

COMMONSENSE NATURALISM*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Metaphysical naturalism is, roughly speaking, the view that there are no supernatural beings - no such beings as, for example, God or angels or ghosts.¹ Thomas Reid was a theist and, therefore, not a naturalist. Consequently, one wouldn't expect to find in Reid's writings an argument in support of naturalism. But one *can* find in Reid the resources for a defense of naturalism against a certain sort of objection to it. In this paper I will propose a Reid-inspired commonsense response to Alvin Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism. It is a response whose relevance extends far beyond Plantinga's argument. For it also serves as a preliminary defense and illustration of some of the main elements in a commonsense response to skepticism.

Plantinga has recently argued (in his 1993, ch. 12 and his unpublished) that naturalism is self-defeating. He asks us to imagine a race of creatures about whom we know nothing except that they form and change beliefs and that they came into existence via the mechanisms of evolution. Then he asks us to consider the probability that the cognitive faculties of these creatures are

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¹ This is how Alvin Plantinga (unpublished) characterizes the view he attacks in his evolutionary argument against naturalism (see also his 1996b, pp. 350-52). Since the sort of naturalism under discussion in this paper is the sort - whatever it is - that Plantinga is attacking, it would be best to begin with his understanding of it. Another similar characterization of metaphysical naturalism is Michael Devitt's. He says (1998, p. 46) that it amounts to physicalism - the view that all entities are physical entities. If I were trying to give a precise account of metaphysical naturalism, much more would have to be said. But this will do for our purposes. See the essays in French, Uehling and Wettstein (eds.) 1994 and in Wagner and Warner (eds.) 1993 for various attempts to clarify what naturalism is as well as the essays in Robinson (ed.) 1993 for discussions of what physicalism is. See also section VII of this paper where I discuss varieties of naturalism other than the sort roughly defined here.

reliable - more specifically, he asks us to consider the probability that their cognitive faculties are reliable *given* naturalism and evolution. We can express this probability as $P(R/N\&E)$ where 'R' is the claim that the cognitive faculties in question are reliable, 'N' is the claim that naturalism is true and 'E' is the claim that these faculties came into existence by way of the mechanisms of evolution. Plantinga thinks $P(R/N\&E)$ is low or inscrutable because evolutionary processes aim at adaptive behavior and having reliable faculties doesn't seem particularly probable with respect to adaptive behavior. This is so, he thinks, when $P(R/N\&E)$ is specified to the hypothetical creatures mentioned. But he also thinks $P(R/N\&E)$ is low or inscrutable when we specify it to ourselves - there being no relevant difference between ourselves and the creatures in his example.

That's the first stage of Plantinga's argument. In the second stage he points out that the fact $P(R/N\&E)$ is low or inscrutable constitutes a *defeater* for R for anyone who endorses N&E. Then he says that if you're a naturalist, the sensible thing for you to believe is that evolution is true (you have no recourse to divine creation). So the naturalist should believe N&E. But then, once apprised of Plantinga's argument, the naturalist will have a defeater for R. And a defeater for R is a defeater for every one of a person's beliefs - including N. This, says Plantinga, makes naturalism self-defeating. (Notice that Plantinga's argument can be construed as an argument - starting from naturalistic premises - for global skepticism. This is why my Reidian response to it can be used as an example of how to respond to more typical skeptical challenges.)

For the purposes of this paper, I will grant to Plantinga the conclusion of the first stage of his argument - that $P(R/N\&E)$ is low or inscrutable when specified to us. My contention is simply that this does not necessarily constitute a defeater for R (for the supporter of N&E). In order to defend this view I will first explain, in the next section, a response Plantinga gives to the probabilistic argument from evil. Then, in sections III and IV, I will present a view of Reid's that makes possible a *Reidian* response to Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism that parallels *Plantinga's* response to the probabilistic argument from evil.² In sections V through

² Keith Lehrer's response to Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism is superficially similar to my own. For in giving his response to that argument he too draws upon Plantinga's response to the problem of evil (see his 1996) and upon Reid (see his forthcoming paper with Bradley Warner). But the use Lehrer makes of Reid and of

VIII I will develop Reid's commonsense response in the context of considering a variety of objections to it. I will conclude in section IX by connecting that response as well as my defense and development of it with the more general issue of skepticism.

I should note at the outset that my Reidian response isn't merely an *ad hominem* attack on Plantinga. True, Plantinga endorses a Reidian epistemology so a Reidian response patterned after a response Plantinga himself gives in another setting will, if successful, create a special problem for him. But the Reidian response I offer relies on elements of Reid's epistemology that have a much wider appeal than does Plantinga's own epistemology. It depends on the Reidian views that (i) a belief can be noninferentially justified or warranted if formed on the basis of an experience rather than on the basis of another belief³ and that (ii) among our noninferentially justified beliefs are a good number of our commonsense beliefs. The sort of foundationalism inherent in (i) is not the least bit unusual among contemporary epistemologists. And the commonsensism endorsed in (ii) is thoroughly intertwined with the particularist approach to philosophical analysis that is commonly employed in contemporary metaphysics, ethics and epistemology.⁴ So although the response I propose will be of no use to those who reject (i) and (ii), its benefits are by no means limited to those who accept Plantinga's epistemology.

One more preliminary remark. Some will wonder if my use of Reid (a theist) in defense of naturalism is something of which Reid himself would approve. To soften up such readers, I will include a quotation from Reid in which he suggests that one needn't be a theist to believe with justification in the reliability of one's senses:

Shall we say, then, that this belief [in the reliability of our senses] is the inspiration of the Almighty? I think this may be said in a good sense; for I take it to be the immediate effect of our constitution, which is the

Plantinga's response to the problem of evil is quite unlike the use I make of them. So our responses to Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism are, in the end, very different (which is what one might expect given that I'm an externalist foundationalist and that Lehrer is at least very sympathetic to an internalist sort of coherentism).³ In saying that (i) is a Reidian view, I'm assuming that he is a foundationalist. Lehrer challenges that assumption. In support of a coherentist reading, Lehrer points out passages in Reid which could be taken as saying that the justification of each of our beliefs depends on a further belief about the trustworthiness of that original belief's source. See Lehrer 1990, pp. 42-43. This isn't the place to defend the view that Reid is a foundationalist. So I'll just say that I read those passages in Reid as saying that we *can* be justified in the further belief that our belief sources are trustworthy, not that we *must* be in order for our beliefs produced by those sources to be justified.

⁴ See Chisholm's 1982 for an account of this particularist approach.

work of the Almighty. But, if inspiration be understood to imply a persuasion of its coming from God, our belief of the objects of sense is not inspiration; for a man would believe his senses though he had no notion of a Deity. He who is persuaded that he is the workmanship of God, and that it is a part of his constitution to believe his senses, may think that a good reason to confirm his belief. But he had the belief before he could give this or any other reason for it. (1969, pp. 294-95; 1983, p. 203)⁵

I'm sure that Reid would say that similar remarks apply to the naturalist's belief in R.

II. PLANTINGA ON THE ARGUMENT FROM EVIL

Plantinga has a lot to say about the probabilistic argument from evil.⁶ I don't propose to discuss all of it here. But one thing he says is of particular interest for our purposes. Suppose that $P(G/HE)$ is low (where G is the claim that God exists and HE is the claim that there are horrendous evils). What follows concerning the rationality or reasonableness or warrant for the belief that G ? Not much says Plantinga. For someone who believes that $P(G/HE)$ is low might also believe some other proposition Q and recognize that $P(G/HE\&Q)$ is high. If so, the fact that she also believes that $P(G/HE)$ is low won't make it unreasonable for her to believe G . But, says Plantinga, suppose we grant to the atheist objector that $P(G/k)$ is low (where k is the *total* relevant propositional evidence at one's disposal). What follows then concerning the rationality of holding G ? Again, not much says Plantinga.

Here's an example he uses to explain why (from his 1988, pp. 88-89). Suppose that a letter has gone missing, that you have an obvious motive for stealing it and that both circumstantial evidence and eyewitnesses place you at the scene of the crime with ample opportunity to steal the letter. You claim to have been out alone for a walk in the woods at the time the letter was stolen (call this claim 'W'). But because of the strength of the case against you (and the fact that you have done things of this sort in the past), others are extremely doubtful of W . They sensibly conclude that $P(W/k)$ - where k is their total propositional evidence - is quite low. However, you clearly remember being out in the woods for a walk earlier in the day at the time the letter was

⁵ Reid 1969 is complete but Reid 1983 (which isn't complete) is more readily available. I will give references to both where possible.

