

Plantinga, Alvin (2010) *Religion and Science*

The Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism:

(1) The probability that naturalism and evolution alone could produce *reliable human cognitive faculties* is low. (basic)

(2) If the probability that naturalism and evolution alone could produce *reliable human cognitive faculties* is low, then a person accepting naturalism and evolution should doubt her *human cognitive faculties are reliable*. (basic)

(3) **So, a person accepting naturalism and evolution should doubt her *human cognitive faculties are reliable*.** (MP 1, 2)

(4) If a person accepting naturalism and evolution should doubt her *human cognitive faculties are reliable*, then that person should doubt any other beliefs she holds.

(5) **So, that person should doubt any other beliefs she holds.** (MP 3, 4)

SUMMARY

Plantinga believes that naturalism and evolution alone are not able to explain a person's having *reliable human cognitive faculties* and that if evolution merely produces *adaptive behavior*, then evolution is not sufficient for producing *true* beliefs. He suggests that if that is the case, then it is a defeater for anyone claiming naturalism and evolution alone are able to account for *reliable human cognitive faculties* and *true* beliefs. Why? It is self-defeating.

EVALUATION

The logic itself may be pristine, however, there is no reason to accept premise (1) and everything hangs on its actually being true.

The first issue is what we might mean by "*reliable*". From the standpoint of evolutionary theory, if our brains are evolved, it is to help us survive in terms of what brains can do; how they function. So it seems fairly obvious that to be a brain that is *reliable* is to be one that produces appropriate choices far more often than not, the sort that natural selection could select from. Given some 2 million years of this sort of selection among homo sapiens, the likelihood of brains that are *reliable* in this way seem high.

Plantinga's only motivation given for premise (1) is probability and a convenient way of describing evolution:

“What counts for adaptivity are the NP properties and the behavior they cause; it doesn't matter whether the supervening content is true. The NP properties are indeed adaptive; but that provides no reason, so far, for thinking the supervening content is true. Having B is adaptive by virtue of its causing adaptive behavior, not by virtue of having true content.” (27)

Here, what we see is that Plantinga does not mean that *reliable* describes a subject's ability to interact with the world in appropriate ways. What Plantinga means is that with an account of *human cognitive faculties*, a reliable human cognitive faculty is one that is geared to producing true beliefs. There are four stark issues I do not think Plantinga can overcome.

1. Adaptation et. al. is not the teleological end of natural selection.
2. Beliefs might not be entities which exist (see Eliminativism).
3. Truth might not exist, but even still, it plays no role in human judgments about the way things are.
4. There can be no test Plantinga could create that would differentiate a subject S whose *human cognitive faculties* are geared to producing true beliefs and a subject S* whose *human cognitive faculties* are geared to a producing patterns of thought which cause a subject to interact with the reality in appropriate ways.

Premise (1) hangs on the idea that evolution is about **adaptive behavior** rather than **appropriate behavior** and of course, not all adaptive behavior is appropriate behavior. Appropriate behavior in terms of natural selection is behavior that keeps one around long enough to breed. At any rate, natural selection would act on **maladaptive behavior** all the same. What we are left with on an evolutionary account is a person who acts on her beliefs and rightly, confidently does so, given natural selection has pruned her potential ancestors for having had inappropriate beliefs more often than not.

On Plantinga's view, a subject S who is geared to have true beliefs cannot be the result of evolution on a naturalistic view, evolution must be guided in order to produce an S sort of person. On the other hand, if a subject S* is geared only in ways that naturalism and unguided evolution are themselves capable of, then we cannot expect that S* sorts of persons are those having more true beliefs than not.

Plantinga's premise (1) would be false if Eliminativism is true, given what Plantinga takes *reliable* and *beliefs* to mean. I do not want to argue this given our scope here, but rather to just bring out the point that premise (1) is making three claims (one about *reliability*, one about beliefs, and one about the sorts of beliefs S and S* might form) and this is one plausible way to address Plantinga's premise (1) based on a view of belief full stop.

Far more troublesome is the apparent gap between the metaphysical notion that truth is mind-independent and objectively real (e.g. is a property of propositions, is a real relationship between propositions and facts, etc.) and the epistemic inability to know if such a metaphysical notion is true.

Like other eliminativist and deflationary thinkers, I tend only to think of terms like truth, morality, belief, and so on, as conceptual terms that play a role in language. If there are actual entities or properties that go with truth, morality, and belief, they generally seem to be superfluous to the *language function* to which they relate. That is, if I am trying to explain why I acted one way versus another, I am speaking with

the aim of being believed (a *perlocutionary* act). I and my audience may want to examine my comments (*locutionary* act), but the only objective reasons a person would have for becoming convinced or being skeptical would be on epistemic grounds.

That is, on the classic biconditional view that 'p if and only if *really* p', we can only imply '*really* p' on epistemic grounds and no *language function* could appeal to '*really* p' in order to imply the antecedent p.

So, what could Plantinga expect from being in a possible world containing both S and S* persons?

If brains reason and the aim of *human cognitive faculties* is to provide a network of thought which produce appropriate behaviors, and those thoughts are all tasked with processing facts, then it seems facts (or at least perceptions about facts) and reasons are synonymous. These reasons are how thoughts would, I suppose, hang together. Having appropriate behavior would entail having good thoughts and good thoughts would entail having good reasons, and having good reasons would entail only a certain human cognitive **type** of function. That is, the sort that perceived *accurately* and the sort that could assess reasons to keep or discard certain thoughts and the sort where those thoughts being kept where from evolutionarily successful *human cognitive faculties*; those which can be best described as a subject's ability to interact with the world in appropriate ways.

