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Alvin Plantinga

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## RESPONSE TO NICK WOLTERSTORFF

Alvin Plantinga

This is a response to Nick Wolterstorff's "Then, Now, and Al."

First, I want to thank Nick Wolterstorff for his characteristically wise and insightful paper. While listening to it, I recalled something I once heard the theologian Paul Henry say: he was introduced in a way that he thought a bit over the top, and said, "When something like this happens, I ask the Lord to forgive the speaker for stretching the truth, and to forgive me for enjoying it so much!"

I want to say publicly how much I have learned from Nick over the years (nearly sixty years!) and how much I have appreciated and given thanks both for his friendship and for his work. He and I have been friends and co-laborers, or maybe co-conspirators, for many decades. Perhaps it all began at Calvin, some fifty-eight years ago, when we took a college course in the philosophy of Kant from the legendary Harry Jellema. Nick and I were the only students in the class. (We pretended to read the *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft* in Kant's labyrinthine German, but actually kept a surreptitious eye on Norman Kemp Smith's translation.) We have been working together ever since.

Of course we have also worked separately. Nick's wide-ranging scholarship (everything from strenuous metaphysics to philosophy of art and philosophy of education) and his passion for justice have been a great gift both to the Christian philosophical community and to the Christian community at large. I certainly don't mean to downplay the contributions of others—Bill Alston, for example; but the whole face of Christian philosophy would be vastly different, and vastly impoverished, without the wonderful work Nick has done.

I also want to thank Kelly Clark and Mike Rea who organized the conference at which Nick spoke—a job, as anyone who has organized such a conference knows, that takes a great deal of work and patience. And I want to say how delighted I was with the conference itself. I've told several people that the general quality of the papers was as high as that at any conference I've ever attended. You may wish to discount my opinion on the grounds of undue paternal pride (many of the speakers were my former doctoral students); I remain convinced.

Finally, now that I will no longer be teaching graduate students, I want to thank and praise the grad students I've had over the last twenty-eight years at Notre Dame. There have been very many of them, and it has been



a splendid privilege and a pure pleasure to be associated with them. I have learned as much from them as they have from me. I found these students very good philosophers indeed (and over the last few years, the older I got, the better they got!), but also very good people—cheerful, ready and willing to cooperate with each other, often helping each other rather than trying to shoot each other down, full of fun and elan, but serious about both religion and philosophy.

And what to say about the prospects for Christian and theistic philosophy? A danger we now face, perhaps, is triumphalism. Philosophy, as Quentin Smith lamented, may have become desecularized; it is now possible for Christian philosophers to work together and publish on topics that would have been beyond the pale forty years ago; there are an increasing number of Christian philosophers at American universities. But of course the truth is the contemporary philosophical world, like that of western academia generally, is for the most part hostile or indifferent to the concerns of Christian and theistic philosophers.

Still, things look good for the next generation—both in the US and in such countries as Iran and China. According to figures I saw on the Leiter blog (so I really can't vouch for their accuracy) the proportion of theists among American grad students is nearly half again as great as that among philosophy faculty members. Given my sample of these grad students (mostly Notre Dame, but a fair number of others as well) I'd judge that the future for Christian and theistic philosophy looks bright. Of course only God knows the future (who would have thought, fifty years ago, that there would be substantial numbers of serious philosophers writing in journals like *Faith and Philosophy* and *Philosophia Christi?*); and, as I say, we must reject triumphalism; nonetheless the number and quality of young Christian and theistic philosophers is wonderfully heartening, and an occasion of joy and thanksgiving.

*University of Notre Dame*