

EWA ODOJ

PLANTINGA'S INTERPRETATION OF EPISTEMOLOGICAL DEONTOLOGISM*

In contemporary epistemology the concept of epistemic warrant formulated by Alvin Plantinga enjoys considerable popularity. The term *warrant* is used by him to denote the so-called third condition of knowledge. Plantinga challenges the well-rooted tradition of thinking about this condition as the subject's fulfillment of his or her epistemic duty. As Plantinga himself states, he defends epistemological naturalism understood, among other things, as a rejection of the deontological conception of the third condition of knowledge. His own concept of warrant is an example of such epistemological naturalism. I try to show that, in several respects, Plantinga misinterprets the idea of epistemic duties and that, consequently, his argument against deontologism is not sound. In what follows, I begin by summarizing Plantinga's understanding of deontologism and then offer my own critique of this interpretation, which focuses on five issues: the problem of recognizability of epistemic duty, describing epistemic duty as objective or subjective, Plantinga's assumption of the principle of obviousness, the understanding of justification as absence of guilt, and the issue of doxastic voluntarism.

EWA ODOJ, PhD, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Institute of Philosophy, Department of Theory of Knowledge; e-mail: ewakuchta@gmail.com; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0821-9317>.

* This research project was funded by the National Science Centre by decision no. DEC-2012/05/N/HS1/02864. The author obtained funding for the preparation of a doctoral dissertation from the National Science Centre as part of the funding of a doctoral scholarship by decision no. DEC-2014/12/T/HS1/00145. The project is funded by the Minister of Science and Higher Education under the program "Regional Initiative of Excellence" 2019–2022, project no. 028/RID/2018/19, amount of funding: 11,742,500 PLN.

I. PLANTINGA'S UNDERSTANDING OF EPISTEMOLOGICAL DEONTOLOGISM

According to Plantinga, epistemological deontology is widespread in contemporary epistemology and determines the most popular understanding of the concept of justification. He refers to the combination of deontological justification, evidentialism, classical foundationalism and internalism as the classical package and sees the sources of this way of thinking in epistemology in the thought of modern philosophers, especially Locke (PLANTINGA 1993a, v, 4–5, 8–11; PLANTINGA 2000, 81–82, 88). Plantinga is aware of the differences between philosophers he associates with this tradition, but nevertheless believes they all share some important assumptions. He emphasizes that, according to modern thinkers, by our very nature as rational beings, we have duties concerning what beliefs we should and should not hold. Plantinga holds that classical deontologists and their successors strictly link epistemic justification to the fulfilment of an epistemic duty and often follow Locke in identifying one's main epistemic duty with proportioning belief to evidence (or defend some variant of this idea) (PLANTINGA 1993a, 12–14, 25–26; PLANTINGA 2000, 86–89).

Analyzing the position of epistemological deontologists, Plantinga cites some intuitions from the moral domain that are, in his view, crucial for a proper understanding of deontological justification. He emphasizes that in this respect the fulfilment of epistemic duty is understood by the proponents of this conception analogously to the fulfilment of moral duty. These intuitions are as follows:

- 1) Subjective duty is a duty that the subject attributes to himself.
- 2) Objective duty is a duty of the subject, regardless of whether he is aware of it and recognizes it or not.
- 3) The subject is guilty of failing to perform his subjective duty.
- 4) On the other hand, the subject is not guilty of failing to perform his objective duty, which he was not aware of for reasons beyond his own fault.
- 5) A duty presupposes the subject's ability to perform it (so-called principle "ought implies can") (PLANTINGA 1993a, 15–19).

In the concept of epistemic duties Plantinga sees the source of another position typical of modern and contemporary epistemologists, namely internalism (see SOSA 1996 and BRUECKNER 1996 for a criticism of this idea). According to the representatives of internalism, the justification of beliefs depends exclusively on the factors cognitively available to the subject from

their internal, subjective perspective. Plantinga formulates theses that he attributes to representatives of the deontological conception of justification. He calls these theses "internalist motives" as, in his view, they reveal the connection between epistemological deontologism and internalism. Internalist motives are particularly relevant to the topic addressed in this article, since they uncover the way Plantinga interprets traditional epistemological deontologism. The first internalist motive reads as follows:

- M1 Epistemic justification (that is, subjective epistemic justification, being such that I am not blameworthy) is entirely up to me and within my power. (PLANTINGA 1993a, 19)