⁶ See Plantinga 1979, 1988, 1996a and 1998.

stolen. This memory involves a belief ground that is *nonpropositional*; it involves a *seeming* of some sort that results in your taking a particular memory belief to be obviously correct under the circumstances (the phenomenology of these belief grounds is familiar enough but it is very difficult to describe). You, unlike those who think you are guilty, have the experiential evidence of *its seeming to you like you were out for a walk earlier in the day* and that very evidence grounds the belief that you did not steal the letter.⁷

So you know you didn't steal the letter and you know this on the basis of *nonpropositional* evidence. Nevertheless, your total relevant *propositional* evidence is more or less the same as that of those who think you are guilty.⁸ You too agree that $P(W/k)$ is low. Yet this doesn't in the least suggest that you are irrational to believe *W*; for you clearly remember being out in the woods at the time in question. The point is that just because a proposition is improbable on everything else you know or believe, that doesn't mean it is irrational to believe it. And this is so even if these other things you believe are clearly *relevant* bits of evidence. For you may have in addition to all the *propositional* evidence at your disposal certain *nonpropositional* evidence. And this nonpropositional evidence may be strong enough to make it completely reasonable for you to hold the belief in question even while recognizing that the belief is improbable on your total relevant *propositional* evidence. Furthermore, given that this total relevant propositional evidence is all your accusers have to go on, you can also concede that your accusers are completely reasonable in thinking you are guilty. They are in this unfortunate situation because they lack an important bit of (nonpropositional) evidence that only you have.

⁷ When I describe the experience as one of its *seeming to you that you were out for a walk in the woods earlier in the day* I don't mean to suggest that the experience has a propositional content. I'm just saying that the experience in question is a seeming that inclines you to believe that you were out for a walk in the woods earlier in the day.

⁸ We have to imagine the case so that you have all the propositional evidence your accusers have and that in addition to that, all you have is the memory experience and the belief that *W*. In particular, you don't have any beliefs about your memory experience or about how trustworthy it is, etc. Your belief that *W* is based solely on the memory experience in question and nothing other than the belief that *W* is based on that memory experience. One might think that, upon being accused and thinking carefully about your memory experience, you will form additional beliefs on the basis of it. But we can stipulate that we are focusing on the time before you are accused - the point at which you first learn of all the evidence that exists against you.

Plantinga applies these considerations to the theist confronted with the probabilistic argument from evil in the following way. A person might have sufficiently strong nonpropositional evidence for G by way of what John Calvin calls ‘the *sensus divinitatus*’. This faculty triggers belief in God (or beliefs about God) in response to certain experiences and circumstances. We observe the beauty and majesty of a starry night, are overwhelmed with a sense of awe and find ourselves thinking *God has created this universe*; we recognize that we have done something that is wrong, feel guilty before God and find ourselves thinking *God disapproves of this*; when life is sweet and satisfying we are overcome with a sense of gratitude and believe *God is to be thanked and praised*. In each case, we have a belief about God formed not on the basis of other beliefs but on the basis of experiences. (Plantinga 1983, pp. 80-81). In cases where this evidence is sufficiently strong, one can come to rationally believe in God’s existence despite recognizing that $P(G/k)$ is low. The nonpropositional evidence makes rational a belief that is improbable with respect to one’s total relevant propositional evidence.

In evaluating Plantinga’s response to the argument from evil, one might wonder whether there is any such nonpropositional evidence for theism and, if so, how strong it is. But the main point I want to draw attention to is that the belief that $P(G/k)$ is low does not in itself constitute a defeater for G (for the person whose total relevant propositional evidence is k). In addition, it must be the case that the person in question has no sufficiently strong *nonpropositional* evidence for G.

III. REID ON KNOWING R

Reid (or Reid as I understand him) says that we know R not by basing that belief on other beliefs but instead in the basic way. According to Reid, R is a first principle:

7thly, Another first principle is, that the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious. (1969, p. 630; 1983, p. 275)

And first principles, says Reid, are properly believed *noninferentially*. (1969, p. 593) We obtain this noninferential knowledge of first principles - which he also calls ‘principles of common sense’, ‘self-evident truths’ and ‘intuitive judgments’ - by employing that branch of our faculty of reason he calls ‘common sense’.⁹ (1969, p. 567) The idea isn’t that we have a faculty for knowing in the basic way things like “You shouldn’t try to drive downtown in a hurry during rush hour”. Common wisdom of this latter sort is cultural and learned and will vary across times and places. Reid is talking about something else. He’s speaking of a faculty whereby we form beliefs naturally held by sane humans in normal circumstances - noninferential beliefs that are not the result of education but of our constitution (though they are certainly acquired sometime after birth).¹⁰ Reid thinks that by means of this faculty we know both contingent and necessary truths. (1969, pp. 614-15) What he thinks of as knowledge via common sense of necessary truths is what we would call ‘a priori knowledge’. Examples he gives of necessary truths known via common sense are the axioms of logic and mathematics. (1969, p. 644; 1983, pp. 284-85) Examples he gives (in addition to R) of contingent truths known noninferentially via common sense are beliefs such as “The thoughts of which I am conscious are *my* thoughts”, “Other humans have minds” and “I have some degree of control over my actions”. (1969, pp. 611-43)

So Reid thinks we know R and other first principles (both contingent and necessary) in the basic way by means of common sense. Now, just as there is a mechanism by which we form sense perceptual beliefs in the basic way, so also there is a mechanism of sorts for forming our commonsense beliefs. Sense perception seems to work as follows: we experience sensations (visual, tactile, etc.) and on the basis of them form beliefs in the existence of external objects having certain qualities. The ground of our sense perceptual beliefs is our sense experience, not other beliefs. It is because they aren’t based on other beliefs that they are called basic or noninferential. Now consider what Reid says about how commonsense beliefs in first principles are formed:

⁹ The other branch of reason enables us “to draw conclusions that are not self-evident from those that are”. (1969, p. 567)

¹⁰ See Reid 1969, essay VI, chapter IV ‘Of First Principles in General’, parts of which are included in Reid 1983.

We may observe, that opinions which contradict first principles are distinguished from other errors by this; that they are not only false, but absurd: and, to discountenance absurdity, nature has given us a particular emotion, to wit, that of ridicule, which seems intended for this very purpose of putting out of countenance what is absurd, either in opinion or practice. (1969, p. 606; 1983, p. 259)

The idea is that when we entertain the contrary of a first principle, we experience the emotion of ridicule. On the basis of this experience, we dismiss as absurd the contrary of the first principle and believe the first principle. In other words, we consider the contrary of a first principle and have an experience that prompts this sort of belief: "That's absolutely nuts! It's ridiculous!" It thereby also prompts belief in the first principle itself though, as Reid notes, we rarely attend to beliefs in first principles. (1969, pp. 632-33; 1983, p. 277) Just as in the case of sense perception, the ground of the first principle belief is an experience not a belief.

IV. A REIDIAN RESPONSE TO PLANTINGA

It should now be pretty obvious how a Reidian could respond to Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism. She could combine *Plantinga's* method of responding to the probabilistic argument from evil with *Reid's* account of how we can know R in the basic way. We've given to Plantinga the claim that $P(R/N\&E)$ is low or inscrutable. He says this is a defeater for R. But the commonsense naturalist can respond as follows: "Even if a naturalist believed that $P(R/N\&E)$ is low or inscrutable, this needn't give her a defeater for R. For she could have *nonpropositional* evidence for R that is sufficiently strong to make belief in R rational, reasonable and warranted - even for someone whose total relevant *propositional* evidence, k, was such that $P(R/k)$ is low or inscrutable. The nonpropositional evidence she has could be of the sort Reid describes."

To clarify this Reidian response, let me briefly consider two objections to it that are based on misunderstanding. The first has to do with the parallel between ourselves and the hypothetical creatures mentioned in stage one of Plantinga's evolutionary argument. It seems that the conjunction of the belief that N&E and the belief that $P(R/N\&E)$ is low or inscrutable *does* -

when specified to these hypothetical creatures - constitute a defeater for our belief that *their* cognitive faculties are reliable. But then why should the same beliefs specified to ourselves not constitute a defeater for R specified to us? There is no relevant difference between the two cases since the facts concerning our origins are the same.

