


REPLY TO NICHOLAS WOLTERSTORFF

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I

 turn now to Nicholas Wolterstorff's very critical comments on me. I have tried hard to give what I regard as rather powerful grounds for setting aside reformed theology, something that is at the center of Wolterstorff's thought and commitment. It seems to me to be a thoroughly mistaken—even retrograde—orientation concerning religious belief and conviction.¹ Wolterstorff returns the compliment about my naturalism and my articulation, utilization, and defense of wide reflective equilibrium. I do not think it is at all gauche or even the slightest bit untoward of him to mount such an attack on me on this occasion or indeed any other. Remember Stout's remarks on the critical spirit. I would like to know where, if at all, my views are even in the ballpark of being right. And I can't know that without knowing where they have gone wrong. When the organizers of this conference asked me for names of participants on this section of the conference, Wolterstorff was prominent among my suggestions. I knew him as a philosopher of ability and integrity who is as much opposed to views like mine as I am to his. He would surely, I thought, give my views a good, critical probing, and that is exactly what he did, and that is just what I wanted. I am grateful to him for that.

II

Before considering Wolterstorff's arguments against wide reflective equilibrium one by one, I want to address what I take to be an important mistake in his strategy of argument. He, taking them to be my most original and interesting

arguments, considers only what I have to say about an appeal to considered judgments in wide reflective equilibrium vis-à-vis religion and of the resultant alleged "consequences of changes in our *Zeitgeist*." He acknowledges that I make some other, as he puts it, "standard arguments against theism," but he ignores them, concentrating only on my WRE arguments vis-à-vis religion while ignoring my repeated claim that they are only a part of a *cumulative* argument for atheism—naturalism if you will—that is part of an unfolding Enlightenment narrative that has been going on for a long time and has distinctive phases critical, in various ways, of religion. I think wide reflective equilibrium, as far as its deployment concerning religion is concerned, should be seen in that setting.

We secularists go from Holbach and Hobbes, to Hume and Kant, to Feuerbach and Marx, to the distinguished nineteenth-century religious thinkers (none of whom were standard theists), to J. L. Mackie and Wallace Matson, to thinkers such as Axel Hägerström and Ingemar Hedenius who challenge the very cognitivity of theism.² It is the cumulative effect of these Enlightenment arguments set in their cumulative narrative where, as I tell it, we get the principal force of the critique of religion. Many people, more and more people, have been either closet or armed secularists. The cumulative narrative gestured at above has given us at least a putative justification for such a secular orientation. My utilization of reflective equilibrium vis-à-vis religion would be without force if it did not assume the soundness of at least some rational reconstructions vis-à-vis religion of Hume and Kant and of Feuerbach and Marx. Moreover, Marx's contentions about religion would have little relevance if Hume's arguments (or some rational reconstruction of them) had not been generally sound. Original or not, I have tried to argue for these Enlightenment beliefs and I have argued that appealing to considered judgments in reflective equilibrium in religion would have little force without the background of the Enlightenment critiques of religion. But some might argue, including Wolterstorff, we are just in effect pointing to changes in the *Zeitgeist* with wide reflective equilibrium arguments. But unless we have good reasons to believe the Enlightenment had undermined the grounds and even the very rationale of religious belief, convictions about the facts of what can and cannot be gotten into wide reflective equilibrium would have no point in this context. We need the background of Hume and Kant and (though in a different way) of Feuerbach and Marx and a recognition of the essential soundness of their achievements for our appeal here to wide reflective equilibrium to have much force concerning the examination of religion. With such a change in our understanding of *veridicality*, or in what at least with considerable plausibility could be taken to be the *veridicality* of religious belief, it has brought about, the shift in considered judgments has a point but without that it has little or none. Changes in *Zeitgeist* without such background claims being largely justified are just that: without rational or justificatory relevance. But with the validation, or at least partial validation, of the Enlightenment story with its cumulative argumentative significance they have considerable significance. Under such condi-

tions the growth in agreement of considered judgments among contemporary Western intellectuals is frosting on the cake of the Enlightenment.

