

WARRANT AND CONDITIONS FOR WARRANT IN ALVIN PLANTINGA'S PHILOSOPHY

GABRIEL MUSTAȚĂ*

ABSTRACT. *Warrant and Conditions for Warrant in Alvin Plantinga's Philosophy.* Warrant is the central concept of Alvin Plantinga's epistemology. As Plantinga suggests it, warrant is that quantity or quality which together with belief and truth constitutes knowledge. This paper, intends to present broadly the concept of warrant and to analyze the conditions for warrant in order to see if the conditions proposed by Plantinga are necessary and sufficient for a belief to be considered knowledge.

Keywords: *warrant, belief, knowledge, justification, Alvin Plantinga*

Introduction

Knowledge, as we know for centuries is justified true belief. Plato in *Theaetetus* raises the question: „What is that which must be added to mere belief to obtain knowledge?” He suggests that a belief is known by us only when it is both true and justified, so knowledge is justified true belief. But what is “justification”? According to Plantinga, “theologians of the Protestant Reformation had a clear conception of justification; justification, they held, is by faith.”¹

This article deals with, the topic of Warrant, Alvin Plantinga's concept about justification. Its concern is to present how a belief is justified (warranted) and what are the conditions under which a belief is warranted. To do that, in the first place, it is curical to present some contemporary perspective about justification such as: internalism, coherentism, and reliabilism from Plantinga's point of view. As Plantinga suggests none of the conceptions mentioned above are correct so, this paper seeks to suggest an alternative. Secondly, is necessary to consider different definitions of warrant as they are presented in Plantinga's trilogy. Finally, the paper will examine the conditions for warrant.

* PhD candidate, Doctoral School in Philosophy, Faculty of History and Philosophy, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. E-mail: gabrielmstt@gmail.com

¹ Alvin Plantinga, “Positive Epistemic Status and Proper Function”, *Philosophical Perspective*, 2 (1988): p. 1.

In the first section, we shall introduce some of the contemporary perspectives on justification, without analyzing them individually, in a short survey of the arguments Plantinga holds in order to reject them. The second and final section, will introduce and analyze the definitions and conditions for warrant to see if they are sufficient for warrant as Plantinga suggests.

Contemporary perspective in epistemology

According to Plantinga, the field of knowledge is flourishing as never before. One of the most interesting thing in the twentieth century regarding the theory of knowledge is the rejection of deontology and the reappearance of different forms of externalism. Externalism goes long way back to Thomas Reid and Thomas Aquinas, even back to Aristotle. With few exceptions like Augustine and the Platonic Academy, internalists are very rare prior to Descartes. In the words of Plantinga internalism is “recent interloper”.²

This chapter, will provide with a description of the major contemporary perspectives in the theory of knowledge, internalism, coherentism, and reliabilism. This inquiry shall concern only with the main points for each theory and the arguments for which Plantinga rejects them.

Internalism

The basic idea of internalism is that justification is determined by factors that are internal to a person. Plantinga suggests that the term internalism is confusing because it is used differently from person to person. “It expresses different ideas loosely related by analogies and family resemblance.” An important aspect to observe is the fact that the notion of internalism is fundamentally epistemic; the subject is or must be aware of the states or conditions under which the knowledge is taking place. According to Plantinga, not just any access will do, it is required a kind of special access.³

In order to understand internalism Plantinga proposes to start with classical deontologism of Descartes and Locke and afterward, to continue with Roderich Chisholm’s internalism.

² Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. p. v.

³ *Idem*, p. 5.

Classical deontologism

Anthony Brueckner suggests that on a deontological conception of epistemic justification, S is justified in believing P if and only if S's belief that P is in conformity to S's epistemic duty.⁴

The notion of duty and obligation is central to the writings of Descartes and Locke. Plantinga cites from the forth *Meditation* of Descartes where he gives an account on the origin of errors. According to Descartes, the error is due to the misuse of my free will; when we choose to give judgment without perceiving it with sufficient clearness and distinctness we are worthy of blame. Our duty is to abstain from denying or affirming a proposition until we perceive it with sufficient clarity and distinctness, only this way we are blameless.