But there is a relevant difference. It may be true that if $P(R/N\&E)$ is assigned a low value when specified to the hypothetical creatures then it should also be assigned a low value when specified to us. But it's *not* true that if belief in that low probability claim results in a defeater in the case of the hypothetical creatures it also results in a defeater in our own case. First let's be clear about what exactly gets defeated in the case of the hypothetical creatures. It is *our* belief that *their* faculties are reliable. But notice that, in thinking about these hypothetical creatures, all we have to go on is *propositional* evidence; we have no *nonpropositional* evidence for R specified to them. That's why it is plausible to think that the belief that N&E along with the belief that $P(R/N\&E)$ is low or inscrutable (where both beliefs are specified to these hypothetical creatures) constitutes a defeater for our belief that *their* faculties are reliable. But of course things are different with our belief in the reliability of *our own* cognitive faculties. In our own case, we have *nonpropositional* evidence *in addition to* the sort of propositional evidence we have in the case of the hypothetical creatures. That's why the belief that $P(R/N\&E)$ is low or inscrutable along with the belief that N&E (where both beliefs are specified to us) does not constitute a defeater for our belief that our own faculties are reliable.¹¹

A second objection is that the Reidian response implies that R is beyond defeat. But R *could* be defeated. Suppose someone became convinced that she was the victim of a Cartesian demon. This would give her a defeater for R.

¹¹ Thus, Plantinga is right when he says in his 1993, p. 229 that the person considering R specified to the hypothetical creatures has no source of information about R other than the propositional evidence mentioned. But when he considers (pp. 233-34) what other sources of information we might have for R specified to *us*, he considers only other *propositional* evidence for R. And he considers it only as a candidate for being a defeater of a defeater for R instead of thinking of the other source of information about R as something that prevents us from having a defeater for R in the first place. He fails to acknowledge that we have *nonpropositional* evidence for R specified to us and that this is a relevant difference between the two cases; it's a difference that results in our having a defeater in the one case and not in the other.

That seems right. But nothing I've said conflicts with it. Consider again the example of your being falsely accused of stealing a letter when you clearly remember your innocence. The circumstantial (propositional) evidence fails to defeat your memory belief. But that doesn't mean that your memory belief is beyond defeat. You could become convinced that the memory in question was planted in you artificially by someone intending to deceive you. This would create a defeater for it. Or consider theism and horrendous evil. You might believe G in the basic way and thereby have a lot of warrant for it. If so, then the fact that you also think $P(G/HE)$ is low does not defeat your belief that G. But you could become convinced that your belief in G is the product of a Freudian sort of wish fulfillment - a way of forming beliefs that you take to be unreliable. Then you would have a defeater for your theistic belief.¹² In the same way, belief in the Cartesian demon might be a defeater for R even though belief in N&E together with belief in the low probability of R on N&E is not. Notice that the presence of these defeaters (the Freudian defeater for G or the Cartesian defeater for R) is compatible with the existence of nonpropositional evidence for G or for R. It's not that this nonpropositional evidence has no effect; rather, it's that its effect has been defeated by the stronger contrary effect of the defeater in question.¹³

V. A DISANALOGY?

I've claimed that my Reidian response to Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism is analogous to Plantinga's response to the probabilistic argument from evil. But is it? Here's a reason to think not. The example of the Freudian defeater for theism mentioned in the previous section is instructive. For it is successful in the face of nonpropositional evidence for theism even though the belief that $P(G/HE)$ is low, used in the argument from evil, is not. The reason

¹² Notice that the mere *existence* of the Freudian explanation is not in itself a defeater for G just as the mere existence of the Cartesian demon hypothesis is not in itself a defeater for R. It must also be the case that the alternative hypothesis in question is reasonable and/or believed.

¹³ Those sane humans for whom R is defeated (assuming there are such) are not counterexamples to my earlier suggestion that the outputs of R are beliefs naturally held by *all* sane humans in normal circumstances. For in order to be defeated, these beliefs had to first be held. And, in fact, they *are* held in normal circumstances; it is only in *abnormal* circumstances that someone comes to later believe she is the victim of a Cartesian demon.

for this, one might think, is that the Freudian defeater is an *undercutting* defeater. It works against theistic belief by casting doubt on the trustworthiness of its *source*. In this way it is unlike the argument from evil which is a *rebutting* defeater - a defeater that provides evidence for the *falsity* of theistic belief. If a person has sufficiently strong nonpropositional evidence for her theistic belief, it will not be defeated by her belief in the potential rebutting defeater that the probability of theism on her propositional evidence is low. Instead, that person will learn merely that one of her beliefs - her theistic belief, which she still reasonably holds - happens to be unlikely on her propositional evidence. But when she comes to have doubts about the trustworthiness of the source of her theistic belief, then she does have a defeater - an undercutting one. The nonpropositional evidence for theism doesn't help because its value as evidence is now in doubt.

This helps us to see how the Reidian response to Plantinga's proposed defeater for naturalism is supposed to be disanalogous to Plantinga's response to the defeater for theism from horrendous evil. Plantinga's response to the problem of evil worked (we'll waive concerns about whether theistic belief is properly basic) because the defeater from horrendous evil didn't cast doubt on the *source* of theistic belief. But, one might argue, the Reidian response won't work because Plantinga's proposed defeater for naturalism *does* cast doubt on the source of our beliefs - including the belief in naturalism. This is an important point. For in the previous section I conceded that the Freudian defeater for theistic belief and the artificial-memory-implant defeater for one's memory beliefs can be successful. What these defeaters have in common is that they are undercutting defeaters that focus on the source of the belief to be defeated with the aim of casting doubt on that source's trustworthiness. If I grant that such defeaters can work, how can I resist Plantinga's proposed defeater for naturalism, which works in the same way?

In order to answer to this question, it will be helpful to be more precise about what the Freudian defeater, the artificial-memory-implant defeater and the Plantingian defeater for

naturalism have in common. Here's the structure they share.¹⁴ We'll call the belief threatened with defeat 'B'. The proposed defeater for B consists of two further beliefs:

X: The source of B is of kind K.

Y: P(a belief source S is reliable/S is of kind K) is low or inscrutable.

This pair of beliefs is supposed to result in a defeater for B because a person who believes both X and Y will come to have grave doubts about the truth of

Z: The source of B is reliable.

And doubts about Z are the very sort of thing that result in an undercutting defeater for B. (Notice, by the way, that one doesn't need to actually believe that Z is false in order for B to be thus defeated.¹⁵) We can see as follows that each of the three defeaters under consideration is of the above form:

Freudian Defeater for Theism

Because of the following beliefs:

X: The source of my belief that G (i.e., that God exists) is wish fulfillment

Y: P(a belief source is reliable/it is a sort of wish fulfillment) is low or inscrutable

it is reasonable to doubt:

Z: The source of my belief that G is reliable.

Artificial-Memory-Implant Defeater for W

Because of the following beliefs:

X: The source of my belief that W (i.e., that I was out for a walk in the woods at the time the letter was stolen) is artificial input by scientists who, as far as I know, have no particular interest in the beliefs so produced being true.

Y: P(a belief source is reliable/it consists of input by scientists who, as far as I know, have no particular interest in the beliefs so produced being true) is low or inscrutable

it is reasonable to doubt:

Z: The source of my belief that W is reliable.

Plantinga's N&E Defeater for Naturalism

Because of the following beliefs:

X: The sources of our beliefs (including my belief in naturalism) came about by way of N&E

Y: P(a belief source is reliable/it came about by way of N&E) is low or inscrutable

it is reasonable to doubt:

Z: Our belief sources are reliable (i.e., R).

By way of contrast, consider the form of the defeater for theism from evil:

¹⁴ If they share a structure at all. See below where I raise doubts about whether the Freudian and memory implant defeaters really involve probabilistic inference in the way that Plantinga's proposed defeater does.

¹⁵ It's also worth noting that to agree that doubts about Z are sufficient to defeat B is not to agree that belief in Z is necessary for B's justification or warrant.

Defeater for Theism from Evil

Because of the following beliefs:

X: HE (i.e., there exists horrendous evil)

Y: P(G/HE) is low or inscrutable

it is reasonable to doubt:

B: G.

In each of these four cases, the person holding the threatened belief B (whether B is theism or W or naturalism) is supposed to have a defeater for it upon learning that the relevant X and Y are true. But in the first three cases, the defeater is an undercutting one that works by causing doubts about Z - the belief about the *source* of B - whereas in the last case, the defeater is a rebutting one that works by casting doubt on the truth of B itself.¹⁶ What is supposed to cause problems for my Reidian response is the fact that Plantinga's proposed defeater for naturalism is (in the ways just noted) more like the Freudian and memory implant defeaters than it is like the defeater from evil.

The reason the Freudian defeater for theism and the artificial-memory-implant defeater for W are successful is that they cause the person holding the threatened belief to have doubts about that belief's source. I agree that if defeaters of this sort can succeed in causing such doubt, they will be effective even if one has nonpropositional evidence in support of the belief that the source in question is reliable. However, it's important to recognize that there is no reason to think that such defeaters will be successful if the person holding the threatened belief does *not* come to have doubts about the trustworthiness of its source. So the question we need to ask ourselves is whether belief in X and Y in cases that are like the first three *always requires* the person holding the threatened belief to have doubts about Z? I say it doesn't.

