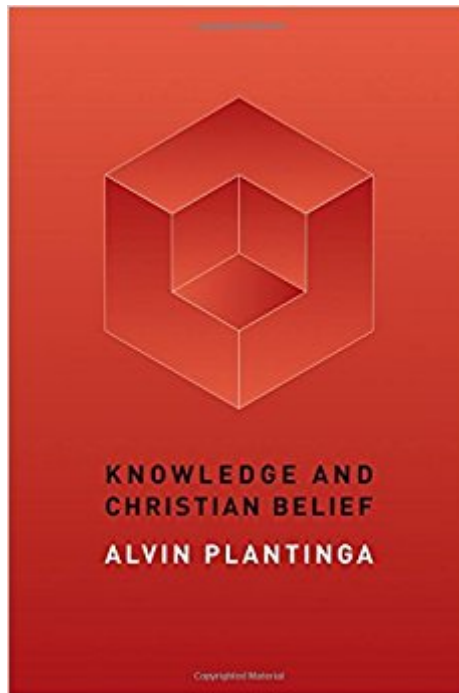




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# Knowledge And Christian Belief





## Synopsis

In his widely praised *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford, 2000) Alvin 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 briefer, much more accessible fashion. Recognized worldwide as a leading Christian philosopher, 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 such well-known atheists as Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens are completely wrong. Finally, Plantinga addresses several potential "objections" to Christian belief -- pluralism, science, evil and suffering -- and shows how they fail to successfully defeat rational Christian belief.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Ordained Servant "An excellent book. . . . Pastors needing an aid responding to the kind of objections to Christian belief permeating the modern-day intelligentsia would do well to turn to this resource." *The Review of Metaphysics* "An ideal introductory text for even beginning students in philosophy of religion or apologetics. . . . Plantinga's careful development of his arguments reveals the working of a first-class philosophical mind." *Christian Research Journal* "Tremendously insightful and enjoyable to read. . . . Everyone interested in Christian apologetics and how knowledge of God works should read Plantinga, and this book is the best place to start." *World* "Plantinga deftly answers objections, using erudite arguments and entertaining examples and nicknames. He proves that for Christianity to be irrational, it would have to be false." William J.



Abraham â" Perkins School of Theology "Alvin Plantinga's Warranted Christian Belief is a landmark book on the rationality of Christian belief. . . . This splendid shorter rendering of that book's proposals makes them accessible to general readers and to students outside the field of philosophy. It is a total pleasure to welcome this version of his seminal work. All the hallmarks of Plantinga's humility and brilliance are on display here; no one can read this book without being spiritually refreshed and intellectually challenged."Francis Schüssler Fiorenza â" Harvard Divinity School "A remarkable book. Over the years Alvin Plantinga has undercut conventional prejudices and defended theistic beliefs. This book contains the major ideas of his philosophy of religion on God, faith, historical criticism, pluralism, and many other key topics. What distinguishes this book is the clarity with which Plantinga presents and develops his arguments. . . . An excellent compendium of his thought."Michael Bergmann â" Purdue University "Written by one of the greatest living philosophers of religion, this book is sure to be an instant classic. It provides a concise and accessible statement of one of his most distinctive ideas â" which he has developed with extreme rigor and care over the past fifty years â" namely, that theistic and Christian belief can amount to knowledge, without being based on arguments."Thomas M. Crisp â" Biola University "This welcome simplification of Warranted Christian Belief, Plantinga's magnum opus of Christian religious epistemology, is highly readable but just as erudite and philosophically engaging â" worth reading and rereading for both its intellectual and its spiritual depth."Michael Rea â" University of Notre Dame "Alvin Plantinga's magisterial Warranted Christian Belief is one of the most important works on the epistemology of religious belief within the last century. It is exciting to see the core ideas of that great work presented here in a more succinct and accessible format. Knowledge and Christian Belief is a pleasure to read and will serve as an excellent and engaging introduction to Plantinga's most influential ideas about the rationality of religious belief."Richard Swinburne â" University of Oxford "A very clear, easy-to-understand, and challenging presentation of the main steps of Plantinga's argument in his magnum opus Warranted Christian Belief. Using the tools of modern epistemology, Plantinga defends a classical position â" that Christian belief does not need to be supported by any arguments from generally agreed premises in order to be fully rational, and that that belief cannot be shown to be false by any such arguments."

Alvin Plantinga is John A. O'Brien Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. His other books include *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* and *Warranted Christian Belief*.



Illuminary Alvin Plantinga, twice Gifford Lecturer and *ÂœAmericaÂ™s* leading orthodox Protestant philosopher of God (TIME), curtails his 530 paged magnum opus, *Warranted Christian Belief*, into an accessible 126 paged *Knowledge and Christian Belief*. Alvin's highly nuanced language insists attentive reading despite his simplistic thesis: Christian belief, if true, warrants belief. There are four major characteristics of warranted belief: (1) cognitive faculties functioning properly; (2) appropriate cognitive environment for those faculties; (3) according to design; and (4) successfully aimed at truth (see italicized at the bottom of p. 28). Alvin follows the A/C (Aquinas and Calvin) model of *sensus divinitatis* as *basic* or presuppositional. Just as seeing the sun rise is basic "without the arduous need of cognitive activity" warranted belief arises through the work of the Holy Spirit and *sensus divinitatis* (seed of divinity), if true, as basic. What does this mean? Christian belief on its own ground is firmly rooted; the question of *is it true?* cannot be answered by the philosophers: it is God's domain.[...]

This book is compelling only if one comes to accept what he is trying to prove: that Christian belief has warrant. That is not the same thing as proving that it is true. Others may attempt to do that, but Plantinga thinks it a futile task. Christian belief can only be shown to be more probable than not. It cannot be prove true with 100% certainty. If you fail to understand the limitation of this work, then it will frustrate you immensely.

