Religious Studies **37**, 259–269 © 2001 Cambridge University Press
DOI: 10.1017/S0034412501005650 Printed in the United Kingdom

Can God speak? Does God speak?

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Abstract: **This paper critically examines what Nicholas Wolterstorff has to say in *Divine Discourse* in response to the two questions in the title. It tries to show that his argument for the conclusion that God can have the obligations of a speaker is defective. It also tries to show that his argument for the conclusion that some actual person is entitled to believe that God has spoken to her is incomplete. The paper's conclusion is that Wolterstorff's arguments fail to establish, or to provide strong grounds for accepting, a positive answer to either of the questions in its title.**

Nicholas Wolterstorff devotes three chapters of *Divine Discourse* to the two questions of my title.[1] He divides the first of these questions into two further questions. One of them is addressed in Chapter 6, whose title is 'Could God have and acquire the rights and duties of a speaker?'; the other is answered in Chapter 7, whose title is 'Can God cause the events generative of discourse?'. Chapter 15, whose title is 'Are we entitled?', addresses my second question. I have no serious quarrel with Chapter 7. Its conclusion is that 'divine discourse of anything like the range and diversity claimed in the scriptures and traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, almost certainly requires direct intervention by God in the affairs of human history; and contemporary science provides us no good reason for thinking that such intervention does not occur' (129). I agree with this conclusion and, quibbles about small points of detail apart, with the arguments Wolterstorff offers to support it. I do, however, have sharp disagreements with both Chapter 6 and Chapter 15. I believe the argument of Chapter 6 is defective, and I also believe that the argument of Chapter 15 is inconclusive. In what follows I argue in support of these beliefs. Before embarking on the sea of criticism, let me say that I greatly admire *Divine Discourse* for its boldness and originality. And since it has provoked this critical response, I do not offer an idle compliment when I also say it is very provocative.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412501005650 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Can God have the obligations of a speaker?

According to Wolterstorff's account of speech acts, a speaker's uttering of certain words counts as performing a speech act of a certain kind because the standing of one who has performed a speech act of that kind is normatively ascribed to the speaker. Having uttered the words, the speaker acquires the right to be treated as one who has performed the speech act, and we acquire the obligation so to treat the speaker. What is more, the standing of one who has performed a certain speech act is itself normative in that it carries with it prima facie moral rights and duties. Thus, for example, the standing of having made a promise involves a prima facie obligation to keep the promise. And there are normative conditions for the acquisition of such standings. Wolterstorff's example is that 'one is (prima facie) obligated not to assert something unless one believes it' (96). On this account, the question of whether God can speak becomes the question of whether God can have or acquire the standing of a speaker, which in turn becomes the question of whether God can have or acquire the rights and obligations of a speaker.

Some philosophers think that God is altogether outside the human network of rights and obligations. According to some divine command theories of morality, God cannot have moral obligations. Robert M. Adams has defended a divine command theory of this sort, and William P. Alston has advised divine command theorists to accept this view.[2] Wolterstorff wants to resist it, and so undertakes the task of rebutting Alston's arguments. Of course divine command theorists do not exclude God completely from the community of speakers; God, they insist, does issue commands. But God cannot make promises or enter into covenants if the standings of having done these things carry with them prima facie obligations to keep one's promises or to perform as one has covenanted to do. And not only is God's participation in the community of speakers perforce limited, Wolterstorff points out, it is also deeply idiosyncratic. God is not obligated to take us at our word when we pray; God is not even obligated to count us as having spoken. 'And lastly', Wolterstorff says, 'the divine command theory implies that, unlike your and my speaking, there are no normative conditions attached to God's speech' (102).

It seems to me that Wolterstorff is mistaken on this last point. What follows from divine command theories of the sort espoused by Adams is simply that there are no obligations attached to God's speech. Hence, for example, God is not prima facie obligated not to assert something unless God believes it. But deontological conditions such as obligation are clearly not the only normative conditions that might attach to divine speech. It is consistent with such divine command theories to affirm that, other things being equal, God is good in not asserting something unless God believes it. Wolterstorff in effect concedes this point when he goes on to say that God will be praiseworthy if God says only what God believes. So even

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if a divine command theory of this sort is correct, God's participation in the community of speakers will be less idiosyncratic than some of Wolterstorff's remarks, taken literally, portray it as being. Still, God's participation in the community of speakers will, we may suppose, be limited and idiosyncratic if God does not have and cannot acquire obligations. Wolterstorff's criticism of Alston's arguments is therefore intended to reduce the limitations and eliminate the idiosyncracies as far as possible.

