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PHILOSOPHER ALVIN PLANTINGA AWARDED 2017 TEMPLETON PRIZE

WEST CONSHOHOCKEN, PA. – Alvin Plantinga, an American scholar whose rigorous writings over a half century have made theism – the belief in a divine reality or god – a serious option within academic philosophy, was announced today as the 2017 Templeton Prize Laureate.

Plantinga’s pioneering work began in the late 1950s, a time when academic philosophers generally rejected religiously informed philosophy. In his early books, however, Plantinga considered a variety of arguments for the existence of God in ways that put theistic belief back on the philosophical agenda.

Plantinga’s 1984 paper, “Advice to Christian Philosophers,” challenged Christian philosophers to let their religious commitments shape their academic agenda and to pursue rigorous work based on a specifically Christian philosophical vision. At the same time, he was developing an account of knowledge, most fully expressed in the “Warrant Trilogy” published by Oxford University Press (1993 and 2000), making the case that religious beliefs are proper starting points for human reasoning and do not have to be defended or justified based on other beliefs. These arguments have now influenced three generations of professional philosophers.

Indeed, more than 50 years after this remarkable journey began, university philosophy departments around the world now include thousands of professors who bring their religious commitments to bear on their work, including Buddhist, Jewish, and Muslim philosophers.

“Sometimes ideas come along that revolutionize the way we think, and those who create such breakthrough discoveries are the people we honor with the Templeton Prize,” said Heather Templeton Dill, president of the John Templeton Foundation, which awards the Prize. “Alvin Plantinga recognized that not only did religious belief not conflict with serious philosophical work, but that it could make crucial contributions to addressing perennial problems in philosophy.”

The Templeton Prize, valued at £1.1 million (about \$1.4 million or €1.3 million), is one of the world's largest annual awards given to an individual and honors a living person who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life's spiritual dimension, whether through insight, discovery, or practical works. The announcement was made online at www.templetonprize.org today by the Foundation, based in West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania.

Established in 1972 by the late global investor and philanthropist Sir John Templeton, the Prize is a cornerstone of the John Templeton Foundation's international efforts to serve as a philanthropic catalyst for discoveries relating to the deepest and most perplexing questions facing humankind. The Foundation supports research on subjects ranging from complexity, evolution, and emergence to creativity, forgiveness, and free will.

"Sir John founded the Templeton Prize long before he created the John Templeton Foundation," says Dill. "He realized that many of his friends and colleagues thought of religion as uninteresting and old-fashioned, or even obsolete. He wanted to honor people who were responsible for, in his words, the 'marvelous new things going on in religion.' The Prize was designed to help them become more well known, not so much for their own benefit, but for the benefit of people who might be inspired by them."

Plantinga, 84, is the John A. O'Brien Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at the University of Notre Dame, where he taught for 28 years until retiring in 2010. Prior to that, he was a professor of philosophy at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan from 1963 to 1982.

"I am honored to receive the Templeton Prize," Plantinga said. "The field of philosophy has transformed over the course of my career. If my work played a role in this transformation, I would be very pleased. I hope the news of the Prize will encourage young philosophers, especially those who bring Christian and theistic perspectives to bear on their work, towards greater creativity, integrity, and boldness."

One philosopher who nominated Plantinga for the Prize wrote: "Alvin Plantinga's intellectual discoveries have initiated novel inquiry into spiritual dimensions. His precise and carefully developed insights have opened up intellectual-spiritual space. In the 1950s there was not a single published defense of religious belief by a prominent philosopher; by the 1990s there were literally hundreds of books and articles... defending and developing the spiritual dimension. The difference between 1950 and 1990 is, quite simply, Alvin Plantinga."

An early landmark in Plantinga's career was his "free will defense" against the so-called "argument from evil," the most widely cited argument against theistic belief, which posits that the existence of

both God and evil are logically incompatible. Plantinga counters that in a world with free creatures, God cannot determine their behavior, so even an omnipotent God might not be able to create a world where all creatures will always freely choose to do good. Its final version in *God, Freedom, and Evil* (1974) is now almost universally recognized as having laid to rest the logical problem of evil against theism.

