand?

True, it has been many a long year since proofs of this sort have been at all fashionable in philosophy, or even taken very seriously by anybody any more. And, indeed, the very last thing that one would be likely to hear expounded in the lecture halls of Harvard, or Oxford, or Paris, or really any place else these days, would be anything on the order of the traditional proofs for the existence of God. But, then, so what? For, surely, we may not expect that Calvinist-Analysts as sophisticated as P. W. and Co. would be content merely to dismiss presumed proofs and arguments for God's existence on no other grounds than that they are no longer exactly *à la mode*. For don't we all know that we are here dealing with philosophers, and of course philosophers--particularly Analytic Philosophers--would never allow themselves just to go along with prevailing fashions, merely because they were the fashions? That's the last thing philosophers ever do! Accordingly, why, as but humble and simple-minded and out-of-fashion Thomists, may we not direct a humble petition and advice to our Calvinist-Analyst adversaries, and beg them to at

least come out in the open and tell us just what it is that they find to be so wrong with that so-called Foundationalism that in their eyes needs to be taken as the very cornerstone of Thomistic natural theology--a cornerstone which they continually imply is not just crumbling, but already crumbled!

But alas no, there seems to be something about P. W. and Co. such that they cannot seem ever to bring themselves to specify, either too clearly or too fully, just what these criticisms of Foundationalism are, or what the real philosophical grounds for such criticisms might be. Instead, their tactic would seem ever to be one of merely drawing the mantle of their own Analytic sophistication around them, assuming apparently that an attitude of high-minded condescension ought to be able to do duty for anything like considered philosophic criticism. Thus consider the following deliverance by Wolterstorff, right in the very Introduction to *Faith and Rationality:*

> The last decade or so has seen radically new developments in the field of philosophical epistemology. Among the most significant of these developments is the rise of meta-epistemology. Rather than just plunging ahead and developing epistemological theories, philosophers have stood back and reflected seriously on the structural options available to them in their construction of such theories . . . . One of these structural options is classical foundationalism, and most, if not all, philosophers would agree that this option, along with close relatives of it, has constituted the dominant epistemological tradition in the West. What now must be added is that most philosophers who have clearly seen the structure of this particular option have rejected it. On closer scrutiny they have found classical foundationalism untenable.[6]

Alas for us poor Thomists!--or at least for those among us who cannot claim to be members of that exclusive club of latter-day Analysts who have had the good fortune to have been made privy to just what these "new developments" have been in "philosophical epistemology in the last decade or so," which Nick Wolsterstorff would appear to be so taken with, if not even taken in by. True, there are many of us who have read around a bit--yes, some of us even a very great deal--in the epistemological writings of the last decade or so, and yet it would never have occurred to us that any great breakthrough had taken place in epistemology. Rather, we would have supposed it to have been more like a breakdown! But, then, our failures in appreciation of the achievements of recent epistemology may be due to our never before having heard it called by so uplifting a term as "meta-epistemology." That term alone, had we only heard it earlier, might well have caused the scales to fall from our eyes!

C. The Charge of Evidentialism: Is It a Mere Consequence of Foundationalism?

Still, it won't do for us as Thomists to use irony as our only defense. Instead, if P. W. and Co. won't deign to come out and tell us what their much-vaunted meta-epistemological objections are to so-called Foundationalism and the Foundationalist Principle, then we have no alernative but to try to figure out for ourselves just what the hidden moves are in this new meta-epistemology of the Analysts. And, once these moves are actually exposed and brought to light, it should then be possible for us to recognize whether the actual charges leveled against Foundationalism rest rather on misunderstandings, or on faulty reasons, or on just sheer bluff.

Still, this may not be quite the time for us to start beating the bushes and trying to flush out all the hidden meta-epistemological arguments that P. W. and Co. are covertly employing against Foundationalism. Instead, it would seem better were we first to turn our attention to that other charge, which our Calvinist-Analyst friends would seem to want to lay at the door of Thomistic natural theology. This is the charge of so-called Evidentialism.

Moreover, the reason we would prefer to look first into this charge, before considering the charge of Foundationalism, is that, as Alvin Plantinga sees things, Evidentialism is a fallacy that is to be regarded as an inevitable consequence of Foundationalism. Hence, in Plantinga's own procedure, he would apparently figure that, if he can first expose some of the enormities of Evidentialism, that should in turn reflect discredit upon the much more basic error, and yet at the same time an error much more difficult to deal with philosophically--viz., the error of Foundationalism.

Accordingly, on our own procedure, let us see if we cannot first show how, so far as Evidentialism is concerned, Plantinga has simply got it wrong: there is just no way in which a thinker like St. Thomas Aquinas could ever rightly be accused of Evidentialism. Yes, one is tempted to wonder whether, in leveling this charge against Aquinas, Al Plantinga may not have been betraying a rather gross ignorance of the relevant texts of St. Thomas, not to mention a curious insensitivity to the really pertinent philosophical and theological considerations. Besides, if it should turn out that the enterprise of natural theology in philosophy does not necessarily lead to any such thing as Evidentialism, so far as our Christian faith is concerned, then Plantinga's effort at poisoning the wells of Foundationalism in advance, and before even examining it, by simply accusing such Foundationalism of generating the error of Evidentialism--this whole clever tactic on Plantinga's part will have been effectively forestalled and aborted.

What, then, is Evidentialism? And just how is it supposed to be the unfortunate spawn and by-product of Foundationalism? Well, already we have noted, more or less in passing, that, so far as Foundationalism and the Foundationalist Principle are concerned, such a principle is nothing if not one having to do with the very rationality of our human beliefs--yes, of any and all human beliefs. For, given any human belief, it would seem always to be in order to raise the question whether any such belief might be said to rest on adequate evidence or not. That is, is the belief a rational one, in the sense of being capable of being

justified in terms of truly cogent evidence; or is it a belief for which we must admit that we have but comparatively insufficient evidence, or perhaps no reliable evidence at all?

Moreover, it is just here that Plantinga seeks to invoke the Foundationalist Principle as being relevant to the situation. For what is such a Principle supposed to be, if not the very norm and standard of the rationality or justifiability of any and all beliefs such as we may have? And, further, it is Plantinga's contention that Thomists in general, and St. Thomas in particular, would indeed take the Principle to be just this kind of a norm or standard. Very well, then, that must mean that, if any one of our beliefs should turn out to be either not self-evident in itself, or else not supported by propositions that ultimately are thus self-evident, then that belief must be ruled out as simply irrational and unwarranted.

But, then, what is the import of such a norm or standard, and of the rationality and hence of the acceptability of our beliefs, so far as specifically religious beliefs are concerned? For instance, take our Christian beliefs such as these are enumerated in the Nicene Creed. Can they ever meet the standard of the Foundationalist Principle? Well, so far as the very opening affirmation of the Creed goes, it would seem that, in the eyes of the Thomist, this affirmation might fare very well, as judged by the standards of rationality that are enunciated in the Foundationalist Principle:

> I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

Given the apparatus of Thomistic natural theology, and assuming that God's existence, as well as the existence of certain of His attributes, can actually be proved and demonstrated, then it would surely have to be conceded that the acceptance of the first article of the Creed, on the basis of such demonstrations, could not but be adjudged to be other than entirely rational.

But what about the succeeding articles of the Creed--for example:

> And [I believe] in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God; Begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; Begotten, not made; Being of one substance with the Father; By whom all things were made, etc.

Clearly, none of these latter beliefs are subject to any rational demonstration in the way in which the belief in God's existence, or in His unity, say, might be subject to demonstration. So what to do?

Well, the usual response of the Christian theologian or philosopher would presumably be simply to admit that all of these subsequent articles of the Creed are to be accepted merely on faith, it being impossible for us (at least in this life) to find or recognize anything like a demonstrative rational evidence of their truth.[7] Nevertheless, as Plantinga sees things, St. Thomas Aquinas could never have been content with this traditional and customary way of viewing the matter. No, for, according to Plantinga, Aquinas insists upon taking the Foundationalist Principle as being the absolute norm or standard of any proper rationality anywhere, be it in matters of science and philosophy, or in matters of religious faith and belief. Hence, for Aquinas, the notion that the acceptance of at least the subsequent articles of the Creed merely on grounds of faith, and not on grounds of reason, could mean that our Christian faith would have to be judged irrational.

But surely, Plantinga thinks, Aquinas would not wish to accept any such consequence as this. And so what is he to do? Well, according to Plantinga, what Aquinas seems to do is to try to dredge up a kind of evidence for the several other articles of the Creed that follow upon the first one. Indeed, Plantinga avers:

> What [Aquinas] means to say is that to believe in the mysteries of the faith is not to be foolish,

> or to believe with undue levity, because we have *evidence for* the conclusion that God has proposed them for our belief. This evidence consists in the fulfillment of prophecy and in the signs and wonders accompanying the proclamation of these mysteries.[8]

Now it is by some such means as this, Plantinga thinks, that St. Thomas would attempt to salvage the notion of the rationality, not just of our scientific and philosophical beliefs, but of our religious beliefs as well. In other words, as Plantinga interprets him, Aquinas would extend his Evidentialism so as to cover religious beliefs, no less than properly philosophical or scientific beliefs. Nor is the interesting thing here so much whether Aquinas is successful in thus stretching his Evidentialism to make it cover even our Christian religious beliefs. No, for Plantinga thinks the entire enterprise of Evidentialism is wholly unsuccessful, be it in regard to philosophical beliefs or religious beliefs, either one. After all, Plantinga is convinced that so-called Foundationalism is corrupt, as it were, *per se* and simply in itself, this just not being a proper criterion of rationality either in philosophy or in religion. Hence it is little wonder that Plantinga should think that Evidentialism, as being the unhappy offspring of Foundationalism, should be no less corrupt, particularly when such Evidentialism is made to serve as a criterion for the rational acceptability even of religious beliefs.

Still, the interesting thing just now, we are suggesting, is not whether Aquinas is successful in his purported effort to set up an Evidentialism as being the one true standard of the rational acceptability of our religious beliefs. No, the interesting thing is that, in Plantinga's eyes (at least in this present connection), if St. Thomas can get away with importing his Evidentialism directly into the domain of religious faith, then St. Thomas in effect has radically and profoundly subverted the faith in his very effort to render that faith rational.