A very readable and very compelling explanation as to why Christian belief is basic and why it is completely defensible rationally. What is basic belief? (I admit I didn't understand this until reading this). When you walk into a room and you see a chair, you have a belief that there is a chair there. You don't need rational, philosophical arguments to prove it. You have direct, incontrovertible evidence. How Christian belief is basic in that sense I will let Dr Plantinga explain.

I am always impressed by Alvin Plantinga's response to the various forms of atheistic worldview. This is a short book where he summed up some of his responses.

This book is well written, and a non-philosopher should be able to understand it all. Plantinga here also presents his major arguments with slight variations from before, all updates done in response to all that has been written about the arguments. So it's all reasonable and very well argued.



Before I say anything, I will say first that Plantinga's work on warrant has been terribly misunderstood and misused in the popular sphere. In part, this is due to philosophers such as William Lane Craig, who, though I'm sure he didn't intend to make this implication, by appealing to Plantinga's proper basicity in the context of an argument for the reality of God, has implied that this is some sort of theistic argument. It is not. The problem facing Christian epistemologists is this: the vast majority of Christians today, and indeed the vast majority of Christians who have ever lived, have never studied philosophy, history, science, or apologetics. So how can they know that God exists and Christianity is true? We wouldn't deny that they have a true relationship with God in Christ, but are we forced to say that they have a true, but unwarranted belief unless they have studied apologetics or academic theology? Plantinga's answer is no: whether or not Christians have formally studied theology or apologetics, they are still warranted in holding belief in God and Christ. Essential to this is Plantinga's four criteria for a warranted belief: it must be the result of a cognitive faculty intended to produce true belief, that faculty must be functioning in the environment for which it was designed, it must be well designed, and it must be operating without defects. What the careful reader will notice is that these criteria are inescapably teleological: the implication is that if a faculty was not designed for anything at all, or if it is oriented merely towards survival and not truth for its own sake, then all of one's beliefs produced by said faculty are unwarranted. This is where Plantinga gets the evolutionary argument against naturalism. But for the sake of this book, that's besides the point. What all of us recognize is that on the Christian view, rationality is one such faculty of the mind aimed at truth: one can really have warranted beliefs derived from rationality. The critical point, for Plantinga, is that it is not the only such faculty. There is what John Calvin calls the "sensus divinitatis." This is the inherent sense of divinity we all possess. In support of this, Plantinga points to anthropological evidence suggesting that most people, under certain conditions, spontaneously form the belief that there is a person such as God. They do so when observing the beauty of the world, reflecting on the sheer gratuitous nature of existence, and so on. This is not the result of a philosophical argument like "The world is beautiful, therefore theism." Instead, it is spontaneous and formed without argument. As Plantinga points out, if Christian theism is true, there is very likely something such as the *sensus divinitatis*. Thus, if Christian theism is true, then a properly basic belief in God is very likely warranted. Plantinga aims to extend this beyond mere theism and towards Christian theism. Essentially, he does so by appealing to the internal witness of the Holy Spirit. Again, it's key to point out that this is not an argument for the truth of Christianity. It is not as if a person says "I have the witness of the Spirit, therefore you ought to accept the Christian



faith." Instead, the argument is that if Christian theism is true, then there is probably something like the witness of the Spirit which provides warrant directly, apart from rational argument. In my estimation, Plantinga's argument is largely sound, and accomplishes the task of showing how your average believer is warranted in subscribing to Christianity, even if they are not philosophically astute. There's one question I have with respect to Plantinga's extended A-C model. In his chapter on whether pluralism constitutes a defeater for Christian belief, Plantinga cashes out the nature of an arbitrary conclusion. It's not arbitrary to subscribe to one faith in the midst of many faiths as long as one thinks one is privy to a source of warrant that most other persons are not. For example, if one has studied a set of unique arguments providing warrant for Christianity and most people have not, it's not arbitrary to hold Christianity. If one has reflected upon purported defeaters for Christian belief and concluded that they are unsound, it's not arbitrary to take them as unsuccessful. Similarly, Plantinga says, if one believes oneself to be privy to the witness of the Spirit, then it's not arbitrary to hold most others to be wrong. I follow Plantinga most of the way here, but I'm not sure how to get around the objection that there are other faiths which seek warrant in the same fashion. For example, Mormons believe that the witness of the Spirit (understood in Mormon terms) provides warrant for one's belief in the historicity of the Book of Mormon. Plantinga, presumably, holds that they are wrong. I'm not sure how one could avoid the charge of arbitrary belief if one rejects the notion that a Mormon is warranted in the same sense that a classical Christian is. Of course, one could suggest that since Mormonism is false, their warrant is not genuine, and this would be fine as far as it goes, since Plantinga's argument is that if Christian theism is true, then it is probably warranted in a basic way. Still, I think that in order to avoid the charge of arbitrary selection of beliefs, one would need a way to more substantially distinguish between the Mormon experience and the classical Christian experience. I'm sure Plantinga has discussed such objections elsewhere, and I'm certainly not claiming a decisive refutation of Plantinga's thesis (as I said, I go with it all the way with respect to theism in general). Still, this is a question I'm still working through. Altogether, I recommend that those who are interested in Plantinga's overall thesis consult this book for an introduction to his views, recognizing that he has developed them in more depth in his three volume series on warrant and Christian belief.

I got this for a class, and it was a little bit confusing to read at times, but it was interesting overall.

The most helpful book I have ever read. It bolstered my belief and most/best of all, comforted me. Also it should be read on an iPad, kindle, or any such reader with a "touch dictionary". Note: it should



not be read simultaneously with books by William Lane Craig or Thomas Wright. Your head will explode ã ã ã^ã .

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