

Warranted religion: answering objections to Alvin Plantinga's epistemology

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Abstract: Alvin Plantinga over the decades has developed a particular theory of warrant that would allow certain beliefs to be warranted, even if one lacked propositional arguments or evidence for them. One such belief that Plantinga focuses on is belief in God. There have been, however, numerous objections both to Plantinga's theory of warrant and to the religious application that he makes of it. In this article I address an objection from both of these categories. I first tackle an objection that attempts to show that proper function isn't a necessary condition for warrant. After tackling this, I move on to interact with the Pandora's Box Objection. This objection argues that Plantinga's epistemology is weakened by the fact that all sorts of serious religious beliefs could be warranted by using his system.

Introduction

The first volume of Plantinga's trilogy, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, tackles contemporary internalist, reliabilist, and coherence-based theories of warrant.¹ Plantinga's goal in this work is to demonstrate the inadequacy of each of these theories and to show how each theory's failure points to the necessity of the proper function condition. Thus, in his second volume, *Warrant and Proper Function*, he fleshes out his theory of warrant as he demonstrates its explanatory scope, power, and plausibility in accounting for certain problems in epistemology. These problems include the Gettier problem, the problem of induction, and the problem of justifying belief in other minds. In his third volume, Plantinga argues that given that the conditions for warrant-as-proper function are in place, it would seem to follow that it is epistemically possible for belief in God and even belief in Christianity to be warranted. Plantinga makes this argument by asserting two different epistemological models. In regard to how theism could be warranted,

he proposes the Aquinas Calvin model (AC), which goes as follows: if God exists and if He has constituted the human cognitive system in such a way that when it is properly functioning belief in Him would come about naturally; it would appear that one could be warranted in believing that God exists.² Plantinga then extends this model (EAC) to include specifically Christian belief.³ This extended model goes as follows: if God exists and if His Spirit testified about the truths of the Gospel to a subject, as long as the subject believed the Spirit's testimony, the subject could be warranted in believing the truths of the Gospel.⁴

Though Plantinga's work on warrant has been hailed as a major accomplishment in twentieth-century epistemology,⁵ it isn't without its criticisms.⁶ Because of this, I will now focus on two specific objections that deserve more attention than Plantinga originally gave them. First, I will focus on an objection aimed at Plantinga's theory of warrant. The particular objection that I shall address is that the proper function condition is not a necessary condition for warrant. I will use Sosa's Swampman counterexample to demonstrate this objection as Sosa thinks that Swampman is a subject who has warrant and yet lacks proper function. I will respond to this objection by demonstrating how Swampman lacks a tight connection to truth⁷ (which is needed for warrant), while he still meets both internalist and reliabilist requirements. After tackling the objection that is aimed towards Plantinga's proper functionalism, I will then engage with an objection aimed at the religious implications that Plantinga draws out from his theory of warrant. The particular objection that I will deal with argues that Plantinga's religious epistemology seems to be weakened by the fact that all sorts of serious religious and even anti-religious beliefs could be warranted by using his system. The particular expression of this objection that I will specifically address can be seen in Rose Ann Christian's argument that Plantinga's epistemology has allowed Advaita Vedanta Hinduism to be warranted in the same way as Christian belief could be warranted. I argue against this largely by addressing Plantinga's critiques on naturalism and then applying them to Advaita Vedanta Hinduism.

Sosa's Swampman and the Proper Function Condition

Plantinga's theory of warrant goes as follows:

- (1) One's cognitive faculties must function properly.
- (2) One's cognitive environment has to be sufficiently similar to the one for which the cognitive faculties were designed.
- (3) The design plan that governs the production of such belief is aimed at producing true belief, and
- (4) The design plan is a good one in that there is a high statistical (or objective) probability that a belief produced under these conditions will be true.⁸

I will now articulate an objection to (1). In Ernest Sosa's chapter 'Proper functionalism and virtue epistemology', Donald Davidson's Swampman example is used as a counterexample to Plantinga's proper function account.⁹ Sosa quotes Davidson:

Suppose lightning strikes a dead tree in a swamp; I am standing nearby. My body is reduced to its elements, while entirely by coincidence (and out of different molecules) the tree is turned into my physical replica. My replica, The Swampman, moves exactly as I did; according to its nature it departs the swamp, encounters and seems to recognize my friends, and appears to return their greetings in English. It moves into my houses and seems to write articles on radical interpretation. No one can tell the difference. But there *is* a difference.¹⁰

Sosa claims that Swampman lacks proper function as a design plan and the correct way in which the design plan should be carried out (proper function) aren't the sort of things that can come about through these various random conditions. However, Sosa argues that Swampman would nonetheless have justified beliefs as Swampman's cognitive system would indeed be a reliable one.¹¹ His cognitive system is a reliable one in that it produces true beliefs and would still produce the same true beliefs given slightly different circumstances. In addition to meeting the reliabilist's requirement, Swampman would also seem to meet the internalist's requirement in having access to or awareness of those properties which confer warrant.¹² This would be so as Swampman's beliefs would be identical to Davidson's beliefs and he would also share Davidson's reasons for holding these beliefs. Given that Swampman would meet these requirements, it would seem that Swampman would have knowledge and yet still lack proper function.