According to Locke, "faith is an asset of the mind: which if it be regulated, as is our duty..."⁵ Again we have a clear affirmation that we have a doxastic duty not to affirm a proposition without good reason. In classical deontologism to act according to these duties or obligations, says Plantinga, means to be within one's rights, it is to be subject to no blame and disapprobation, it is to be deontologically approvable, it means to be justified.⁶

Plantinga argues that the internalist perspective is based on three "internalist motif". The first one is if the epistemic justification is deontological justification, and if Descartes and Locke are speaking about subjective duty or obligation, (subjective meaning guilt and innocence, blame and blamelessness) then it follows that epistemic justification is up to me and within my power. All that I have to do is my subjective duty. The problem Plantinga sees here is who can guarantee that I'm doing my duty correctly, maybe my "system of beliefs may be widely skewed and laughably far from the truth. I may be a brain in a vat or a victim of a malicious Cartesian demon."⁷

The second internalist motif stated by Plantinga regards the objective duty. To regulate my belief in order to fulfill my objective duty means that belief has to be supported by the believer's total evidence. But what happens if I affirm a belief without having the appropriate or no evidence at all. Then according to internalists, you are worthy of blame. This means according to Plantinga that objective duty coincides with subjective duty.

⁴ Anthony Brueckner, "Deontologism and Internalism in Epistemology", *Noûs*, 30, no. 4 (December 1996): p. 527.

⁵ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, London: New York: Penguin Books, 1997, p. 421.

⁶ Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, pp. 12–14.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

The second internalist motif has three corollaries. First, if it is our duty to regulate our belief then you have to be aware of this duty. Plantinga suggests on Descartes and Locke's perspective, a person whose cognitive faculties are function properly will not make a mistake. On this perspective, a person will always know how to regulate his beliefs, "a properly functioning human being can simply see what objective duty requires".⁸

The second corollary: according to Descartes and Locke I can determine whether a given belief is justified for me by determining something else. This "something else", this property according to Plantinga is the medieval term *ratio cognoscedi*. We do not directly determine whether a proposition is justified for me, we do it by determining whether or not it is clear or distinct for me. The basic idea according to Descartes and Locke is that a properly functioning human being will be able to tell whether a given belief has this necessary property for justification. In other words, we have a means by which we can tell if a proposition is justified for me. But, according to Plantinga, the grounds of justification, the property which confers justifications for a belief is the same as the *ratio essendi*, property of being supported by the believer's total evidence (Locke), and being certain (Descartes) for the believer. So the *ratio cognoscendi* (the grounds of justification) is the same as the *ratio essendi* (the property of being supported by evidence or being certain).

The third corollary states that if we have guaranteed access to *ratio cognoscendi*, and if *ratio cognoscendi* coincide with *ratio essendi*, it means we have access to the latter as well. This means that a properly functioning human being can simply see if a proposition has the property that confers justification or not. In this case it seems clear that we have the requisite special access.⁹

The final internalist motif states that if we have this special access, a guarantee on which my beliefs are justified and if I non-culpably mistakenly believe then, that belief has the justification-making property. But Plantinga clearly affirms that we don't have this type of access, at least not in all cases, then the "justification-making property will have to attach to this states" and these states are the plausible ones to hold and I cannot make a nonculpable mistake. Hence, as Plantinga mentions, all these states are internal to me and it would be better to name this type of internalism "personal internalism".¹⁰

In other words, we don't have this special access in all cases, as Plantinga mentions we don't have access to the pH level of our blood, or to the size of my liver, etc., but we can have access to information like: you live in New York and

⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 20–21.

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 21–22.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 22–23.

others of the same kinde. A second remark here, if this interpretation is accurate, the justification-making property would have to be bound together with such states, which in the end are still internal to the subject, and the subject is the one who determines if a belief is in the correct status and has the justification-making property.

Chisholmian internalism

Roderick Chisholm version of internalism is fairly similar to the classical internalism or deontological internalism. According to Plantinga, the difference between classical and Chisholmian internalism rests on the fact that Descartes and Locke limit knowledge to what is certain, while Chisholm does not. Another notable aspect is the fact that in his view warrant is actually, justification. For him warrant or positive epistemic status, as he calls it, is to be understood in terms of fulfillment of epistemic duty. And this idea according to Plantinga is a continuity of the thoughts of classical internalism.¹¹

The most important detail to notice regarding Chisholmian internalism is that he added an "undefined technical locution: *p* is more reasonable than *q* for *S* at *t*". This means when someone believes or withholds something, according to Chisholm, there is indeed something one believes or withholds. Plantinga's example is: if I say that Venus is approximately the same size as the Earth, then it means I have a belief on which I made this affirmation.