Plantinga emphasizes that modern epistemological deontologists spoke in the context of justification about the subject's guilt or the lack of it. Taking into account the above-mentioned intuitions (3) and (4), this means, in his opinion, that these epistemologists equated justification with the fulfillment of subjective epistemic duty. Moreover, in accordance with intuition (5), he emphasizes that the fulfillment of subjective epistemic duty depends on the actions of the subject.¹ The second internalist motive and its corollaries concern people's ability to recognize their objective epistemic duty. Thanks to it, subjective epistemic duty would correspond to the objective duty:

- M2 For a large, important, and basic class of objective epistemic duties, objective and subjective duty coincide; what you objectively ought to do matches that which is such that if you don't do it, you are guilty and blameworthy. (PLANTINGA 1993a, 20)
- C1 In a large and important set of cases, a properly functioning human being can simply see (cannot make a nonculpable mistake about) what objective epistemic duty requires. (PLANTINGA 1993a, 21)

According to Plantinga, assuming the above theses, epistemological deontologists also consistently presume that a subject cannot be mistaken about whether a belief is justified for them.

¹ In Plantinga's view, the first internalist motive is revealed in the evaluation of the Cartesian evil demon scenario. For in the situation described there, the attribution of justification to a belief depends on the subject's efforts, regardless of the fact that the subject has no chance of successfully recognizing reality (PLANTINGA 1993a, 19).

In Plantinga's view, the best example of the continuation of the classical deontologism of modern thinkers is the early epistemology of Roderick Chisholm (as expressed in the first and second editions of his *Theory of Knowledge* and in his *Foundations of Knowing*). Hence, in order to criticize this epistemological tradition, he refers to Chisholm's epistemology. I want to focus on a certain element of Plantinga's analysis of the Chisholm's view, which in my view best illustrates one of the central problems with Plantinga's interpretation of deontologism.

Chisholm defines epistemic obligation in different ways in his texts but according to Plantinga: "The basic idea, however, is that our epistemic duty or requirement is to try to achieve and maintain a certain condition—call it 'epistemic excellence'—which may be hard to specify in detail, but consists fundamentally in standing in an appropriate relation to truth" (PLANTINGA 1993a, 33). When it comes to the realization of the epistemic duty thus understood, Plantinga strongly emphasizes in his interpretation of Chisholm's thought the aspect of the subject's endeavor:

What stands out, here, is that Chisholm states the intellectual duty or obligation or requirement as one of *trying* to bring about a certain state of affairs. One's duty as an intellectual being is not that of bringing it about that one has a large set of beliefs, most of which are true; it is instead that of *trying* to bring about this state of affairs. My requirement is not to succeed in maintaining epistemic excellence; my requirement is only to *try* to do so. Presumably the reason is that it may not be within my power to succeed. Perhaps I don't know how to achieve epistemic excellence: or perhaps even though I do know how, I simply can't manage it. So my duty is simply to *try* to bring about this state of affairs. (PLANTINGA 1993a, 33-34; Plantinga's emphasis)

He then asks what it means to "try" to accomplish something. In his view, to "try" means to act in accordance with what seems to a person to be the best way to accomplish a particular task. Regarding epistemic duties, he believes this is tantamount to accepting those beliefs that seem to a person to be true:

In particular, if a person is strongly (and nonculpably) convinced of the truth of a proposition—if that proposition seems obviously true to him—then (barring defeating conditions) the way for him to try to achieve epistemic excellence is to

accept it; and the more obvious it seems to him, the more status of *this* sort it has for him. (PLANTINGA 1993a, 43; Plantinga's emphasis)²

This element of Plantinga's interpretation of epistemological deontology plays a crucial role in his critique of this tradition so I will focus on it. For the ease of reference I propose to formulate it in the form of the following thesis, which I will call the principle of obviousness (PO):³

PO The best way for a given person to fulfill their epistemic duty is to accept that belief which seems obviously true to them.

It is worth mentioning here that in his epistemological analyses (especially those coming from the last stage of the development of his thought) Plantinga particularly strongly emphasizes the importance of the subject's sense of obviousness in accepting beliefs. He actually treats this subjective "sensation" of the subject as a kind of experience and calls it *doxastic experience* (see e.g. PLANTINGA 2000, 111–12, 183–84, 264, 333; PLANTINGA 1993b, 190).