For but consider: must not any Christian, be he Orthodox or Roman Catholic, Reformed or Anglican, Lutheran or Zwinglian,

Predestinarian or Arminian, or whatever, surely acknowledge that in any true profession of Christianity the believer simply has to accept things on faith, and has to accept them on faith even when there are no reasons, in the proper sense, for his accepting them? Surely, this is nothing if not simply undeniable, so far as religious faith is concerned.

But not so Aquinas--or at least not so Aquinas as Plantinga interprets him. For having committed himself to Evidentialism, Aquinas--so Plantinga thinks--cannot allow himself to admit that even articles of faith are to be accepted without reason, or in the absence of sufficient reasons. That's why, as Plantinga sees it, Aquinas is careful to point out that even the articles of the Creed that follow upon the first article are not things that the Christian is ever to accept without reason. No, for even here one can appeal to such things as miracles, "the fulfillment of prophecy," and "signs and wonders" generally. It is these that can provide us with reasons for our beliefs, and thus spare us having to admit to having anything like purely irrational beliefs.

But, with this, poor St. Thomas would appear to have worked himself into a truly hopeless predicament, so far as anything like a genuine Christian religious faith and commitment on his part is concerned. For, in his determination to secure for the faith an unmistakable and undeniable rationality, he in effect has eliminated anything like faith from Christianity altogether! And surely no Christian, of whatever variety or persuasion, would ever suppose that one could be a Christian without having faith in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ. But does that mean that on Plantinga's analysis St. Thomas turns out not to have really been a Christian at all? Surely, that would be going just a little bit too far--even for Al Plantinga!

D. Aquinas is no Evidentialist--no way!

May we say, then, that perhaps Plantinga is not entirely serious in his insistence that Aquinas was nothing if not a thoroughgoing Evidentialist--an Evidentialist no less in matters of religious faith than in matters of philosophy? Still,

notwithstanding, we find that in this connection Wolterstorff even calls John Locke to witness--perhaps a rather anachronistic witness under the circumstances, but still a witness that Wolterstorff does not hesitate to call to testify. Nor is that all, for Wolterstorff is careful to underscore the fact that Locke is nothing if not a typical child of the Enlightenment. Accordingly, Locke insists that any believer who would consider himself to be truly Enlightened--yes, even a Christian believer--would need to be sensitive to his being under obligation to do his utmost always to find adequate reasons and evidence for his religious beliefs. Thus it is that Wolterstorff sums up various of Locke's deliverances on the subject:

> If we are entitled to accept without argument [either that God exists, or] that what God reveals is true, then why may we not also accept without argument that the New Testament, say, is a revelation from God? Because, says Locke, we would then have no way of showing that "the enthusiasts" are irresponsible in their believings.[9]

To this Wolterstorff then adds:

> Of course this challenge to the enthusiasts is also a challenge to Christian believers; if they do not believe on the basis of adequate evidence that the Bible is God's revelation, they too must give up their religion.[10]

Oh, but with quotations to this effect, is it not immediately apparent that P. W. and Co. have surely over-reached themselves? For by no stretch of either the historical or the logical imagination can it ever be imagined that St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century was ever a child of the Enlightenment in the 18th century; or that he was in any way or at any time a disciple of John Locke! And, with that, one begins to be suspicious of P. and W.'s entire case to the effect that St. Thomas was even or ever an Evidentialist at all. For one thing, the term "Evidentialist" is itself a term entirely of P. W. and Co.'s own ingenious manufacture,

there being no conceivable equivalent to such a thing to be found anywhere in Aquinas.

But then what about Foundationalism? you may ask. For, even though the term Foundationalism is nowhere to be found in Aquinas, surely the sort of thing that is designated by the term would seem to be there. And Foundationalism certainly breeds Evidentialism--that, it would seem, is something that Plantinga would seem almost to stake his very reputation upon. To this, however, the reply simply is that while in a sense St. Thomas might perhaps be said to subscribe to a kind of Foundationalism and also to the Foundationalist Principle--of this we shall have more to say in the succeeding section--it just isn't true that Foundationalism necessarily breeds any kind of Evidentialism. And the reason simply is that St. Thomas never interprets the Foundationalist Principle as being the sole criterion of the rationality of our beliefs, be this either in matters of religious belief or in philosophy. Particularly, Aquinas would never suppose such a principle to operate in the manner of an absolute standard that would bar the acceptance of any belief, be it Christian or otherwise, unless and until the believer had such evidence for his belief as that specified under the terms of the Foundationalist Principle. For there are many things, Aquinas would say, that we come to accept, and accept rationally, on the basis of experience and as a result of induction; and these are far from meeting the criterion of being either self-evident or derivatively evident from that which is thus self-evident.

But let us move on to some specific quotes in evidence of how seriously and even tendentiously P. and W. would appear to have distorted St. Thomas' views. Thus, for example, St. Thomas lays it down as a fundamental principle of all religious faith that "the intellect of the believer assents to that which he believes, not because he sees it [to be true] either in itself, or by resolving it into first principles that are self-evident (*per se visa*), but because he is convinced by divine authority that he should assent to those things which he does not see and on account of the command of his will."[11]

Given pronouncements such as this, how can P. and W. possibly maintain that St. Thomas is precluded from ever supposing that religious truth may be accepted merely on grounds of faith alone? Still more important, it should be noted how St. Thomas makes a seminal and decisive distinction between rational investigation such as may *precede* the act of our will in believing, and such investigations as are prompted by, and thus *follow upon*, what it is our will to believe:

> Human reasoning in support of what we believe may stand in a two-fold relation to the will of the believer. First, as preceding the act of the will, as, for instance when a man either has not the will, or not a prompt will, to believe, unless he be moved thereto by human reason; and in this way human reasoning diminishes the merit of faith . . . . Secondly, human reasons may be consequent to the will of the believer. For, when a man has a will ready to believe, he loves the truth he believes, he thinks out and takes to heart whatever reasons he can find in support thereof; and in this way human reasoning does not exclude the merit of faith, but is a sign of greater merit.[12]

In other words, what Aquinas does in this passage is to provide the very charter and title deed of any proper program of a "faith seeking understanding" (*fides quaerens intellectum*). It is not at all a question of our affirmations of faith and of religious belief having to wait upon a prior authentication by the understanding. Instead, it is a question of faith itself being prior to the understanding and thus being the very guide and inspiration for such eventual and future understanding as we human beings may be able to attain. And surely that puts an effective quietus upon such contentions as both Plantinga and Wolterstooff were at one time given to advancing--viz., that Aquinas is nothing but an Evidentialist, and that as an Evidentialist he cannot avoid conceding that any Christian belief that is based only on faith and not on reason is no better than an irrational belief.[13]

But now, having scotched this snake of Evidentialism, is it not high time--at least in this Preliminary Statement--that we moved on to scotch that other snake of Foundationalism, which P. W. and Co. are so determined operates to invalidate the entire Thomistic account of rationality, much as Evidentialism was supposed to invalidate the Thomistic account of faith. Oh, this is not to say that there is not much more that needs to be said on the question of rationality, precisely in its bearing upon religious faith. For, quite apart from the red herring of Evidentialism, there are any number of other things that P. W. and Co. have to say on the matter of just how and in what way our Christian faith may be said to be properly rational--things which as Thomists we feel need to be examined and criticized. But these are things that may be left to our subsequent essays,[14] and not the sort of thing that should be allowed to clutter up and prolong this already cluttered and overly long Preliminary Statement.

II: Rationality as it Pertains not Just to Religious Belief but to Belief Generally

In the foregoing Part of this Preliminary Statement, our concern was with questions of whether and how "rationality," in the sense of the title "Faith and Rationality," might be understood to have a bearing upon religious "faith." But now with this second Part the issue shifts to that of rationality itself: just what is rationality, and just how may a so-called rational knowledge, or a rational understanding, of things be most properly conceived and understood? Thus, so far as P. W. and Co. are concerned, their thesis in *Faith and Rationality* is that, as a religio-philosophical thinker, St. Thomas Aquinas is sadly confused, and even more sadly confounding, in the account which he gives of the bearing of rationality upon our Christian beliefs; but, still more than that, P. W. and Co.'s really heavy artillery would seem to be directed at St. Thomas' basic notion of human rationality itself, and of the way such rationality functions so as to bring us to something approximating a genuine knowledge and understanding. Moreover, P. W. and Co.'s strategy is first to knock out St. Thomas' very epistemology, and then to install in its place a truly up-dated and sophisticated Calvinist-Analyst version of

epistemology--one which will reflect the insights, not to say the blessings, of what Wolterstorff would call the new meta-epistemology.

All right, let us proceed at once to consider the attack on Thomistic epistemology: just how is the attack mounted, and what particular weapons does it use? Already, and even from our earlier discussions, it should be apparent that the focal point of the attack is certain to be directed at what P. W. and Co. like to term the Foundationalism of St. Thomas' epistemological position, and particularly at the Foundationalist Principle upon which that position supposedly rests. Also, as we warned earlier, in trying to counter such attacks on Foundationalism, we poor Thomists find ourselves not a little hampered by the fact that, while P. W. and Co. may not be deliberately masking their batteries, they certainly are not coming clean and telling any mere Thomists what and where these batteries are. Of course, one might say that, so long as we have chosen to speak in the language of battles, and of artillery attacks and counter-attacks, it is scarcely appropriate to complain that our Analyst opponents have not chosen to keep us informed of just what their strategy and tactics are. After all, in any and all war-games, fancied or otherwise, it can hardly be demanded that the language of the game should be other than one of concealment and perhaps even deceit, and thus not one of forthrightness and careful disclosure of argument. But confound the business of language games! And, instead, let us just say that we find it hard not to complain that, in their attack on Foundationalism, our Calvinist-Analyst opponents seem not to deign to let us poor benighted Thomists know just what it is they find to be so mistaken about what they claim is the Foundationalism of St. Thomas, and why they find that Foundationalism to be so wrong-headed philosophically. Instead, they leave it to us simply to guess and make mere surmises as to what their reasons and arguments in the matter really are.