Furthermore, a proposition "A is beyond reasonable doubt for a person... if it is more reasonable for her to accept that proposition than to withhold it."¹² This means that A must have some presupposition on which it is more reasonable to accept it than to withhold it. Plantinga is not satisfied with the locution "is more reasonable" he thinks that Chisholm should bring some light on this expression, whoever this reasonably as Chisholm sees it is a normative concept, therefore, it is deontological.¹³

Plantinga's rejection of Chisholm's perspective is based on two of the six principles that Chisholm presents in *The Foundation of Knowing*. The first principle states that:

"If the property of being F is self-presenting, then for every x, if x has the property of being F and if x considers his having that property, then it is certain for x then is for F."¹⁴

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 31.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

¹⁴ Roderick M. Chisholm, *The Foundations of Knowing*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982, p. 12.

According to Plantinga, to say *p* is certain for *S* mean that *p* is beyond the reasonable doubt, this means to have the maximal degree of warrant. In this case, there's no need for a *q* proposition to fulfill the epistemic requirements. If a belief really is self-presenting, in Chisholm's sense, then to hold that belief in a specific occasion is not up to me. In other words, the „self-presentation” is not depending on me, is not depending on my duty, on my responsibility to achieve epistemic excellence. The second problem regarding the first Chisholmian principle is how do I know that I can best satisfy this obligation? I have no certainty that I achieved the epistemic excellence.¹⁵

Another principle that Plantinga considers when rejecting Chisholm's perspective is the fifth principle form *The Foundation of Knowing*.

“For every *x*, if (i) *x* perceptually takes there to be something that is *F*, and if (ii) his perceiving an *F* is epistemically in the clear for *x*, then it is beyond reasonable doubt for *x* that he perceives something that is *F*. If, moreover, his perceiving something that is *F* is a member of a set of properties, which mutually support each other and each of which is beyond reasonable doubt for *x*, then it is evident for *x* that he perceives something that is *F*.”¹⁶

Plantinga divides this principle into two parts P5a and P5b. He rejects the first part (a) on the same basis as in the first principle.

“A person could satisfy the antecedent of P5a with respect to some proposition and nonetheless utterly fail to fulfill his epistemic obligation in believing that proposition, so that proposition would not be beyond reasonable doubt for him.”

What Plantinga suggests is that in normal conditions a person could train himself to form the belief that is not in accordance with the reality. I could see a red color and I train my self, and form the belief that the color is not red, is orange. In this way, the first part of Chisholm's principle is fulfilled, but according to Plantinga, such a person can not fulfill better his duty to the truth than to withhold from accepting that proposition.

Plantinga adds another example to sustain his argument. Let's say that a person who tries to fulfill his epistemic duty and that is the passion of his life, is born with some brain lesion, or is a victim of a Cartesian demon and all around him are manipulated by demons or Alpha Centaurian cognitive scientists. In this case, the person is doing his epistemic duty in excelsis, but the belief-forming this way have no positive epistemic status. He is deontologically justified but to his beliefs lacks warrant.¹⁷

¹⁵ Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, pp. 39-40.

¹⁶ Chisholm, *The Foundations of Knowing*, p. 21.

¹⁷ Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, p. 42.

Coherentism

The central idea in coherentism, more specific in the coherence theory of justification is that a belief or a set of beliefs is justified only if that belief coheres with a set of beliefs and that set forms a coherent system. According to Plantinga the best way to understand coherentism is contrasting it with the foundationalism. The most common objection for which coherentism is rejected is circular reasoning.

“The fundamentalist finds fault with a system of beliefs in which a belief A_0 is accepted on the evidential basis of a belief A_1 , which is accepted on the basis of A_2 , which is accepted on the basis of A_3, \dots , which is based on A_n , which is based on A_0 .”¹⁸

For Plantinga, the circular reasoning cannot produce warrant. Warrant does not arise by way of warrant transfer. The basic relation between beliefs isn't the source of warrant, instead coherence is the only source of warrant. As Plantinga suggests, coherentism is pointing to a condition under which a belief is proper basic and under this condition, the belief has warrant without being accepted on the evidential basis of other beliefs. This means, as coherentist claim that each belief in a proper noetical structure are equal, and if one fails then all the other beliefs in the structure also fail.