In attempting to articulate better what is at the heart of Davidson's Swampman case, Sosa also mentions the possibility that instead of a Swampman emerging, a Swampbaby came about via a random lightning strike. If a hunter found the Swampbaby and raised the baby in a normal way, it would appear that the Swampbaby would grow up knowing all sorts of things.¹³ Swampbaby would go to school and form beliefs about what was being taught. Swampbaby (or Swampchild?) would come to certain conclusions such as that Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean blue in 1492 or that $1 + 1 = 2$, and so on. Sosa argues these Swampfamily counterexamples are incompatible with proper functionalism because proper functionalism entails that proper function is necessary, that is to say it is impossible that someone could be warranted without proper function. Since the Swampman case seems logically and metaphysically possible, it would appear that proper functionalism has a genuine counterexample.

Does Sosa's Swampman constitute a genuine defeater for the necessity of proper function? Unlike Donald Davidson, Swampman lacks a particular way in which his faculties should function. When Davidson sees an alligator in the swamp area that is running after him, if his faculties are functioning as they should, there will be a belief produced that an alligator is running after him. If instead of producing the belief that an alligator is running after him, his faculties produced

the belief that a beautiful woman is running towards him, it would appear that something is wrong with Davidson's cognitive system. There is a malfunction in this situation because this isn't the type of belief that the faculties should produce under these conditions.

The same couldn't be said about Swampman however, as Swampman has no way in which his faculties should produce certain beliefs under particular circumstances.¹⁴ There is no right sort or wrong sort of belief that should or shouldn't be produced from his cognitive system. This would be so even granting that Swampman's faculties are counterfactually reliable and/or that he has the right internal access or awareness.¹⁵ If this is so, it would appear that even if Swampman produces the belief that an alligator in the swamp is coming for him and there does happen to be one coming for him, this would be a genuine case of cognitive luck.¹⁶ It just so happens that his cognitive system produces a belief in an alligator instead of a beautiful Swampplady friend or any other sort of belief. It is not as if his faculties have been designed (whether it be by God, by evolution, or both) to produce this belief under the appropriate circumstances. Because there are no ways in which his cognitive system should produce any beliefs appropriately in this way, it would appear that any true belief that is produced would lack a tight connection to truth.

Someone might find it hard to believe that a subject could have a cognitive process that continually produced mostly true beliefs, with the subject even being aware of the right reasons for holding those true beliefs, and yet lack this tight connection to truth. I will give a certain scenario that I think, taken with the Swampman counterexample, might make this possibility more obvious. After giving what I have termed the Gambling Demons Scenario, I will then briefly reiterate how the Swampman counterexample demonstrates that one could have certain internal access or a reliable process and yet still lack warrant due to the absence of proper function.

The Gambling Demons Scenario

It seems logically possible that there be a world where demons run around in hell looking to commit great sins and atrocities. It seems possible that in their demon common room they might have some sort of belief-forming and reason-forming slot machines with which they like to play. Perhaps these demons, who love to cause havoc, pick a handful of very unfortunate souls who upon the demons pulling the levers on the belief and reason forming slot machines will then have whatever beliefs and reasons that come up on the machines placed into their cognitive systems. So, one might hold the belief that ducks have blue antlers under the earth, and the reason for this belief is that 1-dog=Noggot. However, much to a not-so-lucky demon's surprise, upon pulling the levers on each of the slot machines, there come about only beliefs that would be true for the unfortunate

soul, along with reasons that just so happen to correspond with these true beliefs. It just so happens that all of the beliefs that were selected (the slot machines at once produced all the beliefs and reasons that the unfortunate soul will have for the rest of the unfortunate soul's life) come about at the right time and for just the right reason. Thus, when the unfortunate soul forms the belief that he is walking to church, he actually is walking to church.

There is of course something about this scenario that would make the beliefs that one would hold seem to have little or no warrant as these beliefs and reasons came about by complete chance. Moreover, we have a clear example of how one could have a cognitive system that consistently produced the right beliefs with the subject aware of the right reasons, and yet the individual would not be warranted in his beliefs. Now one might say that the unfortunate soul lacks warrant not because he lacks proper function, rather he lacks warrant because he has a poor design plan. This would of course be different from the Swampman counter-example where the Swampman lacks proper function all together. It is important that I reiterate that this scenario was only meant to make it clearer that one could go about producing mostly true beliefs while being aware of the right reasons for holding those beliefs and yet still lack a tight connection to truth.

I have established two things thus far. First, I have established that because Swampman lacks proper function there seems to be something serendipitous about his true beliefs, for his cognitive system lacks a way in which his beliefs should be produced. Second, I have established that just because a subject's cognitive system consistently produces true beliefs and the subject is aware of the right reasons for holding those beliefs, it does not follow that the subject's cognitive system has a tight connection to truth. Thus, even if the Swampman is consistently producing true beliefs and even if he can articulate why these beliefs are true, it doesn't follow that these beliefs have any tight connection to truth.