The intuitive idea behind Alston's view that God can have no obligations is that obligations can be in force only where there is at least the possibility of resistance to them. Obligations serve to check, bind, or constrain our unruly wills. Being essentially perfectly good, however, God always acts supremely well, spontaneously and ineluctably. Since God does not have an unruly will, God cannot be bound by obligations. One of Alston's arguments in support of this idea relies on the premise that a principle of action can function as rule on which members of a population act, only if members of the population do not ineluctably perform the action specified by the rule. Wolterstorff notices that a principle of action might apply to a population in which some members ineluctably perform the action it specifies while others do not. In such a case, he supposes, the principle would function as a rule, not for every member of the population, but for the population at large. Now imagine that the mixed population contains both God and human persons. In this case, Wolterstorff concludes, 'the moral frailty of human beings will insure that there are a great many practical principles of moral obligation which are in force for the entire population, including God; and some of those will apply to God, even though God ineluctably obeys them' (106). To the objection that there cannot be self-addressed divine commands which obligate, he replies with two human analogies. A human sovereign can issue an edict that imposes an obligation on a population which includes herself. And human legislatures can, and often do, pass laws that impose obligations on their members. His conclusion is this: 'it's not at all clear that the divine command theory has to be construed in such a way as to imply restrictions on God's participation in the community of discoursers' (108).

I agree with Wolterstorff that humans can impose obligations on themselves indirectly by imposing them on populations of which they are members. Suppose I am the head of my philosophy department. I am told by my superiors that I must come up with a better way of exercising control over the departmental travel funds. So I send my colleagues a memo saying that any member of the department who wishes to be reimbursed for travel to a conference must submit the new estimated travel expense form for approval at least a week in advance of the departure date. I think I thereby impose on myself, as well as my colleagues, a conditional obligation to submit the form if reimbursement is desired. I also think humans can impose obligations on themselves more directly. Suppose I also say in my memo that the head of the department will indicate approval or disapproval of any forms

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submitted within three working days of receipt. It seems to me that I thereby impose on myself alone an obligation to handle this particular bit of bureaucratic paperwork. So I see nothing amiss with the general idea of self-imposed obligations or of self-addressed commands which obligate. Hence, I am willing to grant that it is not clear that divine command theory must deny that God has obligations.

But it does not follow that divine command theory may affirm that God has obligations, and Wolterstorff's argument does not establish this stronger conclusion. To see why, let us return to the situation in which a principle of action applies to a population in which some members ineluctably perform the action it specifies while others do not. Let us grant Wolterstorff's supposition that, in such a case, the principle functions as a rule for the population at large but not for every member of the population. It is consistent with this supposition to assume that the principle serves to impose obligations on the population at large but not on every member of the population. It imposes an obligation on those who do not ineluctably perform the action it specifies and so might disobey; it merely describes the conduct of those who do ineluctably perform the action it specifies. When we transfer this assumption to the case of a population that contains both God and human persons, it yields a conclusion at odds with the one Wolterstorff reaches. Due to human frailty, practical principles impose obligations on us which we may fail to satisfy; but these same principles, though they apply to God in the sense that they describe the way God ineluctably acts, do not impose obligations on God which God could fail to satisfy. I do not insist that this interpretation of the situations of mixed populations is correct, though I do find it plausible. Rather, I claim that Wolterstorff's argument does nothing to rule it out. Even if we allow that self-addressed human commands can serve as a source of self-imposed human obligations, because of human frailty, and also grant that there can be self-addressed divine commands, it remains open to us to deny that self-addressed divine commands can serve as a source of self-imposed divine obligations.

Though Wolterstorff devotes a couple of pages to what he describes as Alston's second argument, he uses those pages to contend that what Alston offers is not really an argument. As Wolterstorff understands him, Alston simply presents a thesis in the hope that, once we grasp it, we will find it self-evident. The thesis is that 'an action which is good for a person to do can only have the property of being *morally required of* that person if that person is not necessitated to perform it' (109). Wolterstorff does not find this thesis self-evident; in fact, he does not even find it true. But unwilling to settle for a stalemate of clashing intuitions about what is self-evident or true, he tries to advance the discussion by introducing a new notion of requirement. It is the notion of character requirement.