III

I turn now to Wolterstorff's specific criticisms of me, some of which seem to me to have more force than others. He is right in thinking my claims are indeed strong. Some might even find them offensive. I am claiming that only a secular *Weltanschauung* is justified and rational for twentieth- and twenty-first-century critical intellectuals, educated as we have been in the rich capitalist democracies. To make this very claim some, no doubt, will think is enough to justify us in setting it aside. I would not, of course, say it if I did not believe it; but to take some of the sting out of it and its *seeming* arrogance, let me say at once what I have said again and again on many occasions, that I am not saying believers are generally irrational. That would be an absurd thing to say. I am claiming rather that *believers are being irrational in believing in God*, not that they are *generally* irrational. Everybody, I suspect, has some irrational beliefs—some blind spots about something—but certainly not everyone is irrational. I am saying that *in respect to having a belief in God*, believers are less rational than nonbelievers. I am not saying they are generally less rational, though *perhaps* sometimes they are. Swedish society seems to me to have more rational and reasonable people in it than US society or Mexican society or South African society. And there is little in the way of religious belief in Sweden. I am not absurdly attributing this to anything innate in the various peoples mentioned but routinely to their social fortunes: their levels of wealth and the extensiveness and types of their education. And this plainly affects their religious orientations. Moreover, I am not saying (absurdly) that I am more rational or more reasonable than Wolterstorff, though with respect to belief in God I think I am.

Wolterstorff also says I have a *voluntarist* conception of belief and justification. I don't recognize myself in that description. I do not take it that a condition of being justified in believing something is that the activity of justifying it has been successfully performed by me or perhaps by anyone else. I have, and we have, many of what Charles S. Peirce called *acritical* beliefs (e.g., fire burns, rivers flow, people die, the earth has existed for a long time), *some* of which I have not the faintest idea how to justify. Yet for me they are *acritical* background beliefs, some of which, *if focused on*, become considered beliefs and cease being *acritical* and become criticizable and justifiable. (Though everything that can be criticized need not actually be criticized.) One would if one lives in normal circumstances have to be insane not to believe the bulk of our *acritical* beliefs. They are vague and, as Peirce pointed out, usefully so, but not in the slightest untoward. Moreover, even *if* I had an actual voluntarist understanding of justification, I do not see that that is damaging in terms of my account of justification in terms of wide reflective equilibrium.

I agree with Wolterstorff that "a belief is not justified *tout court* but [perhaps] always and only with reference to a certain group." It is not the way I would put things, but I will here go with his claim "that justification is always performed with respect to some specific class of person—a reference class," as he calls it. Standard theism (the usual kind of belief in God in our societies) cannot, I claim, be successfully justified with respect to "present-day Western intellectuals or present-day Westerners in general" taken as a reference class. In contrast, Wolterstorff argues that standard theism "is to be justified with reference to those intellectuals who are theists." The reference class, he has it, shouldn't be present-day Western intellectuals generally or present-day Westerners generally, but theistic intellectuals. Indeed only to those who he says believe in what he calls standard theism. But that, to put it mildly, seems at the very least to be ethnocentric and arbitrary and since contemporary Western theists are the ones at whom justification is aimed they will end up saying either that theistic belief is justified or must be just accepted fideistically, on faith. In any event, a lot of people just get arbitrarily excluded. Wolterstorff admits that theistic belief can't be justified if we take present-day Western intellectuals or present-day Westerners to be the reference class. But then, he remarks, neither can naturalism nor atheism be justified to such a wide reference class. But each of us, he says, with a bit of hyperbole, belongs to countless different groups. But if I or some group of us succeed in shaping up—getting into wide reflective equilibrium—the beliefs I or we share as members of a reference class, have we justified those beliefs? Wolterstorff remarks that he fails to see that he or I, in doing this, have done that. More assertively he remarks, "Whatever I have done, I have not done that." But it seems to me he has done exactly that if shaping up the beliefs is to be understood as getting them in wide reflective equilibrium. Wolterstorff remarks, "I fail to see that I now justifiedly hold those beliefs. Suppose it turns out that the optimal wide reflective equilibrium for one group of which I am a member requires believing p , and the optimal wide reflective equilibrium for another group of which I a member requires believing in not- p . Suppose I believe p . Do I then believe p justifiedly or do I not?" He sees no way of answering the question.