The natural response to learning X and Y in the Freudian and memory implant cases is for the person who was holding B to have grave doubts about Z and, on the basis of such doubts, to retract B. Let's call this sort of response 'response 1'. The alternative response that I want to consider - response 2 - is this: the person who was holding B accepts X and Y, agrees that they show that Z is unlikely but continues to hold both Z and B, pointing out that X and Y have simply shown her that something she knows to be true - i.e., Z - happens to be unlikely on other

¹⁶ Note however that the three *undercutting* defeaters (for G, for W and for N) involve *rebutting* defeaters for the belief that the source of the belief that G or W or N is reliable.

propositions she believes. This person has no doubts about Z even though she accepts X and Y. If there are cases where this second sort of response is rational, then there are cases where a potential defeater that has the same structure as the Freudian and memory implant defeaters doesn't work. And if Plantinga's defeater for naturalism is one of those cases, then my Reidian response is successful after all.

But isn't it obvious that there *are* cases in which someone can believe propositions resembling X and Y without having doubts about a corresponding proposition resembling Z? If a person comes to learn that some proposition she thinks is true is unlikely on other things she believes, that doesn't automatically require her to reject it. For example, consider X, Y and Z in the straw drawing case:

Straw Drawing Case

X: The straw is drawn from the lottery straws.

Y: P(straw is about three inches long/it is drawn from the lottery straws) is low or inscrutable.

Z: The straw that is drawn is about three inches long.

Suppose you came to believe, in the normal way (through observation), that Z - i.e., that the straw you just selected from a large number of lottery straws is about three inches long. Then suppose you learn that all the lottery straws but one were twelve inches in length and that, as a result, you believe Y. This together with your belief that X would *not* make it reasonable for you to stop believing that the straw you drew was about three inches long. Instead, it would make it reasonable for you to think that something you *know* is true (i.e., Z) is *unlikely* given your propositional evidence. This shows that there are cases where someone could believe X and Y without coming to have doubts about Z. And that suggests that there are cases where response 2 is the correct response to defeaters with the same structure as the Freudian and memory implant defeaters.¹⁷

¹⁷ One might resist the parallel I'm drawing between the straw drawing case and cases like the Freudian and memory implant defeaters on the grounds that the latter two involve undercutting defeat whereas the straw drawing case involves only rebutting defeat. But (as I mentioned in note 16) the cases involving undercutting defeat work by way of a rebutting defeater for the belief that *the source of the belief threatened with undercutting defeat is reliable*. And my point is that if this rebutting defeater doesn't work, then the undercutting defeater that depends on it won't work either. So it is relevant to focus on rebutting defeaters (like the straw drawing case) that parallel the sort of rebutting defeater that plays a role in the undercutting defeat in the Freudian and memory implant cases.

But is Plantinga's proposed defeater for naturalism a case of this sort? Is it more like the straw drawing case or more like the cases of the Freudian and memory implant defeaters? Well, in each of these four cases (the straw drawing case, the Freudian and memory implant defeaters and Plantinga's proposed defeater for naturalism) we have some evidence *against Z*. That evidence is a probabilistic inference from X and Y. If that evidence is not outweighed by other sufficiently strong evidence *for Z*, then the sensible thing to do is to have doubts about Z. The reason it is sensible to persist in believing Z in the straw drawing case is that the evidence for Z from sense perception and memory is sufficiently strong to outweigh the counterevidence from the probabilistic inference. But in the Freudian and memory implant cases, there is no evidence for Z that outweighs the probabilistic evidence against it. In the remainder of this section I will explain why, in light of the Reidian account of how we know R, Plantinga's proposed defeater for naturalism is more like the straw drawing case than it is like the Freudian or memory implant cases.

Let's first compare the various cases with respect to evidence *against Z*. The natural way to understand the case of the Freudian defeater for theism is so that the person holding the theistic belief thinks the probability mentioned in Y (i.e., the probability that a source is reliable given that it is a sort of wish fulfillment) is equal to zero. This makes one wonder whether the propositional evidence against Z in this case is properly thought of as merely *probabilistic*. For the person holding the threatened theistic belief doesn't think only that beliefs formed by way of wish fulfillment are *unlikely* to be reliable. She thinks they're *not* reliable. And, of course, if she thinks that then she should certainly have doubts about Z. Similar remarks apply to the memory implant case. If a person comes to believe that her memories are implants, then she just assumes their source isn't reliable.¹⁸ But with Plantinga's proposed defeater for naturalism the case against Z isn't nearly as strong. In order for it to be as strong, Plantinga would need to argue that

¹⁸ My point is that our *natural tendency* is to think that the subjects in these two cases who think their belief's source is wish fulfillment or due to a memory implant will think the source in question is *not* reliable, not merely that it is unlikely to be reliable. This tendency on our part (to read these particular cases non-probabilistically) is present even when the case is explicitly described in merely probabilistic terms.

cognitive faculties that come about by way of N&E are *not* reliable, not merely that they are *unlikely* to be reliable (or that the probability that such faculties are reliable is low or inscrutable). But Plantinga doesn't come close to arguing that such faculties aren't reliable. In fact, the naturalist isn't even given a good reason to believe that the probability mentioned in Y in the Plantingian N&E case is *low*. The only persuasive reason Plantinga gives for thinking that the $P(R/N\&E)$ is low or inscrutable is that $P(R/N\&E)$ is inscrutable.¹⁹ This isn't to say that Plantinga's proposed defeater doesn't count against naturalism. If one was considering whether or not to maintain her belief in naturalism and the *only* relevant consideration was that the probability of that belief's source being reliable was inscrutable, that would be enough to make a sensible person have doubts about the source and, therefore, about naturalism. Nevertheless, it isn't a very *strong* reason to have doubts about Z - not nearly as strong as the reasons for doubts about Z in the Freudian and memory implant cases.²⁰ In fact, the Plantingian N&E case against *his* version of Z is weaker even than the (easily overturned) case against the Z of the straw drawing example since, as I filled in the latter example, the probability in question was known to be low.

Now what about the evidence *for* Z? In the straw drawing case, the evidence for Z is nonpropositional evidence via sense perception and memory. This evidence is strong enough to adequately counter the probabilistic inference against Z. It's not that the evidence for Z is a defeater-defeater that defeats the defeater constituted by the probabilistic inference from X and Y. Instead, the nonpropositional evidence for Z in the straw drawing case prevents the propositional evidence against Z from ever functioning successfully as a defeater in the first place. The same sort of thing happens in the case of Plantinga's proposed defeater for naturalism. In the Plantingian N&E case, the naturalist has extremely strong nonpropositional evidence for Z - stronger, one might think, than the evidence one has for Z in the straw drawing

¹⁹ Plantinga suggests this in his 1993, p. 229.

²⁰ This claim - that the evidence against Z in the Plantingian N&E case is weaker than the evidence against Z in the Freudian and memory implant cases - does *not* depend on my taking the probabilities mentioned in Y in the latter two cases to be equal to zero. So long as the probabilities in the Freudian and the memory implant cases are sufficiently low and the probability in Plantinga's N&E case is merely inscrutable, the claim is justified.

case. Z, in the Plantingian N&E case, is R; and the nonpropositional evidence supporting it comes by way of common sense. Again, it's not that the nonpropositional evidence from common sense is a defeater-defeater that defeats the probabilistic defeater for Z. Rather, the nonpropositional evidence for Z (i.e., for R) prevents the probabilistic inference from ever functioning as a defeater for Z in the first place.²¹ Furthermore (and this is the important thing to recognize here), the evidence for Z in the Plantingian N&E case is as strong as or stronger than it is in the Freudian and memory implant cases. For it is natural and sensible to place much more confidence in R than in the reliability of the source of one's belief that G or the trustworthiness (on that particular occasion) of the source of one's belief that W. As a result, less counterevidence is required to make it rational to mistrust the source of G or of W than is required to make it rational to doubt R.

So, the evidence *against* Z is much weaker in the Plantingian N&E case than it is in either the Freudian or memory implant cases; it is even weaker than it is in the straw drawing case. And the evidence *for* Z is much stronger in the Plantingian case than it is in either the Freudian or memory implant cases; it is at least as strong as it is in the straw drawing case. It is, therefore, reasonable to conclude that in the Plantingian case the evidence for Z outweighs the evidence against it. In this way, the Plantingian case is more like the straw drawing case than it is like the Freudian or memory implant cases. In the straw drawing case, it is reasonable to believe that the straw you drew was about three inches long. All that your acceptance of X and Y does in that case is make it reasonable for you to think that something you know to be true - namely, that the straw you drew was about three inches long - is unlikely to be true given other things you know. The same goes for the case of Plantinga's proposed defeater for naturalism. It is reasonable for the naturalist to believe R. And all that her acceptance of X and Y does in that case is make it

²¹ If the probabilistic evidence against Z *did* function as a defeater, the nonpropositional evidence for Z could not be used as a defeater-defeater of that defeater. For once one doubts Z (which in this case is R), one has an undercutting defeater for *all* one's beliefs, including R itself. One couldn't very well rely on common sense to remove one's doubts about common sense. See section VI for further discussion of this issue.

reasonable for her to think that something she knows to be true - namely, that her cognitive faculties are reliable - is unlikely to be true given other things she believes.