Plantinga might grant this objection, thinking it does not necessarily imply we should think an S and S* person would be indistinguishable in behavior. He might suggest that we should not expect S persons to be more successful than S* persons if observation is how we can tell one sort of person from another. That is a plausible way for him to navigate that objection.

We could however just as easily grant Plantinga that rejoinder too.

The issue is this: If we determine who is an S or S* sort of person based on how appropriate their behaviors are, then why would we think the probability of any person's ability to act appropriately in the world would be low given just naturalism and evolution. It seems, again, obviously high! In evolutionary theory, selection works on behavior. Second, if having *true* beliefs is what is supposed to make the behavioral difference between S and S* sorts of persons, how would we know since having *true* beliefs does not itself guarantee an S or S* person would act in any particular way. Meaning, '*true*' would be synonymous with behavioral success; not just having beliefs or beliefs of any particular variety **except appropriate beliefs**. We certainly can have *true* beliefs and fail to recognize they are *true* after all. Finally, if truth is to be thought of aside from behavior, I suspect that the intrinsic value of having *true* beliefs is either nil, or at least less valuable than anything else we value (Wrenn, cf.).

Plantinga cannot hope to properly motivate premise (1) without resolving these four objections at least as far as I can tell.

I have no good reason to doubt I am the sort of person who should not rely on his *human cognitive faculties*. I accept naturalism and evolution alone as able to explain why I can rely on my epistemic judgments. It is more likely (or at least as likely) that an S* person will exhibit more (or at least the same quantity of) *appropriate* behaviors than an S person, given the prospect that *truth* has little or no intrinsic value. Natural selection guarantees it.

All of this is amid a background of more obvious issues, some of which need mentioning as well.

For instance, if I have the belief that my being born was inevitable, or that I would find my wife-to-be out of several billion people around the world, or that my children were also inevitable, the probability for any of these events would just be low, they would be amazingly low.

Should I doubt I exist, that I am married, or that I have children?

Should I doubt I exist, that I am married, or that I have children if I do not believe in God, or whatever kind of special magic-sauce "God" is supposed to be in order to make those odd disappear?

Or should I instead take the facts as they are and figure out where my god-thinking has gone wrong ... because the EAAN feels an awful lot like a god-of-the-gaps argument.

In fact, opposed to what Plantinga claims (cf), we can assess the degree to which we can rely on our judgments and in that case, aside from any bad logic in the EAAN, we can properly find Plantinga's problem in reformulating things, facts-first:

(6) I have *reliable human cognitive faculties*. (basic)

(7) If I have *reliable human cognitive faculties*, then God exists. (basic)

(8) So, God exists. (MP 6, 7)

But anyone who knows (6) also knows that (7) is unmotivated, full stop. And so would it be for the proposition that specifically, I exist, I am married to a specific person, I have the specific children that I have. None imply God. So goes Plantinga's premise (2). We could, I suggest, grant that none of our explanations of facts of the matter are at all sufficient to explain their relationships to one another and never have a good reason to infer God, consequently. And, those facts alone themselves do not imply God either.

In other words, no theist would think that just because the probability is low that an omnibenevolent God exists, because of the problem of evil, that they should not believe in God.

If we remove the props of necessity, then my existence was not inevitable and that some human child's birth almost certainly was, my marriage to my wife was not inevitable but marrying anyone was highly probable, and that I would have children is nearly certain as well.

For Plantinga here, we remove the prop of equivocation. I know that I can *rely* on my *human cognitive faculties*. I have no good reason to think truth is mind-independently real. I have no good reason to think of belief as ontologically real. I have absolutely no reason to think *having appropriate behavior* would not stem from *having appropriate beliefs* or that truth could be judged apart from having either. I have no reason to think that the probability of naturalism and evolution being low in being sufficient to account for that *reliability* is either a good reason to doubt that *reliability* or doubt whether naturalism and evolution are plausible explanations.

What Plantinga fails to argue is a salient point. That is, any probability related to naturalism and evolution would have nothing to do about whether a supernatural reality was more probable rather than taking naturalism as true and that *because* we can rely on our *human cognitive faculties*, that a better theory within the theory of evolution needs to be, and likely could be fleshed out which *would* account for the *reliability* of our *human cognitive faculties*. As it is, very good explanations within evolutionary theory do exist for addressing the subject specifically.

There too, merely supposing the supernatural would not at all account for any *natural* process.

That is, either God's action in guiding evolution is ***aside from laws of nature*** or God's action in guiding evolution ***abides by the laws of nature***. With the former, God is no explanation of anything nor could God be. In the case of the latter, it is a naturalistic explanation (whether it is via evolutionary theory or anything else which is a completely naturalistic account) that would account for our having *reliable human cognitive faculties*.

Ultimately, why should anyone believe that if $P(R | N \& E)$ is probabilistically low, then we should doubt our *reliance* on our *human cognitive faculties*?

Low probability is not a defeater for our *reliance* nor does low probability imply anything serious about the theory of evolution itself or naturalism being the case.

A defeater should imply falsity, which "probabilistically low" does not seem to and it certainly does not guarantee it, which is what would be required for us to doubt our *human cognitive faculties*.