Fundamentalism on stilts: A response to Alvin Plantinga's reformed epistemology

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ABSTRACT

During the greater part of the 20th century, biblical scholarship and the philosophy of religion were not considered to have much in common. However, towards the end of the millennium, a movement of a few Christian philosophers of religion called 'Reformed Epistemology' (RE) suggested the need for interdisciplinary dialogue. With Alvin Plantinga as primary representative, these philosophers claimed to be concerned with what they considered to be the lack of philosophical reflection on the foundations of historical criticism and its non-traditional findings. In this article, the author (qua biblical scholar) suggests that Plantinga's arguments have not been taken seriously because of his fundamentalism and the resulting failure to grasp the nature and contents of the hermeneutical debates that have raged within biblical theology for the past 200 years.

INTRODUCTION

Since the middle of the 20th century philosophers of religion have proliferated considerably (Stump 2000:896). As a result it has become increasingly difficult to make a clear distinction between the philosophy of religion and philosophical theology. This has meant that in contrast to an earlier period when philosophers felt that reflection on religion was philosophically respectable only if it was abstract and generic, philosophers of religion today feel free to examine any concept in any religion, since these are philosophically interesting in their own right (Stump 2000:896). As part of this expansion of religious-philosophical loci, some philosophers of religion have begun to look beyond the propositions of Systematic Theology to the presuppositions of Biblical Theology for philosophically interesting topics to discuss. In doing so, a number of them have expressed a concern with what they perceive to be serious philosophical problems pertaining to the epistemological assumptions of biblical criticism (e.g. Plantinga 2000c:374–421; Stump 1985; Ward 1998:81–98).

To be sure, not all philosophers of religion have been so interested in – or have any pains with – biblical criticism. The ones in question are associated with the movement commonly referred to as Reformed Epistemology (RE), the views of which are encountered in the writings of Christian (Protestant) philosophers such as Alvin Plantinga, William Alston and Nicholas Wolterstorff (see Forest 2006; Hoitenga 1991). As a school of thought, RE had its beginnings in the so-called parity argument presented by Alvin Plantinga in his book *God and other minds* (see Plantinga 1967). With reference to Biblical Studies, RE's primary concern seems to be the 'unorthodox' results of historical-critical biblical scholarship. Allegedly, what critical biblical scholars are doing goes against the grain of 'traditional perspectives' and, according to some proponents of RE, renders the Bible useless for contemporary philosophical theology (Plantinga 2000c:374–421; Stump 1985). As a result, some RE exponents have taken biblical scholarship to task in their writings and, in doing so, have issued an invitation to interdisciplinary dialogue – something which I agree is long overdue. However, I am myself motivated to taking up the invitation, partly as a result out of a concern with what Stump (1985) considers the two main motives for the discussion, which are the following:

- Philosophers of religion can learn much from biblical scholars and a detailed acquaintance with biblical criticism is crucial for the philosophical examination of Judaism and Christianity.
- Philosophical reflection on the epistemology of biblical criticism is lacking and the findings of biblical criticism will turn out very differently if biblical scholarship is subjected to analysis and questioning by philosophers.

When taken out of context, these claims seem relatively unproblematic. However, when considered along with the details of the ideas many RE proponents put forward about the Bible, these motives for wanting to engage in interdisciplinary dialogue become problematic. On closer inspection they are actually driven by the ideological agenda of what has become lamentably all too familiar in contemporary Christian society: fundamentalism (see Carroll 1997 on 'biblical' Christianity). This is perhaps exactly why many critical biblical theologians have not bothered to enter into dialogue with these philosophers of religion (aside from the other lamentable fact – that of the anti-philosophical sentiment fashionable in 20th-century Biblical Theology; see Barr 1999:146–171). However, given the rising popularity of fundamentalism in lay spirituality and as an Old Testament scholar who takes an interest in the philosophy of religion, I cannot set this opportunity for interdisciplinary discussion lightly aside. It is my conviction that while the philosophy of religion can and should be applied to biblical thought (something I do myself), it is hermeneutically problematic when one does this while at the same time failing to take seriously the philosophical implications of the history of (Israelite) religion.