In sum, the rational response to learning X and Y in the case of Plantinga's proposed defeater for naturalism is not response 1 - having doubts about Z - but response 2 - continuing to believe Z (i.e., R) despite the fact that it is known to be unlikely given other things one believes. The linchpin of my defense of this Reidian response to Plantinga's proposed defeater for naturalism is that our confidence in R (which is believed in the basic way) is reasonably as great or even greater than our confidence in properly basic sense perceptual and memory beliefs like Z in the straw drawing case. It is because of this that the naturalist's belief that R is not defeated by the sort of probabilistic inference on which Plantinga relies in his evolutionary argument against naturalism.

VI. EPISTEMIC CIRCULARITY

One might object to the parallel I've drawn between the straw drawing case and Plantinga's proposed defeater for naturalism on the grounds that, in the straw drawing case, Z is not about the trustworthiness of a belief's source whereas it is in the Plantingian N&E case. But that difference is irrelevant. Consider the case of having doubts about one's auditory beliefs where X, Y and Z are as follows:

Auditory Belief Source Case

X: My auditory beliefs are the result of input by scientists who, as far as I know, have no particular interest in the beliefs so produced being true.

Y: P(a belief source is reliable/it consists of input by scientists who, as far as I know, have no particular interest in the beliefs so produced being true) is low or inscrutable.

Z: My auditory beliefs are reliable.

If I ground my belief in Z in this case on the positive results of the many tests I and others have performed to check my hearing (tests which in no way depend on the reliability of *my* auditory beliefs) then that belief is completely reasonable. And this is so even if I also justifiably believe X and Y. I am completely justified in thinking that Z in this case is true despite the fact that it is

unlikely to be true given the above versions of X and Y. The results here are exactly parallel to those in the straw drawing case. So the alleged problem with the parallel I've drawn doesn't seem to be a problem at all.

But perhaps the worry about the difference between the straw drawing example and the case of Plantinga's proposed defeater for naturalism is not just that Z, in the Plantingian case, is about the trustworthiness of a belief source whereas it isn't in the straw drawing case. Perhaps the real concern with my claim that the two cases are alike is that there is some sort of circular reasoning going on in the Plantingian N&E case that isn't present in the straw drawing example. In the straw drawing case, what makes the belief that Z (i.e., that you drew a three-inch straw) reasonable even after you learn that it is extremely unlikely for such a belief to be true is the nonpropositional evidence you have, via your short term memory and your sense perception, of your clearly observing yourself drawing that three-inch straw a few moments ago. But in the case of Plantinga's proposed defeater for naturalism, what makes your belief in Z (i.e., in R) reasonable, according to Reid, is the nonpropositional evidence you have for it via common sense. The problem is that in learning X and Y in the Plantingian N&E case you thereby obtain a reason to think that the probability that your belief sources - including common sense - are reliable is low or inscrutable. And, say those who object to my Reidian response, once you learn *that* you can't continue to trust your nonpropositional evidence for Z. For that evidence will itself be in doubt. You can't use the evidence of common sense to verify that the evidence of common sense (along with other kinds of evidence) is worthy of your trust.

As I suggested above, the complaint being expressed here is that circularity of a certain sort is unacceptable. You can't come to believe that a belief source is trustworthy by relying on the trustworthiness of that very source. This is a very plausible sounding complaint. But it is ambiguous. I will distinguish three ways of understanding it. The first two are extremely sensible; the third isn't. But it is only the third that applies to my Reidian response to Plantinga's proposed defeater for naturalism.

The first way to understand the complaint is as follows: a *logically* circular argument for the conclusion that a belief source is trustworthy contributes nothing to the reasonableness of accepting that conclusion. A logically circular argument is one that includes its conclusion among its essential premises (where an essential premise is one whose deletion would make the argument invalid). We needn't pause to discuss the reasons why such an argument is completely unhelpful.

The second way to understand the complaint is this: epistemically circular arguments for the trustworthiness of a belief source cannot help us *restore lost confidence* in such a source. An epistemically circular argument for the trustworthiness of a belief source S relies on premises, belief in which is produced by S. But if one has doubts about the trustworthiness of S, one's confidence in S won't be restored by an argument depending on S's own testimony. On this second reading, the complaint is one we can, once again, readily appreciate.

But neither of these two understandings of the complaint applies to the Reidian response I've developed.²² According to that Reidian response, a person can rationally continue to believe Z - which, in the Plantingian N&E case, is R - even after learning that it is unlikely on other things she believes. The reason belief in R can be maintained is that it is justifiably believed quite firmly in the *basic* way. By employing her faculty of common sense, the person holding R comes to have very powerful *nonpropositional* evidence for R, which justifies her belief in it. So R isn't believed on the basis of a logically circular argument. It isn't held on the basis of an argument at all since it is based on nonpropositional evidence. For the same reason, it isn't based on an epistemically circular argument.

Nevertheless, the belief in question *is* infected with a sort of epistemic circularity. For the belief that R - i.e., that all of our belief sources, including common sense, are reliable - is itself produced in the basic way by common sense. But although this is a case of a belief source

²² Reid himself demonstrates an appreciation of something like the above two versions of the complaint in question. And his response to them bears a strong resemblance to the one I present in this paragraph (or perhaps I should say that my response bears a strong resemblance to his). See his discussion of the seventh of the "first principles of contingent truths" in Reid 1969, pp. 630-33 (parts of which are included in Reid 1983, pp. 275-77).

vouching for its own trustworthiness (as well as the trustworthiness of many other belief sources), it is not a case of a belief source being depended on to *restore* confidence in its own trustworthiness. For the person in question does not have any doubts about the trustworthiness of common sense. It's true that if she did, then common sense would be of no help to her. But because she holds Z with confidence, there is no restoration of confidence needed. The epistemic circularity infects the process by which she comes to have confidence in Z in the first place. But it does not infect any process by which she comes to have restored confidence in Z since there *isn't* any such process. There isn't any such process because confidence in Z has not been lost and so is not in need of restoring.

This leads us naturally to the third and strongest reading of the complaint: if there is *any* epistemic circularity involved in the production or sustenance of a belief, that belief is not justified. And this complaint *does* apply to the Reidian response I've presented. For, as I explained in the previous paragraph, according to that response (to Plantinga), one can come to have, via common sense, a noninferentially justified belief that common sense is trustworthy.²³ But this complaint is not nearly so plausible as the other two. I grant that, at first glance, even this third version of the complaint seems to have something going for it. But a careful consideration of exactly what's involved in such circularity and of what the alternatives to it are makes it doubtful that this sort of circularity is vicious. I don't have the space here to delve into this. So I'll refer the reader to my 2000 as well as to Alston's 1986, Sosa's 1994 and Van Cleve's 1979 and 1984 for criticisms of the assumption that such epistemic circularity is always objectionable.²⁴ However, I will point out one troublesome result of rejecting this sort of

²³ Reid more or less explicitly concedes this. Concerning R, he says (in Reid 1969, p. 632):

How then come we to be assured of this fundamental truth on which all others rest? Perhaps evidence, as in many other respects it resembles light, so in this also, that as light, which is the discoverer of all visible objects, discovers itself at the same time: so evidence, which is the voucher for all truth, vouches for itself at the same time.

²⁴ The basic defense of this sort of epistemic circularity is this. A belief can be justified according to a principle even if the person doesn't have a justified belief in the truth of the principle. The principle could be an internalist one like *a belief is justified if it is clearly and distinctly perceived* or an externalist one like *a belief is justified if it is formed via a reliable process*. To avoid regress problems, some internalists and most, if not all, externalists are willing to deny that the subject must believe the principle itself in order for the belief to be justified in accordance with the principle. But then one could use beliefs that are justified *according to* the principle as premises in an argument that

circularity. If this third complaint is an appropriate one, it creates problems not only for my Reidian response but also for anyone who thinks belief in R is justified. For, obviously, a person cannot come to believe R without relying on her own cognitive faculties. But that means that *any* belief in R will be infected with epistemic circularity. Sosa makes the point like this. Suppose that T is our total way of forming beliefs. The belief that *T is reliable* will, of necessity, be formed using T itself; any argument for T's reliability will be circular insofar as it employs premises that receive what warrant they have by being outputs of T. He concludes that:

a correct and full response to rational pressure for disclosure of what justifies one in upholding the premises must circle back down to the truth of the conclusion. *Necessarily* such an argument must be epistemically circular - that much seems clear enough. To rue that fact at this stage is hence like pining for a patron saint of modesty (who blesses all and only those who do not bless themselves), once we have seen that there could not possibly be such a saint. (1994, p. 284)

Not even God could form the belief that his ways of forming beliefs are trustworthy without relying on those ways of forming beliefs (cf. Plantinga 1996b, p. 342).