According to Plantinga, coherentism is neither sufficient nor necessary for warrant. For the sufficiency, he appeals to a set of examples that involves some type of cognitive pathology or dysfunctions. In his example, Plantinga suggests that a person could have a coherent system of beliefs, but to his beliefs lack warrant. Coherence is neither necessary for warrant, for that he offers another set of examples that implies, that I could have a coherent system of beliefs but nobody could guarantee that this system is complete. Therefore, at any time, in my coherent system of belief could appear another belief (in Plantinga case a belief from memory) and in in this case my whole system of belief will be “called for its revisioning”. Plantinga believes that coherentism may be a source of warrant but is not the best one, we have better options, better source of warrant than coherentism.¹⁹

Laurence Bonjour's coherentism

Another type of coherentism that Plantinga analyzes in his book *Warrant: The Current debate* is Laurence Bonjour's coherentism. As Plantinga mentions, Bonjourian coherentism has many fascinating topics, with many points of interest and for that, we shall resume to describe what Plantinga says about this perspective.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 68.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 77–83.

For BonJour justification is a matter of epistemic responsibility. As BonJour suggests we have the goal of achieving truth. For BonJour, “one’s cognitive endeavors are epistemically justified only if and to the extent that they are aimed at this goal...”²⁰ Plantinga’s question is “Do we all have this goal?” Maybe others have no goal at all, or maybe they have other goals as comfort, salvation or fame, etc. And let’s suppose we have the same goal, of achieving truth, what about responsibility. According to BonJour and classical deontologists, we act responsibly only when we believe on the basis of reason. But let’s suppose I cannot be responsible, that “I might be feckless, or I might be heedless or reckless” but would I be irresponsible? Or perhaps I think that the normal way to be responsible lies in accepting the truth not on the basis of reason, but on pure instinct. As Plantinga mentions, I could be perfectly responsible even if I accept a belief on the basis of reason, as well as one that I accept on faith or simply trusting my nature. Hence Plantinga observes BonJour is not preoccupied with such absurd and self-defeating problems, he starts “with the initial trust in reason,”. BonJour’s response to this objection is that, in some cases in which we have *a priori* and self-evident beliefs, responsibility doesn’t require to have a reason for the belief. Then, this is an incoherence, or, in Plantinga’s words, an arbitrary partiality, because initially BonJour writes as we need a reason for everything we believe, and now he writes that we don’t need a reason to believe a deliverance of reason.²¹

According to Plantinga coherence is not sufficient for warrant. A belief could be coherent in a system of beliefs and still have little warrant. Again Plantinga offers a series of examples with cognitive malfunctions in which the subject could build the whole system of beliefs on a single false belief, for him all the belief could be coherent, but they do not have warrant. They could be true by accident, but they do not constitute knowledge.

Coherence is neither necessary for warrant. As Plantinga affirms we don’t need to include a belief in a coherent system of beliefs in order to see if that belief has warrant. There are beliefs which could have warrant without the help of other beliefs. For example, I know what my name is, I do not need other beliefs for that. In the end, BonJourian coherence is neither necessary nor sufficient for warrant.²²

²⁰ Laurence Bonjour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1985, p. 8.

²¹ Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, Plantinga, pp. 97–100.

²² *Ibidem*, pp. 110–13.

Reliabilism

Reliabilism seems to be a new trend in contemporary epistemology. According to Plantinga, many epistemologists have shown their interest in various forms of externalism such as reliabilism and quasi-reliabilism. The term reliability is a new one, it can be tracked back to F. P. Ramsey (1926) in his essay *Truth and Probability*.²³ In his essay, Ramsey claims that knowledge is true belief that is certain and is obtained by a reliable process.²⁴ This section, will briefly discuss different types of reliabilism.

William Alston

Alstonian reliabilism, according to Plantinga seems to be a “bridge” between internalism and externalism. In Alston’s conception, a person is justified in holding a belief only if that person believes on the basis of reliable indicators. It is important to emphasize that Alston talks about justification, which implies duty, responsibility, etc., and not warrant. Alston claims that deontology is not sufficient for justification, so we need an evaluative concept. At this point, Plantinga asks: “What guides the search here? How do we determine which of all the many epistemic nondeontological values is the right one?” Otherwise, if a belief is justified in the base of reliable indicators, how do we determine the reliable indicators? Is it on the basis of important topics, such as survival, good life, spiritual excellence, etc? How do we know that our belief-producing mechanism is a reliable one?