The fact is that the charges against biblical criticism made by Stump (1985) and Plantinga (2000c) are not wholly correct. It is not the case that biblical scholars have not paid attention to their epistemological assumptions, especially in view of the fact that the last 200 years of biblical criticism since the separation of biblical and dogmatic theology with Gabler (and the subsequent distinction between Old and New Testament theology with Bauer) has led to intricate hermeneutical discussions, the epistemological ramifications and philosophical issues of which neither Stump (1985) nor Plantinga (2000c) seem to appreciate. To be precise, these two exponents of RE's philosophical handling of the Bible is strangely

reminiscent of what one found in pre-critical Reformed Orthodoxy from the time before Gabler, when dogmatic biblical '*ei*segesis' was practiced bereft of any real historical consciousness or of the possibility of a real appreciation of the fact that conceptions of God in classical philosophical theology are anachronistic in the context of ancient Israelite religion. And while being 'Reformed' might mean for many believing today exactly what Calvin supposedly believed centuries ago, many Calvinist systematic-theological convictions are of little use when confronted with the conceptual challenges contemporary non-fundamentalist Biblical Theology has to deal with (contra Childs 1992:72).

However, up to now no Old Testament scholar that I am aware of has bothered to respond to the charges of RE, to the effect that their views are still considered intellectually respectable in many philosophical circles (in biblical scholarship the movement is mostly unknown). So, out of a concern to expose the fallacies of the sort of philosophy of religion one might call 'fundamentalism on stilts' (i.e. making outdated biblical-theological conceptions seem respectable with the aid of philosophical jargon) I have decided to accept the invitation of Stump (1985) and others and to devote this article to a discussion of why I believe some of RE's philosophy of religion is seriously damaged by a failure to appreciate the problems of Old Testament theology. I have no pains with the concept of a 'Reformed' epistemology per se but I do believe that in the writings of some philosophers of religion it really involves little more than a disguised attempt to sneak fundamentalist theology back into the academia (in a way not dissimilar from what one finds in the biblical theology of Brevard Child; see Barr 1999:437). In order to show what exactly it is that I consider to be problematic in RE's philosophical views about the Bible (and in view of the limitations of space incumbent in the writing of this article), I therefore have decided to provide a cursive and introductory critical assessment of the fundamentalist biblical-theological foundations of the philosophy of religion of RE's leading exponent, Alvin Plantinga.

ALVIN PLANTINGA'S REFORMED EPISTEMOLOGY (RE^{P})

According to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alvin_Plantinga, Alvin Carl Plantinga was born in 1932 and is a contemporary American philosopher known for his work in epistemology, metaphysics and the philosophy of religion. In 1980 already Plantinga was described by *Time* magazine as 'America's leading orthodox Protestant philosopher of God' ('Modernizing the case for God', 1980:55-56). He was portrayed in that same article as a central figure in a 'quiet revolution' regarding the respectability of belief in God among academic philosophers. More recently, many American Christians looked to him as their representative in the apologetic attempt to respond to the controversial ideas of the atheist Richard Dawkins in his *The God delusion* (Dawkins 2006). Plantinga has moreover delivered the prestigious Glifford Lectures on three separate occasions and his philosophy of religion is characterised by defences of theological ideas from the Dutch Reformed tradition in which he was raised. Not surprisingly, many of his writings incorporate discussions about the Bible and biblical scholarship (e.g. Plantinga 2000c). Plantinga is currently the John A. O'Brien Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame and somewhat of a cult-figure in American conservative Reformed apologetics.