However, Wolterstorff has his justification, though he seems not to have realized it. He has already supplied the answer with his argument that justification is always relative to a reference class. If my aim is to justify something politically in and for a liberal society, I appeal to one reference class; if my aim is to justify something aesthetically in the modern world, I justify this by reference to another reference class; if my aim is to justify something in molecular biology or in chemical engineering, other reference classes are involved, and so on. Justification is always contextual and at least arguably will endorse different reflective equilibria. There is no general or Archimedean point wide reflective equilibrium. My p may be justified in one equilibrium but not in another without the slightest conflict. Reflective equilibrium is *practice-relative* with its distinctive aims, though this does not preclude the legitimacy of ques-

tions about the justification of any particular practice itself using a different equilibrium for different purposes as part of a different practice but with the same method of justification for attaining justification of considered judgments in wide reflective equilibrium. What hangs on the fact that a belief is or is not justified with respect to some reference class—that this is the way that justification goes—means that there is no justification *überhaupt* but only justification vis-à-vis some particular practice or cluster practices—justification, that is, only with respect to their distinctive rationales and with respect to certain purposes.

But then isn't Wolterstorff plainly right in maintaining that justification for Christian belief is for and to Christian believers and that it can't be anything else? Indeed, he insists, justification, even for and to Christian believers, works only if they are standard theists. That is and must be, so the claim goes, the appropriate reference class vis-à-vis Christian belief. No it isn't, for many Christian believers, and particularly reflective ones, including standard theists, want to show that Christian belief in standard theism would be justified for any reasonable person living in a culture such as ours—perhaps even for any person, period. Christ is said to be the Truth and the Way. It is not enough for them to show that it would be justified only for those who already believe. They have the *right* to so believe, all right. That is not in question. But there can be many things we have the right to do or to believe that we are not justified in doing, feeling, or believing. Philosophers, and what G. E. Moore calls many plain people as well, thinking about and feeling through about religion—skeptics and believers alike—want to see if it could be ascertained whether it is more reasonable or better (everything considered) to believe in God than not to believe in him.³ And in specifying (pace Wolterstorff) the reference class as Western intellectuals living at our time and place, I am not violating the restrictions Wolterstorff reasonably makes for reference classes. Many people living in the circumstances in which we live are able to communicate with each other and not infrequently want to ask that question. It is not an unreasonable thing for them to be concerned with. Wolterstorff is just being arbitrary in blocking it off and in setting it aside. Given the importance of belief/nonbelief—a religious commitment versus a purely secular one—in our lives, it is important to see, if only we can, what would be more reasonable for informed people, but still people caring for others and caring as well about their own lives, now living in relative security in the rich capitalist democracies, come to believe, and indeed should believe, about God. We know what the explicitly Christian community believes, but what about the reference class just specified: What do they believe and what should they believe about God and religious commitment? Wolterstorff, whatever his intent, just evasively leads us away from this crucial question and he does nothing to show that, appearances to the contrary, it is not a crucial question with which many reflective human beings want to come to grips.

IV

Wolterstorff challenges my belief that getting the beliefs of a group of which one is a member into wide reflective equilibrium is a way of justifying those beliefs. He points out—exaggerating things—that each of us belongs to countless different groups and that there, he has it, is the rub. He remarks, “Suppose I regard the shared beliefs of some group of which I am a member as quite chaotic. Suppose further that I feel loyalty to the group, and want to do what I can to get their beliefs into as coherent a shape as possible. Suppose I forge a coherent account of these beliefs. I get the beliefs and convictions—their considered judgments—into a consistent and coherent pattern. But have I thereby justified them? Have I brought it about that the members of the group are now justified in holding those beliefs?” Wolterstorff continues, “I fail to see that I have done that with any method or without one. Whatever I have done, I have not done that.” *Au contraire*, I think that he has done exactly that. I don’t say *completely* or finally justified them; nobody achieves that. There is no *such* justification any more than there is a last word. But they have been justified, or at the very least given *some* justification, all the same.