In his critique of epistemological deontology, Plantinga first seeks to show that there is a tension in Chisholm's epistemology because the epistemic principles Chisholm formulates do not agree with how he conceives the third condition of knowledge.⁴ Second, Plantinga cites counterexamples intended to show that justification understood deontologically is not sufficient to turn true belief into knowledge (PLANTINGA 1993a, 36–46).⁵ One of them is this:

² See also: "How do I tell whether a given proposition is such that accepting it will contribute substantially to the fulfillment of duty to try to achieve epistemic excellence? Well, one way would be by determining how much or how strongly it seems to me to be true. The more strongly the proposition in question seems to me to be true, the more apt accepting it is for fulfillment of my epistemic duty" (PLANTINGA 1993a, 34–35).

³ In my monograph on Plantinga's epistemology of religion (ODOJ 2020) I called this thesis the principle of certainty. Now I think that it is not a good name. I thank the anonymous reviewers for pointing out to me the problems with talking about certainty in this context.

⁴ I do not have enough space here to discuss this critique of Chisholm's epistemic principles in detail. My aim is only to show that Plantinga misinterprets the very idea of epistemological deontology, and that this calls into question his entire critique of this position.

⁵ Plantinga also gives one example in favour of the non-necessity of the justification conditions given by epistemological deontologists, but this example is hardly convincing (see Plantinga's own comment in PLANTINGA 1993a, 36). I will briefly address this point below.

I will be the next president

Suppose I develop a rare sort of brain lesion that causes me to believe that I will be the next president of the United States. I have no evidence for the proposition, never having won or even run for public office.... Nevertheless, due to my cognitive dysfunction, the belief that I will be the next president seems to me obviously true—as obvious as the most obvious truths of elementary arithmetic. Now: am I so situated that I can better fulfill my obligation to the truth by withholding than by accepting this proposition? Can I better fulfill my obligation to try to bring it about that I am in the right relations to the truth by withholding than by accepting it? Surely not. That I will be the next president seems to me to be utterly and obviously true; I have no awareness at all that my cognitive faculties are playing me false here. So if I try to achieve epistemic excellence, I will count this proposition among the ones I accept.... We may add, if we like, that I am exceptionally dutiful, deeply concerned with my epistemic duty; I am eager to bring it about that I am in the right relation to the truth, and am trying my level best to do so. Then, surely, I am doing my epistemic duty in accepting the proposition in question; nevertheless that proposition has little by way of warrant for me. Even if by some mad chance I will in fact be the next president, I do not know that I will be.⁶ (PLANTINGA 1993a, 44)

II. A CRITIQUE OF PLANTINGA'S INTERPRETATION OF EPISTEMOLOGICAL DEONTOLOGISM

1. THE ABILITY TO RECOGNIZE EPISTEMIC DUTY

Let us recall that in discussing the second internalist motive (and its corollaries) Plantinga refers to the assumptions of traditional deontologists that we possess the ability to recognize our objective epistemic duties. In this context he concludes that, according to these thinkers, subjective epistemic duty (one that the subject ascribes to himself) always corresponds to the subject's objective epistemic duty. Plantinga seems to understand the convergence of these duties in the following way: (a) whenever a subject recognizes and ascribes some epistemic duty to himself, it is his objective duty; (b) whenever a subject has some objective epistemic duty, he ascribes it to himself (it is also his subjective duty).

I think Plantinga misinterprets the thought of traditional epistemological deontologists. He is certainly right in claiming that they are guided by the

⁶ It is easy to see that Plantinga follows the PO principle in his assessment of this example.

assumption that we have the ability to recognize our objective epistemic duties. However, Plantinga is wrong in assuming that according to these thinkers this ability is perfectly operational. It is true that Plantinga includes in his formulation of internalist motives the restrictions “for a large, important, and basic class of objective epistemic duties,” but in practice he seems to ignore any exceptions to the rules he describes there. It seems that, according to Plantinga, if such exceptions exist, they are not relevant.

Let us note, however, that the human fallibility of cognition—the fact that we make mistakes—plays a very important role, for example, in the epistemology of the classical epistemological deontologist, Descartes. This is to say that the imperfection of human cognition is the reason why he undertakes the enterprise of arriving at the indubitable knowledge that would constitute the basis of all our knowledge. I think that this assumption about the fallibility of human cognitive capacities is an important part of traditional deontology.

