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Nicholas Wolterstorff, REASON WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF RELIGION, 2nd edition

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“critical dialog” with the nonbeliever that the significance for truth of the soundness of an argument is underplayed.

The diffidence displayed in natural theology vanishes when an appeal is made to religious experience and special revelation. Non-mystical, psychologically immediate, experiences of God mediated through his creation, his acts in history, a hymn, etc., are held to provide prima-facie evidence, which, having been checked against overrides, can be considered ultima-facie evidence. A similar confidence comes through the receipt of special revelation, with its ““authenticating miracles.”” Where such appeals leave the dialog with the nonbeliever is not clear.

The book concludes with a balanced, sensitive treatment of the role one’s personal faith plays in the “critical dialog” with the nonbeliever and his objections. The believer is advised to make a cumulative case *a la* Basil Mitchell, based on “less-than-algorithmic evidence” admitting of logical, and a modicum of existential, doubt.

Given the limitations in length and readers’ background, the treatment of the religious language problem could have been shortened in favor of the chapter on objections to theism. Not only would this have made a somewhat compressed chapter more understandable to the neophyte, but it would impress the nonbeliever with the seriousness with which the dialog with him is being taken. Nonetheless, the book is an authoritative, concise survey of the subject which should be unusually effective in making the Christian faith more “rationally convincing.”

Reason Within the Bounds of Religion, by **Nicholas Wolterstorff**. 2nd edition. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1984. Pp. 161.

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The first edition (1976) of Nicholas Wolterstorff’s *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion* dealt with the intellectual integrity of Christian scholarship. Its main thesis was that Christian doctrine may and should act as a constraint on the sorts of positions a Christian scholar holds in his area of expertise. This thesis conflicts with the standard modern view of inquiry as the unrestricted pursuit of truth wherever evidence and argument lead. Wolterstorff maintained that the ideal of unrestrained inquiry is defensible only on the basis of epistemological foundationalism; only, that is, if there is available a body of certainties (the foundation of knowledge) from which all valid knowledge claims can be derived. He attacked foundationalism, arguing first that foundationalists have given no adequate explanation of how knowledge claims are derived from the foundations and, second,

that in any case the body of certain truths available to us is not sufficient to yield all of our legitimate knowledge claims. Given the untenability of foundationalism, he maintained, we have no alternative but to base our inquiry on what we find ourselves believing. "Confronted as we are with the fact that we lack a shared foundation, each of us has no choice but to one's own self be true" (p. 66). Accordingly, Wolterstorff concluded that it is entirely appropriate for the Christian scholar to let his faith control the positions he takes in his discipline.

This defense of Christian "control beliefs" is reprinted here as Part I of the second edition of *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion*. It remains a clear and stimulating starting-point for reflections on the intellectual integrity of scholarship informed by Christian faith. There are, however, some major gaps in Wolterstorff's argument. For one thing, he considers only the form of foundationalism that requires foundational beliefs to be the sort of indubitable truths that could withstand Cartesian doubt. By ignoring less stringent versions of foundationalism (e.g., those of Aristotle and Aquinas), he makes it unfairly easy to show that the foundations are not sufficient to support the full extent of our knowledge. Further, he does not justify his move from the inadequacy of foundationalism to the legitimacy of basing our inquiry on whatever we happen to believe at a given time. Even if there is no body of indubitable truths available as a foundation of knowledge, it does not follow that *all* our *de facto* beliefs are legitimate bases of inquiry. On these issues Wolterstorff's discussion needs (as his preface to the second edition suggests) supplementing with his own more recent work as well as that of Alston, Plantinga, et al.

Part II of this second edition consists of a new essay (of some 35 pages) that turns from the question of the intellectual integrity of Christian scholarship to the complementary question of its moral integrity. Wolterstorff begins with some reflections on the Christian conception of the goal of human existence. As he notes, mainline Christian tradition has defined this goal solely in terms of knowledge and enjoyment of God, with no explicit reference to our relations to nature and to other human beings. Wolterstorff proposes, however, that the latter relations should be included and that this be done by taking the goal of human existence to be peace (*shalom*), construed, it is highest form, as enjoyment of God, nature, and one's fellows (and as including justice as an essential component). Accordingly, Wolterstorff holds that the moral justification of Christian scholarship must be its contribution to *shalom*.

His next step is to argue that knowledge as such has intrinsic value and hence is one aspect of *shalom*. Thus, although he agrees that knowledge may also have value as a practical means of improving our condition ("praxis-oriented theory"), he rejects the idea that scholarly work is justified only by the usefulness of its results. But he further holds that scholars can have obligations to aid in attaining practical ends and that the pursuit of theory simply for the inherent worth or

personal interest of the knowledge sought (“pure theory”) cannot always be counted on to yield, of itself, sufficiently useful results. Accordingly, he concludes that the Christian scholar’s choices of research topics must keep in mind both the intrinsic worth of his work and the utility of its results. “He cannot engage in praxis-oriented theory without first considering the claims of knowledge which is of intrinsic worth; and he cannot engage in pure theory without first considering the claims of the inherent results and utility of knowledge” (p. 133).

Many may see this as an uncontroversial, middle-of-the-road position; but Wolterstorff suggests that it differs significantly from traditional Christian ideas about scholarship. Just as Christian concepts of the goal of human existence have typically mentioned only our relation to God, so traditional Christian conceptions of knowledge do not order it to any humanly useful goal. Indeed, the two sorts of conceptions seem to merge in the classic view of Augustine and Aquinas that the highest form of knowledge, the intellectual contemplation of God, *is* the goal of human existence. Wolterstorff sees this classic Christian view as “a profoundly different perspective from that which I have outlined” (p. 139). Similarly, he criticizes the later “traditional Protestant view” of knowledge for having “all too often encouraged the irresponsible pursuit of pure theory when praxis-oriented theory was called for” (p. 142).

Like his treatment of intellectual integrity, Wolterstorff’s discussion of the Christian scholar’s moral integrity is a good starting-point for reflection. But, also like the earlier discussion, his treatment has some important gaps. Particularly, it seems to me, Wolterstorff does not sufficiently justify his claim to put forward a position that differs “profoundly” from the classical Christian view. His discussion seems to confuse the question of the ultimate goal of human existence, which classical Christianity surely does see as a contemplative union with God, with the question of the goal of scholarship here on earth, which classical Christianity just as surely sees as obligated to minister to human needs. Here Wolterstorff might well have referred to Thomas Aquinas’ subtly balanced analysis of the relative merits of the contemplative life and the active life (*Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 182). While maintaining the intrinsic ultimate superiority of the purely contemplative life, Aquinas nonetheless insists that “the necessity of present life” may well require us to subordinate contemplation to the practical goals of an active life (cf. q. 182, a. 1, end of *respondeo*).

Another gap in Wolterstorff’s discussion concerns the question of whether the pure theory he defends is even possible or whether all theory is implicitly praxis-oriented (as, e.g., Marxists and Freudians often suggest). Wolterstorff mentions this difficulty on his final pages but merely rejects it without, as he admits, giving it the consideration it deserves. This is unfortunate, since the question of the “purity” of pure theory is currently the most pressing challenge not only to Wolterstorff’s position but to the fundamental project of scholarship as we con-

ceive and live it. Here I think the most significant difficulties come not from standard Marxist and Freudian views but from Michel Foucault's disconcerting analyses of the historical development of reason in the West, with their suggestion that rationality is itself just a particularly subtle and effective means of practical domination. I would very much like to see Wolterstorff apply his acute and sensitive mind to this challenge.