John Rawls, I think, has brilliantly and thoroughly done that, exemplifying that very method with respect to *political liberalism* in his *Political Liberalism* and some essays that followed that.⁴ Why does Wolterstorff think this method fails, indeed gives no justification at all? He remarks, “I fail to see that I now justifiedly hold those beliefs. Suppose, to recycle his previous example, it turns out that the optimal wide reflective equilibrium for one group of which I am a member requires believing *p*, and the optimal wide reflective equilibrium for another group of which I am a member requires believing not-*p*. Suppose I believe *p*. Do I then believe *p* justifiedly or do I not? I see no way of answering this question.” As soon as we take note, as Wolterstorff supposedly has, that justification is context-relevant and practice-relative, the whole problem disappears. Suppose on an autumn evening Wolterstorff and I are walking along and I remark to him *p*, “the moon is pink tonight,” and he replies not-*p*, “Don’t talk nonsense, the moon never changes color.” We are both right. From the point of view of commonsense observation and convention (the way we actually speak in everyday life) and the practices involved, the moon tonight is pink; from the point of view of science, it is not. I could be a member of both groups and coherently assert *p* in one context and not-*p* in another. There is no sense or point in trying to assert what color (if any) it *really* is. Both *p* and not-*p* in *their particular contexts* are true. And the contexts are not in conflict. A scientist can as coherently assert *p* in a commonsense context as can a plain man. It is a matter of keeping track of the context and the relevant reference class.

Wolterstorff could respond that it is legitimate enough for some people with a wide reference class and the practices that go with it to ask that question. But I, Nicholas Wolterstorff, am interested in another reference class and

another set of practices that go with it, namely the reference class and related practices of my Christian community. Since you, Nielsen, claim that all justification is practice-relative or at least practice-contingent, why is this not a perfectly legitimate thing for me to do? What non-question-begging grounds can you have for criticizing it? There is no point of view from nowhere; there is no viewing things *sub-specie etemitatis*; there is no *superpractice* that is the mother of all practices.

I feel the sting of this. Yet I think it leads, with such a stark appeal to a reference class, to a *reductio*. The Hell's Angels are no philosophic construction. Yet if all justification is practice-relative and contingent then if (as they do) the Hell's Angels have their own cluster of distinctive practices and ways of doing things, they are perfectly justified in doing them. *In this respect* they do not differ from the atheist community or the Christian community except in size. Why isn't what is good enough for the Christian community also good enough for the Hell's Angels community?

I think it would be as hard for Wolterstorff to bite that bullet as it is for me. We seem at least both to be caught in a *reductio*. Perhaps this should lead us (or at least me) to go back to the drawing board with respect to such a severe context-oriented, practice-conception way of viewing things. Yet it is very hard—arguably even impossible—to find a nonvacuous critical perch on which to stand that is *social-practice free*.

I will try, though not with a great deal of confidence, to see if we can meet the Hell's Angels *reductio* without trying to go "practice-transcendent." There is among our practices—practices of contemporary Western culture—the practice of being a critical intellectual (something that Jean-Paul Sartre, Max Weber, and Edward Said have said profound things about). Part of the very vocation of a critical intellectual is trying to look barbarity in the face and to criticize it without evasion or when pushed without making an elicit question-begging reply. It is also to try to gain an understanding of and hopefully to move toward what Richard Falk calls a humane society in the face of brutalities just being thrust on us, where in ascertaining how to attain and sustain such a humane society, or even more fundamentally to group what it would be like to obtain this and sustain it, requires an understanding of what in such a context is both warrantably ascertainable and morally acceptable. If we work in the practice framework I am adopting and assuming (and Wolterstorff at least seems to assume as well), we must acknowledge that we have no coherent alternative to this human-practice way of viewing things that is itself practice-transcendent, though it can be transcendent to some *particular practices*. There are practices and practices and there are critical practices where ascertaining what is warrantably assertable is at play and where a *critical* morality with its impartiality and the giving of reasons is at play.⁵ To respect this and to utilize these critical practices in our actions and in our thoughts is just part of what it is to be (to be pleonastic) a critical intellectual—to have what Weber called the vocation of an intellectual. The Hell's Angels and the Nazis do not have this