In order to better illustrate this point, we can compare the entirety of human cognitive competences, through which we acquire beliefs about the world around us, to the sense of sight. It is true that virtually all of us have the ability to see, but we sometimes make a mistake about what we see, and moreover, some people see worse than others (they see less and are more often mistaken). I think the same is true, in deontologists' minds, of our ability to properly recognize objective epistemic duties. Hence, I think that the second internalist motive and its corollaries are mistaken or, more precisely, they miss an important aspect of the deontologists' vision of us as cognitive subjects. It is not true that one cannot misidentify one's objective epistemic duty and that subjective and objective duties always coincide. I think that one of the underlying reasons why the classical deontologists (such as Descartes, David Hume) took up their epistemological issues was the conviction that too often our subjective epistemic duties do not correspond to our objective duties.

2. THE PRINCIPLE OF OBVIOUSNESS AND SUBJECTIVE EPISTEMIC DUTY

From the perspective of the assertion that subjective and objective epistemic duties are partially divergent, the question of which of them should be equated with justification is of particular importance. Plantinga argues that deontologists equate justification with the fulfillment of subjective epistemic duty. However, I think that reflecting on the cases of self-deception allows

us to see that we consider a belief to be justified when the subject has fulfilled his objective epistemic duty.

For the purposes of the present analysis, I propose to call *epistemic self-deception* those situations in which in accepting a belief a subject is guided more by his own subjective preferences (e.g., feeling pleasure) than by the epistemic goal of accepting true beliefs and avoiding false ones. As an example, we can imagine a situation in which the subject either is not satisfied with the available, relatively strong evidence and does not accept the belief in question, or is very quickly satisfied with the relatively low probability of the belief in question in the light of the available evidence and accepts that belief. Cases of epistemic self-deception include a situation in which the subject is guided by stereotypes or wishful thinking.

I think that at least some situations of epistemic self-deception can be described as examples of epistemic guilt. This certainly applies to those cases in which it is clear that if a person were more respectful of the need to pursue an epistemic goal when adopting beliefs, they would act differently in a given epistemic situation. Culpable examples of epistemic self-deception could be seen as a kind of manipulation of evidence in front of oneself for one's own benefit. I assume here that, in situations where epistemic guilt is present, it is possible for the subject (by means of self-reflection) to correct his or her faulty belief-forming procedures and adopt the proper epistemic attitude.

Such examples of epistemic self-deception show, I think, that the principle of obviousness—which Plantinga embraces—is not correct. For instance, in a typical situation of wishful thinking a person has a very strong doxastic experience, as Plantinga calls it, but it is obvious to an external observer that adopting a particular belief (or, more broadly, adopting a particular epistemic attitude) is not the best way to fulfill the person's epistemic duty. In such a situation, the sense of obviousness being experienced could be motivated more by the emotional attitude of the subject than by the strength of the evidence.

Intuitively, we do not consider a belief adopted on the basis of wishful thinking to be epistemically justified even if it seems absolutely obvious for the subject. I think that the intuitions I have indicated regarding the phenomenon of epistemic self-deception are in line with the deontologism traditionally assumed in epistemology, and therefore Plantinga wrongly attributes to the representatives of this way of thinking the assumption of the PO principle. According to the representatives of deontologism in epistemology, the

best way to fulfill an epistemic duty is not always to adopt the belief which seems obvious to a person. However, this is also in tension with Plantinga's second assumption that according to deontologists the fulfilment of an epistemic duty means the fulfilment of a subjective epistemic duty. Classical epistemological deontologists assumed, I think, that having a justified belief consists in the subject's fulfilment of his objective epistemic duty.⁷ In doing so, they assumed that a person could make a culpable mistake when recognizing his epistemic duty, and therefore that the fulfilment of subjective epistemic duty would not determine the justification of a belief.

Assuming, as Plantinga does, the assumption about our having a perfectly efficient ability to recognize our objective epistemic duty, it is easy to equate that duty with subjective epistemic duty, and then to adopt the PO principle. But these assumptions are, in my view, incompatible, firstly, with our intuitions about knowledge and justification and, secondly, with the thought of representatives of the deontological conception of justification. The difference between Plantinga's interpretation of the deontologists' position and how I think it should be understood can be captured by two different inferences:

Classical deontologists:

- 1) The sense of obviousness accompanies the fulfilment of a subjective epistemic duty.
- 2) Subjective epistemic duty does not always correspond to objective epistemic duty.
- 3) Hence, experiencing the sense of obviousness does not always mean fulfilling objective epistemic duty.

Classical deontologists according to Plantinga:

- 1) The sense of obviousness accompanies the fulfilment of subjective epistemic duty.
- 2) Subjective epistemic duty (practically⁸) always corresponds to objective epistemic duty.