Plantinga further stoked controversy with his 1984 article, "Reason and Belief in God," which disputes the "Classical Foundationalist account of knowledge" according to which beliefs are justified if and only if they can be justified by a chain of reasoning terminating in various types of self-evident beliefs. Plantinga contends that the set of foundational beliefs, what he calls "properly basic beliefs," are much broader and include belief in the existence of God.

That article became the launching point for his magnum opus, the "Warrant Trilogy," an examination of theistic belief, larger questions of knowledge and rational belief, and the notion of warrant, which he defines as that which distinguishes knowledge from true belief. *Warrant: The Current Debate* and *Warrant and Proper Function* were published in 1993. In 2000, his *Warranted Christian Belief* looked at the role of warrant in theistic belief and whether it is rational, reasonable, justifiable, and warranted to accept Christian belief. Many consider it among the twentieth century's most important philosophical treatises on religious belief.

As his international reputation grew in the 1980s, Plantinga became increasingly sought out for international speaking engagements. He has given more than 250 public lectures, including more than 30 named lectureships, throughout the United States and Europe as well as in China, Iran, Israel, and Russia.

Plantinga's publications since 2000 have largely focused on the relationship – and compatibility – of scientific and religious belief. His positions draw upon his "Evolutionary argument against naturalism (EAAN)," formulated in 1993 and restated in *Knowledge of God* (2008). In contrast to the common claim that evolution is incompatible with theism, the EAAN asserts that evolution is incompatible with naturalism, the philosophical view that denies the existence of any spiritual reality. In 2011 he continued that line of reasoning in *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism*, boldly asserting that the conflict is not between science and religion but between theism and naturalism – theism supports science while naturalism undermines it.

Alvin Plantinga joins a group of 46 Prize recipients, including Mother Teresa, who received the inaugural award in 1973, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1983), and philosopher Charles Taylor (2007). The 2016 Laureate was Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, who has spent decades bringing spiritual insight to

the public conversation. He was preceded in 2015 by Canadian philosopher and theologian Jean Vanier, founder of L'Arche, the international network of communities where people with and without intellectual disabilities live and work together as peers. Czech priest and philosopher Tomáš Halík was awarded the Prize in 2014, Archbishop Desmond Tutu in 2013, and the Dalai Lama in 2012.

Alvin Plantinga will be formally awarded the Templeton Prize in a public ceremony at The Field Museum in Chicago, Illinois, on September 24, where speakers will include Hamza Yusuf of Zaytuna College in Berkeley, California, Yoram Hazony of the Herzl Institute in Jerusalem, and Meghan Sullivan of the University of Notre Dame.

Notes to Editors

- Further biographical information on Alvin Plantinga, still pictures, and biographical information on the 46 previous Templeton Prize Laureates are available at www.templetonprize.org.
- A video of Alvin Plantinga, a video of Heather Templeton Dill announcing the 2017 Templeton Prize, and videos of Alvin Plantinga from the PBS/public television series "Closer to Truth" are also available at www.templetonprize.org.
- Follow the Templeton Prize on Twitter using @TempletonPrize and the hashtag #TempletonPrize2017.
- Everyone is a potential nominator for the Templeton Prize. For nomination details, go to: <http://www.templetonprize.org/nomination.html>.

Alvin Carl Plantinga

Alvin Carl Plantinga was born on November 15, 1932, in Ann Arbor, Michigan, the first of four sons of Cornelius, a professor and first-generation immigrant from the Netherlands, and Lettie Bossenbroek, a homemaker and second-generation Dutch American. Both came from strong backgrounds in Calvinism, also known as the Reformed tradition, a Protestant branch established in the mid-16th century. After his father received a Ph.D. in philosophy from Duke University, the family lived in Huron, Michigan and then in Jamestown, North Dakota, where Cornelius taught at Jamestown College.

