



CONTACT: Donald Lehr – The Nolan/Lehr Group / +1 (212) 967-8200 / mob +1 (917) 304-4058
dblehr@cs.com / www.templetonprize.org

Books by Alvin Plantinga (with abstracts) and Selected Papers

Alvin Plantinga has authored or edited more than a dozen books and some 150 journal articles. His books and articles have been translated into more than a dozen languages including Arabic, Chinese, Dutch, Farsi, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, and Swedish. The following lists most of his books, with abstracts, and provides links to a selection of his most influential articles.

BOOKS

- [God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God.](#) Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1967; revised ed. 1990.

God and Other Minds re-kindled serious philosophical debate on the existence of God in philosophical circles by arguing that belief in God was like belief in other minds: although neither could be demonstrated conclusively against a determined sceptic, both were fundamentally rational. The book has three main parts: 1) Natural Theology (arguments to prove the existence of God) – a consideration of the cosmological, ontological and teleological arguments; 2) Natural Atheology (arguments for the falsehood of theistic belief) – a consideration of the problem of evil, verificationisms, and other attacks against theism; and 3) God and Other Minds – a consideration of the problem of our knowledge of other minds and the bearing of this problem on the question of the rationality of theistic belief. Plantinga's first major work is a potent defense of the rationality of religious belief and is widely acknowledged as having put theistic belief back on the philosophical agenda by challenging the assumption that the rationality of theism stands or falls with the cogency of traditional philosophical arguments for theism.

- [The Nature of Necessity.](#) Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1974; revised ed. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979.

This book is an exploration and defense of the notion of modality, the idea that objects have both essential and accidental properties, and was one of the first full-length studies of modalities to emerge from the debate to which philosophers Saul Kripke, David Lewis, Ruth Barcan Marcus, and others were contributing. Plantinga develops his argument by means of the notion of possible worlds and ranges over such key problems as the nature of essence, trans-world identity, negative existential propositions, and the existence of un-actual objects in other possible worlds. He also applies his logical theories to the elucidation of two problems in the philosophy of religion: the problem of evil against theism (which he returns to the same year in *God, Freedom, and Evil*), and the ontological argument for God's existence. The book was immediately recognized to be of lasting importance in general metaphysics.

- [God, Freedom, and Evil.](#) Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1974.

In this discussion of natural theology and natural atheology, Plantinga focuses on two traditional arguments: the ontological argument as an example of natural theology, and the problem of evil as the most important representative of natural atheology. His argument on the latter, known as "Alvin Plantinga's free will defense," published here in its final version after an initial formulation in the 1967 book, *God and Other Minds*, is almost

universally recognized as having laid to rest the logical problem of evil against theism. Plantinga summarizes his defense as follows:

“A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all. Now God can create free creatures, but He can’t cause or determine them to do only what is right. For if He does so, then they aren’t significantly free after all; they do not do what is right freely. To create creatures capable of moral good, therefore, He must create creatures capable of moral evil; and He can’t give these creatures the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so. As it turned out, sadly enough, some of the free creatures God created went wrong in the exercise of their freedom; this is the source of moral evil. The fact that free creatures sometimes go wrong, however, counts neither against God’s omnipotence nor against His goodness; for He could have forestalled the occurrence of moral evil only by removing the possibility of moral good.”

- [Does God Have a Nature?](#) Marquette University Press, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1980.

In this book, the Aquinas Lecture for 1980, Plantinga proposed to discuss three questions: 1) Does God have a nature? 2) If so, is there a conflict between God's sovereignty and his having a nature? and 3) How is God related to properties (including his nature), propositions, states of affairs, numbers, and other denizens of the Platonic realm of necessarily existing abstract entities? Plantinga's conclusions are straightforward: 1) God has a nature distinct from himself; 2) the claim that God has a nature, while not incompatible with the belief that God is sovereign, does conflict with a common though mistaken intuition about God's sovereignty; and 3) in whatever way we are ultimately to conceive of God's relation to his own nature and to other necessarily existing abstract entities, it is at any rate clear that God has no control over either their existence or their essential characteristics.

- [Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God](#) (ed. with Nicholas Wolterstorff). University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1984.

Faith and Rationality is a collection of papers that investigates the implications of what Plantinga and his co-editor, philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff, call “Calvinistic” or “Reformed Epistemology.” This is the view of knowledge – enunciated by Calvin and further developed by John Barth – that sees belief in God as its own foundation; in the contributors’ terms, it is properly “basic” in itself. In other words, for the reformed epistemologist, religious belief can be rational without any appeal to evidence or argument.

- [Warrant: The Current Debate](#). Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993.

Plantinga ventures further into epistemology in this book and its companion volume, *Warrant and Proper Function*, both based on his 1987-88 Gifford Lectures. He examines the nature of epistemic warrant – the nature of rationally justified belief – and whatever it is that when added to true belief yields knowledge. This volume surveys the major contributions to the debate and paves the way for his own proposal in *Warrant and Proper Function*. This is the first of the three-volume series known as the “Warrant Trilogy.”

- [Warrant and Proper Function](#). Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993.

In this companion volume to *Warrant: The Current Debate*, Plantinga develops his approach to the question of epistemic warrant – that is, what turns true belief into knowledge. His concept of “proper functionalism” argues that what is crucial to warrant is the proper functioning of one's cognitive faculties in the right kind of cognitive environment. The book also contains Plantinga's first formulation of the “Evolutionary argument against naturalism” which contends that a purely naturalistic view of the world, when conjoined with the best evolutionary accounts of the origins of human cognitive capacities, is self-undermining. The argument triggers a wide range of discussion including an entire volume of responses by philosophers along with Plantinga's replies, and is refined, expanded and reformulated in the 2008 book, *Knowledge of God*.