⁷ Identifying the deontological conception of justification with the fulfilment of subjective epistemic duty (and the absence of guilt), Plantinga makes reference to the sceptical scenarios of the evil demon and the brain in the vat. However, I think that these scenarios are so specific that one cannot, as Plantinga does, extrapolate the intuitions associated with them without a detailed analysis of what they have in common and what makes them different from more common situations (PLANTINGA 1993a, 19).

⁸ As I noted above, Plantinga mentions some limitations, but he does not consider them at all in his discussion. In my interpretation of epistemological deontology, these limitations play a crucial role.

- 3) Hence, experiencing the sense of obviousness (practically) always means fulfilling objective epistemic duty.

3. JUSTIFICATION AS A LACK OF GUILT

Plantinga identifies the fulfillment of epistemic duty: first, with the fulfillment of subjective epistemic duty and, second, with the absence of guilt. Both of these elements are found in the first internalist motive. Plantinga gives many examples of people who, in his view, hold justified beliefs precisely because they are not guilty of having them, for instance the belief *I will be the next president* mentioned above. It is worth quoting here another example, in which Plantinga describes a mentally ill person who has a great number of delusional beliefs:

Now there is no reason to think this unfortunate man was flouting epistemic duty, or derelict with respect to cognitive requirement, or careless about his epistemic obligations, or cognitively irresponsible. Perhaps he was doing his level best to satisfy these obligations. Indeed, we can imagine that his main goal in life is satisfying his intellectual obligations and carrying out his cognitive duties. Perhaps he was dutiful *in excelsis*. If so, he was *justified* in these mad beliefs, even if they are mad, and even though they result from cognitive dysfunction. (PLANTINGA 2000, 101–2)

Should we agree with Plantinga's assessment that this mentally ill man has justified beliefs? I do not think that this assessment is consistent with our intuitions. Let us consider what intuitions accompany us in similar situations on moral ground. If we were to regard the acceptance of a belief as a morally evaluable action, then we would not in fact be assigning guilt to the described subject. We would be guided by the principle "ought implies can", whereby we exempt a person from a duty if it is beyond their capacity to perform a particular task for reasons beyond their control. Similarly in this case, a mentally ill person is not guilty of having delusional beliefs because they are unable to use their cognitive faculties properly as a result of the mental dysfunction. However, this does not mean that their delusional beliefs are justified in a deontological sense. They have not fulfilled their epistemic duty, so their beliefs are not justified. This indicates that, contrary to Plantinga's claim, having a deontological justification cannot be equated with the absence of guilt.

In his critique Plantinga cites numerous counterexamples to deontological conception of epistemic justification.⁹ Only one is cited above (*I will be the next president*), but the scheme of all these examples is similar. The subject's cognitive abilities do not function properly, because he or she has a certain tendency (a fixed disposition) to form false beliefs. The underlying cause of this pathological tendency is one of the following factors: (a) dysfunction at the psychological level, (b) dysfunction at the biological level (e.g., brain damage), (c) intervention of an extraordinary being (e.g., demon, mad scientist). As is usually the case in such counterexamples, by a fortunate coincidence some beliefs produced by the subject's pathological tendency turn out to be true. In discussing these counterexamples Plantinga concludes that the best way for the described subjects to fulfill their epistemic duty is to adopt the belief dictated by the pathological tendency. He emphasizes that these beliefs are the result of the operation of a particular belief-acquisition mechanism, accompanied by a strong doxastic experience, and thus these people are unable to control the acceptance of their beliefs. This means, according to Plantinga, that they are not guilty of having the beliefs in question, and thus are justified in a deontological sense. I do not think that this assessment corresponds to our intuitions and to traditional epistemological deontologism. Rather, it should be said of the beliefs in question that although the subject is not guilty of having them, they are not justified because he or she is unable to fulfill his/her epistemic duty. I think that Plantinga erroneously identifies justification with blamelessness.¹⁰

Plantinga also provides one counterexample to show that a deontological condition is not necessary for having justified beliefs (PLANTINGA 1993a, 45). I don't think this is a good counterargument, hence I won't pay much attention to it. Briefly, it describes a situation in which a person is convinced that visitors from an alien planet take control over his brain in such a manner that every time he formulates the belief "I see something red", they implement to his brain many false beliefs. To do justice to his epistemic duty to accept true beliefs and avoid false ones, he learned to refrain from accepting the problematic belief. On one occasion, however, seeing an oncoming bus, he told himself "epistemic duties aside" and adopt a belief that he is seeing

⁹ Including Plantinga's counterexamples to coherentism, since he understands this conception of justification as a specific kind of epistemological deontologism (PLANTINGA 1993a, 66–67; 81–84).

