

THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF ALVIN PLANTINGA

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Abstract. In this article we intend to present Alvin Plantinga's epistemology by showing the way in which its central concepts: the Reidian foundationalism, the partial critique of evidentialism, warrant, proper function, reliability and externalism - are logically interrelated. A section of this article is reserved to the critiques of his account of warrant brought by Peter Klein and Richard Feldman and to the way in which Plantinga answered them, by developing the concepts of cognitive maxi- and mini-environment. In the end we will see the way in which Plantinga's epistemology relates to both modernism and postmodernism.

Keywords: Alvin Plantinga, epistemology, Reidian foundationalism, evidentialism, reliability.

Introduction

A central concept of epistemology is that of 'knowledge'. In his dialogue *Theaetetus*, Plato raised the question: 'What is it that which must be added to mere true belief to obtain knowledge?' In this way he suggested that a belief is *known* by us only when it is both true and justified (or warranted).

Alvin Plantinga, the philosopher whose epistemology we intend to present in this essay, prefers to use – when writing about knowledge and its essential components – the term 'warrant'; he makes a certain distinction between 'warrant' and 'justification'¹ – and defines warrant as '(that) elusive quality or quantity enough of which, together with truth and belief, is sufficient for knowledge'².

Plantinga was well known in the contemporary philosophical world for his contributions to the metaphysics of modality and to the philosophy of religion (especially on such topics as theodicy and the arguments for the existence of God). But starting with the 90'-s, Plantinga began to write intensively on epistemological subjects. As result, his trilogy on warrant: *Warrant: The Current Debate* (1993), *Warrant and Proper Function* (1993) and *Warranted Christian*

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¹ As we will see, Plantinga associates the term 'justification' with *internalism* – and considers that only the internalists identify warrant with justification. However, his option is for *externalism* – and for externalists there is a clear distinction between these two concepts.

² Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993, p. v.