The idea of bridge that connects internalism with externalism is due to the fact that Alston does not reject deontologism, he adds to it the evaluative concept mentioned above. According to Plantinga, this seems to be a compromise Alston makes in order to keep the deontological tradition, in which: “(a) justification is conceived deontological, (b) justification heavily involves evidence or grounds, and (c) justification is necessary and nearly sufficient for warrant.”

In the deontological tradition, justification is necessary and nearly sufficient for warrant, but alstonian justification is not necessary for knowledge and neither for warrant.²⁵ Alston thinks that beliefs that “just pop into” my mind would not count as justified because we do not have the required access, and deontology needs some sort of access. In this case, Alston is aware that his type of justification is not necessary for warrant, but he thinks that is sufficient for knowledge because they are produced by my reliable belief production mechanism.²⁶

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 183.

²⁴ F. P. Ramsey, “Truth and Probability,” in *The Foundations of Mathematics and Other Logical Essays*, ed. R. B. Braithwaite, Trubner & Co., London, 1931, p. 197.

²⁵ Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, p. 189.

²⁶ William P. Alston, “An Internalist Externalism,” *Synthese*, 74, no. 3 (1988): p. 281.

According to Plantinga this type of justification is neither sufficient for knowledge nor sufficient up to Gettier problems. To support this argument that Plantinga enumerates a series of examples in which he describes several types of cognitive dysfunctions. On the basis of these examples, Plantinga concludes that we could base our beliefs on the reliable indicators, but in some cases, those indicators could not function properly due to some diseases or dysfunction, or our beliefs formed in this way could be just accidentally true, thus will not have warrant.²⁷

Fred Dretske

For Fred Dretske warrant is first seen in terms of origin and provenance; a belief has warrant for me if it is produced and sustained by a reliable belief-producing mechanism, and second sees warrant as a matter of *probability*: a person is said to know a (true) proposition A if he believes it, and if the right probability relations hold between A and its significant others. Here Plantinga adds two comments: first, Dretske is writing about perceptual knowledge and this is not applying to a priori knowledge, and second, this account of warrant is “restricted” to what Dretske calls “de re content”.²⁸ Where “de re content” meaning the content of a belief or as the informational content of a signal.²⁹ Meaning that a piece of information could validate a belief to be true, or to cause or causally sustain a belief. Dretske does not provide the type of information that can sustain a belief, or as Plantinga correctly observes Dretske does not mention anything about the amount of information.

As Plantinga suggests, if we restrict knowledge as the sort of knowledge Dretske proposes, indeed “if a know that *s* is *F* there must be a signal *r*’s being *G* related to *s*’s being *F*”, still this is not sufficient for knowledge, although we have this relation this does not mean we have knowledge, because according to Plantinga we could obtain this relation just by cognitive accident. Again, Plantinga offers a series of examples of cognitive dysfunctions in which a subject could think he meets all conditions proposed by Dretske and still not have knowledge.³⁰

Alvin Goldman

As Plantinga writes goldmanian reliabilist comes in two versions. In the first version the older one, reliabilism is “the justification status of a belief”, “is a function of the reliability of the process or processes that cause it, where reliability

²⁷ Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, p. 192.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 193.

²⁹ Fred I. Dretske, *Knowledge & the Flow of Information*, 1st MIT Press ed. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1981, p. 246.

³⁰ Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, p. 196.

consists in the tendency of a process to produce beliefs that are true rather than false".³¹

The second version is more complex so it is worth to mention a short and simple version. For Goldman a belief is justified for a person "if it is permitted by a right rule of justification; a justification rule is right if it is an element of a right system of justification rules; and a system of rules is right if it is appropriately reliable – that is, has a high enough truth ration."³²

How should these rules be understood? According to Goldman, these rules permit or authorize certain process, moreover, these rules do not apply to all the cognitive process or cognitive types.³³ Thus a belief, in order to be justified, must be approved by a set of justification rules and these rules must be part of a specific cognitive type. For example, the rules that apply for memory do not apply for perception because according to Goldman, only this cognitive process or type can be properly reliable or unreliable.