In short, my response to the third version of the circularity complaint is this. First, it is not convincing for reasons others and I discuss at length elsewhere. However, if it were plausible, we could easily show that *everyone* - naturalist and theist alike - has a defeater for R. For if the third version of the circularity complaint were correct, then belief in R can't be justified. The conclusion of Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism would thereby be vindicated but at the cost of becoming highly uninteresting in light of a simpler argument for a much more general conclusion - one that creates a problem for Plantinga, the naturalist and every other possible cognizer as well.

Before moving on, let me return to my claim that the circularity involved in the Reidian response to Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism is *not* of the unacceptable second kind - the kind where epistemic circularity infects the attempt to *restore* confidence in R. For someone might say this: "Once I come to believe that R is unlikely on other things I believe I *should* lose confidence in my belief that R (in which case that confidence will need restoring

is intended as a justification for the conclusion that the principle in question is true. This implies that epistemic circularity is not always objectionable.

after all). This is just to emphasize something that we accept in the straw drawing case and the auditory belief case. In each of those cases, X and Y give us a reason, at least initially, to have doubts about Z.²⁵ But those doubts about Z are quickly countered (in those two cases) by strong evidence in support of Z - evidence whose value has *not been called into question*. The same thing should happen in the case of Plantinga's defeater for naturalism. If I am a naturalist, I should, initially at least, have doubts about Z (i.e., R) upon learning Plantinga's versions of X and Y. But, I can't in this case rely on any other evidence to counter these doubts because *all* other evidence has been called into question in virtue of my having doubts about R." The main point of this objection is that the believer in N&E *should initially have doubts* about R upon learning that P(R/N&E) is inscrutable. Because of these doubts, the epistemic circularity in question is of the unacceptable second kind since it is involved in the attempt to *restore* lost confidence in R.

So the crucial question is: Should the believer in N&E, initially at least, doubt R once she learns that P(R/N&E) is inscrutable? Or should her natural and sensible confidence in R remain firm and high? If the latter, then the epistemic circularity is of the third kind and is not problematic; if the former, she is in real trouble.²⁶ To address these questions, let's consider another example:

Typical Skeptical Objection to R

Because of the following beliefs:

X: I currently have these experiences and beliefs

Y: P(R/I currently have these experiences and beliefs) is inscrutable

it is reasonable to doubt:

Z: R.

A few clarificatory comments on this example are in order. First, the phrase "these experiences and beliefs" which appears in X and Y is to be understood as if it is accompanied by an

²⁵ Without pursuing the matter, I'll just note here that I don't think this is true of the straw drawing case.

²⁶ Notice that what's at issue here is whether the Reidian response to Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism involves a defeater-defeater (this would be the case if Plantinga's argument led to initial doubts about R) or whether it prevents Plantinga's argument from functioning as a defeater for R in the first place (this would be the case if Plantinga's argument engendered no doubts). I agree that the Reidian response won't work as a defeater-defeater. If Plantinga's argument manages to create doubts about R, one can't rely on anything to quell those doubts (since all belief sources are now in doubt). But the Reidian response is not meant to be a defeater-defeater. As I argue below, it is intended to show that Plantinga's argument doesn't function as a defeater in the first place.

introspective pointing to *all* my current experiences and beliefs. Second, the motivation for believing Y in this example is due to reflection on typical skeptical scenarios like the Cartesian demon or the brain in the vat (hence the name of the example). The experiences and beliefs of a person who was the victim of a Cartesian demon or who was a brain in a vat would, by stipulation, be exactly as they in fact are except that that person's belief sources would be radically unreliable. So how likely is it that one's belief sources are reliable given that she has the experiences and beliefs she does - ones that suggest to her (among other things) that her belief sources are reliable? It seems that, in light of the above considerations concerning typical skeptical objections, this probability is inscrutable. Hence Y above. (Of course if we added all the other things we believe to that on which R is conditionalized in Y, things might be different. But we aren't adding them.) Third, I agree that the following strategy of objecting to Plantinga's N&E argument isn't generally acceptable: (a) replace N&E in Plantinga's argument with *any* old proposition to get a parallel argument and (b) note that the parallel argument is a bad one. For the parallel argument to be acceptable for use in this sort of objection to Plantinga's argument, one must replace N&E with something that is *relevant* to our confidence in R. N&E is relevant because it tells of the origin of the faculties mentioned in R. But my replacement for N&E in the typical skeptical objection example - namely, that I currently have these experiences and beliefs - is also relevant because whatever it is that I have going for my belief that R is going to be among my beliefs and experiences (or at least many people think that this is so).

The thing to notice is that the typical skeptical objection to R given above doesn't require one to doubt R. One can recognize that the probability mentioned in Y (in the typical skeptical objection case) is inscrutable - that one can't see that it is high - and yet still sensibly believe that one's faculties are reliable. For one's belief that those faculties are reliable is, as Reid says, a *basic* belief. It is not formed on the basis of other beliefs such as the belief that *I currently have these beliefs and experiences* and that *R is likely given that I have these experiences*. Instead, belief in R is formed on the basis of the experiences themselves - in particular, the experience of the emotional of ridicule. (Sense perceptual belief works the same sort of way: I don't believe in

the existence of external objects of sense perception on the basis of the belief that *I have such and such sense perceptual experiences* and that *the existence of such objects is likely given that I have experiences of that sort*. I just believe in such objects on the basis of the experience itself.) Because I don't base my belief in R on the belief that P(R/I currently have these experiences and beliefs) is high, the fact that I believe Y, according to which that probability is inscrutable, needn't lead me to have doubts about R.

In the previous paragraph, I've explained why, in the typical skeptical objection example, one can maintain belief in R despite one's acceptance of X and Y in that case. There is no need to doubt R, even initially. And my suggestion is that since Plantinga's N&E case is relevantly like the typical skeptical objection example, the naturalist can sensibly maintain *without doubts* her belief in R despite her acceptance of Plantinga's versions of X and Y (having to do with N&E). Thus, the answer to our crucial question -Should the believer in N&E, initially at least, doubt R once she learns that P(R/N&E) is inscrutable? - is 'No'. Just as rationality doesn't require us to doubt R in response to the typical skeptical objection given above, so also, the naturalist doesn't need to doubt R in response to Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism.

If one wants to resist the response I've just recommended to the typical skeptical objection, then one can save Plantinga's argument but only at the cost of making it uninteresting. For using the typical skeptical objection, one can reach a similar skeptical conclusion (i.e., that R is defeated) that will apply to *everyone* regardless of whether he or she is a theist or a naturalist. In sum, either (a) there is no need to doubt R (even initially) in response to either Plantinga's N&E argument or the typical skeptical objection in which case the only epistemic circularity involved in the Reidian response is of the acceptable *third* kind or (b) one should doubt R in response to both Plantinga's N&E argument and the typical skeptical objection in which case the epistemic circularity involved is of the unacceptable *second* kind. But if (b), then Plantinga's argument becomes uninteresting in light of the equally convincing typical skeptical objection for the same conclusion which applies to everyone - naturalist and theist alike.

VII. NATURALISM AND COMMON SENSE

Let's turn now to a concern that a naturalist might have with the Reidian account of how we know R. The problem with Reid's account, according to this objection, is that it's not easy to see how to fit the faculty of common sense within a naturalistic framework. We can easily fit our sense perceptual faculties into this framework because we can see (at least in broad outline) how, in the usual cases, the fact that p causes our sense perceptual belief that p. And we can see that the relevant causal story involves no reference to things that aren't a part of the naturalist's ontology. But there is no available story of this sort to be told in the case of commonsense belief in propositions such as R. So my Reidian response to Plantinga isn't of much help to the naturalist.

A very similar complaint has been lodged against a priori knowledge. (Benaceraff 1973, Devitt 1998) But the sensible naturalistic response in each case - the first volley at any rate - seems to be essentially the same. First, we recognize that we do in fact seem to know *in the basic way* (i.e., noninferentially) the very things that are supposed to be outputs of these faculties: I know in the basic way the necessary truths that modus ponens is a valid argument form and that $2+3=5$; likewise, I know in the basic way the contingent truths that the thoughts of which I am conscious are *my* thoughts and that my cognitive faculties are reliable. But then, given this starting point, the naturalist will sensibly assume that, *unless there is some good reason to think otherwise*, common sense and a priori knowledge *are* compatible with naturalism.