RE^{P} as such can be construed as exemplifying the following philosophical superstructure, which is itself characterised by a number of negative epistemological tendencies:

- A rejection of evidentialism – RE^{P} argues that religious belief is rational and justified even if there is no proof to support its truth claims. It also argues that evidentialism is inconsistently applied and self-refuting.
- A rejection of radical fideism – RE^{P} is very concerned to show that faith and reason are compatible and that belief in God is rational even without any supporting evidence to back it up.
- A rejection of classical foundationalism – For RE^{P} the belief in God is held to be properly basic and not something to be inferred from more fundamental beliefs.
- A rejection of internalism – RE^{P} is externalist and argues for proper functionalism and reliabilism with reference to human cognitive apparatus (with an ad hoc error theory of transworld depravity to account for unbelief).

These tenets are evident from the writings of Wolterstorf (1976; 2001), Plantinga (1964; 1983; 2000a–c) and Alston (1991). As such they have been subjected to critical assessments which, according to Clark (1990), Sennett (1992) and DeRose (1999a) have been put forward by both theistic and atheistic philosophers of religion. The major objections are as follows (*inter alia*):

- RE^{P}'s naïve-realist appeal to religious experience is rejected, since most philosophers feel the concept of a *sensus divinitatus* on which the parity argument is based is essentially contested.
- RE^{P} is too latitudinarian, permitting the rational acceptability of virtually any belief and giving rise to the so-called Great Pumpkin Objection. According to this line of critique (alluding as it does to a scenario in the Peanuts cartoon where the character Linus sincerely believes in the return of the Great Pumpkin to the pumpkin patch each Halloween), if RE is consistently applied without double standards it allows belief in any sort of far-fetched entity to be justified as simply foundational or basic. Anyone can claim that their own beliefs are properly basic without the need for any justification in holding them. Therefore, the Great Pumpkin Objection to Plantinga's notion of proper basicality intends to show that there must be something wrong with RE if it allows such wayward beliefs to be warranted as basic.
- RE^{P} has been rejected because it has been perceived to be crypto-fideism (if one defines fideism as the view that belief in God may be rightly held in the absence of evidence or argument).

All of these objections have as their focus point RE^{P}'s central claim, namely that belief in God is properly basic (*cf*. Swinburne 2001:203–214). Of course, Plantinga has responded thoroughly to these critiques (see Plantinga 1983:16–93; 2000c). His response in turn itself invited a counter-response (see DeRose 1999b). In the end, the bottom line of the philosophical critique concerns RE^{P}'s presupposition that there is religious truth, when the existence of such truth is exactly the bone of contention and so cannot be taken for granted. This is why evidentialist and presuppositionalist theistic philosophers of religion have also faulted RE^{P} for its commitment to 'negative' apologetics, in that not only does RE^{P} offer no reasons for supposing that theism or Christianity is true (contra so-called positive apologetics), it also leaves no tool for discriminating between justified and unjustified constituent beliefs (Swinburne 2001:212).

To be sure, the above summations of RE^{P}'s views and the philosophical critique against it are of necessity cursory and cannot do justice to the intricacies and details of the debates that have raged in and around the movement since its inception (see Forest 2006; Suddith 2000). What is relevant to the present discussion is the fact that past critiques of Plantinga have tended to focus almost exclusively on problems in the *philosophical* 'superstructure' of RE^{P} with little real attention being paid to the *biblical-theological* 'base structure' of his arguments. And yet it cannot be disputed that the latter is ultimately foundational to the former – its *raison d'être*, if you will. But if this is indeed the case, it means that whatever the merits of Plantinga's sophisticated philosophical rhetoric, if it can be shown that his biblical foundations are both mistaken and/or nothing of the sort, the entire *modus operandi* of RE^{P} will have been fatally compromised. Given that philosophers of religion have already demonstrated the conceptual fallacies in RE^{P}'s philosophical superstructure, the discussion to follow is therefore meant as a supplemental critique aimed at exposing related fallacies in the biblical-theological base structure on which Plantinga's philosophy is built.