As suggested by Plantinga, is not enough to say that an output of a process is determined by the truth ratio of a set of rules that authorize that process, the output process must meet another condition, the cognizer must have cognitive equipment that is working propely.³⁴

Warrant

In his books, Plantinga offers four definitions to warrant. In *Warrant: The Current Debate* the first chapter defines warrant "whatever precisely it is, which together with truth makes the difference between knowledge and mere true belief."³⁵ At this point, for Plantinga warrant is the same thing as justification.

In *Warrant and Proper Function*, in the preface, we find another definition, warrant is "...elusive quality or quantity enough of which together with truth and belief, is sufficient for knowledge".³⁶ As Mark J. Boone observes the second definition is subtly different from the first one, this must not be a problem, the former must be seen as a general definition of warrant and the later more as a specific one.³⁷

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 197.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 200.

³³ Alvin I. Goldman, *Epistemology and Cognition*, Reprint edition, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988, p. 85.

³⁴ Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, p. 208.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

³⁶ Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. v.

³⁷ Mark J. Boone and Evangelical Philosophical Society, "Proper Function and the Conditions for Warrant: What Plantinga's Notion of Warrant Shows about Different Kinds of Knowledge," *Philosophia Christi* 14, no. 2 (2012): p. 3.

James Taylor has two objections to this definition. The first would be “if the concept of proper function is analyzable in terms of an actually designing agent, (whether a conscious designer or impersonal process, such as evolution) then my account is subject to counterexample” and the second objection: If the concept of proper function is not analyzable in terms of an actually designing agent, then either my account reduces to a version of reliabilism or at any rate it is not a superior alternative to reliabilism.

To the first objection, Plantinga suggests that we don’t need an answer because there are thousand different ways in which we can analyze the concept of proper function in terms of the desingning agent. And for that, he enumerates a series of questions:

“Does the actually designing agent have to know what he is doing? Could he design something by accident? Couldn’t something be designed by a committee, or by a series of designers... and would that count?”.

To the second objection, Plantinga suggests that we could avoid the notion of proper function and adopt a form of reliabilism, but we have to say something about the cognitive environment, and second, even if the set of cognitive powers is reliable there is no guaranty that the belief produced are warranted.³⁸

In “Warrant: A First Approximation” which is the first chapter of *Warrant and Proper Function*, Plantinga adds some details to his concept of warrant:

“a belief B has warrant for S if and only if the relevant segments (the segments involved in the production of B) are functioning properly in a cognitive environment sufficiently similar to that for which S’s faculties are designed; and the modules of the design plan governing the production of B are (1) aimed at truth, and (2) such that there is a high objective probability that a belief formed in accordance with the modules (in that sort of cognitive environment) is true; and the more firmly S believes B the more warrant B has for S.”³⁹

What is striking at this definition is the expression „if and only if” which according to Bonne these conditions are sufficient and necessary for warrant.

In the second chapter entitled “Warrant: Objection and Refinements” we find the last definition or description of warrant:

³⁸ Alvin Plantinga, “Warrant and Designing Agents: A Reply to James Taylor,” *Philosophical Studies*, no. 64 (1991): pp. 203–14.

³⁹ Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 19.

“a belief has warrant for me only if (1) it has been produced in me by my cognitive faculties that are working properly (functioning as they ought to, subject to no cognitive dysfunction) in a cognitive environment that is appropriate for my kinds of cognitive faculties, (2) the segment of the design plan governing the production of that belief is aimed at the production of true belief, and (3) there is a high statistical probability that a belief produced under those conditions will be true.”⁴⁰

This definition does not contain the same expression as the above definition, it contains just “only if”, which according to Boone suggests that the conditions mentioned by Plantinga are only necessary but not sufficient in all cases of knowledge. He suggests that in some cases these conditions are only necessary but not sufficient to have knowledge, and in some cases, justification may be needed for warrant.⁴¹

Conditions for warrant

As mentioned in the definition there are three conditions Plantinga holds for a belief to have warrant.