A. Is Foundationalism Self-Referentially Incoherent?

Still, this accusation may not be quite fair, at least not so far as Al Plantinga is concerned. For in the leading essay in the

volume, the essay entitled "Reason and Belief in God," he comes right out swinging, and saying precisely why he thinks Thomistic Foundationalism must be repudiated. For the trouble with Foundationalism, Plantinga says, is that it is "self-referentially incoherent." And not only does he say it; he explains just why he says it![15]

All of that notwithstanding, it quickly turns out that, once one begins to scrutinize this charge of Plantinga's more carefully, one begins to wonder whether even he himself would ever have supposed that this particular charge was one to be taken too seriously. Or was it only a kind of diversionary tactic on his part? For no sooner does one consider just how Plantinga chooses to formulate the Foundationalist Principle than one quickly recognizes that, as he formulates it, the Principle certainly is self-referentially incoherent all right. The only trouble is that, formulated that way, the Principle could have not the slightest relevance to Thomistic epistemology at all, with the result that Plantinga's charge of self-referential incoherence is nothing if not just one more red herring!

Recall once more how we ourselves have consistently stated the Principle--viz. that, if any proposition be such that its truth be undeniably evident to us, then that proposition must be seen to be either evident just in itself, or else seen to be derivatively evident from truths that are thus self-evident. And, thus stated, it would indeed seem that the principle purports to be nothing if not itself self-evident; and, as thus purportedly self-evident, the principle as formulated is self-referential. And yet it certainly is in no wise incoherent.

Oddly enough, though, the way in which we have just formulated the Principle is not the way in which Plantinga chooses to formulate it. Instead, he formulates it: for any proposition which is taken to be a "basic proposition," that proposition must be either evident in itself, or else derivatively evident in terms of propositions that are thus self-evident. Moreover, in using the term "basic proposition" Plantinga explains that he means that "a

proposition is *basic* for me if I believe it, and do not believe it on the basis of other propositions."[16]

Clearly, though, there is nothing about this way of understanding "basic propositions" that compels one to recognize the Principle, when so formulated, as having to be either self-evident or derivatively evident. Quite the contrary, it is entirely conceivable that I might just accept a proposition as being "basic" for me even though I might well admit that I did not have any decisive evidence of its truth, be it either a self-evidence or a derivative evidence. In contrast, if it be not "basic propositions" in the sense just specified that I am talking about, but rather propositions whose truth I hold to be simply evident to me, then obviously (i.e., self-evidently) under these terms the proposition in question must be either self-evident to me or derivatively evident to me.

Accordingly, formulating the Foundationalist Principle in the way we have done--and that would surely seem to be the normal way of understanding the Principle--then there is no doubt that, as so formulated, the Principle itself is nothing if not self-evidently true; and, as self-evidently true, the Principle may be said to refer to itself in its very formulation. But where, pray tell, could there be any "self-referential incoherence" in such a formulation? In contrast, once the Principle is formulated in the somewhat gratuitous way in which Plantinga chooses to formulate it, then the Principle is in no wise a self-evident truth, and hence to suppose that in its very formulation it refers to itself as being self-evident--this would indeed be patently incoherent.[17]

B. Why Require Self-evident Truths: Are These the Grain or Only the Chaff of Epistemology?

Very well, supposing that P. W. and Co.'s first and really only ostensible criticism of the Foundationalist Principle--viz., that it is self-referentially incoherent--is a criticism that is lacking, alike in cogency and in relevance, what now of their other and more covert criticisms? And here first of all--as one might very well suspect--P. W. and Co. are inclined to take a rather dim view

of the whole idea of so-called self-evident principles as ever being able to serve as proper principles for a genuine human knowledge. This is not to say, of course, that P. W. and Co. would simply deny outright that there are any self-evident truths. Quite the contrary, Plantinga insists that self-evident truths are one kind of "basic propositions," as he puts it. Moreover, as he defines basic propositions, these are propositions that are rationally acceptable, even though their acceptance be not based on the acceptance of any other prior propositions from which the former might be derived. And, certainly, self-evident propositions unquestionably meet this criterion of being basic.

On the other hand, even though P. W. and Co. are quite willing to accept self-evident propositions as being basic, they are equally given to implying, if not actually asserting, that self-evident propositions amount to little more than purely logical or linguistic truths, which are for that reason wholly uninformative. Or at least they are uninformative in the sense of being unable to yield any information about facts in the world.

Still, we need to consider some of the examples which Plantinga himself gives of such self-evident truths.[18] For instance:

(1) 2 + 1 = 3

or

(2) No man is both married and unmarried.

Likewise, there are various truths of logic, as they might be called, which Plantinga also takes to be self-evident:

(3) For any proposition p the conjunction of p with its denial is false.

(4) If p is necessarily true and p entails q, then q is necessarily true.

(5) The proposition *all men are mortal* is distinct from the proposition *all mortals are men.*

And, finally, Plantinga adds still further examples such as:

(6) The whole is greater than the part.

And, rather "more dubiously," as Plantinga remarks, a proposition such as:

(7) Man is an animal.

No sooner, though, does one consider propositions such as these, that Plantinga cites as being examples of self-evident truths, than anyone--particularly among present-day philosophers--will no doubt be struck by what nearly everyone will take to be the common feature or character of such propositions. For are they not all of them in the nature of what might be called purely verbal or linguistic truths? In any case, they are certainly not "truths about the world," as the current saying goes. Nor are they truths that would seem to be derived from experience and observation as, for example, a proposition like "Silver melts at 960.5° C" would be. Yet, despite this non-factual, non-empirical character of these self-evident truths, would it not seem that, if we are to heed the requirements of the Foundationalist Principle, it must be just such presumably empty and hollow truths as these self-evident truths that have to be reckoned as being no less than basic principles upon which any and all genuine human knowledge must needs be erected? For does not the principle stipulate that the only way in which the truth of any proposition can be made evident to us is either by its being seen to be evident just in itself, or else by its being seen to be derivable from other truths that are thus self-evident?

Is it any wonder, then, that P. W. and Co. are inclined to think that "something is rotten in Denmark" with the Foundationalist Principle? That principle, they say, has simply got to go, if one is ever to give any proper account of human rationality and human knowledge and understanding. And the

reason it has got to go is that it presupposes that all genuine human knowledge--yes, all human rationality--must ultimately be but an affair of quite empty self-evident truths, or at least be reducible to such truths. All the same, be it noted that, while P. W. and Co. repudiate the notion of self-evident principles playing the role in knowledge that the Foundationalist Principle requires that they play, that certainly does not mean that P. W. and Co. deny that there are self-evident truths. Far from it. Thus, for example, in Plantinga's very notion of "basic propositions," which we alluded to in the foregoing section, Plantinga would classify self-evident truths as one kind of "basic propositions." And indeed there is no denying that a self-evident truth certainly meets Plantinga's criterion of a basic proposition, for self-evident truths certainly are not the kind of truths that one ever believes on the basis of other propositions.

Very well, then, let us say that P. W. and Co.'s objection to self-evident truths is neither that there are no such things, nor that they are not "basic propositions." Instead, their only objection is that, rather than having the decisive role in human knowledge that the Foundationalist Principle requires that they have, they need be relegated to the mere sidelines of human knowledge and understanding.

All the same, could it be that P. W. and Co. may have moved a bit too far, too fast, in their dismissal of self-evident truths? For consider the following propositions:

(8) Silver melts at 960.5° C.

or

(9) Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny.

Clearly, these are not self-evident propositions. Nor presumably would they be examples of what P. W. and Co. would call "basic propositions." For certainly both (8) and (9) are based on other propositions, being, let us suppose, both of them, but inductive generalizations based on propositional reports of

observations and experiments. Nevertheless, let us for a minute stop to cosider if (8) and (9) might not seem, at least superficially, rather like proposition (7) above, which for our present purposes we will simply render as "All men are animals." Would not (7) appear to be no less a truth about the world than (8) and (9)? And likewise could (7) not be said to be a truth that human beings could be said to have learned from experience? For why is it anything other than simply a truth of fact, and a truth of fact derived from our human experience, that has come to be borne in upon us, and as a result of which we have been brought to recognize that animality and rationality are nothing if not distinguishing features of human beings?

Yet note that Plantinga does not think so. Indeed, may we not guess that that was just why it was that, when he cited (7) as one of his examples, he added immediately that it was a somewhat more "dubious"[19] example of a self-evident truth than were his other examples (1)-(6)? Nor is it hard to guess why he regards this example as a dubious one: it is because, (7) being regarded as a self-evident truth, Plantinga then is determined that it not be taken as a truth about the world, or as a truth based on experience. In fact, if we should take it to be a truth of the latter sort, then Plantinga, as it would seem, just dogmatically rules that it cannot be a self-evident truth, it being no less a dogma with him that a self-evident truth can never be anything more than purely verbal or linguistic in character--as if, for instance, men could be said to be self-evidently or necessarily animals on no other ground than that the word "animal," just by its very meaning, is bound up with or implicated in the meaning of the mere word "man."[20]

From this, though, one can immediately guess that Plantinga's way of understanding "self-evident truths" is radically different from the way Aquinas would understand them, or similarly from the way in which Aristotle might be presumed to have understood a notion such as that of propositions that are *per se nota*. Oh, it's true that none of the propositions (1)-(7) would either Aristotle or Aquinas have denied were self-evident. And yet the more likely sorts of examples that Aristotle or Aquinas would have given of such truths as were *per se nota* would have been truths like (7);

and indeed for them (7) would be reckoned as *per se notum* for the very reason that Plantinga would deny that it was so--viz., that it is a self-evident truth about the world, and one that is derived from our experience of the world.

Or, again, consider such principles and propositions as play very decisive roles in Aristotle's physics or metaphysics, e.g.:

(10) No accidents but what they are accidents of substances.

(11) Any change that occurs in the world cannot be anything other than a change *of* something, *from* that thing's being something, *to* its being something else.