His childhood was steeped in the teachings and practice of historic Calvinism through Sunday school and services, church meetings, and summer camp. By age 11, he understood and contemplated the so-called "five points of Calvinism" enshrined in the TULIP acronym: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and the Perseverance of the saints. His curiosity about "Total depravity" – that every important area of life is distorted and compromised by sin – fueled his lifelong inquiry on how to comprehend the existence of evil in a world where God is omnipotent and omniscient.

At 16, he enrolled at Jamestown College. A few months later the family moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Cornelius began teaching at Calvin College, the Christian Reformed liberal arts institution, where he also enrolled. The next year, he applied for a scholarship to Harvard and was accepted. There, for the first time in his life, he encountered serious non-Christian thought and debate.

While visiting his family over spring break, he attended a few classes at Calvin taught by philosopher William Harry Jellema. Specifically aiming to study philosophy with Professor Jellema, he returned to Calvin College in 1951. He later credited Jellema's teachings with sustaining him in the Christian faith through times of doubt and uncertainty about his religious path and for helping set the trajectory of his adult intellectual life.

Plantinga graduated from Calvin College with a degree in philosophy in 1954. He received a Master's degree in philosophy from the University of Michigan in 1955, and a Ph.D. in philosophy from Yale in 1958.

In 1955 he married Kathleen DeBoer, who also came from a strong Dutch Christian Reformed background. They have four children: Carl (b. 1957), Jane (b. 1959), Harry (b. 1961), and Ann (b. 1968).

After one year teaching at Yale, in 1958 he was appointed professor at Wayne State University, at the time one of the nation's leading departments of analytic philosophy. Again, he often found himself as a lone voice in an academic environment of well-versed and sophisticated anti-theists. In 1963 he returned to Calvin College where he served as professor of philosophy for 19 years, with various sabbaticals to teach at Harvard, Balliol College at Oxford, and many other institutions.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Plantinga's work centered on a defense of the rationality of religious belief, general metaphysics and philosophy of religion, and the long-standing conundrum of the existence of evil in a world where God is omnipotent.

In his 1967 book, *God and Other Minds*, he considered a variety of arguments for the existence of God. However, he concludes that belief in the existence of God is rational on the same grounds that belief in other human minds is rational. While we observe the *behaviors* of other people, our belief that they have minds (including beliefs, desires, etc.) is rational even though it cannot be inferred from those behaviors (how would we know they are not automata?). Likewise, a religious believer's encounters with the divine license the belief in a divine mind even though such a mind cannot be strictly inferred from the experiences. This book marked the beginning of Plantinga's efforts to put theistic belief back on the philosophical agenda.

In his 1974 book, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, Plantinga aimed to undermine the most widely cited argument against theistic belief, the so-called argument from evil, which aims to show that the existence of God and the existence of evil are logically incompatible. Plantinga responded to the argument by showing that in a world with free creatures God might not be able, by definition, to determine the behavior of those creatures. If the behavior of free creatures is in the control of those creatures, it may be impossible (even for an omnipotent God) to create a world where all those creatures will always freely choose to do good. As a result, we cannot infer, as the argument from evil claims to, that a world created by God will not contain evil.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Plantinga's work turned to philosophical theology, philosophical articulation of the nature of God, and "Reformed Epistemology," the notion that religious belief can be rational without appeal to evidence or argument. He also began to encourage other Christian philosophers to integrate their religious commitments into their scholarship, at a time when academic philosophers generally rejected religiously informed philosophy.

In an article titled "Modernizing the Case for God," *Time* magazine in its April 5, 1980 issue described Plantinga as "America's leading orthodox Protestant philosopher of God."