The Pandora's Box Objection

As one can see from the above objection, Plantinga's theory of warrant is quite controversial. There have been whole volumes authored by numerous top epistemologists attacking both his model of warrant and his application of it to Christianity.¹⁷ There is, however, one specific objection to which Plantinga and his disciples have paid little attention. This objection argues that though belief in the Great Pumpkin or voodoo shouldn't be taken seriously when determining possible candidates who could be warranted under Plantinga's system, there are still serious religions and world-view beliefs that could act in an analogous way to Christian belief when combined with Plantinga's religious epistemology. The objection argues that Plantinga has opened something like Pandora's Box in allowing for numerous serious belief systems and religions to use his model of warrant.

Rose Ann Christian has suggested that a follower of Advaita Vedanta religion could adopt Plantinga's religious epistemology.¹⁸ She sees this as a problem since this religion is vastly different from Christianity as it teaches that reality is ultimately the impersonal Brahman.¹⁹ James Beilby makes the point that there might be possible objections to such a world-view, yet one might be able to handle these potential defeaters in a similar way as Plantinga does with Christianity.²⁰ David Tien makes a similar argument that Neo-Confucianism could be warranted in the same way that Plantinga's Christianity could be warranted. Tien finds this troubling for it would show that the follower of Neo-Confucianism is in the same epistemic boat as the Christian.²¹ Plantinga seems to believe that various religious traditions could use his system as he states,

For any such set of beliefs, couldn't we find a model under which the beliefs in question have warrant, and such that given the truth of those beliefs, there are no philosophical objections to the truth of the model? Well, probably something like that *is* true for the other theistic religions: Judaism, Islam, some forms of Hinduism, and some forms of Buddhism, some forms of American Indian religion. Perhaps these religions are like Christianity in that they are subject to no *de jure* objections that are independent of *de facto* objections.²²

Now, I am unsure what forms of Buddhism and Hinduism Plantinga has in mind. If by forms of Hinduism or Buddhism he has in mind those forms that espouse personal theism, I would be sympathetic to his comment. However, there are major historic philosophical forms of Hinduism that wouldn't fall into this category and I am unaware of any Buddhist school that would as well. It is with this statement that I would like to challenge the claim that Plantinga has allowed a wide range of serious religious beliefs to be warranted in the same way that the Judaeo-Christian religion could be warranted. Since Christian claims that Shankara's Advaita Vedanta Hinduism could account for Plantinga's religious epistemology, I will specifically address this tradition of Hinduism. However, in order to establish my critiques against Advaita Vedanta Hinduism, I will need first to establish briefly Plantinga's argument from proper function against naturalism. This will lay the foundation for arguing that Advaita Vedanta Hinduism predicts its own unwarrantedness.

What is naturalism?

Before defending these arguments against naturalism, it is important to provide a working definition for what I mean by naturalism. There are many variations of what one can mean by naturalism. I have in mind something like a metaphysical definition of naturalism.

Armstrong defines metaphysical naturalism as 'a spatio-temporal account of the general nature of reality'.²³ Similarly, Stace argues 'naturalism [is] the belief that the world is a single system of things or events every one of which is bound to every other in a network of relations and laws, and . . . outside this "natural order"

there is nothing'.²⁴ In regard to what Plantinga specifically has in mind, Michael Bergmann states: 'Metaphysical naturalism is, roughly speaking, the view that there are no supernatural beings – no such beings as, for example, God or angels or ghosts.'²⁵

Naturalistic attempts at proper function

Keeping these sorts of definitions in mind, if proper function is needed for warrant, could naturalism supply those conditions to make proper function intelligible? Plantinga makes the point that a lot of the naturalistic accounts that attempt to account for proper function are not necessarily proper function accounts but are in fact really close accounts to proper function (nearby notions of it) that invoke evolution and natural selection.²⁶ Because of the limited range of this article, I will not be able to interact exhaustively with all contemporary naturalistic accounts of proper function.²⁷ This said, I will interact with one very popular account that is appealed to as an account of proper function, in order to give an example of why Plantinga thinks naturalistic accounts of proper function fail. This account will be viewed through Plantinga's two standard counter-examples that attempt to demonstrate that naturalistic accounts espouse neither necessary nor sufficient conditions. Engaging with this account will then establish the grounds needed to tackle Christian's objection regarding Advaita Vedanta Hinduism being able to account for Plantinga's theory of warrant.

The very popular account of proper function that I will engage with can be seen in Ruth Millikan's book²⁸ *Language, Thought, and Other Biological Categories*. The book articulates the following account:

Putting things very roughly, for an item *A* to have function *F* as a 'proper function', it is necessary (and close to sufficient) that one of these two conditions should hold (1) *A* originated as a 'reproduction' (to give one example, as a copy, or a copy of a copy) of some prior item or items that, due in part to possession of the properties reproduced, have actually performed *F* in the past, and *A* exists because (causally historically because) of this or these performances. (2) *A* originated as the product of some prior device that, given its circumstances, had performance of *F* as a proper function and that, under those circumstances, normally causes *F* to be performed by *means* of producing an item like *A*. Items that fall under condition (2) have 'derived proper functions', functions derived from the devices that produce them.²⁹

I don't think this sort of naturalistic account will work. Naturalistic accounts often have one thing in common – namely a need for no originals. Notice that (1) depends on 'A' originating as a reproduction of some prior item. This would be a problem for items that didn't fit into (2), if there were logical possibilities where there were no originals but yet there was still proper function. For example, is the story of Adam and Eve (or something very much like this) logically possible? If so, it would appear that this sort of natural selection explanation

would not work, for Adam and Eve's hearts were properly functioning and yet there were no ancestors, or prior copies in their case. Plantinga points this out when he states: 'Whether or not God directly and immediately created Adam and Eve, clearly he could have – and if he had, they would have had no ancestors.'³⁰ Similarly, would the first ever computer be properly functioning if indeed it lacked predecessors? I think it is obvious that it would. It appears to me that one will not be able to use accounts that depend on natural selection in order to explain proper function as long as first copies, originals, and God are logical possibilities.