¹⁰ Greco criticizes Plantinga's view in similar manner. He argues that deontological justification should be understood as praiseworthiness, not blamelessness (GRECO 1993, 174–79).

something red. According to Plantinga, this belief is warranted despite the fact that the subject in question has acted contrary to his epistemic duty.

I agree with Meeker's comments on this argument in "Chisholming Away at Plantinga's Critique of Epistemic Deontology" (MEEKER 1998, 92–96). Firstly, Plantinga says of his own conception that it applies only to typical cases, because our concept of knowledge is vague so it is impossible to specify conditions that will cover all cases. For the same reason, the discussed example does not undermine the deontological conception because the counterexample is extremely unconceivable, even unrealistic. Secondly, this counterargument refers to only one formulation of the epistemic duty, whereas just as often the duty is formulated in terms of the evidentialism thesis (the duty to accept beliefs on the basis of sufficient evidence). Given this understanding of epistemic duty, it is not true that it is epistemically irresponsible to accept a belief about a red bus because perceptual experience is a particularly strong kind of evidence (see also GINET 1995, 403–4 and Plantinga's reply PLANTINGA 1995, 434–35).

4. DOXASTIC VOLUNTARISM

Note that the analogy between epistemic and moral duties introduced by Plantinga has some limitations, namely, in the case of epistemic duty (unlike with moral duty) it is impossible not to fulfill one's recognized obligation. The fulfillment of epistemic duty consists in recognizing that a given belief is true which inseparably entails the acceptance of this belief. As it seems, we do not have freedom on epistemic grounds—we cannot decide whether we accept a belief or not. At least at first glance, it seems that one cannot recognize that a belief is true and not accept it and one cannot fail to recognize that a belief is true and accept it. The classic quote addressing this problem comes from Bernard Williams and reads as follows:

If I could acquire a belief at will, I could acquire it whether it was true or not; moreover I would know that I could acquire it whether it was true or not. If in full consciousness I could will to acquire a 'belief' irrespective of its truth, it is unclear that before the event I can seriously think of it as a belief, i.e. as something purporting to represent reality. (WILLIAMS 1970, 108)

The claim about the lack of epistemic freedom is the basis of the most important objection to epistemological deontologism, known as the problem of doxastic voluntarism. The objection can be stated as follows:

- 1) If a subject is obliged to do something, then he must be able to do it or not do it.
- 2) We do not have freedom over what beliefs we possess.

Thus:

- 3) We cannot have duties with respect to it.

An analysis of Plantinga's texts suggests that he takes a determinist position with respect to the problem of doxastic voluntarism.¹¹ The central idea of Plantinga's epistemology is the notion of the proper functioning of a subject's cognitive faculties. In characterizing these cognitive faculties, he repeatedly highlights that they operate in ways that can be described as automatic, i.e., strictly defined (by the author of the design plan of that faculty¹²), independent of the subject's will, resistant to influence by the subject. One aspect of how these mechanisms work is to create in us a doxastic experience connected to the beliefs that they produced. Plantinga constantly emphasizes that when experiencing the strong sense of obviousness we are unable to stop ourselves from adopting a given belief, we are unable to control the acceptance of it. These three elements play a key role in Plantinga's argument against deontology and he strongly emphasizes them in his own epistemological analyses: the presence of concrete mechanisms of belief acquisition, the sense of obviousness, and a lack of control over beliefs. In Plantinga's works one finds frequent remarks on these topics in the context of common-sense beliefs: memory beliefs, perceptual beliefs, beliefs about the existence of the external world and other minds, beliefs derived from the testimony of others, as well as in the context of religious beliefs (for similar

¹¹ One reviewer pointed out that Plantinga makes a distinction between believing and accepting and allows that we have epistemic freedom when it comes to acceptance. This is true but only in relation to Plantinga's first important text on the rationality of religious belief, "Reason and Belief in God" from 1983 (PLANTINGA 1983, 37–39). This text has already contained key elements of Plantinga's thought on religious beliefs but lacked his most important epistemological position, i.e. the concept of warrant. Moreover, at that stage Plantinga had not yet taken a clear position on a couple of specific questions, including whether the fulfilment of epistemic obligation is a necessary condition for knowledge. For this reason, in my critique of Plantinga's position, I refer exclusively to his mature thought, which he included in his trilogy on the concept of warrant in epistemology (PLANTINGA 1993a, 1993b, 2000). In these three books he did not in any way mention any important role of acceptance, as something different from belief, in epistemology.