The first: A belief has warrant for me if and only if, it is produced by my cognitive faculties functioning properly. According to Plantinga, this condition is necessary but alone is not nearly sufficient for warrant.⁴² Before moving to the other conditions proposed by Plantinga, it is necessary to understand what proper function means. First of all, my cognitive belief-forming mechanism must be *free* of all cognitive malfunctions or dysfunction. Secondly, working properly means not just producing true belief but also *sustaining* that belief. Plantinga adds here that is not true that all my cognitive faculties have to work properly, for example, my memory can trick me, this does not mean the rest of my cognitive faculties are not functioning properly. Thirdly, we have to take into account the *environment*. Our cognitive faculties might work properly but, due to the environment in which we find ourselves at a given time, we could form beliefs that have little or no warrant at all. For example, a car is designed to run well on the road and it is running well but, if we change the environment, let's say to the bottom of the ocean, then it will not run as it was designed. Finally, proper function comes in *degree*. For example, my visual beliefs may constitute knowledge even if my vision is not perfect.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

⁴¹ Boone and Evangelical Philosophical Society, “Proper Function and the Conditions for Warrant,” p. 6.

⁴² Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 4.

As Richard Swinburne accurately observes, the definitions of proper functionality is not complete unless Plantinga makes a connection between the concept of proper functioning of faculty or organ and its functioning in the way God or evolution determines it. Plantinga does not mention who determines how my cognitive faculties should form beliefs. Maybe my beliefs forming mechanism, as Swinburne suggests, is functioning in the way normal to species and my belief are directed to survival or health or other similar things.⁴³ More specifically as William Alston formulate this objection is it the function of our cognitive to attain truth?⁴⁴ To answer this objection we have to move to the next condition.

The second condition is that my cognitive faculties or segments must function according to a design plan. Plantinga has in mind the same example with a car that is running according to a design plan that the manufacturer had in mind. In the same way, a human being is functioning properly if he functions in a specific or “*particular way*”, as God or evolution designed the plan. Plantinga uses the term “design” in the way Daniel Dennett uses it, even if Plantinga has other convictions. Another thing that Plantinga mentions on this topic is that the design plan must be aimed at producing true belief.⁴⁵ With this characteristic added in place he answers the objection mentioned earlier. The proper function if it is “running” according to the correct design plan then it will be aimed at producing true beliefs and not at survival, health, etc.

The third condition Plantinga offers is that the modules of the design plan not only must be aimed at truth, but they have to provide a high objective probability that a belief formed in accordance with those modules is true; “and the more firmly S believes B the more warrant B has for S.”⁴⁶ The final condition Plantinga offers is more or less the conclusion of his argument. So, according to Plantinga, a belief has warrant for me “just if”⁴⁷ it meets these conditions. He is aware that there are many unanswered questions and objections, but the best way to proceed further is not to rebuke the concept of warrant and proper function but to analyze in the main area of cognitive life.

Conclusions

In conclusion, none of the contemporary perspectives in epistemology are sufficient for knowledge. As observed before, according to the internalists the

⁴³ Richard Swinburne, “Plantinga on Warrant,” *Religious Studies* 37 (2001): p. 204.

⁴⁴ William Alston, “Epistemic Warrant as Proper Function,” ed. Alvin Plantinga, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 55, no. 2 (1995): p. 397.

⁴⁵ Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, pp. 13–16.

⁴⁶ Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, p. 19.

⁴⁷ Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. xi.

characteristic that turns belief into knowledge is justification. According to the internalists, the main condition we have to satisfy is a deontological one, (Descartes and Locke), and to attain epistemological excellence (Chisholm). In the end, the fulfillment of the epistemic duty is neither necessary nor sufficient for warrant. Nor does coherentism offer a satisfactory account of warrant. Coherentism alongside with the concept of proper function does not seem to be coherent at all. And finally reliabilism, in which a belief has warrant if and only if it was produced by a reliable cognitive mechanism. Although this perspective is closer to the concept of proper function it is not complete.

The concept of warrant proposed by Plantinga is trying to offer another set of conditions under which a belief is justified, or warranted. The first condition implies the concept of the proper function of our cognitive faculties. Proper function means in the first place, that our cognitive faculties don't have any type of malfunction or dysfunction. Secondly, our cognitive faculties will work properly when they are in the appropriate environment. Another condition that must be satisfied for a belief to be warranted is that our cognitive faculties function after a design plan and this design plan must be aimed at truth, not to have other motivations. Only under these conditions, Plantinga concludes, a belief will be knowledge. He thinks that these conditions are necessary and sufficient for knowledge.

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