Furthermore, with regard to Millikan's definition, not only does it seem not necessary (given the logical possibility of Adam and Eve), but as Plantinga has pointed out, it doesn't appear to be sufficient either. Plantinga gives the example of a Hitler-like madman, who in order to fulfil his Nietzschean plan to play God, orders his minions to enable a genetic mutation in selected non-Aryan victims; a mutation that will hinder their visual system greatly and add a certain amount of pain when they open their eyes.³¹ The Nietzschean regime then decides to start killing off the non-Aryan non-mutants. In doing so, the genetic mutation that hinders the visual system and causes discomfort actually saves the non-Aryan mutants from perishing. If one looks to some generations later, we can see the criteria of Millikan's definition being met. The later generations of non-Aryan mutants have a visual system that actually aided in its past generations' survival and it continues to aid them currently in survival.

But should one really consider that the non-Aryan mutants have a visual system that is properly functioning? Plantinga answers no to this question and takes it as reason to reject the account all together as he states: 'But wouldn't it be wrong (not to mention crazy) to say that m's visual system is functioning properly?'³² Like Plantinga, I too (and I think most people will) share the strong intuition that there would still be something wrong in saying that the non-Aryan mutants' visual systems are functioning properly. If this is the case, I think one would have good reason for rejecting this account of proper function.

In other works, Plantinga interacts with other widely accepted naturalistic accounts of proper function by using these two counterexamples. Granting that these counterexamples are just as successful against those accounts as they are against Millikan's account, it would appear that these counterexamples could help in creating a litmus test for being a genuine account of proper function. I believe the success of these counterexamples helps vindicate the intuition that a design plan needs a designer. Though open to entertaining new naturalistic accounts of proper function, Plantinga thinks that naturalism fails in accounting for the proper function condition as it lacks a conscious and intentional designer. If naturalism cannot account for proper function, then according to Plantinga's theory of warrant, belief in naturalism cannot be warranted even if it were true. Having said this, however, it would appear to me that other world-views and religions that

have the right tools, namely a conscious and intentional designer, could account for proper function and thus could be warranted.

Warranted religion: Advaita Vedanta Hinduism

As previously stated, since Christian claims that the Advaita Vedanta religion could account for Plantinga's religious epistemology, I will now specifically address Advaita Vedanta Hinduism. However, in order to address it properly, I will need first to articulate its central doctrinal claims as seen in its central thinker, Shankara. This will lead us to see that Shankara endorsed a sort of proper functionalism. Since Shankara endorsed something like proper functionalism, this endorsement would seem to provide even more reason to think that Plantinga's epistemology would allow Shankara's Hinduism to be warranted in a similar way. This will further motive a response to Christian's original objection.

After explaining the central tenets of Advaita Vedanta Hinduism, I will then argue that Advaita Vedanta Hinduism lacks the resources to make intelligible both the proper function condition and the truth-aimed condition of Plantinga's theory of warrant. This will be due to Advaita Vedanta's ontological commitment that all reality consists of the impersonal Brahman.

A brief biography of Shankara

To help better understand Shankara's religious claims and beliefs, it will be important to establish the context in which he lived and taught. Paul Devanandan seems to agree with this sentiment as he states:

To the student of history of religion this tendency presents no little difficulty. Hinduism, at any period in its history, is a glorious confusion of religious notions and philosophic concepts couched in terms which are used interchangeably by different schools and sects. In each case the exact connotation is only to be gained by study of the context; and the context is variously explained by commentators, though all of them claim the sanction of Scriptures.³³

Shankara was born probably *c.* 788 into a Namburdri Brahmin family in a place called Kaladi.³⁴ Early in life, Shankara showed a high aptitude for abstract thinking and soon renounced the world. Shankara at a young age began to study under Govinda (a disciple of Guadapada).³⁵ Shankara became famous for going from city to city reforming Hindu practices, starting monasteries, and debating with famous gurus on certain metaphysical and religious epistemological claims.³⁶ At the heart of all of his teaching was Nirguna Brahman, that is to say, Brahman without qualities.³⁷

Though his debating skills were unrivalled, he is even better known for his writing. Shankara wrote commentaries on the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita,

and the Vedanta Sutras. The most influential and well-known philosophical writings that are attributed to him would include the *Upadesasaharsri* and the *Viveka-Chudamani*.³⁸ His writing gave rational thinkers a way to embrace his Hindu teachings³⁹ and it gave the religious a way to interpret scriptures in a consistent and philosophically sophisticated manner.⁴⁰ In summarizing the life of Shankara, Radhakrishnan states the following:

The life of Sankara makes a strong impression of contraries. He is a philosopher and a poet, a savant and a saint, a mystic and a religious reformer. Such diverse gifts did he possess that different images present themselves, if we try to recall his personality. One sees him in youth on fire with intellectual ambition[,] a stiff and intrepid debater; another regards him as a shrewd political genius, attempting to impress upon the people a sense of unity; for a third, he is a calm philosopher engaged in the single effort to expose the contradictions of life and thought with an unmatched incisiveness; for a fourth he is the mystic who declares that we are all greater than we know.⁴¹

Shankara's philosophy

Shankara bases his philosophy on the formula 'That art thou'.⁴² Shankara believes that Brahman is an absolute being, devoid of qualities. He has no genus and he is related to nothing.⁴³ Shankara makes this clear as he states: 'Brahman is the reality – the one existence, absolutely independent of human thought or idea. Because of the ignorance of our human minds, the universe seems to be composed of diverse forms. It is Brahman alone.'⁴⁴ Thus, for Shankara, all that exists is the unified and absolute oneness that is Brahman. Though the scriptures seem to indicate Brahman being personal and interacting with creation, Shankara distinguishes different layers of reality that exist. Victoria Harrison summarizes Shankara's categories in the following way:

Layer 1: Absolute reality.

Nirguna Brahman, Qualityless Brahman, Brahman/Atman.

Layer 2: Absolute reality seen through categories imposed by human thought.

Saguna Brahman, Brahman with qualities. Creator and governor of the world and a personal god (Ishvara).

Layer 3: Conventional reality.

The material world, which includes 'empirical' selves.⁴⁵

Christopher Isherwood makes a similar distinction within Shankara's thought when he asks,

Are there then two Gods – one the impersonal Brahman, the other the personal Ishvara? No – for Brahman only appears as Ishvara when viewed by the relative ignorance of Maya. Ishvara has the same degree of reality as Maya has. God the Person is not the ultimate nature of Brahman.⁴⁶

Kant's distinction between the phenomena and noumena is somewhat analogous to Shankara's layers of reality. Given that this is the case, Kant's distinctions can help shed light on what Shankara argues for. For Kant, human minds attempt to understand the noumenal realm, that is the realm in which things exist in themselves and independently of human experience; but in doing so human minds project only things how they appear. The phenomenal realm exists merely as the appearance of what is most real (the noumena), but this realm or layer is not the most ultimate realm or layer of existence. In the same way, Shankara argues that because of *maya*, human faculties are aimed towards producing conventional beliefs that don't reflect ultimate reality. Moreover, even after overcoming a sort of conventional way of perceiving the world, at the second layer of reality, human faculties still project categories onto the Divine that, at the ultimate level, lack existence. It isn't until one can stop the projection of categories that 'All sense of duality is obliterated',⁴⁷ and one is illuminated in knowing the first layer of reality, namely that all is the impersonal Brahman. For Shankara, this layer of reality would be the known as the noumenal realm.

Zimmer summarizes this by stating: 'Only knowledge (*vidya*) effects release (*moksa*) from the sheaths and bondages of nescience, and moreover this knowledge is not something to be obtained but is already present within, as the core and support of our existence.'⁴⁸ Zimmer goes on to state that realization can be attained through critical thought, following the orthodox tradition, and practicing mind-amplifying practices of yoga.⁴⁹ Zimmer puts a special emphasis on yoga practices within Shankara's thought as he states: 'Yogic exercises of intensive concentration are the main implement for the realization of the truth communicated by the guru; but these cannot be undertaken by anyone who has not already prepared himself, by means of cleaning austerities and impeccable conduct, in a spirit of virtuous self-abnegation.'⁵⁰

In order to summarize what has been established thus far, it is important to emphasize that in the ultimate layer of reality all there is, is the impersonal Brahman. Moreover, though the impersonal Brahman is the only thing that exists in the ultimate sense, *maya* creates the illusion of diversity. Human beings are trapped as their cognitive faculties consistently produce belief in diversity, including the belief in the existence of the empirical self. In order to get out of this trap, man must have the right knowledge that all that exists in the ultimate layer of reality is the impersonal Brahman. Human beings can come to this right knowledge through dedicating their lives to the right practices, which especially includes being instructed by a guru and following through with the right mind-altering yoga techniques. Upon faithfully doing this, according to Devanandan, one, 'by the cogitation of absolute identity, finds absolute rest in the Self, consisting of bliss, then he is freed from the fear of transmigratory existence'.⁵¹

Advaita Vedanta and the proper function condition

Having established the central tenets of Shankara's Advaita Vedanta tradition, I will now take a closer look at Shankara's epistemology. This will help further articulate Christian's claim that Advaita Vedanta could be warranted in the same way that Christian belief could be warranted. Using the work of Thomas Forsthoefel, I will conclude that Shankara's epistemology shares much in common with Plantinga's epistemology. However, I will then argue that though they share a similar epistemology, unlike Christianity, Advaita Vedanta lacks the resources to make Plantinga's (and its own) epistemology intelligible.