¹² At the stage of strictly epistemological analysis, Plantinga does not resolve the question of whether this author is a personal God or maybe evolution.

comments see ZAGZEBSKI 1993, 201–5; MOURAD 2001, 615–27; HELM 2001, 112–13).

I think that the assumption of determinism is Plantinga's fundamental assumption, which affects all of his epistemological considerations and especially his understanding of the issue of epistemic duties. Plantinga's position on whether we are free with respect to the beliefs we accept can be compared to compatibilism's position on the existence of free will. Plantinga does not openly deny that epistemic responsibility exists (he only denies that it forms a part of the third condition of knowledge), but he seems to assume that it is compatible with epistemic determinism. The principle "ought implies can" means in this view that it is necessary for a duty that the subject be able to perform the act which is the object of the duty. However, the fact that the subject *must* carry out the act does not contradict this principle. With regard to the aforementioned reasoning, Plantinga seems to reject the validity of premise (1) (at least on epistemological grounds), and accepts the validity of premise (2), and even extremely strongly emphasizes it. Admittedly he disagrees with the conclusion of the reasoning expressed in (3), but this follows from the rejection of (1). In short, Plantinga seems to assume that while we do not have freedom with respect to what beliefs we adopt, this does not prevent us from having duties with respect to them.

I believe that in classical epistemological deontologism there is a different assumption about the freedom we have in relation to our beliefs from what Plantinga assumes. Representatives of this way of thinking presuppose the validity of premise (1). They disagree with (2) and therefore do not draw the conclusion expressed in (3). The central discrepancy between Plantinga's interpretation of epistemological deontologism and how I believe this position should be understood concerns the existence of epistemic freedom, that is, (2). Plantinga rejects (1) and therefore assumes a different understanding of the concept of epistemic duty from that of classical deontology. For this reason, although Plantinga, contrary to the deontologists, accepts (and even emphasizes) (2), he rejects (3) in agreement with them and assumes that we have epistemic duties. However, this agreement is only apparent because the key concept of epistemic duty is understood differently. I think it is Plantinga's fundamental assumption about the absence of epistemic freedom that entails the rest of the differences between his interpretation of epistemological deontologism and how the position should be understood.

Clearly, deontologists have a serious task on their hands: they must explain how epistemic freedom is possible (at least the kind that suffices to

hold responsibilities in this regard), given the strongly persuasive intuition expressed in the quote by Williams. This is not the place here to address this problem systematically. Briefly, I think there is an intuition in classical deontology that we have a kind of epistemic freedom which is related to the aforementioned tendencies to make mistakes, to self-deception, and to epistemic negligence, and at the same time we have the capacity for self-reflective control of our own belief acquisition practices. Thanks to the latter, we can correct our own cognitive errors and limit the influence of our own inclinations, which have a negative influence on the reliable recognition of reality. Epistemic freedom understood in this way is a condition for the possibility of the epistemic duties the fulfillment of which is necessary to have a deontologically understood justification.

CONCLUSION

Plantinga argues that there are epistemic duties, however, the fulfillment of which by the subject is not what makes a true belief an instance of knowledge. In the examples he gives he states repeatedly that the question of having a deontological justification is trivial (PLANTINGA 200, 101–2). It must be admitted that with the interpretation adopted by Plantinga indeed this question seems to be trivial. This is clearly visible when we look at Plantinga's assumed PO principle. However, as I have tried to demonstrate, it results from other assumptions made by Plantinga which are not present in the traditionally assumed epistemological deontology. Summarizing the above discussion, it should be concluded that Plantinga adopts an inadequate interpretation of deontology, attributing the following claims to representatives of this position:

- 1) The best way for a particular person to fulfill his/her epistemic duty is to accept that belief which seems true to him/her (the principle PO).
- 2) We have a fully functional ability to recognize our objective epistemic duty.
- 3) A belief is justified if the subject has fulfilled his subjective epistemic duty.
- 4) A belief is justified if the subject is not at fault for having it.
- 5) We do not have epistemic freedom, i.e., we are unable to influence what beliefs we have.