vocation and stand in deep conflict with the practices of such a vocation. Some religious communities have it and some don't, but we have, adopting the stance of a critical intellectual and using the critical practices that go with such a vocation, the ability to criticize practices which conflict with such a stance. Thus we have a critical way of criticizing practices without doing the impossible, to wit, "transcending all practices." If having what Jeffrey Stout calls "the critical spirit" has the value he takes it to have, we have a very strong rationale for adopting that practice.

But isn't this to use our critical practices to batter down other practices that *we regard* as evil, barbaric and/or irrational? Aren't we still being question begging? We can respond that this is just a part of what it is to be reasonable and that it is senseless to ask, "Why be reasonable?" Can we rightly take such a short way with dissenters or so justifiably beat back the invasion of the barbarians? Or is this all emotive talk?

It is not all emotive talk or simply question begging, for it requires us to cultivate certain things that on any reasonable account—nonethnocentrically reasonable—would count as unproblematic virtues: attending to and having respect for evidence, trying to be consistent, being impartial, trying to see the various sides of an issue, being able to listen to voices distinct and sometimes distant from ours and challenging to ours without blocking up or just assuming our superiority, realizing we can be mistaken, recognizing and acknowledging the burdens of judgment, trying open-mindedly to see how things hang together, and having a sharp eye for *parti-pris* and plainly ethnocentric practices (including our own). These themselves are, of course, practices—the critical practices of an intellectual, but they are practices that, if successfully practiced, lead us away from partisanship and a narrow ethnocentric outlook attuned only to the practices of our own tribe, and toward practices that yield a sense of reasonability that is not just tribal. (Though the terminology in which these paradigmatic virtues are expressed may be radically different, common underlying notions are still there.) With such critical practices we see something of what it is to be reasonable and open to others and not to be fixed in our tribal mores. Don't say that that itself is *just* to adopt the tribal mores of liberal society, for it isn't. We have with such a culture a culture studying culture that enables us to a degree to transcend our culture. With these unproblematic virtues, with their distinctive practices, the practices of a critical intellectual, we have a way of putting ourselves in question and not being fixated in an unreflective doing of the thing done. We will have a respect for tradition while still putting it in question. There we are not using one culture to batter down another. We are not just imposing liberal culture though both the history of imperialism with its colonialism and present imperialism with client states rather than colonies exhibits a lot of that. There is, and continues to be, a lot of such battering and imposing in our world. But that need not be so if we adopt those critical practices.

V

I want finally to consider one last thing that divides us, and that principally rests on a series of arguments that we cannot resolve just by sitting and reflecting in our armchairs, but is something that must be resolved empirically.

One place where I stand corrected by Wolterstorff is over my claim that naturalism can be justified by an appeal to consensus among contemporary intellectuals. There may very well be a preponderance of naturalistic or secular intellectuals among present-day Western intellectuals, but there is a distinguished contingent of Western intellectuals who are theists—some of them even standard theists. That they are outnumbered (if they are) is not terribly significant. Justifiability does not always go with the big battalions. It is never consensus *tout court*. But consensus is relevant in complex ways. Wolterstorff, to the point, remarks, "If the absence of consensus on theism among our intellectuals prevents theism from even entering the mix to be equilibrated, and thus to be justified with reference to our intellectuals, then by the same token the absence of consensus on naturalism prevents it from being thus justified with reference to our intellectuals."⁶ Consensus by itself does not constitute or establish justification. It is consensus along with the cumulative argument that I deploy in partial justification of naturalism. That, along with these beliefs in wide reflective equilibrium, is what does the justification in that context. Straight consensus is never enough. Moreover, straight consensus is not the same as an overlapping consensus concerning political justice in liberal societies where people with that overlapping consensus have different comprehensive conceptions of the good but still agree about political justice. We need in the political liberalism case in our modern liberal societies to gain not just a consensus but a consensus that stands in wide reflective equilibrium, and this in that context requires agreement about political justice for a liberal society.