THE CONTENTS OF THE BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL BASE STRUCTURE OF RE^P

Before we can understand the fallacies of the biblical-theological base structure, we have to understand the assumptions in Plantinga's philosophical superstructure about the relation between text and reality (or 'referentiality', as Barr 1999:38 calls it). In this regard, RE^P presupposes the following ideological isomorphisms:

- The assumption that the Bible provides a unified view of reality
- The assumption that biblical theism is metaphysically true
- The assumption that RE^P is itself 'biblical'.

As for the actual materials constituting the foundations, Plantinga furthermore endorses RE^P solely because he considers it to be

- an affirmation of *Christian* philosophical theology – RE^P is basically Christian apologetics in philosophical garb;
- an affirmation of *Reformed Protestantism* – the reason why the epistemological approach is called 'Reformed' to begin with is Plantinga's notion that it is based on some of the central ideas in Calvinist dogmatics; and
- an affirmation of fundamentalist hermeneutics – Plantinga assumes on *a priori* grounds that the Bible is historically, scientifically and theologically 'inerrant' (literally the 'Word of God').

With regard to the third point above, following the views put forward by Barr (1977; 1984), I do not use the term fundamentalism in the context of Biblical Studies as in popular discourse where it refers to someone who reads the Bible in a consistently literal fashion. It has been demonstrated that the essence of fundamentalism is not literalism but the *a priori* belief in the inerrancy of biblical discourse. Because the defence of inerrancy is their main concern, fundamentalists are not consistently literal but will switch to non-literal readings when a literal reading seems problematic from their own scientific, theological or historical point of view. To be sure, Plantinga may deny that RE^P is fundamentalist in essence but the denial is contradicted by what Plantinga himself has actually had to say about the Bible on those occasions when he has ventured across disciplinary lines to take to task mainstream biblical scholarship. In his *When faith and reason clash: Evolution and the Bible* (1991) and *Warranted Christian belief* (2000c:374–421; Chapter 12: *Two (or more) kinds of scripture scholarship*), Plantinga's fundamentalism is readily discernable from claims such as the following:

> *Scripture is inerrant: the Lord makes no mistakes; what He proposes for our belief is what we ought to believe. Scripture is a wholly authoritative and trustworthy guide to faith and morals. God is not required to make a case. The principal Author of the Bible – the entire Bible – is God himself, not so much a library of independent books as itself a book with many subdivisions but a central theme: the message of the gospel. By virtue of this unity…"interpret Scripture with Scripture." One can't always determine the meaning of a given passage just by discovering what the human author intended.*
>
> (Plantinga 2000c:384)

This is a typically Protestant fundamentalist confession on the Bible and biblical interpretation. As such, it is vulnerable to a number of criticisms based on related fundamentalist hermeneutical fallacies.

FALLACIES IN RE^P'S ARGUMENTS FOR A 'BIBLICAL' EPISTEMOLOGY

Like most Protestant fundamentalists accusing the rest of the world of not being 'biblical' enough and constantly calling everyone to return [sic] to a 'biblical' view on just about every particular theological subject, Plantinga is neither as 'biblical' nor as 'Reformed' as he thinks. His philosophical arguments aimed at discrediting the work of biblical scholars engaging in historical-critical analysis are riddled with a number of glaring fallacies, stereotypically encountered in the writing of all fundamentalist philosophers of religion.

First of all, Plantinga claims that belief in God is properly basic and that the God with reference to whom belief is such is, conveniently for him, the God of the Bible (Plantinga 2000c:384). Yet Plantinga's view of YHWH is radically anachronistic and conforms more to the proverbial 'God of the Philosophers' (Aquinas in particular) than to any version of YHWH as depicted in ancient Israelite religion. This means that the pre-philosophical 'biblical' conceptions of YHWH, the belief in whom is supposed to be properly basic, is not even believed by Plantinga himself. His lofty notions of God in terms of 'Divine Simplicity', 'Maximal Greatness' and 'Perfect-Being Theology' are utterly alien with reference to many of the characterisations of YHWH in biblical narrative (e.g. Gn 18). The absence of critical historical consciousness on the part of Plantinga on this issue means an utter lack of awareness of the fact that RE^P's philosophical monotheism is – technically – 'unbiblical'.