Plantinga aims to show the insufficiency of deontological conceptions of justification but given his misinterpretation of this position his argument seems to be unsuccessful. Thus, Plantinga's case for epistemological naturalism appears to have been stripped of one of its important pillars.

REFERENCES

- BRUECKNER, Anthony. 1996. "Deontologism and Internalism in Epistemology." *Nous* 30(4): 527–36. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2216117>.
- GINET, Carl. 1995. "Comments on Plantinga's Two-Volume Work on Warrant." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 55(2): 403–8.
- GRECO, John. 1993. "Is Natural Theology Necessary for Theistic Knowledge?" In *Rational Faith: Catholic Responses to Reformed Epistemology*, edited by Linda Zagzebski, 168–98. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- HELM, Paul. 2001. "Warranted Christian Belief by Alvin Plantinga (review)." *Mind* 110(440): 1110–15.
- MEEKER, Kevin. 1998. "Chischolming Away at Plantinga's Critique of Epistemic Deontology." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 76(1): 90–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048409812348221>.
- MOURAD, Ronney B. 2001. "Proper Function and Justified Christian Belief." *The Journal of Religion* 81(4): 615–27.
- ODOJ, Ewa. 2020. *Wiara bez świadectw? Wokół Alwina Plantingi krytyki ewidencjalizmu w epistemologii religii*. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL.
- PLANTINGA, Alvin. 1983. "Reason and Belief in God." In *Faith and Rationality. Reason and Belief in God*, edited by Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, 16–93. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- PLANTINGA, Alvin. 1993a. *Warrant: The Current Debate*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- PLANTINGA, Alvin. 1993b. *Warrant and Proper Function*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- PLANTINGA, Alvin. 1995. "Reliabilism, Analyses and Defeaters." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 55(2): 427–64. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2108562>.
- PLANTINGA, Alvin. 2000. *Warranted Christian Belief*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- SOSA, Ernest. 1996. "Plantinga on Epistemic Internalism." In *Warrant in Contemporary Epistemology. Essays in Honor of Plantinga's Theory of Knowledge*, edited by Jonathan L. Kvanvig, 78–83. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- WILLIAMS, Bernard. 1970. "Deciding to Believe." In *Language, Belief and Metaphysics*, edited by Howard E. Kiefer and Milton K. Munitz, 95–111. State University of New York Press.
- ZAGZEBSKI, Linda. 1993. "Religious Knowledge and the Virtues of the Mind." In *Rational Faith: Catholic Responses to Reformed Epistemology*, edited by Linda Zagzebski, 199–225. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

PLANTINGA'S INTERPRETATION OF EPISTEMOLOGICAL DEONTOLOGISM

Summary

Alvin Plantinga challenges the rooted tradition of thinking about justification as the subject's fulfillment of his or her epistemic duty. I try to show that, in several respects, Plantinga misinterprets the idea of epistemic duties and that, consequently, his argument against deontologism is not sound. I begin by summarizing Plantinga's understanding of epistemological deontologism and then offer my own critique of this interpretation, which focuses on five issues: the problem of recognizability of epistemic duty, describing epistemic duty as subjective, Plantinga's assumption of the principle of obviousness, the understanding of justification as absence of guilt, and the issue of doxastic voluntarism.

Keywords: justification; epistemological deontologism; epistemic duty; doxastic voluntarism.

PLANTINGI INTERPRETACJA DEONTOLOGIZMU EPISTEMOLOGICZNEGO

Streszczenie

Alvin Plantinga kwestionuje zakorzenioną tradycję myślenia o uzasadnieniu jako spełnieniu przez podmiot swojego obowiązku epistemicznego. Staram się wykazać, że pod kilkoma względami Plantinga błędnie interpretuje ideę obowiązków epistemicznych i w związku z tym jego argument przeciwko deontologizmowi nie jest poprawny. Rozpoczynam od zaprezentowania przyjętej przez Plantingę interpretacji deontologizmu epistemologicznego, a następnie przeprowadzam jej krytykę. Skupiam się przy tym na pięciu kwestiach: problemie rozpoznawalności obowiązku epistemicznego, utożsamianiu obowiązku epistemicznego z obowiązkiem subiektywnym, przyjmowaniu przez Plantingę zasady oczywistości, rozumieniu uzasadnienia jako braku winy oraz kwestii woluntaryzmu przekonaniowego.

Słowa kluczowe: uzasadnienie; deontologizm epistemologiczny; obowiązek epistemiczny; woluntaryzm przekonaniowy.