However, with the secularism/religious belief issue there is no resolving it by finding a consensus in wide reflective equilibrium. There will be no consensus—and particularly not an overlapping consensus—about whether there is a God to be seen or to stand in the presence of, or about whether one can in any way encounter God, or even about whether God exists. Some say God is utterly transcendent to the world, but still God is said by some (sometimes the same ones) to be a person. God is said to be infinite and a person. It is utterly unclear how these beliefs could be equilibrated and there is in our culture at large no consensus about them. But they are the rather isolated considered judgments of *some* people. But for others, including some of the nonorthodox religious, all entities are space-time entities. Are persons spatiotemporal entities? For some, it is a considered judgment that they are. For others, human beings are taken to be, either in whole or in part, "spiritual realities." But for many, human beings are identified by their bodily identity. Could all of these judgments be equilibrated? It would surely seem not. Given

the diversity among different intellectuals in our societies, there is no chance of getting a reflective equilibrium concerning such matters, just as there is no chance of getting an overlapping consensus on a comprehensive conception of the good. There is no chance without the abandonment of at least some central religious beliefs of getting all these beliefs into wide reflective equilibrium.

But why abandon the religious ones rather than some others? Because they conflict with too many of the other beliefs concerning which we have a wider and firmer consensus and, religious beliefs aside, a nonconflicting consensus. They are accepted more unquestionably by more intellectuals. Why is that relevant? When we have considered judgments—things we reflectively endorse—which, when simply viewed as considered judgments, have only initial credibility, the firmer and more extensive consensus we have about them, the greater consensus we have about them, the more we can trust them, and the more reason we have to think our beliefs are in wide reflective equilibrium. And beliefs are extensively justified when they are in the widest wide reflective equilibrium we can for a time muster. This is our best test for both the justifiability and the rationality of beliefs here. Some of the religious ones (e.g., God, an infinite person who is transcendent) do not square with much of common sense or natural science, and their very meaning is very unclear.

Why appeal to intellectuals here? Why not appeal instead to everyone in a society or a cluster of related societies? Because *in this context* intellectuals are the best ones to make reliable judgments. Over morals we start with, as data, the considered moral judgments of people in the society in which we are seeking equilibrium. Then intellectuals (typically philosophers in this endeavor) try to get these considered judgments in reflective equilibrium: to forge them into reflective equilibrium. Philosophers are the best ones to do that, but they have no authority or privileged place over or concerning the initial considered moral judgments themselves. These judgments are the intellectual's *data* to be used in forging a wide reflective equilibrium over morals or normative politics and if she cannot make sense of most of them, so much the worse for her theory: her proposed reflective equilibrium.

It is not so straightforward in the case of religious belief in our complex, perhaps secular-trending societies. When we are trying to ascertain whether religious beliefs can be in a reflective equilibrium with the rest of what we know or reasonably believe, we have among our various religious beliefs and secular beliefs often intractably conflicting beliefs even at the level of data. For some religious people it is a considered judgment that people sometimes stand in the presence of God. For others—secularist and *some* religious believers alike—only something with a body (which God hasn't) could be encountered or seen or literally be stood in the presence of. To be seen, they believe, something must have a bodily (spatiotemporal) identity. We cannot get such diverse beliefs—such considered judgments—in wide reflective equilibrium. It seems, in our societies at least, we cannot even get started here. Even if we are *methodological* conservatives and we try to preserve as many beliefs as

possible, we still have too many conflicting, very divergent beliefs to get the necessary agreement. In this context too many of such very different conflicting considered judgments exist together.