Forsthoefel argues that Shankara held that what ultimately brings one to the knowledge of the impersonal Brahman is introspective access. This access would be self-justifying in such a way that the subject would have immediate knowledge of Brahman.⁵² Though there is a strong internalist component to Shankara's epistemology, this internalism is not sufficient. It is also necessary to have certain cultural and external mechanisms. Shankara required that this internalist component was accompanied and supported by certain external processes such as religious texts (Vedas), tradition, a guru,⁵³ and the mind working in the way it should.⁵⁴ Forsthoefel makes this clear when he states the following:

It remains for Advaita, and for all traditions, I think, to establish a culture of liberation in which doctrine, value, text and interpretation weave together a coherent circuit of doxastic practices. These belief-forming mechanisms have a variety of internal checks – norms of exegesis, standards of argument, the coherence of a received tradition, and as we will see, the examples of extraordinary teachers and saints. When these mechanisms function properly, they contribute to a reliable cognitive output. And in the case of Advaita, although liberation ultimately negates constructive discourse, various cognitive inroads are nevertheless made to understand, communicate and evoke the truth and experience of Brahman. Teachings, texts, practices, and the examples of saints and gurus, thus help constitute the 'cognitive environment' of a subject. Combined with the subject's own 'properly functioning' mental equipment – in a mundane sense, but also with respect to doxastic practices of the particular culture of liberation – the cognitive outputs of these processes may enjoy prima facie justification. We see, therefore, in addition to traditional Advaita's internalism, a deeply implicated externalism in its epistemology of religious experience.⁵⁵

According to Forsthoefel, Shankara's epistemology endorses that certain external things (including one's mental equipment) need to be properly functioning. It would seem that Shankara should and would probably endorse Plantinga's proper function condition for warrant. Moreover, it also seems that having the right doxastic practices functioning properly will contribute to the right sort of epistemic environment that a subject needs to be in, in order to have the right sort of internal access or awareness. Thus, in addition to the first condition of Plantinga's theory of warrant, Shankara would probably agree with the right epistemic environment condition. I will now discuss the commonality and

distinction between Shankara and Plantinga with regard to Plantinga's truth-aimed condition.

Advaita Vedanta and the truth-aimed condition

At some level, both Plantinga and Shankara advocate that human beliefs produced in a certain way lead one to knowledge. Plantinga's emphasis is on human cognitive proper function and on having a design plan aimed at producing true beliefs. Shankara, however, emphasizes how human beliefs and practices bring about certain effects that lead one to the right state where one can then have the right internal access or awareness. For Shankara, this is especially the case with regard to conventional beliefs that don't ultimately reflect reality, which can be considered illusions. A man who thinks he sees a snake when what he really sees is a piece of rope can still die from the heart attack that the illusion helps produce. Thus, even though human cognitive faculties are aimed at producing beliefs about things that don't exist at the ultimate layer of reality, these beliefs can still have a real impact on how humans function and gain knowledge.

Even if one wanted to grant this, wouldn't it still be obvious that Shankara's world-view fundamentally denies Plantinga's truth-aimed condition, which holds that the truth-aimed condition requires that faculties are geared towards producing true belief according to what is ultimately real? In responding to this, one might try to argue indirectly that our cognitive faculties can still be aimed towards producing true belief. One might argue that even granting that human faculties are aimed towards producing conventional beliefs that don't correspond to ultimate reality, one could potentially have faculties that indirectly produce belief(s) that correspond with ultimate reality, due to the effects of the Vedas and gurus, our cognitive faculties could indirectly be aimed at producing true belief in Brahman. Just as the illusion of a snake can have a real effect on a man's heart, so the illusion of the Vedas and the gurus can cause the right realization. Shankara proposes a classic objection to this as he asks the following:

If we acquiesce in the doctrine of absolute unity, the ordinary means of right knowledge, perception, &c., become invalid because the absence of manifoldness deprives them of their objects; just as the idea of a man becomes invalid after the right idea of the post (which at first had been mistaken for a man) has presented itself. Moreover, all the texts embodying injunctions and prohibitions will lose their purport if the distinction on which their validity depends does not really exist. And further, the entire body of doctrine which refers to final release will collapse, if the distinction of teacher and pupil on which it depends is not real. And if the doctrine of release is untrue, how can we maintain the truth of the absolute unity of the Self, which forms an item of that doctrine?⁵⁶

Shankara then responds to this objection as he states:

These objections, we reply, do not damage our position because the entire complex of phenomenal existence is considered as true as long as the knowledge of Brahman being the Self of all has not arisen; just as the phantoms of a dream are considered to be true until the sleeper wakes. For as long as a person has not reached the true knowledge of the unity of the Self, so long it does not enter his mind that the world of effects with its means and objects of the right knowledge and its results of actions is untrue; he rather, in consequence of his ignorance, looks on mere effects (such as body, offspring, wealth, &c.) as forming part of and belonging to his Self, forgetful of Brahman being in reality the Self of all. Hence, as long as true knowledge does not present itself, there is no reason why the ordinary course of secular and religious activity should not hold on undisturbed.⁵⁷

I take Shankara to be arguing that as long as one doesn't come to the knowledge that all is the impersonal Brahman, the Vedas and gurus can still aid in bringing about full realization and enlightenment. The epistemic subject will be able to benefit from the utility of these conventional beliefs in the same way that a man could be affected by a heart attack from the illusion of seeing a snake. As long as real knowledge is lacking, the external conditions will still create the right sort of environment that a subject needs to become enlightened. Having addressed this, I will now argue that both the proper function condition that seems to be endorsed by the Advaita Vedanta tradition and the tradition's attempt to ground the truth-aimed condition fall short of the glory of warrant.