The second problem follows from the first: What kind of God is it with reference to which Plantinga asserts belief to be properly basic? It is useless to say belief in God is properly basic unless one can specify what the contents of the beliefs about God are supposed to be. But in this Plantinga's philosophy is radically undermined by his failure to take cognisance of the fact that he is committing the fallacy of essentialism. Like all fundamentalists he seems to know nothing (and want to know nothing) of the philosophical problems posed by conceptual pluralism in Old Testament theology or the diachronic variation in the beliefs about YHWH in the history of Israelite religion. In short, he seems blissfully unaware that there is no such thing as *the* 'biblical' perspective on God. So if it is the 'biblical' God with reference to which belief is supposed to be properly basic, and given the pluralism in the biblical discourse, most Old Testament theologians would like to know which particular version of YHWH it is with reference to which belief is supposed to be properly basic. This suggests that any recourse to proper basicality to avoid justification is shipwrecked by the fact that the notion is essentially non-informative, since the actual practice of holding any belief in God requires filling it with a notion of God, which in turn requires justification for choosing one view of God over another. Therefore a second-order set of beliefs, which Plantinga himself implies is not properly basic, comes into play, and this concerns his belief that a) RE^P's belief that the Bible is true and coherent is correct; b) RE^P's view of God is biblical; and c) RE^P's interpretation of the texts are correct. Yet on all three counts biblical criticism has shown Plantinga is mistaken, and as a result, his entire philosophical superstructure becomes in jeopardy.

A third problem concerns another way in which Plantinga's philosophy of religion brackets the history of religion. RE^P claims to be 'biblical' in that the religious epistemology is assumed to mirror that of the biblical texts themselves. Of course, the biblical texts are not philosophy and the biblical authors do not discuss religious epistemology – yet even the Old Testament discourse contains epistemological assumptions about the nature of knowledge, belief and truth. Now aside from the possibility of epistemological pluralism that may once again rear its ugly head (e.g. in the incommensurable religious epistemologies of Daniel and Qoheleth), the fact is that it is wrong to assume, as Plantinga does, that the Old Testament is anti-evidentialist. On the contrary, there is ample reason to believe that a 'soft' evidentialism is in fact the default epistemology taken for granted in ancient Israelite religion given the nature of many of the pre-philosophical epistemological assumptions in the biblical narratives. The whole idea of miracles (signs) and revelation via theophany, audition, dreams, divination and history can be said to presuppose an evidentialist epistemology (see the oft-repeated formula 'so that they may know…'). After all, of all the religious epistemologies that come to mind, it is difficult to imagine that the prophet Elijah in the narrative where he takes on the Baal Prophets on Carmel was endorsing anything remotely similar to 'Reformed Epistemology' (see 1 Ki 18). If that is not an instance of evidentialism in the Old Testament, what is? To be sure, there

might be other biblical trajectories more amenable to Reformed Epistemological ideas but my concern lies with those that are not, particularly in view of Plantinga's insinuation that his view is the only 'biblical' one.

A fourth biblical-theological shortcoming of RE^P concerns Plantinga's naïve-realist hermeneutics. The naïveté lies both on the level of the practice of biblical interpretation and on the meta-level of views on the nature of the biblical materials. With regard to exegesis, Plantinga (2000c:387) suggests that we should check our interpretations of the text with the text itself, thereby failing to appreciate the fact that we cannot compare our view with the Bible itself, we are always only comparing interpretations with each other. Therefore it is a priori impossible to check our interpretation of the Scriptures against the Scriptures absolutely (in a sense analogous to the distinction between the Kantian 'phenomenon' and 'noumenon', the thing-as-it-appears and the thing-in-itself). In this Plantinga seems not to have awaken from his 'dogmatic slumbers' (to borrow Kant's reference to himself following a reading of Hume) in that on the meta-level he seems unable to distinguish between God / the Bible as such and his (Plantinga's) *views* (or dogmas) on God / the Bible (his dogmas or ideology). Plantinga imagines himself and RE to be loyal to and fighting for the Bible as such when in fact he is not so much defending the Bible for its own sake but struggling to place his own Reformed Fundamentalist view of the Bible beyond the possibility of critique.