Plantinga left Calvin College in 1982 and was appointed John A. O'Brien Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame and director of its Center for Philosophy of Religion. It became the hub of work in the field, attracting scores of graduate students whose goal was to be supervised by Plantinga.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Plantinga's work returned to matters of theistic belief and larger questions of knowledge and rational belief. He argued against the "the Classical Foundationalist account of knowledge," according to which beliefs are justified if and only if they can be justified by a chain of reasoning terminating in various types of self-evident beliefs. He maintained that while rational belief must indeed be grounded in foundational beliefs, as the Foundationalist contends, the set of foundational beliefs, what Plantinga calls "properly basic beliefs," are much broader than Classical Foundationalists allowed. These properly basic beliefs include, for example, belief in the existence of God. This however raised a puzzle which occupied Plantinga for the next two decades: how can we determine which beliefs count as "properly basic" (in other words, why is belief in God included, while belief in, say, the Great Pumpkin, is excluded?) He explored these and many other ideas in his 1987-88 Gifford Lectures and in the three-volume "Warrant Trilogy," considered his magnum opus. The first two volumes, *Warrant: The Current Debate* and *Warrant and Proper Function*, were published in 1993. The final volume, *Warranted Christian Belief*, was published in 2000.

After co-founding the Society of Christian Philosophers in 1978, he served as its president from 1983 to 1986.

In his 1984 article, "Advice to Christian Philosophers," Plantinga called upon Christian philosophers to let their religious beliefs set the agenda for academic philosophy, alongside the intellectual needs of their religious

communities. He urged colleagues to continue engagement with the broad philosophical community but also to explore philosophical problems through a theistic lens, and pursue rigorous work on the details of a theistic or specifically Christian philosophical vision. The paper was widely discussed, sharply debated, and influenced a generation of religious philosophers and, in turn, their students.

As his international reputation grew, Plantinga was sought out widely for international speaking engagements. In 1994 he visited China to inaugurate a series of conferences at Peking University organized between the Society of Christian Philosophers and various Chinese universities.

Plantinga's publications since 2000 have largely focused on the relationship – and compatibility – of scientific and religious belief. His position draws upon his “Evolutionary argument against naturalism (EAAN),” originally formulated in 1993 and restated in the 2008 book, *Knowledge of God*. In contrast to the common claim that evolution is incompatible with theism, the EAAN asserts that evolution is incompatible with *naturalism*. In standard evolutionary theory, traits of organisms are selected for because they facilitate survival and reproduction. Plantinga shows that belief forming capacities can be perfectly adaptive even when the beliefs that they generate are false. As a result, if the only explanation for the formation of our belief forming capacities are random trait variation and natural selection, then it is unlikely that belief forming capacities are truth conducive (since there are many more ways to have false-but-adaptive beliefs than there are true beliefs). But it is incoherent to affirm that one's beliefs are most likely false. As a result, it is incoherent to affirm evolution and naturalism and thus one must surrender one of these beliefs.

In his 2011 book, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism*, he challenged the militant atheism and materialism that he found in the sciences. He argued that the real conflict is not between science and religion but between theism and naturalism – theism supports science while naturalism undermines it.

Plantinga retired from Notre Dame in 2010 and returned to Calvin College. He and his wife of 62 years, Kathleen, live in Grand Rapids.

The Templeton Prize

The Templeton Prize each year honors a living person who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life's spiritual dimension, whether through insight, discovery, or practical works.

Established in 1972 by the late global investor and philanthropist Sir John Templeton, the Prize is a cornerstone of the John Templeton Foundation's international efforts to serve as a philanthropic catalyst for discoveries relating to the deepest and most perplexing questions facing humankind. The Foundation supports research on subjects ranging from complexity, evolution, and emergence to creativity, forgiveness, and free will.

The monetary value of the Prize is set always to exceed the Nobel Prizes to underscore Templeton's belief that benefits from discoveries that illuminate spiritual questions can be quantifiably more vast than those from other worthy human endeavors.

Everyone is a potential nominator for the Templeton Prize. For nomination details, go to: <http://www.templetonprize.org/nomination.html>.

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