Well, is there any good reason to think otherwise? Before answering this question, we need to distinguish some of the many ways in which the term 'naturalism' is used. The reader will recall that, in this paper, we have been concerned with *metaphysical* naturalism - roughly, the view that there are no supernatural entities.²⁷ One might well ask here whether the ontology of a

²⁷ One might object that this view is better called 'anti-supernaturalism' than 'naturalism' of some kind. Perhaps so. But Plantinga thinks (see his 1996b, pp. 350-52) that any sort of metaphysical naturalism will entail anti-supernaturalism. So in objecting to anti-supernaturalism, he is objecting to metaphysical naturalism too. In any case, whatever the view is called, it is the one Plantinga is attacking and I am defending.

metaphysical naturalist could include abstract objects like propositions, properties, numbers or sets. Or should we just say that metaphysical naturalism is the view that everything is physical and, hence, that there are no abstract objects? Or perhaps there are several varieties of metaphysical naturalism - some of which include abstract objects in their ontologies and some of which do not. In any case, it is a sort of *metaphysical* naturalism that is the focus of our discussion in this paper.

The other main sort of naturalism is *epistemological* naturalism. Alvin Goldman identifies three sorts of epistemological naturalism - scientific naturalism (SN), empiricist naturalism (EN) and moderate naturalism (MN). He defines them (in his forthcoming, section 2) as follows:

(SN) Epistemology is a branch of science. The statements of epistemology are a subset of the statements of science, and the proper method of doing epistemology is the empirical method of science.

(EN) All justification arises from empirical methods. The task of epistemology is to articulate and defend these methods in further detail.

(MN) (A) All epistemic warrant or justification is a function of psychological (perhaps computational) processes that produce or preserve belief.
(B) The epistemological enterprise needs appropriate help from science, especially the science of the mind.

Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism is not directed at these forms of naturalism. It is directed at a form of metaphysical naturalism. Likewise, my Reidian response is aimed at defending *metaphysical* naturalism against Plantinga's evolutionary argument. So what's important for my response is that knowledge via common sense is compatible with metaphysical naturalism, not that it is compatible with one of the above forms of epistemological naturalism. (Of course, metaphysical naturalism isn't compatible with Reid's ontology since Reid is a theist. But what's at issue is whether it is compatible with those elements of Reid's view on which my Reidian response to Plantinga's evolutionary argument depends.)

Now we can return to our question: Is there any good reason to think that a priori knowledge or commonsense knowledge is incompatible with naturalism? Prior to my laying out the above distinctions, one might have been inclined to say that there were some arguments on offer for the incompatibility of a priori knowledge and naturalism. But once we are sensitive to the fact that

there are many different kinds of naturalism, we should be more hesitant in answering this question affirmatively. Michael Devitt and Philip Kitcher, two philosophers who take their naturalism to be in conflict with a priori knowledge, define naturalism so that is something like (EN).²⁸ Devitt says (1998, p. 46) that the heart of epistemological naturalism is captured by his claim that “the only way of knowing is the empirical way of knowing”. And Kitcher (1992, p. 76) thinks of naturalism as including the claim that “[v]irtually nothing is knowable *a priori*, and, in particular, no epistemological principle is knowable *a priori*”. These quotations certainly make it look as if they think of naturalism as the sort of epistemological naturalism that implies empiricism (or something very much like it). Of course, it is very easy to argue that *that* sort of naturalism is incompatible with a priori knowledge. But that isn’t what is at issue in this paper. Our concern is the compatibility of metaphysical naturalism with a priori knowledge and, more importantly, with commonsense knowledge. In light of the above comments, we shouldn’t be so optimistic about there being good reasons for the naturalist to reject her assumption that metaphysical naturalism is compatible with these two kinds of knowledge. Even Devitt himself says:

Metaphysical naturalism is *physicalism*: the view, roughly, that all entities are physical entities and that the laws they obey are in some way dependent on physical laws. This is a reductive doctrine. It has *nothing* to say about ways of knowing except that they must be, like everything else, physicalistically acceptable: so it alone entails nothing one way or the other about a priori knowledge. (1998, p. 46)²⁹

The above remarks place the ball back in the objector’s court. She could respond in a couple of ways. I will mention only two. First, she could disapprove of my taking it to be unproblematic to begin our epistemological investigations by appealing to obvious facts about what we know. In doing this I am employing what Chisholm (1982) calls ‘the particularist approach’ to epistemological questions. Those who employ this approach begin with clear cases of what counts as knowledge or justified belief and proceed from there. But as I mentioned in the introduction, there are those who object to this approach.³⁰ Any naturalists who object to it

²⁸ Goldman makes basically this same point about Devitt and Kitcher in his forthcoming, section 2.

²⁹ See also Georges Rey’s defense of the compatibility of naturalism and a priori knowledge in his 1998.

³⁰ Devitt says (1998, p. 46):

will not be able to respond to Plantinga's arguments in the Reidian way I suggest. However, given the popularity of particularism among contemporary epistemologists - including contemporary epistemologists who are metaphysical naturalists - the Reidian response I've provided should recommend itself to many.

The other response the objector could make is to say that although metaphysical naturalism hasn't been shown to be inconsistent with commonsense knowledge, that doesn't give commonsense a clean bill of health from the naturalist's perspective. For metaphysical naturalists are typically inclined to accept some sort of epistemological naturalism as well. So, according to the objector, I also need to show that commonsense knowledge is compatible with at least *some* sort of epistemological naturalism.

I'm not so sure this is true. But I offer this response. (MN) - the sort of epistemological naturalism Goldman favors - says the epistemological enterprise needs *appropriate* help from the sciences. Does this mean that, according to (MN), one can't posit *anything* in one's epistemological theory that hasn't been established by the sciences? This certainly doesn't seem to be the suggestion Goldman is making in proposing (MN). He insists (forthcoming, section 2) that (MN) involves no such empiricist commitments. John Pollock and Joseph Cruz (1999, 162-73) also consider themselves to be supporters of epistemological naturalism. But they says this:

At this stage of the development of cognitive psychology, the most appropriate methodology for investigating procedural knowledge is the standard philosophical methodology. The philosopher constructs thought experiments, makes judgments about whether certain kinds of beliefs or inferences would be epistemically justified in the circumstances envisioned, and then tries to construct a theory capturing the resulting "philosophical intuitions". ... [T]he best way to study [epistemology] may not be with the standard tools of contemporary cognitive psychology. (1999, p. 172)

Epistemological naturalism [i.e., empirical naturalism or (EN) according to which the only way of knowing is the empirical way] applies to all knowledge. So it applies to knowledge of ways of knowing themselves

...

This might signal his reject of particularism insofar as particularism takes seriously (as a source of apparently nonempirical knowledge about our ways of knowing) our natural inclinations to judge certain cases of belief as obvious cases of knowledge.

Clearly, someone who is an epistemological naturalist in the sense that either Pollock, Cruz or Goldman is could affirm the existence of a priori knowledge even if she lacked a scientific account of how a priori knowledge works.³¹

Now as I suggested above, one of the main reasons that some epistemological naturalists (e.g. Devitt 1998, p. 50) resist the suggestion that we have a priori knowledge is that we can give no plausible scientific account of it. From the perspective of (EN) or (SN), this has devastating consequences for a priori knowledge (and a similar problem would afflict commonsense knowledge). For if we can't give a scientific account of a priori knowledge then, according to (SN), we can't do epistemology with respect to a priori knowledge. According to (SN), science is *the* method for doing epistemology. Likewise, if we haven't determined using empirical methods (like those of science) that we have a priori knowledge then, according to (EN), we have no reason to think there is such a thing. For according to (EN), the *only* way to find things out is the empirical way. But from the perspective of Goldman's (MN) or Pollock's and Cruz's epistemological naturalism, the fact that we lack an adequate scientific account of a priori knowledge or of commonsense knowledge isn't as problematic. Sure, it would be great to have such accounts and that is where continued scientific investigation could help us. But although we don't have such accounts yet, we certainly haven't come close to exhaustively researching the phenomena associated with what we think of as a priori and commonsense belief. One can reasonably be hopeful that we will eventually come up with such accounts after further investigation. Indeed, as Goldman reports (forthcoming, section 5), there have recently been some advances in our scientific understanding of a priori knowledge. Ultimately, however, nonempiricist and nonscientistic epistemological naturalists don't *need* such scientific results in order to take commonsense and a priori knowledge seriously.³²

³¹ One of the purposes of Goldman's forthcoming is to argue that (MN) is compatible with a priori knowledge or warrant.