- [Warranted Christian Belief](#). Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000.

This is the third and most impressive volume in Plantinga's "Warrant Trilogy" based on his 1987-88 Gifford Lectures on the notion of warrant, which he defines as that which distinguishes knowledge from true belief. In this book, Plantinga examines warrant's role in theistic belief, tackling the questions of whether it is rational, reasonable, justifiable, and warranted to accept Christian belief and whether there is something epistemically unacceptable in doing so. He contends that Christian beliefs are warranted to the extent that they are formed by properly functioning cognitive faculties, thus, insofar as they are warranted, Christian beliefs are knowledge if they are true. The book is widely hailed as one of the most important philosophical treatises on religious belief published in the 20th century.

- [Essays in the Metaphysics of Modality](#). Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003.

Collected here are some of Plantinga's most important essays on the metaphysics of modality, which he first visited in the 1974 book, *The Nature of Necessity*. Dating from the late 1960s to publication, they chronicle the development of his thoughts about some of the most fundamental issues in metaphysics: what is the nature of abstract objects like possible worlds, properties, propositions, and such phenomena? Are there possible but non-actual objects? Can objects that do not exist exemplify properties? Plantinga gives thorough and penetrating answers to these questions and many others.

- [Knowledge of God \(with Michael Tooley\)](#). Wiley-Blackwell, Hoboken, New Jersey, 2008.

Is belief in God epistemically justified? That is the fundamental question which Plantinga and the atheist philosopher Michael Tooley debate here with arguments from opposing perspectives. The first half of the book contains each philosopher's explanation of his particular view while the second half allows them to directly respond to each other's arguments. The book also contains a reformulation of Plantinga's "Evolutionary argument against naturalism," originally presented in the 1993 book, *Warrant and Proper Function*.

- [Science and Religion: Are They Compatible? \(with Daniel C. Dennett\)](#). Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010.

One of the most controversial and heated philosophical issues of recent times is whether or not the conflict between science and religion can be reconciled. In this book, Plantinga and atheist philosopher Daniel C. Dennett expand upon the arguments they presented in a lively and contentious debate held at the 2009 American Philosophical Association Central Division conference. The book opens with Plantinga's assertion that Christianity is compatible with evolutionary theory because Christians believe that God created the living world, and it is entirely possible that God did so by using a process of evolution. Dennett vigorously rejects this argument, provoking a reply from Plantinga, another response from Dennett, and final statements from both sides.

- [Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism](#). Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011.

This book was a long-awaited statement by Plantinga on the compatibility of science and religion. He examines where the conflict between the two is supposed to exist – evolution, evolutionary psychology, analysis of scripture, and scientific study of religion – as well as the atheistic narratives of philosopher Daniel Dennett, biologist Richard Dawkins, and philosopher Philip Kitcher that evolution and theistic belief cannot co-exist. Plantinga makes a case that their arguments are not only inconclusive but that the supposed conflicts themselves are superficial, due to the methodological naturalism used by science, and exposes their work as "poor philosophy masquerading as science." The real conflict, he concludes, is not between science and religion but between theism and naturalism – theism supports science, while naturalism undermines it. If our minds are exclusively the product of evolution, he argues, then they can only be trusted to produce beliefs that help us survive, not to produce beliefs that are actually true to reality. Therefore, if we have no spiritual dimension, no soul or image of God, if we are strictly and exclusively the product of natural factors and evolution, we can't trust our cognitive faculties to tell us the truth. And if naturalism means we can't trust our cognitive faculties, how can we trust them when they tell us naturalism is true? If presented as an account of

the grounds of human knowledge in the world, evolutionary epistemology is self-undermining since it casts doubt on the reliability of scientific reasoning. Plantinga suggests that we think about arguments in science and religion in a new way – as different forms of discourse that try to persuade people to look at questions from a perspective such that they can see that something is true. The book is based on his 2005 Gifford Lectures, “Science and Religion: Conflict or Concord.”

- [Knowledge and Christian Belief](#). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2015.

In *Warranted Christian Belief*, published in 2000, Plantinga discussed in great depth the question of the rationality, or sensibility, of Christian belief. In this book Plantinga presents the same ideas in a brief, more accessible fashion. Plantinga probes what exactly is meant by the claim that religious – and specifically Christian – belief is irrational and cannot sensibly be held. He argues that the criticisms of well-known atheists such as Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens are completely wrong. Finally, Plantinga addresses several potential "defeaters" to Christian belief – pluralism, science, evil and suffering – and shows how they fail to successfully defeat rational Christian belief.

PAPERS

Following is a list of and links to a selection of Alvin Plantinga's most influential papers, as published on the Calvin College Virtual Library of Christian Philosophy at:

https://www.calvin.edu/academic/philosophy/virtual_library/plantinga_alvin.htm

[A Response To Pope John Paul II's Fides Et Ratio](#)

[Advice To Christian Philosophers](#)

[An Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism](#)

[Augustinian Christian Philosophy](#)

[Christian Philosophy at the End of the 20th Century](#)

[Christian Scholarship: Nature](#)

[Christian Scholarship: Need](#)

[Darwin, Mind and Meaning](#)

[Evolution, Neutrality, and Antecedent Probability](#)

[Intellectual Sophistication and Basic Belief in God](#)

[Methodological Naturalism: Part 1](#)

[Methodological Naturalism: Part 2](#)

[Naturalism Defeated](#)

[On Christian Scholarship](#)

[On Rejecting the Theory of Common Ancestry](#)

[Theism, Atheism, and Rationality](#)

[Truth, Omniscience, and Cantorian Arguments](#)

[Two Dozen or so Theistic Arguments](#)

[Two \(Or More\) Kinds of Scripture Scholarship](#)

[When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and the Bible](#)

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