Clearly, in judgments such as these--at least so they would be in the eyes of Aristotelians and Thomists--(10) and (11) clearly report what is true of the world of nature as we human beings know it from our experience. True, the judgment that a quality or a quantity or an action has to be the quality or the quantity or the action of something is a necessary truth, or a truth *per se notum*, in a way in which (8) (Silver melts at 960.5° C) certainly is not, this latter being, one might say, but an inductive generalization from experience. And yet the fact that one could not conceivably have an instance of an action such as walking without there being anything that was doing the walking, whereas in contrast it is quite conceivable that on a given occasion silver might not melt at the particular temperature predicted--all of this does not mean that the one truth any more than the other is not about the world or is not learned from experience.

Very well, then, suppose that Plantinga, no less than Aristotle and Aquinas, would all of them admit that there are such things as self-evident truths, still it should now be apparent from the examples we have given that the Moderns have come to regard such truths in a very different way from the Ancients. In fact, there has been nothing less than a veritable sea-change in the way in which such truths once tended to be construed by someone like Aquinas, and the way in which a present-day Analyst like Plantinga would construe them. Nor could the difference be

summed up any better than to say that it is simply a difference between, on the one hand, regarding self-evident truths as basic and fundamental to any rational understanding that we human beings might be able to attain with respect to the nature of the world and of reality; and, in contrast and on the other hand, going along with the widespread latter-day consensus that such self-evident truths are never more than trivial, and have no bearing whatsoever on the world of experience, being wholly *a priori* and verbal and without relevance, so far as conveying any real information about the facts is concerned.

Nor is it hard to account for this sea-change in the way in which self-evident truths were regarded in the older philosophical tradition, and have now come to be regarded in the tradition that prevails today. For, to put it somewhat briefly and summarily: in modern times such supposed self-evident truths have had to undergo a veritable dousing in an acid bath, first by the Cartesians, and then later by the Kantians. Nor is it hard for one to picture to oneself how these poor self-evident truths must have fared, once they were passed through a cleansing of Cartesian clear and distinct ideas. For was it not ever Descartes' counsel--or rather his requirement--that nothing be accepted as true save only that which we can conceive clearly and distinctly? Moreover, that which is conceived thus clearly and distinctly, Descartes would have said, could not be anything other than what is self-evident and *per se notum,* or else derived therefrom logically. But it is little wonder that, uncompromising Rationalist that he was, Descartes should have immediately gone on to decree that any such self-evidence in matters of truth could not be other than an evidence of pure reason, and hence in no wise an evidence of the senses at all. And so it was, then, that self-evident truths came to be pronounced purely *a priori* truths; and doubtless so indeed they did become, once they had gone through the Rationalist acid-bath of Cartesian fashioning. But that this should have also involved a veritable sea-change from the way in which such self-evident truths had been regarded by Aristotle and Aquinas goes without saying.

With this, though, we need to take still another step forward in the history of Western philosophy--or shall we call it a "great leap forward"? Or even more appropriate might it be to call it "one step forward, and two steps back"! In any case, our step this time leads us into the by now supposedly rather well-charted wilderness of Kantian philosophy, and more particularly to Kant's determination simply to treat all self-evident truths as "analytic truths." Again, and with apologies for a certain over-simplification, would it be incorrect to say that the kinds of truth that Aquinas regarded as being *per se nota,* as well as the *a priori* truths of Cartesian coinage--these all now come to be treated by Kant as no more than Analytic Truths? Further, as we all know, Kant insisted that his Analytic Truths were not to be construed as being in any wise truths about the world. Instead, one might say that they amount to little more than truisms, or what later came to be known as mere linguistic truths. Nor would it seem scarcely deniable that one can hardly pretend to learn very much about the world from such patently self-evident truths as "A bachelor is an unmarried man," or even Kant's own example (but taking it in the way Kant construed it), "All bodies are extended."[21]

And so returning, then, to Al Plantinga and his Calvinist-Analyst cohorts, as well as to that conception of theirs of self-evident truths, that we found to be so different from Aquinas' conception, may we not now see that Plantinga's conception of self-evident truths simply reflects that long and dubious heritage which present-day Analytic Philosophy has arrogated to itself from Descartes and from Kant? Self-evident truths, in short, are nowadays conceived, for the most part quite uncritically, as we would think, as being purely *a priori* truths, and not based on experience at all; and, likewise, they are conceived as being truths that are little more than purely verbal and, for that reason, as not in any way informative as regards things in the world at all.

Moreover, given this kind of a conception of self-evident truths, we can now begin to see just why P. W. and Co. would be so dismissive of the Foundationalist Principle, and more generally of that Foundationalism which in their eyes is at the very core of any Thomistic epistemology. For one thing, as P. W. and Co.

see things, the Foundationalist Principle is regarded by Thomists as being no less than the absolute norm or standard of any and all truth such as is based on any kind of proper evidence, and hence as no less than the very criterion of rationality itself and of all rational knowledge. Accordingly, for Thomists, as P. W. and Co. interpret them, it would seem that all true knowledge would have to be couched either in self-evident propositions or else in such propositions as could be derived by logical deduction, and presumably even *more geometrico*, from original self-evident propositions.

Nevertheless, right at this point, we feel that we must interrupt for but a moment the main line of our present exposition and argument, in order to interject a brief parenthesis by way of protest. For be it noted that nothing could be a more gross distortion of the Thomistic view of knowledge than the sort of absolutizing of the Foundationalist Principle, which P. W. and Co. would appear to want to foist upon the Thomists. For, while it is true that, doubtless in St. Thomas' eyes, any proposition whose truth is fully evident to us must be a proposition that is either self-evident or at least derived from truths that are self-evident, still St. Thomas would be the first to warn against the sort of Rationalist epistemological optimism of which someone like Descartes would seem guilty. No, for it is a fundamental consideration with both Aristotle and Aquinas that all human knowledge must arise in and from experience; and, while it is sometimes the case, as, for example, with propositions like (10) and (11), that the knowledge that is prompted by our human experience turns out to be a knowledge that is no less than an evident knowledge (i.e., its truth is rationally evident to us), this is but rarely the case and, even when it is the case, it is the case, as it were, only precariously. Hence, whatever may be the goal or the ideal of human knowledge as this proceeds from experience, in fact most of the knowledge that we are able to achieve turns out to be no more than a mere inductive knowledge, and hence not a knowledge in the sense of a fully evident knowledge, not to mention a full and complete knowledge. After all, such a perfection of knowledge just isn't for us human beings, at least not in this life. Instead, here we "see through a glass darkly," and

only then "face to face" (*I Corinthians*, 13:12). Accordingly, while a self-evident knowledge may well be the goal of human knowledge, it is but very occasionally that any self-evident truths are attained by us at all; and, even in regard to these few, it is not infrequently that we are deceived even as to their supposed self-evidence. There is just no denying that the roadway of human knowledge is strewn with the wreckage of supposed self-evident truths.

But, this parenthesis and protest aside, and returning to P. W. and Co. and their understanding of the Foundationalist Principle, it should be possible now better to understand why such a principle, considered as a basic principle of human rationality, should strike them as being anathema. And little wonder! For, if self-evidence is to be understood to be what it is only after having been put through the Cartesian and the Kantian acid bath, then no self-evident truth could ever have any basis in experience or really be in any way empirically relevant; and likewise no self-evident truth could ever be in the least informative as regards the facts, or the world, or reality, or whatever. Nor is that all for, just as that self-evidence of truth which the Foundationalist Principle would appear to demand amounts to little more than a sort of cognitive fraud, so also the deducibility of truths from self-evident principles, which the second part of the Foundationalist Principle would seem to demand--this also P. W. and Co. would see as being fraudulent as well. For but consider: if self-evident truths, on the Kantian analysis, are always and invariably to be reckoned as uninformative, and if, in any deductive logical demonstration, there can be no more information in the conclusion of a demonstration than is already contained implicitly in the premises, then it would seem that no one could ever hope really to learn anything from logical demonstrations--at least not from such demonstrations as are sanctioned by the Foundationalist Principle.

And so once again--on that Principle--at least as it would seem to be interpreted by P. W. and Co., any knowledge that, in the sense of the Principle, is rationally evident must be a knowledge whose truth is either self-evident, or derivatively evident in the light of other and prior truths that are self-evident.

And so is it any wonder that against this background, and interpreting the Foundationalist Principle in the more or less Cartesian and Kantian contexts that we are suggesting that P. W. and Co. are inclined to do, the upshot will be that P. W. and Co. will think that the Foundationalist Principle is not just irrelevant, but even subversive of all genuine knowledge, and needs to be eliminated, root and branch? And similarly, is it any wonder that, having so uncritically equated Thomistic epistemology with a total commitment to so utterly discredited a version of Foundationalism, P. W. and Co. should think that Thomism and Thomistic rationality need to be simply written off as but a philosophical snare and delusion! And so it should be, if P. W. and Co. are right about what they say Thomistic rationality involves. But of course, they aren't right--at least not about that!

C. Why Not Basic Propositions Instead of Self-evident Truths?

Before, however, we turn to the business of trying to rehabilitate the Thomistic notion of rationality in the face of the misplaced strictures of P. W. and Co., we need first to have a look at what that notion of rationality and of a properly rational knowledge is that P. W. and Co. would want to advocate in place of a Thomistic kind of Foundationalism. Thus what about the proposition "God exists"? What do they say as to the rationality of such a belief? After all, P. W. and Co. not only say that they do indeed believe in God's existence, but they are no less determined to argue that such a belief is entirely rational--i.e., their belief is not a case of mere Fideism,[22] in which the proposition "God exists" is said to be accepted solely on faith, and not as a rationally defensible truth. But, then, how do P. W. and Co. defend the rationality of this belief of theirs in God's existence? Clearly, in view of all the water that has flowed over the dam in this paper of ours thus far, we can be in no doubt that the very last thing P. W. and Co. will try to do by way of exhibiting the rationality of their belief in God will be to try in any way to prove or demonstrate the truth of the proposition "God exists." No, for demonstrations conceived in the spirit of the Foundationalist Principle are simply out! But what, then, is the alternative? For obviously "God exists" is not a proposition which P. W. and Co.

would take as being in any way self-evident; and, even if they did so take it, we have seen how, in their eyes, self-evident truths being uninformative, the self-evidence of "God exists" would not convey the slightest knowledge of whether God really existed or not.