³² Of course, those relying on common sense or a priori intuition *do* need to address potential threats to such knowledge if any are posed by such results (see the preface to DePaul and Ramsey (eds.) 1998). But the threats have to be something more than evidence that a priori intuition or common sense is *fallible*. We know *that* of vision and memory and still sensibly rely on them. In considering the appropriate attitude to take toward common sense and a priori intuition, we don't want to follow the example of Descartes who, upon noting that his senses sometimes

Much more could and should be said about the compatibility of naturalism and Reid's view that we know things via common sense. But what I've said above shows, at the very least, that it is by no means obvious that the metaphysical naturalist (i.e., the anti-supernaturalist) cannot avail herself of my proposed Reidian response to Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism.

VIII. BUT IS REID'S ACCOUNT TRUE?

Perhaps if Reid's account of how we know things via common sense were true it would make possible the response to Plantinga's argument sketched in section IV and defended in sections V and VI. And perhaps, as I've argued in the previous section, Reid's account is *compatible* with metaphysical naturalism. But how does this help the naturalist if Reid's account isn't true or even plausible? In order for my commonsense response to Plantinga to be useful, we need some reason to take Reid's account seriously. I don't have the space here to delve into a full-fledged defense of Reid's account of common sense knowledge. However, I would at least like to say *something* in support of Reid's view and to explain some of the considerations that attract me to it.

But first, let's make the task more manageable. There is no need to defend all of Reid's views on common sense. One certainly doesn't need to agree with Reid about which propositions are first principles. For the purposes of this paper, what matters is that we justifiably believe *R* via common sense. Nor does one need to hold Reid's views on the details of how one comes to believe in first principles like *R* - details such as whether we have a faculty of common sense or

deceived him, made the effort to place no trust in them until their reliability was independently confirmed. Furthermore, the scientific results we look at have to be relevant to the trustworthiness of *common sense* or *a priori intuition*. It won't do to cite in this connection - as Wisniewski does in his 1998, pp. 51-57 - evidence of the fallibility of (a) philosophical theorizing about causes of language use or (b) introspective identification of the causes of our beliefs or (c) distinguishing on reflection our acts of memory from our acts of imagination. (Wisniewski seems to classify each of these activities as intuiting of some sort. But none of them fall into the category of things known via Reidian common sense or a priori intuition.) The problem is that the fallibility of the ways of forming beliefs mentioned in (a)-(c) isn't a good basis for concluding that common sense and a priori intuition are fallible - much less for concluding that they are unreliable.

whether there is an emotion of ridicule. What matters for my Reidian response to Plantinga is that *we believe R noninferentially on the basis of some sort of nonpropositional evidence and thereby have a lot of justification or warrant for it*. Our question, then, is whether this last (italicized) suggestion can be taken seriously.

As a matter of fact, it *is* taken seriously. I've mentioned above that the particularist approach to epistemology is currently quite popular among analytic philosophers. Those who employ it rely heavily on the noninferential knowledge they have of Moorean truths - truths such as that we aren't the victims of massive deception about the external world or about the past and that we aren't brains in vats. According to the particularist methodology, accounts of justification according to which it turns out that we aren't justified in believing such Moorean truths are, thereby, disqualified. The question of *how* it is that such epistemologists know these Moorean truths isn't very often addressed. But it seems that any answer given will be something along the lines suggested by Reid's account sketched above in section III. At the very least, it will involve justified or warranted noninferential belief in R.

Furthermore, a defense of Reid's account could be developed along the following lines. First one could point out that sense perceptual beliefs based on sense experiences can be justified despite the fact that we lack compelling noncircular inductive or deductive arguments from the existence of such experiences to the truth of the beliefs they ground.³³ Then one could point out that a priori knowledge also involves belief processes in which a belief is based on a certain sort of seeming - a seeming which is an experience of some sort.³⁴ In this case too it looks like there is no deductive or inductive argument from the existence of such an experiential ground to the truth of the a priori belief based on it. But this doesn't cast doubt on the justification of our a priori beliefs any more than a similar concern casts doubt on the justification of our sense

³³ See Alston 1993 for an extended critique of various attempts to show that there is some such connection between sense experiences and the beliefs they ground.

³⁴ See Plantinga 1993, ch. 6. Because the experiential ground of a priori beliefs is nonempirical the beliefs are still properly called 'a priori' rather than 'a posteriori'.

perceptual beliefs. In each case (sense perceptual and a priori) the belief is noninferentially justified as a result of its being based on the experiential ground in question.

Once one has shown that the above suggestions are plausible one could then argue that commonsense belief in contingent truths is very much like a priori belief insofar as they each have the same sort of experiential ground (i.e., a certain sort of seeming). Because it is plausible to take seriously both the existence of justified a priori beliefs as well as the account of them as experience-based, it is also plausible to take seriously both the existence of justified commonsense beliefs in contingent truths as well as an account of them as experience-based. Our starting point is the fact that we *do* seem to have justified noninferential beliefs of each kind despite the fact that in each case the belief in question is based on a ground from whose existence we can't deductively or inductively infer the truth of the belief it grounds. And my suggestion is that since many philosophers are inclined to express very little resistance to an account of justified sense perceptual belief according to which the justifying grounds don't entail the truth of the belief, there should also be very little resistance to similar accounts of justified a priori or commonsense belief - especially when such accounts fit so nicely with our introspective understanding of what is going on in typical cases of what seem like justified a priori or commonsense beliefs.

The above remarks are meant to gesture in the direction of a defense of that part of Reid's account that is employed in my response to Plantinga. They are *not* intended to put to rest all doubts those who resist Reid's account might have. To do that one would have to defend the existence of a priori belief as well as the account of it as experience-based.³⁵ And one would also need to consider whether the differences between commonsense belief and a priori belief prevent

³⁵ For doubts about the existence or trustworthiness of a priori belief see Devitt 1998, Kitcher 1992 and some of the papers in parts I and II of DePaul and Ramsey (eds.) 1998. Some able defenders of a priori knowledge or knowledge via rational intuition are Bealer (1993, 1996, 1998), BonJour (1994, 1998) and, more tentatively, Goldman (see his forthcoming as well as his 1998 with Pust). For resistance to the suggestion that a priori knowledge is experience-based in the way suggested above see Conee 1998, pp. 855-57 as well as chapters 4 and 5 of BonJour 1998, especially pp. 106-8 and 145-46. (Neither BonJour nor Conee explicitly discusses or rejects the experience-based account as it is given above but what they do say suggests that they would reject it.) In support of the suggestion that a priori knowledge is experience-based see Goldman and Pust 1998 and Plantinga 1993.

us from moving from a favorable evaluation of our account of justified a priori belief to a favorable evaluation of a similar account of commonsense belief. For example, one might think (though I don't) that although we *can* have noninferential knowledge of propositions that are general and necessary as well as of propositions that are particular and contingent, we *can't* have noninferential knowledge of propositions that are general and contingent. If this were true, it would suggest that a priori knowledge - which is typically of truths that are general and necessary - is acceptable in a way that common sense knowledge - which (at least sometimes) is supposedly of general and contingent truths like R - is not. But dealing with these sorts of concerns is a project for another occasion. Here I merely hope to have shown that a plausible defense of the required elements of Reid's account of commonsense knowledge is by no means out of the question.

IX. SKEPTICISM

In closing, I would like once again to draw attention to the fact that Plantinga's argument against naturalism can also be thought of as an argument from naturalistic premises for global skepticism. Consequently, in defending and developing my Reidian response to Plantinga's argument against naturalism, I have thereby been mustering support at a more general level for a commonsense response to skeptical challenges of various kinds. In particular, I've explained (a) the role that reliance on nonpropositional evidence plays in a commonsense account of how we know that our faculties are reliable (see sections III-V), (b) the reason the commonsensist needn't be troubled by the charge of epistemic circularity (see section VI), (c) the reason the naturalist *qua* anti-supernaturalist can feel comfortable with this commonsense response to the skeptic (see section VII) and (d) the reason one can take seriously certain crucial elements of Reid's account of how we know R in the basic way (see section VIII). All of these points are important in a Reidian response to skepticism. Of course, they could all use further development. And their application to the general issue of skepticism needs to be more explicitly spelled out. But that

too is a project for another paper. Here I simply want to highlight the broader context in which my Reidian response to Plantinga should be situated; it is just one application of a commonsense response to skepticism. I recognize that within that broader context the commonsense response won't satisfy the skeptic. However, I (like Reid) am quite skeptical of the claim that a philosophically adequate and respectable response to the skeptic must leave her satisfied.

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