The preconditions of warrant and Advaita Vedanta

Earlier in this article, I looked at a well-accepted naturalistic attempt to account for proper function. I argued that this account and others like it probably fail because they lack the component of a conscious and intentional designer. If Plantinga's critiques and observation about naturalistic accounts of proper function are right, it would seem to follow that Advaita Vedanta will likewise lack the resources to make proper function intelligible. This is because Advaita Vedanta lacks something like a personal and intentional conscious designer at the ultimate level of reality. Brahman for Advaita Vedanta is an impersonal God who consists of all reality. It seems hard to see how such a view could provide the necessary resources that one would need to account for such a normative notion as proper function.

Moreover, there is an even greater reason to think that the Advaita Vedanta religion can't account for the preconditions that make proper function intelligible. Namely, at the ultimate layer of reality, there is no such thing as proper function or a design plan. All that exists is Brahman without qualities. According to Plantinga, proper function and those things that are entailed by it, such as a design plan, are properties that would need to be predicated in ultimate reality; but given Advaita Vedanta's view of reality, there could be no such things.

Perhaps Advaita Vedanta could argue that Plantinga's proper function condition is necessary inasmuch that one is referring to the second or third layer of reality. Thus, Shankara might endorse the following proper function account:

(SPF) For something to be properly functioning outside of the first layer of reality, that something must be fulfilling an intention given to it by an intentional agent that exists outside of it.

These 'outside' layers of reality would be those layers that in some sense grant the existence of things like properties and faculties. Though this seems to be a possible response, it wouldn't seem to be a preferable one for at least three reasons. First, this would require a drastic and fundamental change to Plantinga's theory of warrant. Introducing a theory of warrant on layers of reality that ultimately aren't real would be a completely different project from what Plantinga's theory is intended for. It would seem right to question if the Advaita Vedanta proponent is really even using Plantinga's epistemology to be warranted, if this is the approach the proponent takes. Second, the new project would seem to lack motivation. If, ultimately speaking, there doesn't exist such a notion as proper function, what would be the motive for arguing what the conditions for warrant are in lesser layers of reality? Lastly, if the proponent of the Advaita Vedanta tradition were to try to use Plantinga's theory of warrant to show how her belief could be warranted, but yet the proponent also rejects that proper function exists at the ultimate layer of reality, then the consequence of rejecting the proper function condition at the ultimate layer of reality would be to reject knowledge at the ultimate layer of reality.

Moving on to the truth-aimed condition, can the advocate of Advaita Vedanta establish a way to account indirectly for this condition of warrant? As discussed earlier, one could argue that given the causal power of illusions, it would seem possible that if certain illusions function in a way that they should, the illusions might reliably help a subject produce true beliefs. In the case of Advaita Vedanta, perhaps the conventional beliefs in the Veda and the guru can still cause a person to act in such a way that they point the subject to the truth of reality, which is the truth of Brahman.

But would one really have a tight connection to truth given that one came to such a belief by an illusion? For Plantinga, the truth-aimed condition is a part of the design plan for how cognitive faculties should operate. It would seem that if there was really no such thing as proper function at the ultimate layer, these items that are only conventionally real lack a design plan for bringing a subject to believe that all is the impersonal Brahman. This would mean that, unless one could account for the proper function condition, one wouldn't be able to account for the truth-aimed condition either.

Perhaps one could just deny the proper function condition and advocate that as long as these illusions or conventional beliefs reliably produce true beliefs,

one would have warrant. It would seem that two things would follow from this. First, this would no longer be Plantinga's theory of warrant as the proper function condition is at the heart of his theory. Second, if the illusions or conventional beliefs weren't designed to accomplish the goal of bringing a subject to enlightenment and it just happened to do work in this way, there would appear to be a loose connection to truth.⁵⁸

Conclusion

I have responded to two important objections to Plantinga's epistemology. I first entertained and then rejected Sosa's Swampman counterexample that attempted to demonstrate that proper function is not a necessary condition for warrant. I argued that Swampman actually lacks a tight connection to truth even though he has a counterfactually reliable cognitive system and the right internal components. I argued that this helps establish Plantinga's proper function condition for warrant.

I then moved on to answering an objection that is aimed at the religious implications of Plantinga's epistemology. I brought up the Pandora's Box Objection and specifically articulated Christian's formulation of it. Christian claims that Shankara's Advaita Vedanta Hinduism could be warranted in the same way that Christianity could be warranted given Plantinga's epistemology. I argued that though Shankara's epistemology shares a lot of the same conditions as Plantinga's epistemology, Advaita Vedanta lacks the resources to account for those conditions. This was largely based on the observations that I (or rather Plantinga) made earlier in this article about needing a designer to account for a design plan. Second, I argued that Advaita Vedanta's ontological commitment about ultimate reality would seem to indicate that at the ultimate level there are no such things as proper function, a design plan, or true beliefs. Having established all of this, I think I have adequately answered Sosa's Swampman Objection and the Pandora's Box Objection.