So what, then, is the ploy which P. W. and Co. propose to us by way of exhibiting the rationality of the belief that God exists? Immediately, Plantinga's answer to this question--and we take it that his answer is definitive for the other contributors to *Faith and Rationality*--is that "God exists" is simply "a basic proposition," that term being a technical term in the Plantinga epistemology. What, then, does the term mean? It means simply that a "basic proposition" is one whose truth is not based on any other proposition. That is to say, its truth cannot be said to be in any way evidenced by any other truths, or to be in any way based on any reasons or arguments, or demonstrations, or any other kind of external evidence whatever.

"Oh," but one might say, "if a basic proposition is one whose truth is not based on any external evidence, must that not mean that its truth must therefore be somehow self-evident?" "But no," Plantinga would say, "that is not the only alternative." True, he would grant that there are self-evident propositions, and that these could properly be taken to be examples of "basic propositions," inasmuch as the truth of any basic propositions certainly is not derived from or based on any other proposition. Still, the basicality of a proposition like "God exits" is not like the basicality of self-evident truths: for one thing, and most decisively, self-evident truths are non-informative, whereas "God exists" is, for P. W. and Co., not just informative, but crucially so!

Very well, then, let's consider another class of examples that Plantinga would give of basic propositions, a class of propositions quite different from self-evident propositions. These are just ordinary empirical or factual assertions such as:

(12) There is a tree before me.

(13) I am wearing shoes.

(14) That tree's leaves are yellow.

Now in just what sense are such ordinary empirical assertions to be reckoned as basic propositions? Well, Plantinga seems to say they are basic just in the sense that they are directly evident to the senses, and evident to the senses precisely in the sense that they are not derived from, or based upon, any other evidence than simply the very perception or observation itself. For example, in (13), I just see that I am wearing shoes. That's why it is both true and a basic proposition.

All right, then, what about "God exists"? Is that a basic proposition in the way in which (13), "I am wearing shoes," is? Well, hardly, for Plantinga would presumably not say that God's existence is evident to me in the way in which the fact that I am wearing shoes is evident--i.e., I just look and perceive I am wearing shoes. No, this is not at all what Plantinga would say: I do not have merely to look and I will see. All the same, Plantinga does insist that, even though "God exists" is neither self-evident nor evident to the senses, it is a basic proposition for all of that, in that it is not asserted on the basis of any other proposition. Not only that but, inasmuch as it is a basic proposition, it would seem that I am entirely rational in thus asserting that God exists. Yes, I am altogether "within my epistemic rights," as P. sometimes likes to put it, in so affirming that God exists.

But how so? For does this not seem to smack almost of paradox? Thus, by Al Plantinga's own account of the matter, it would appear that we could, in a quite specific sense, have no reason for asserting that God exists. For, "God exists" being basic, it is not based on any other proposition, or propositions, of any kind, be they empirical propositions or otherwise: it is neither deduced from them, nor induced from them, nor in any way derived from them, nor dependent upon them for any conceivable kind of evidencing that might be provided for that proposition's truth. How then could it possibly be said to be rational for us to accept that proposition even when we have no evidence for it, and

therefore no reason or reasons of any kind for believing it? Surely, Al Plantinga is not trying to tell us, is he, that it is the very absence of any reasons for accepting such basic propositions that has to be the thing that gives us a reason for accepting them? Putting it that way would be not just logically odd, but downright dumbfounding!

Suppose, though, we try a somewhat different tack in our effort to make some sense out of Plantinga's confident assertion that we have every reason to believe a basic proposition such as "God exists"--and this even though, in another sense (or is it the same sense?), we have no reason for believing it. For it may be that there is another class of basic propositions, other than self-evident propositions, and also other than propositions that in the usual sense are simply evident to the senses. Perhaps, then, "God exists" will turn out to be a basic proposition of this somewhat different kind or class. And, sure enough, Plantinga in his examples of basic propositions would seem to classify the assertion "God exists" more or less with assertions to the effect that there are physical objects, or that there are other minds.[23] For instance, take the belief in other minds. Seemingly, this is a case in which we could hardly be said to have any direct perception of another person's mind. For, even though I might quite properly be said to observe my neighbor going through all sorts of bodily writhings and contortions of his facial muscles, etc., I can hardly say that I actually see or observe his pain. Or, again, in the matter of so-called physical object statements, I certainly have direct perceptual evidence of colors, shapes, sizes, yes, even of motions; but, strictly speaking, the physical objects that have these colors, or are of these sizes, or are in motion, I do not perceive as such--or at least not directly.

But, then, is the case one of my inferring the existence of physical objects from the perception of their sense data, or of my inferring the existence of other minds from the perception of people's writhings and contorting of themselves in a highly indicative manner? Once more, the answer has to be "No." For, basic propositions being basic, they cannot be said to be inferred from reasons, or, indeed, from other evidence of any kind. To

which the only answer would seem to be, "Bravo!" For one simply has to hand it to Plantinga for being as courageous as he is consistent! The only trouble is that, for all of his courage and consistency, Plantinga seems to leave us with little more than sheer paradox, so far as his theory of basic propositions is concerned. For but consider: we are rationally justified, Plantinga assures us, in believing in such things as the existence of physical objects, of other minds, and of God. All the same, none of these beliefs is justified on the ground of being either self-evident or empirically evident. And, if we then ask whether such beliefs may be considered rational beliefs on the ground that they are somehow inferrable from beliefs that are either empirically evident or perhaps self-evident, Plantinga throws up his hands in horror and exclaims: "But to suppose that the truth of such basic propositions is based on inference is to violate their very charter as basic propositions, since by definition no *basic* proposition can be in any way based on, or derived from, any other proposition!"

What, then, are we to say? For seemingly, in his account of basic propositions as being propositions which we are entirely rational in believing, we are precluded by the rules of the basic-proposition game from having any reason to believe them. Surely, this sounds as if Plantinga wanted to have his cake and eat it too![24]

D. What About Causes Instead of Reasons for our Rational Beliefs?

Let it not be thought, though, that P. W. and Co. are entirely without resource, even when they would thus seem to be caught out in the business of both wanting to have their cake and eat it too. And so let us quickly look at their new and latest resource that they would now resort to. Thus the question, or challenge, that P. W. and Co. are seeking to answer at this juncture is just the question as to what possible grounds Al Plantinga can have for insisting that we human beings have "a right"--Plantinga calls it an "epistemic right"--simply to affirm propositions of the character of "There are physical objects," "There are other minds," and "God exists." Moreover, the fact that we have an epistemic right to

make such assertions means, so Plantinga would also insist, that we are entirely rational in doing so. But why and on what grounds is Plantinga able to say this? Could it be that Plantinga's contention as to the "rightfulness" and the "rationality" of our making assertions of this kind--i.e., of the existence of physical objects, or of other minds, or of God--are due simply to the fact that, as one might say, "everyone does it," or "we all do it." And, indeed, is it not true that we all of us do unhesitatingly and daily affirm that there are physical objects, and that there are other minds? Not only that, but may it not also be said that we cannot very well help making assertions or affirmations of this sort? Indeed, would we not think that no one other than a madman could consistently refuse to believe that there were any physical objects or that other people had any minds or feelings? In other words, we just can't help believing that there are other minds, or that there are physical objects.[25]

With that, however, the question comes round to being one of whether the mere fact that we all of us feel impelled, or even compelled, to make assertions to the effect that there are physical objects, or are other minds, implies that the rationality of such assertions is thereby assured. Indeed, if such be the character of Plantinga's argument for the rationality of his so-called "basic propositions," it might just occur to one that this sounds not unlike Hume's appeal to custom as being the explanation for our inescapable human tendency to move from "constant conjunction" to "necessary connection." And yet would not Hume be the first to say that, while our experience of constant conjunction might be the *cause* of our being convinced that necessary connection was involved, it certainly could in no wise be said to constitute a proper *reason* in justification of our affirmation of such necessary connection? But does that then mean that Al Plantinga has been guilty of an elementary confusion of causes with reasons in this matter of the supposed ground or basis for the rationality of basic propositions?[26]

Accordingly, having raised this kind of difficulty with respect to Plantinga's account of the rationality of our affirmations of physical object statements, or statements about other minds, what

about an affirmation to the effect that God exists? For this, after all, is the decisive sort of example that Plantinga must deal with in his concern to establish the rationality of our assertions of basic propositions even when we have no reasons or evidence for the truth of such propositions. How, then, can Plantinga explain and defend his contention that it is perfectly rational for one to assert that God exists, even when it is admitted that that proposition is neither self-evident, nor empirically evident, nor in any way derivatively or demonstrably evident either? True, Plantinga does suggest that such an affirmation of God's existence is on all fours with affirmations like those of the existence of physical objects or of other minds so that, if the latter sorts of affirmation are rational, so is the former. And yet that is just the question: How can one maintain that the affirmation of any of these so-called basic propositions is ever rational? After all, so far as propositions about physical objects or other minds are concerned, all Plantinga seems able to come up with is the notion that there presumably are causes--perhaps psychological causes--that would account for our making such assertions. And yet causes are not reasons. So what about a proposition, then, like "God exists"?