I have argued that increasingly in modern Western societies—even with masses of people who at least in some corner of their lives regard themselves as religious—there is *over the long haul* a growing secularization. A lot of churches, for example, close down in Montreal. A lot of presbyteries are up for sale all over Quebec, and it is harder and harder to recruit people to be nuns. When I was a graduate student in the United States during the mid-twentieth century, many of the professors were in some sense Christians or Jews. Now, people like Wolterstorff or Plantinga are a rare commodity: perhaps, to switch the metaphor, even an endangered species. More and more philosophers (more generally, more and more intellectuals), as far as religious belief goes, are like W. V. O. Quine or Daniel Dennett. Wolterstorff opines that among philosophers, and to a lesser extent generally, there are many closet believers. I would opine there are many more closet atheists or at least nonbelievers particularly among philosophers. These are empirical matters, and neither he nor I have an adequate grasp of what probably are the facts. It *may* be that our conjectures are fueled by our hopes. But these matters are empirically ascertainable.

Wolterstorff would no doubt claim that anyway we are just getting shifts in the *Zeitgeist* and things may well go back and forth. I am claiming that it is not the case that there is just a shift in the *Zeitgeist* but that the shift in the *Zeitgeist* is principally caused by the factors I draw attention to in my cumulative argument—a normative cum factual matter that has been going on for the last two hundred years or so. The demystification of the world is nothing new and it is no accident. There is a little remystification going on in some places now, particularly in the United States and in South Africa, but not widely among the more educated and in the wealthy and secure countries of Europe. More generally it could reasonably be considered a blip due to the increased impoverishment and insecurity many people suffer and to the Neanderthalist education many are getting. (Or is that my wishes unconsciously prevailing?)

Wolterstorff takes what I take to be an empirical trend to be neither a trend nor empirical and he believes to the extent that something like this is happening that it should be resisted. I think (pace Wolterstorff) (1) that the disenchantment of the world is on the whole a good thing and (2) that anyway, barring some economic and educational catastrophe, it cannot as a matter of fact be altered very much. There will, of course, be blips. Right now we are perhaps having one, though we should not neglect the considerable difference between the United States and Europe. But continued disenchantment will, I conjecture, be the long-range trend if our life conditions do not over the long haul continue to degenerate. It is important to ascertain, if we can, our divergent *hopes* notwithstanding, who (if either of us) is more likely to be telling it like it is here. Not all (or perhaps even the main part) can come out of our armchairs. Clear, hard, nonevasive thinking is necessary here, but it is certainly

not enough. My *philosophical* argument is this: If the cumulative argument as part of a narrative rooted in the Enlightenment has genuine intellectual force, as I think it has, and this secular tendency, though not without its ups and downs, is over the long haul on the rise, there is no possibility of justifying religious belief by wide reflective equilibrium. Indeed it may be impossible to justify such belief in any way. But that would not follow just from the fact that disenchantment of the world is a growing trend. It is obvious enough that religious belief is a bit of a scandal to the intellect and that (pace Kierkegaard) it is not necessary to make sense of our lives and to render our morality viable. If these things are true, religious (or at least Jewish, Christian, and Islamic) belief is something that we can reasonably do without and increasingly so, at least in the more affluent and educated parts of the world. This disenchantment of the world will and should go along with increased wealth and security and with more extensive education. Maybe I am blind to something, but I do not see that Wolterstorff has done anything to undermine those whiggish claims and hopes of mine.

NOTES

1. Axel Hägerström, *Religions-filosofi* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1949); *Philosophy and Religion* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1965); and Ingemar Hedenius, *Pro och vetande* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1949).

2. Nielsen, *Naturalism without Foundations* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1996), pp. 312–15.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

4. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

5. Jeremy Waldron, "Minority Cultures and the Cosmopolitan Alternative," in *The Rights of Minority Cultures*, ed. Will Kymlicka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 168–202.

6. Peter Railton, "Made in the Shade: Moral Compatibilism and the Aims of Moral Theory," in *On the Relevance of Metaethics*, ed. Jocelyne Couture and Kai Nielsen (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1995), pp. 79–106.