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Notes

1. For Plantinga, warrant is the ingredient that separates mere true belief from knowledge.
2. Plantinga (2000), 178–180.
3. *Ibid.*, 257.
4. By truths of the Gospel, I have in mind the following story: God created the cosmos and all things in it. God specifically had in mind bringing about human life created in His image; and in doing so He gave them free will. Instead of loving God with all of their heart, mind, and strength, man served his own needs and broke off communion with God. As a response to this, in the way of the ultimate love story, God the Son became man, born of a virgin, to love God in the way that man failed to do. He loved His Father to the point of suffering the consequences of the world's sins on a cross and died. This then pleased God as God raised His Son from the dead three days later. In doing this, God justified and vindicated His Son and is in the current process of reconciling all of the cosmos back into communion with Himself.
5. See quote from Foley on the back cover of Plantinga (1993a).
6. See Kvanvig (1996).
7. By tight connection to truth, I have in mind a tight relationship between the belief produced from one's cognitive system and the truthfulness of that belief. This can be understood on either a reliabilist or an internalist account as the emphasis is on the belief that one has and the truthfulness of that belief. Since the connection pertains to the truthfulness of a belief, the connection here specifically concerns knowledge.

8. Kim (2011), 19.
9. Sosa (1996), 258–259.
10. *Ibid.*, 256. Also, for the original quote see Davidson (1987), 441–458.
11. Sosa (2006), 120.
12. This would seem to be the case given access internalism, internal state internalism, or inferential internalism. In access internalism, one merely needs to have access or the potential to have access to the fact that certain evidence justifies a belief that p. With regard to internal state internalism, one needs to have relevant epistemic properties that supervene on S's belief that p. Lastly, in regard to inferential internalism, one needs access to the connection between one's premises and one's conclusion for believing the conclusion on the basis of justified belief in the premises. See Fumerton (2011), 179.
13. Sosa (1996), 256.
14. See Boyce & Plantinga (2012), 130–131; also see Bergmann (2009), 147–150.
15. Even on an internalist model, there is a need for faculties to function appropriately. According to John Greco, 'evidence is supposed to play a functional role in our cognitive activity, but to do so it must be available to the knower in some sense appropriate to that functional role.' If evidence has a function to play in our cognitive activity, I don't think the notion of proper function (broadly speaking) is far off. It seems that if one lacked an appropriate way to form beliefs based on evidence or if one lacked an appropriate way to obtain evidence all together, then warrant would be lacking. See Greco (2011), 169.
16. By cognitive luck I have in mind the sort of cognitive luck that appears in Gettier cases, where the subject has justified true belief, but yet lacks knowledge due to something accidental in either the environment or the subject's cognitive system.
17. Kvanvig (1996).
18. Christian (1992).
19. It is important to note that Rose Ann Christian's article was published shortly before Plantinga's two-volume work on warrant. I am not familiar with the level of awareness that Christian had regarding Plantinga's epistemology and what it entailed. However, I will proceed to answer the objection, which Beilby has recently taken to be an important one for Plantingians to answer.
20. Beilby (2005), 131.
21. Tien (2004), 31–55.
22. Plantinga (2000), 50.
23. Armstrong (1995), 48.
24. Stace (1949–1950), 22.
25. Bergmann (2002), 61.
26. Plantinga & Tooley (2008), 22.
27. See both Plantinga (1993b) and Plantinga & Tooley (2008).
28. It is important to note that Millikan is not trying to give necessary and sufficient conditions for the notion of proper function. However, this account is appealed to by some, in order to demonstrate how her account could offer the right resources to formulate a necessary and sufficient account of proper function.
29. Millikan (1989).
30. Plantinga & Tooley (2008), 24.
31. *Ibid.*, 25.
32. *Ibid.*, 27.
33. Devanandan (1950), 96.
34. Deutsch & Dalvi (2004), 161.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*, 161–162.
37. *Ibid.*, 162.
38. It is important to note that though *Viveka-Chudamani* might not have been written by Shankara, it is seen as an orthodox text within the Vedanta community (i.e. one that stems from and accurately represents Shankara's thought).
39. It is interesting to note that for both Plantinga and Shankara, religious belief is what motivates philosophy. Plantinga's desire to defend Christian orthodoxy is largely responsible for his historic contributions in both epistemology and metaphysics.

40. *Ibid.*
41. Radhakrishnan (1928), 16; Devanandan (1950), 93.
42. Zimmer (1951), 414.
43. Devanandan (1950), 99.
44. Shankara, Isherwood, & Vivekananda (1978), 70.
45. Harrison (2012), 70.
46. Shankara, Isherwood, & Vivekananda (1978), 18.
47. Harrison (2012), 104.
48. Zimmer (1951), 416.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*, 417.
51. Devanandan (1950), 99.
52. Forsthoefel (2002), 71.
53. *Ibid.*, 61–62.
54. *Ibid.*, 53.
55. *Ibid.*, 61–62.
56. Deutsch & Dalvi (2004), 230.
57. *Ibid.*
58. The Swampman example demonstrates this.