This time Plantinga seems inclined to respond by quoting a presumably somewhat eloquent passage from John Calvin in his support:

> There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty. Ever renewing its memory, he repeatedly sheds fresh drops. Since, therefore, men one and all perceive that there is a God and that he is their maker, they are condemned by their own testimony because they have failed to honor him and to consecrate their lives to his will. If ignorance of God is to be looked for anywhere, surely one is most likely to find an example of it among the more backward folk and those more remote from civilization. Yet there is, as the eminent pagan says, no nation so barbarous, no people so savage, that they have not a deep-seated conviction that there is a God. So deeply does the common conception occupy the mind of all, so tenaciously does it inhere in the hearts of all! Therefore, since from the beginning of the world there has been no region, no city, in short no household, that could do without religion, there lies in this a tacit confession of a sense of deity inscribed in the hearts of all.
>
> Indeed, the perversity of the impious, who though they struggle furiously are unable to extricate themselves from the fear of God, is abundant testimony that this conviction, namely, that there is some God, is naturally inborn in all, and is fixed within, as it were in the very marrow. . . . From this we conclude *that it is not a doctrine that must first be learned in school,* but one of which each of us is master from his mother's womb and which nature itself permits no one to forget.[27]

And, immediately, Plantinga's comment on this passage is:

> Calvin's claim, then, is that God has created us in such a way that we have a strong tendency or inclination toward belief in him. . . . The fact is, Calvin thinks, one who does not believe in God is in an epistemologically substandard position--rather like a man who does not believe that his wife exists, or thinks she is like a cleverly constructed robot and has no thoughts, feelings, or consciousness.[28]

Somehow, when one reads this passage from Calvin as quoted by Plantinga, it is hard not to be struck with utter

astonishment--not astonishment at how someone like Calvin might have written such a passage, but rather astonishment at how and why someone like Plantinga should think that he can quote such a passage to the purpose he does. For his purpose is to show that the acceptance of basic propositions--and specifically, this time, of the proposition that God exists--is properly rational, even when there is no rational evidence in support of the proposition. Why, then, do we accept the proposition? Well, presumably it is because God has implanted it "in the hearts of all," it is just "naturally inborn in all," it is in us in fact by "a natural instinct." Surely, though, these are all only in the nature of *causes* of our believing in God and not *reasons* for our doing so. Yet, on the next to the last page of his essay in *Faith and Rationality*, Plantinga unabashedly asserts: "Belief in the existence of God is in the same boat as belief in other minds, the past, perceptual objects; in each case *God has so constructed us* that in the right circumstances we form the belief in question."[29] And then Plantinga confidently concludes: "But then belief that there is such a person as God is as much among the deliverances of reason as those other beliefs."[30]

And yet does this conclusion really follow from the argument Plantinga would appear to have adduced in its support? For, remember, it is not the mere fact that the affirmation of God's existence is like, or analogous to, such other affirmations as that other minds exist, or that past events have taken place, or that physical objects exist--no, it is not the mere analogy between an affirmation of God's existence and such other affirmations that warrant their being reckoned as "deliverances of reason." Rather, it is the fact that all of us human beings are "so constructed" that we cannot do other than make such affirmations--that presumably is the factor in the situation that is supposed to render such propositions rationally acceptable to us. Surely, though, this will never do! For does it not involve once again a patent confusion of causes for a belief with reasons for that belief? And, surely, if we are lacking reasons for a belief, it is hard to see how something like a mere conditioned affirmation of such a belief could ever render it a "deliverance of reason."

Perhaps, though, we still need rather more by way of evidence and argument in support of this contention of ours that, in his presumed confounding of mere causes for our beliefs with reasons for our beliefs, Plantinga would seem to have committed nothing if not an enormous howler. Accordingly, let us invoke a somewhat amusing example that R. M. Hare resorted to a number of years ago, by way of bringing it home--albeit to a somewhat different point and purpose from our own--just why and how causes for a belief ought not to be confused with reasons for a belief:

> A certain lunatic is convinced that all dons want to murder him. His friends introduce him to all the mildest and most respectable dons that they can find and, after each of them has retired, they say, "You see, he doesn't really want to murder you; he spoke to you in a most cordial manner; surely you are convinced now?" But the lunatic replies "Yes, but that was only his diabolical cunning; he's really plotting against me the whole time, like the rest of them; I know it, I tell you." However many kindly dons are produced, the reaction is still the same.[31]

Do we need then even to bother to point the moral of this quotation, so far as Plantinga is concerned? Put very simply, the moral is none other than that, for all of there having been presumably no lack of causes for the poor lunatic's belief that all Oxford dons were out to murder him--after all, a psychologist or psychiatrist could no doubt have produced any number of such causes in a diagnosis of the man's lunacy--that still does not mean that the lunatic had anything like good reasons or sound evidence for his belief that all dons were determined to murder him. And so with Plantinga: it does not suffice merely to adduce causes for our beliefs, if what one wants to do is to establish that we have good reasons for our beliefs.

E. Why Not Reliable Beliefs Rather Than True Beliefs?

But no, Plantinga is still not dead yet--far from it! And, indeed, just when Plantinga would seem to be caught in that hopeless bind that we have just found him to be caught in--viz., that of confusing causes with reasons--it is then Wolterstorff who sallies forth with a proposal designed at once to supplement and to bolster Plantinga's account of the rationality of our human beliefs. Thus, in an essay subsequent to Plantinga's in *Faith and Rationality,* Wolterstorff seeks to introduce into the picture a notion of what he calls "belief dispositions."[32]

Now in a sense, and at first glance, this scarcely helps Plantinga's case in the least. For all that a "belief disposition" is, as Wolterstorff expounds it, is but a term to designate the sorts of causes (as contrasted with reasons) that impel us to affirm things like the existence of God, of other minds, *et al.*--and this in the absence of all reasons or evidence. Nevertheless, recognizing that the operation of such mere belief dispositions does little by way of explaining and justifying the rationality of such beliefs as are the products of these dispositions, Wolterstorff goes on to suggest that we do need to have a way of testing such dispositions, in order to determine whether they are, as he says, "reliable" or not. And, to this end, Wolterstorff apparently adapts to his own purposes a version of Alvin Goldman's epistemological theory of "reliablism." Moreover, it would seem that the tests to be used for the reliability of our beliefs amount to what in effect are little more than pragmatic tests. Thus, in the case of our belief in the existence of physical objects, say, what we would need to do would be to try to determine whether believing in such objects would on the whole "work better" or enable us, as it were, to "get around better" in the world, or "make our way better" in the world, than not believing in such objects.

And so, to use a somewhat analogous, even if rather crude, example, consider the relative payoff pragmatically of astronomers' believing that the planets move in elliptical orbits, as opposed to their believing that they move in circular orbits. For one thing, will not the mathematics of calculating the positions of

the planets at different times be vastly simplified, if astronomers were to operate on the assumption of the planets moving in elliptical rather than circular orbits, with all of the complications that the latter would entail by way of having to posit epicycles upon epicycles? Very well, would it not then likewise seem that what Wolterstorff is proposing to do is to acknowledge that merely to exhibit the causes of our beliefs in terms of belief dispositions is not enough by way of insuring the rationality of such beliefs? Instead, we need also to invoke pragmatic tests to determine the reliability of such beliefs, before we can properly assess their rationality.

And yet is Wolterstorff right in this? After all, one wonders whether merely to offer ways and means and tests for determining the pragmatic reliability of our beliefs is quite the same thing as establishing the rationality of those beliefs. For, presumably, that any belief of ours should be held to be a rational belief must surely mean that we consider we have reasons for believing it to be true. And yet but a little reflection should suffice to remind us that the mere fact a belief of ours has been shown to be pragmatically reliable by no means implies that we have therefore really compelling reasons for supposing it to be true.[33]

Thus consider again our well-worn example of the issue concerning the orbits of the planets (whether they move in circular or in elliptical orbits): if the pragmatic reliability of a theory is all that counts, then it makes not the slightest difference whether in fact or in truth the planets really move in elliptical orbits or not. Rather all that matters is that on the one hypothesis our scientific calculation and manipulations would be greatly facilitated and simplified, as compared with what they would be on the other hypothesis.

And here I find it hard not to quote what has long seemed to be a singularly illuminating passage from Quine:

> As an empiricist I continue to think of the conceptual scheme of science as a tool, ultimately, for predicting future experience in the

> light of past experience. Physical objects are conceptually imported into the situation as covenient intermediaries--not by definition in terms of experience, but simply as irreducible posits comparable, epistemologically, to the gods of Homer. For my part I do, *qua* lay physicist, believe in physical objects and not in Homer's gods; and I consider it a scientific error to believe otherwise. But in point of epistemological footing the physical objects and the gods differ only in degree and not in kind. Both sorts of entities enter our conception only as cultural posits. The myth of physical objects is epistemologically superior to most in that it has proved more efficacious than other myths as a device for working a manageable structure into the flux of experience.[34]

Consider, then, the implications that a quotation such as this must have for the sort of Calvinist-Analyst epistemology that P. W. and Co. are proposing. For do P. W. and Co. really want to say that a belief in the existence of God--or likewise a belief in other minds, or in physical objects--that beliefs such as these can claim to be rationally superior beliefs in no other sense than that in which a belief in the elliptical orbits of the planets may be said to be rationally superior to a belief in the circular orbits of the planets? Yes, and still more particularly, is it P. W. and Co.'s position that all such beliefs, and particularly the belief in the existence of God, amount to no more than just so many "myths" or "cultural posits" that have established their rational superiority to other myths on no other grounds than that of their having proved to be a better "device for working a manageable structure into the flux of experience"?

Of course, it goes without saying that P. W. and Co. would doubtless draw back from any such consequence as this in both horror and dismay. And yet what alternative do they have, so long as they persist in supposing that, for our beliefs to be adjudged rational, no more is needed than that there be sufficient causes

productive of those beliefs, quite irrespective of whether there be reasons for such beliefs, in the sense of reasons for supposing them to be true? Or, again, while P. and W. would doubtless say that of course a belief is not necessarily a reliable belief if there be no ground for it other than that we are psychologically disposed (i.e., have a "belief disposition") to accept it, all the same, under the conditions laid down by P. and W., what other reason would a person have for not going along with a particular belief of ours unless it be found to be not as reliable, or as pragmatically fruitful, as some alternative belief? The only trouble is that the reliability of our beliefs can be established independently of their truth. And, when the reliability of our beliefs is something thus established quite independently of their truth, the consequence can only be that such a reliability in our beliefs is hardly a substitute for the rationality of those beliefs based on considerations of their truth.

Nor would such a consequence seem to be entirely without a certain irony, so far as P. W. and Co. are concerned. For what with their tendency to rely upon merely pragmatic considerations, so far as the reliability of our belief dispositions are concerned, would not P. W. and Co. appear to have thrown themselves right into the arms of Richard Rorty and the currently fashionable pragmatism of so-called Post-Analytic philosophy?

Oh, it's true that, in the very Introduction to *Faith and Rationality*,[35] Wolterstorff remarks on how "some philosophers [notably Rorty] have concluded from the collapse of the classical foundationalist theory of knowledge that the concept of knowledge itself must be discarded." Still other philosophers (e.g., Feyerabend), Wolterstorff continues, "have concluded from the collapse of the classical foundationalist theory of rationality that the distinction between rational and non-rational beliefs must be discarded." But Wolerstorff vigorously protests that, so far as P. W. and Co. are concerned, though they of course reject Foundationalism, they nevertheless do not wish to go as far as either Rorty or Feyerabend.