The fifth problem – and this point follows from the previous one – Plantinga argues along typical fundamentalist apologetic lines that one either assumes beforehand that the Bible is the Word of God or merely fallible human superstition (Plantinga 2000c:388). Moreover, he believes that the problems of biblical criticism are in fact generated by having the wrong presuppositions (Plantinga 2000c:389). This seems to me to involve a category mistake in that here Plantinga has failed to distinguish between the descriptive and evaluative modi in biblical interpretation. Historical biblical scholarship is supposed to be a descriptive enterprise in which one's personal beliefs about the Bible need not be given up but should be bracketed lest they interfere with the reading process of discovering what the Bible itself means, whether this meaning coheres with our own dogmas or not. To be sure, purely descriptive reading remains only an ideal – like objectivity itself – and I am not assuming an outdated positivist hermeneutics. Yet the fact is that in working descriptively it is not necessary to decide beforehand what the Bible is in the context of systematic theology, since that would be presumptuous. Plantinga therefore confuses the operations of biblical and dogmatic theology and to insist that beliefs about inspiration be endorsed or denied from the outset involves mistaking exegesis for doctrinal reflection. Certainly, we all have assumptions in this regard, but the entire point of critical reading is the willingness to test these assumptions in view of the evidence. Yet Plantinga's own presuppositionalist hermeneutics show that he is more interested in safeguarding his own fundamentalist assumptions than allowing them to be modified should the nature of the biblical data require it. In wanting to prejudge the issue on inspiration, Plantinga conveniently forgets that the question of meaning precedes the question of truth (as analytic philosophy has taught us), and that without this insight no corrective from the Bible on dogmas are possible to begin with.

The sixth problem is that Plantinga claims that his own readings of the Bible follow a 'traditional' approach (Plantinga 2000a:385 and passim). However, not only is any appeal to tradition in itself a potential logical fallacy in the justification of truth claims in the philosophy of religion, but the problem is also that the concept of a singular 'traditional' reading is meaningless, for there never was a single way of reading the text anywhere in the history of interpretation. Moreover, the reason why Plantinga is so concerned with what he takes to be the 'traditional' approach is his mistaken belief that the problems of biblical criticism were generated when biblical interpreters exchanged historical-grammatical exegesis for historical criticism. Therefore, Plantinga seems to assume that the problems dealt with in Biblical Theology (e.g. theological pluralism, the problem of history, the relation between the testaments, the question of a 'Mitte', and the relation to ancient Near Eastern religions) only exist if the exegete endorses the 'evils' of humanism, rationalism, evolutionary theory and methodological naturalism. But this is simply not true and many of the questions biblical scholars ponder are in fact much older than the modern period (known from Rabbinic sources). Moreover, Plantinga overlooks the fact that the primary impetus for historical criticism was not the Enlightenment but the Protestant Reformation itself (see Hayes & Prussner 1985:1; also see Barr 1999's critique of Brevard Childs as crypto-fundamentalist for an analogical situation within biblical theology).