But maybe P. W. and Co. have no choice! For have we not now seen that, in their rejection of Foundationalism, there is no way in which P. W. and Co. can show their basic propositions to have any proper evidence in their support; and, as for the so-called belief dispositions which they would invoke as being grounds of our beliefs, these provide only causes for our beliefs and not reasons for them at all. Hence, for P. W. and Co., there can be no justification for their beliefs other than the largely non-cognitive justification of Pragmatism and Reliablism. And what else must this betoken if not that P. W. and Co. have thereby indeed simply handed themselves over, roped and bound, into the hands of Rorty and Co., and of his Post-Analytic philosophers? *Facilis descensus Averno!*

F. Where Did P. W. and Co. Make Their Wrong Turning?

And now for what would seem to be an obvious question. Granted that P. W. and Co. would appear to have simply made a wrong turning somewhere along the line in their prolonged and laborious efforts to provide an alternative account of just what it is that makes for the rationality of our human beliefs, just where and at what point did this wrong-turning take place? Notice that this question of ours is not one as to why P. W. and Co. made the wrong turning that they did. For, on the matter of the "why," we have already seen that the reason P. W. and Co. made their decision to turn away from anything like the traditional Thomistic account of human rationality is that they were dissatisfied with the Foundationalism, and more specifically with the Foundationalist Principle, that underlies this Thomistic account. For recall that what the Foundationalist Principle underscores, so far as any account of knowledge and rationality is concerned, is that in order for any of our human beliefs--particularly our non-religious beliefs--to be fully rational, they must rest upon sufficient evidence. And this means, according to the way the Foundationalist Principle is then interpreted by P. W. and Co., that the rationality of our beliefs must needs be understood either in terms of a self-evidence, or in terms of an evidence that is

derived from principles that are self-evident. But, of course, P. W. and Co. will have none of this.

All right, but, in turning away from the Foundationalist Principle, P. W. and Co. quickly found themselves being led right down the garden path to their highly incredible and seemingly indefensible theory of so-called basic propositions, these being propositions for which presumably we have neither reason nor evidence, but which notwithstanding we are said to have every reason to accept, and to be entirely rational in so accepting. Very well, then, but just how did P. W. and Co. come to make this seemingly preposterous turn to so-called "basic propositions," and just where and at what point was it that this wrong turning of theirs was made?

Well, presumably the wrong turning was made at that point where, as regards physical-object statements, or statements about other minds (or about God), it seemed that the sensory evidence which we are presented with in our experince turns out not to be a sufficient evidence, or even any evidence at all, of the existence of physical objects (or, *mutatis mutandis*, of other minds, or of God, etc.). And yet, for all of that, it was recognized that we cannot very well avoid making judgments as to the existence of physical objects (confining our attention to this particular type of example for the moment). Hence P. W. and Co. come out with their baffling pronouncement that our belief in the existence of physical objects must therefore be taken to represent one of their much vaunted "basic propositions"--these being propositions for which we have no reason or evidence of any kind (they being neither self-evident, nor empirically evident, nor evident as a result of any kind of inference), but which notwithstanding we have every reason to accept. And that, as we have already insisted, is simply fantastic!

Clearly, though, we should now be able to see that this wrong turning by P. W. and Co. was made precisely at that point where it seemed as if, to take a particular example, we were indeed presented in our sensory experience with all sorts of visual and auditory and tactual data, and yet not at all with the physical

object or objects that it might be supposed sustained such data. As a result, it was said that, while of course we might be said to see the green of the leaf perfectly well, as well as its size, position, etc., the leaf itself we do not see. Nor is it even in principle possible actually to *see* such a thing as a leaf, as contrasted, say, with its color. And no more is it possible, given the circumstances of perception and perceptual experience, as P. W. and Co. understand them, that the existence of such a thing as a leaf is in any way inferable from the perceivable data of the leaf either. Accordingly, it is precisely at this juncture that P. W. and Co. make their wrong turning. For, not being able to claim either any direct perceptual evidence or any inferential evidence of any kind for the existence of the leaf, P. W. and Co. in effect declare that there is just no way under heaven--or even in heaven either presumably--for us to get from the green that we see with our eyes to the leaf that we know the green to be the color of. And so what do they do but simply go ahead and posit the existence of the leaf as a physical object anyway.

Accordingly, we suggest that it is just this bald, bare positing of the existence of the leaf that is the wrong turning that P. W. and Co. are guilty of. What's more, having thus posited that there is a leaf, P. W. and Co. then declare such a positing or affirmation to be in the nature of a "basic proposition;" and a basic proposition, they say, is one that one has every reason to accept and is entirely rational in accepting, even though, seemingly by the very same logic of their position, there is no reason of any kind for accepting it. And what is that if not a hopeless epistemological predicament from which there is for P. W. and Co. seemingly just no exit!

G. But Was Not the Wrong-Turning a Thing at Once Gratuitous and Unnecessary?

But contrast now the way in which this transition from mere perceptual data to a rational understanding of the objects of which those data are the data is both described and justified in the Thomistic tradition. And indeed, to this end, why do we not simply undertake to work with that trivial and all-too-shopworn example which we have already alluded to? This is the example

of my seeing with my eyes the green of the leaf, and then coming to recognize that, as Aristotle or Aquinas would understand the situation here, the leaf is what Aristotle would call a substance, or what contemporary philosophers might simply call a physical object. Nor is it to be denied that the leaf, as a substance or as a physical object, is not as such anything that we are presented with by the so-called external senses or the common sense at least not just as such. No, that we should actually come to see a substance, such as a leaf or a tree, requires an intellectual apprehension or cognition, no less than a simultaneous sensory cognition as well.

Thus, for instance, when I look at the leaf on the tree outside my window I certainly can see with my eyes the green color. But this greenness I, in turn, am certainly able to recognize as being a color; and a color is certainly a quality. Not only that but, it being my intellectual faculties of apprehension that are now being called into play, along with my sensory faculties, does it not immediately become evident to me--yes, intellectually or rationally evident, if you will--that the green color that I am perceiving being a quality, that quality cannot as such be a quantity? No, nor is the green color just as such an action either, any more than it is a quantity, or a relation, or a place, or a time. For, after all, I surely am able to recognize intellectually that the green color I am now being presented with in my sensory perception is a quality, and that a quality is an accident and not a substance, and that an accident such as a quality is not to be confused with other accidents, such as quantities, or relations, or actions, or places, or whatever.

And then, of course, and still more importantly, just as intellectually it is nothing if not evident to me that qualities are not quantities, or quantities actions, etc., so also is it nothing if not evident that every quality must be the quality of something? And, no less than qualities, so also must any and every quantity be the quantity of something, just as any action has to be the action of some agent. Likewise, that of which the quality is a quality, or the quantity a quantity, or the action an action, can be nothing other than the sort of thing Aristotle called a substance.

And lo, what have we here if not a whole cluster of self-evident truths, as, for example, the undeniable truth that there simply could not be any such thing as a green color without its being the green of something, viz., of a substance? To be sure, the existence of the substance of which the green is the color is not made evident to me as a knower in the way in which the green is made known; instead, it is "seen," or intellectually apprehended, directly in conjunction with my sensory apprehension of the several sensory qualities that are all perceived in the leaf outside my window.

And, with this, is not our point established? Our human cognitive faculties are such that our faculties of intellectual insight quite patently function in close conjunction with our sensory faculties; as a result, we not only see the green with our eyes, but we also recognize, through an intellectual insight, that there is a physical object out there that is thus green. Accordingly, from this standpoint what could be more gratuitous than the incredible straining at gnats and swallowing of camels that P. W. and Co. would appear to have gone through, in order to explain how from sensory perceptions we are led--as it would seem quite irrationally--to an actual positing of physical objects. These latter, as P. W. and Co. describe things, we neither see with our eyes nor apprehend intellectually with our intelligence. Rather it takes nothing less than a supposed "belief disposition" to somehow impel us or cause us just to up and posit the physical object. And, of course, such a positing is nothing if not somehow all but in vain, since it provides us with not the slighest evidence for the existence of the physical object. Nor is what Quine calls the "posit" of such an object warranted by anything more than merely pragmatic considerations. In fact, the object must literally be reckoned as only a posit, and not as a fact, there being no evidence of any kind of the actual existence of anything like a real physical object or substance. At least, that is the way the situation shapes up on the account given by P. W. and Co.

Nevertheless, it is just here and at this point that the Thomist must needs, for his part, be wary of a criticism to the effect that, on the account which he and we would give of our human

empirical knowledge of things or substances in the world, the Thomist has admittedly introduced directly into that account a contention to the effect that, alongside our perceptual faculties, there must also be operative an actual faculty of rational or intellectual insight. But no sooner do we Thomists make a move of this sort than immediately, it would seem, we have got ourselves caught up in an irrevocable *a priorism* reminiscent of Descartes, as a result of which any and all supposed rational or intellectual knowledge would need to be adjudged somehow innate, and thus in no wise dependent upon our perceptual experience at all. Surely, though, any such accusations of an *a priorism* and of a Cartesian certainty and indubitability with respect to all knowledge--such accusations must surely be wide of the mark when aimed at an epistemology of the Thomistic type. For is it not patent from the account which we have just given of the operation of what we have termed "intellectual insight,"[36] and which is characteristic of the Thomistic tradition, that such an insight involves no less than an actual recognition and discernment in the green color that is perceived that this same perceied green is the green of a physical object? Accordingly, the insight involved is no less than an insight into the very object of the sensory perception, and an insight that would be simply impossible without the antecedent perception that provides our intellectual insight with the very materials that it has to work on.

Nor need one suppose either that, because this intellectual insight is an operation that is truly intellectual and not merely sensory, its operation must therefore be, as it were, invariably infallible and always sure-fire. Far from it, for the green which I see--to recur to this trivial example again--and which I take to be the green of a leaf, I could well be mistaken about: it could conceivably turn out to be the green only of a piece of felt, and not of a leaf at all. Nor is that all either, for (granted that there is indeed a sense in which, in my coming to recognize intellectually that the green which I see must needs be the green of a physical object or a substance, and that the implicit truth contained therein is certainly a self-evident one), even so, and even as regards such clearly self-evident principles as those pertaining to substances and their accidents, or things and their properties, we need constantly

to be on the lookout lest we misconstrue or misapply them. For, as we have already remarked, from the history of science and philosophy anyone can come up with countless examples of principles that seemed to be unquestionably evident, and thus nothing if not *per se nota*, and that nevertheless later turned out to be not so at all.

Moreover, having said this much, we can perhaps now begin to understand just how and why P. W. and Co. should have been so led astray in their supremely confident and implacable criticisms of Aristotelian and Thomistic Foundationalism. For they took such a Foundationalism, together with the Foundationalist Principle which is the core of that Foundationalism, as if it did no less than set up an absolute standard of rationality, such that if any item of our would-be human knowledge were to fail, even in any respect, to meet the standard of self-evidence (or else to be derivative from the self-evident) then that item of supposed knowledge could not qualify as a rational knowledge at all.

But this is a wholly unwarranted construction that P. W. and Co. have placed upon the Foundationalist Principle. Clearly, their interpretation reflects the unfortunate Rationalist or Cartesian way of reading the Principle, and completely overlooks the way the Principle was always regarded as functioning in a Thomistic or Aristotelian context. For never should it be lost sight of that in the view of Aristotle and Aquinas all human knowledge must proceed from our perceptual experience. As a result, there is just no way in which human knowledge could ever be reckoned as being an affair of innate ideas, or of any sort of Platonic *anamnesis*, much less an affair of mere analytic truths in the Kantian sense.

True, considered ideally, it perhaps is scarcely enough, on the Thomistic view, for example, that something should only be observed to be the case; it also needs to be understood why it is the case. Accordingly, for such a rational understanding in the fullest sense, our beliefs could well be said to need to be either self-evident in themselves, or else derivatively evident from truths that are thus self-evident. Still, that but states the goal and the

ideal of a fully rational knowledge, to which generally in our human scientific and rational understandings we but aspire, and yet seldom, and in only occasional instances, attain.

And so it is that, if all truth--and such is the constant Thomistic contention--must needs arise out of experience, it is both difficult and but rarely that, in such things as are but empirically evident to us, we can detect, be it either through a direct insight, or through an induction leading to such insight, anything that is truly and unmistakably rationally evident in the sense of a self-evidence. And so it is, to revert again to our familiar but continuingly trivial example, that the green that I see with my eyes, when I examine the leaf on a tree, is indeed green. But is it the green of a leaf? As regards this, of course, I may be mistaken. True, it is perhaps self-evident that the green which I see cannot but be the green of something, i.e., of some physical object or substance; but it certainly is not self-evident that the green that I see must be the green of a leaf. Granted, in past experiences, in like situations, the kind of green which I now see has turned out to be the green of a leaf. And yet do I really know, in the sense of having a truly evident knowledge, that this time the green that I see is the green of a leaf, or even just what a leaf is? Of course not, for such a knowledge can only be built up as a result of inductions from experience, and these are ever fallible and subject to correction. Occasionally, to be sure, and usually on a level of high generality, my inductions from experience may culminate in what has sometimes been called an Aristotelian "intuitive induction,"[37] in which one recognizes that the color that one sees is a quality, and that a quality must be the quality of something, of a substance. But even self-evidence of this sort, as we have already noted, could well turn out to be unexpectedly fallible after all, it always being possible that what seems self-evident to us might turn out not really to be so.

In any case, we surely now need say no more either in rebuttal of the kind of Calvinist-Analyst epistemology that P. W. and Co. have proposed in *Faith and Rationality*, or in support of that traditional and rival Thomistic account of rationality that P. W. and Co. are so concerned to repudiate. For by this time it

certainly should be apparent that the reasons for their repudiation turn out not to be really reasons at all, and their substitute concept of human rationality, which P. W. and Co. would put in place of the more traditional Thomistic account, turns out to be not so much a mistake as almost a complete disaster. And so, as Mark Twain might say, is not the most charitable thing that we might now do simply "draw the curtain" on the sorry spectacle of P. W. and Co.'s proposed Calvinist-Analyst variety of epistemology?

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NOTES

1. Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* translated by Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944) 305.

2. *Faith and Rationality: Reason and belief in God,* edited by Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983). Henceforth *FR,* throughout this volume.

3. Be it noted that what follows is only an exhibit of the sort of argument involved, not a defense of it. Nor is anything like a full-dress defense attempted anywhere either in this essay or in the ones that follow, this being not to our immediate purpose in this volume. Nevertheless, readers are referred to R. J. Connell, "Preliminaries to the Five Ways," in this volume, as fundamental to any right understanding of the sorts of demonstrations that are attempted in traditional natural theology.

4. *Per se notum* is used throughout this volume for the singular of what is known *per se*, and *per se nota* for its plural, regardless of the gender of the Latin word translating the English word to which the expression applies.

5. Cf. note 3 above.

6. *Faith and Rationality*, pp. 1 and 4.

7. For confirmation of how such a response is nothing but the obvious one for a Thomist to make, see H. DuLac, "A First Incredulous Reaction to *Faith and Rationality,*" in this volume.

8. *FR*, 46.

9. *FR*, 138-139.

10. *FR*, 139.

11. *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 5, 2.

12. *S.T.*, II-II, 2, 10. The translation is largely that of Anton C. Pegis in the Random House edition of *The Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas.*

13. Perhaps it is somewhat gratuitous that we should bear down thus hard on P. W. and Co. for their seeming to make so much of their charge that Aquinas is, after all, no more than an Evidentialist. Indeed, there are occasional passages even in *Faith and Rationality* where first Plantinga, and then Wolterstorff, would seem to qualify at least somewhat their charge of Evidentialism as directed at St. Thomas. Nevertheless, to recognize that on this point there may well have been, not just a certain qualification of this charge on the part at least of Wolterstorff, but perhaps even an almost complete change of heart and mind, one might do well to consult a volume later than *Faith and Rationality*, entitled *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment*, edited by Audi and Wainwright, published in 1986 by Cornell University Press. In it Wolterstorff would seem quite to withdraw his earlier charges of Evidentialism, as these were aimed at Aquinas. But, even more significant, in the same volume there is an essay by Kenneth Konyndyk, a staunch Calvinist, to be sure, and a colleague of Wolterstorff at Calvin College, in which he, Konyndyk, carefully examines the evidence against Aquinas that he might have been an Evidentialist; and Konyndyk comes out declaring emphatically that Aquinas was presumably just not an Evidentialist at all. Still more decisive, however, is the testimony of still another Calvinist, Arvin Vos, in a volume published in 1985 by the University of Notre Dame Press, entitled *Aquinas, Calvin, and Contemporary Protestant Thought.* This balanced and well-researched volume does nothing if not drive the last nail in the coffin of P. W. and Co.'s utterly wrong-headed notion that St. Thomas might possibly be interpreted as having been little more than an Evidentialist.

14. See especially T. D. Sullivan, "Adequate Evidence for Religious Assent," in this volume.

15. Plantinga's charge that Foundationalism as understood by St. Thomas turns out to be self-referentially inconsistent is developed principally in Section D of Part II of "Reason and Belief in God." See *FR*, 59-63.

16. *FR*, 46.

17. For a rather different assessment of Plantinga's charge of self-referential inconsistency as leveled against what is presumed to be Thomistic Foundationalism, see J. Boyle, "Is 'God Exists' a Properly Basic Belief?", in this volume.

18. The examples which follow are among those Plantinga gives of self-evident truths. See *FR*, 55-56.

19. *FR*, 56.

20. It might be mentioned just in passing that some years ago I undertook a direct critique of the widespread notion that any truth that may be adjudged to be self-evident must for that reason be in the nature of what Kant called "analytic truths," and therefore could not possibly be in any way informative, or a truth about the world. See my *Two Logics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969) 71 ff.

21. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929), Introduction, Sect. IV, B 11.

22. On this, see Plantinga, *FR*, 87-91.

23. On the analogy between belief in God as simply a basic proposition and belief in physical objects, or in other minds, as being likewise propositions which are to be reckoned as basic, see Plantinga, *FR*, 75-82.

24. For a rather different treatment and assessment of Plantinga's reliance on basic propositions, see J. Boyle, "Is 'God Exists' a Properly Basic Belief?", in this volume.

25. It needs to be remarked that, while Plantinga insists that we can have no reasons for our belief in God (or in physical objects, or in other minds), we may not for that reason say that such beliefs of ours are therefore "groundless." See Plantinga, *FR*, 82, for example. As we shall see presently, this seemingly rather paradoxical assertion of Plantinga's that, while we are without reasons for believing in God, we are not without grounds for such a belief--this is all to be explained by the fact that, although we have no reason for believing that God exists, we are nevertheless impelled to believe this by certain causal forces operating upon us.

26. It is not without significance that, in his essay in *Faith and Rationality* entitled *"Jerusalem and Athens Revisited," George Mavrodes* does chide Plantinga and Wolterstorff with just such a confusion of causes with reasons. However, Mavrodes seems not to press this point home--at least not in this particular essay.

27. Quoted in *FR*, 65-66.

28. *FR*, 66.

29. *FR*, 90, stress added.

30. *FR*, 90.

31. *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, edited by Flew and MacIntyre (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1955) 99-100.

32. See "Can Belief in God Be Rational?", *FR*, esp. 139-169.

33. This is not to imply that in pragmatism there is no theory of truth. Rather the point is that "truth" for a pragmatist does not have the same sense as it has, say, for a traditional defender of something like a so-called correspondence theory of truth.

34. Willard Van Orman Quine, *From a Logical Point of View: Logico-Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press) 44.

35. *Ibid.*, 4-5.

36. For a further and more sophisticated discussion of this notion of "intellectual insight" and how it operates, the reader is referred to T. Russman, "'Reformed' Epistemology," in this volume.

37. Of course, this is not a term that Aristotle ever uses, and yet what the term signifies is brought out effectively in the famous concluding chapter (Chapter 19) of Book II of the *Posterior Analytics.*