A seventh and final matter for discussion concerns the *non-sequitur* involved in the ultimate objectives of RE^P in the context of the discussion with biblical scholars and the critique of biblical criticism. Plantinga thinks that if he can discredit historical criticism and evolutionary theory, then his own fundamentalist and creationist hermeneutics win by default and can be taken seriously again (2000c:398). In this he seems to forget that proving historical criticism wrong is not the same as proving historical-grammatical hermeneutics correct – that is another task on its own. The same is the case with regard to his raging against evolution – even if Plantinga could somehow demonstrate a fatal problem in the theory, this does not vindicate creationism. The latter still needs to be justified as part of a separate project and imagining that it gets a second chance if evolution is someday left behind is as naïve as thinking that astrology gets another shot at it if a contemporary astronomical theory is discredited. It does not work that way – one has to go forwards, not backwards, and creationism and fundamentalism have had their day. To discredit historical criticism is not to have done away with the problems of biblical criticism or with the justified critique of fundamentalist and creationist hermeneutics. After historical criticism and evolution have had their day, we will require a new theory, not a reversion to what has had its chance and remains outdated. That is why biblical scholarship developed literary and social-scientific criticism and why modifications in evolutionary theory came about following discoveries in genetics. Plantinga, in his critique of historical criticism and evolutionary perspectives, seems to be battling a straw man in that he engages with older varieties of these views that have little to do with these perspectives in their current formats.

In the end, reading between the lines of Plantinga's pains with biblical criticism, it eventually becomes readily apparent that Plantinga's entire case is in fact little more than a huge demonstration of special pleading. Time and again it is implied that the main reason Plantinga cannot and will not accept a critical approach to the text is not because he really understood what biblical criticism is all about, but rather because of what he takes to be its implication – that he would have to take leave of his own cherished personal 'properly basic' dogmas about the text. This is why Plantinga will not be taken seriously by mainstream biblical theologians. He is always arguing on a meta-level, merely aghast at the revolutionary findings without ever really coming to grips with the details of the research that led to those findings in the first place. Like most fundamentalists, Plantinga has a very distorted and oversimplified view of critical biblical scholarship, assuming all those practising it to conform to the demonised profile of the critical scholar he has constructed from a combination of isolated individuals and out of a paranoia concerning anything approaching 'liberalism'. The lack of understanding in this regard is not a virtue and from the perspective of biblical theologians is simply doing major damage to his philosophical claims.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion above it should be clear that in raging against what he calls 'historical biblical criticism', Alvin Plantinga is not really in a position to speak on these issues –

and will not be taken seriously if he does – if only because he shows no sign of understanding the nature and contents of the problems that biblical scholars themselves have been grappling with for the past 200 years. Unless proponents of RE (and other philosophers of religion interested in dialogue with biblical scholars and concerned with biblical criticism) can get beyond the fundamentalism inherent in RE^{P} and come up with a non-fundamentalist alternative, they will never be taken seriously by anyone acquainted with the discussion in mainstream biblical scholarship.

Of course, being fundamentalist, RE^{P}'s invitations to debate the issues concerning the nature and interpretation of the Bible were, of course, not really meant seriously. Plantinga never for one moment really intends to consider the possibility of actually learning something from biblical scholars practicing historical criticism. Rather, he has already decided beforehand that no apparent problem, fact, interpretation or piece of evidence can be true if it clashes with what he already believes on the level of personal dogma. No serious reconsideration of personal opinion is ever seriously envisaged. Hence debates on RE^{P} will never get anywhere as they are always based on the assumption that it is the biblical critics who are in need of changing their mind. Even so, let it not be said that no response has been forthcoming.

I would therefore like to conclude by pointing out that one need only be cognisant of the fallacies in RE^{P} as outlined above to see that Plantinga has mistaken the philosophy of religion for fundamentalist Christian apologetics. In doing so, he turns out to be neither biblical nor Reformed (or even really 'philosophical') in his arguments. It hardly matters how sophisticated, coherent, interesting, orthodox, complex or convincing the philosophical and specifically epistemological arguments in justifying RE^{P} in its current format might be or become. As long as the assumptions underlying the philosophical jargon are riddled with such biblical-theological fallacies as demonstrated above, Plantinga's version of RE will be considered by many to be no more than fundamentalism on stilts.

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