Wolterstorff supposes we can distinguish, within the totality of actions that express a given character trait, those which are required by the trait and those which are expressions of it without being required by it. Consider someone who

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has a courageous character. Wolterstorff says: 'If that person is to conduct himself ''in the character'' of a courageous person, certain actions will be required of him; not to do them would imply that he, at that point, was not conducting himself ''in (courageous) character''' (111). Let us assume that God has a loving character, since this is an assumption of the divine command theory proposed by Adams with which Wolterstorff is working. According to Wolterstorff, 'some of God's actions are such that they are required of God if God is to act ''in loving character''' (111). If the divine commands to me are such actions, then 'what God requires of me is what God's character requires that God require of me' (112). On this way of understanding things, Wolterstorff concludes, 'there would be a form of requirement more fundamental than obligation, on which obligation depends; that form of requirement, namely, which consists of something being required by the love of God' (112).

What are we to make of this argument? I see it as a case of philosophical legerdemain. It seems to me that Wolterstorff conflates a sense of requirement, in which a requirement is something akin to a necessary condition, and a sense in which a requirement is something like an obligation. The former sense is clearly at work, for example, in the claim that a rainy day requires a cloudy sky. Days are rainy only when skies are cloudy, but rainy days do not make cloudy skies obligatory. Wolterstorff employs this sense in a sentence I quoted in the introduction to this paper. When he says that divine discourse of the extent claimed by the traditions of the major monotheisms almost certainly requires direct divine intervention in human history, he clearly means to imply that, almost certainly, such extensive divine discourse occurs only if God intervenes directly in human history, not that something almost certainly makes it obligatory for God thus to intervene. Or consider the following claim he makes: 'The divine command theory not only *allows* for God's participation in the community of discoursers as an agent therein; it *requires* it' (99). The thought here is that divine command theory implies, or perhaps entails, God's participation in the community of speakers; it is not that divine command theory obligates God to participate.

I think the necessary-condition sense of requirement offers us our best hope of providing a plausible interpretation of Wolterstorff's notion of character requirement. Return to the example of the courageous person he used to explain that notion. Suppose we construe the first clause of the sentence I quoted – if that person is to conduct himself 'in the character' of a courageous person, certain actions will be required of him – as claiming that the person conducts himself in courageous character only if he performs certain actions. It will follow, by contraposition, that if the person does not perform those actions he does not conduct himself in courageous character, which is a tolerably good paraphrase of the second clause of the sentence I quoted – not to do them would imply that he, at that point, was not conducting himself 'in (courageous) character'. So the necessary-condition sense of requirement explains well Wolterstorff's remark about the

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character requirements of courage. Moreover, the alternative, the obligation sense of requirement, comes to grief on the fact that vices as well as virtues give rise to character requirements. Suppose we are trying to find a true interpretation of the claim that if a person is to conduct himself in the character of a cowardly person, certain actions will be required of him, for instance, running away from this battle. A plausible candidate for such an interpretation is the claim that the person conducts himself in cowardly character only if he performs certain actions, for instance, running away from this battle. It is not plausible to suppose that the cowardly person has an obligation to run away from this battle or to act in character; his obligation, what is required of him in the obligation sense, is to act out of character and stand fast. Since Wolterstorff nowhere indicates that his notion of character requirement is to apply only to virtuous character traits, we must interpret it in the necessary-condition sense rather than the obligation sense in order to render it a plausible account of the character requirements of vicious character traits. Hence, charity demands that we read his argument as relying on the necessary-condition sense of requirement at its beginning.

If it is to avoid committing a fallacy of equivocation, it must stick with this sense throughout. When we get to its conclusion, this constrains how we may interpret the claim that there is a fundamental form of requirement which consists of something being required by the love of God. This claim is to be read as saying that God acts in loving character only if God performs certain actions, perhaps including such actions as imposing moral obligations on us by issuing commands. It is not to be read as saying that God is morally required to have a loving character. Wolterstorff recognizes this point; he says that 'to say that a certain action is character-required of the loving God is not to say that God is required to be loving in character' (111–112). Nor is it to be read as saying that God is morally required to act in loving character. Thus construed, however, Wolterstorff's argument fails to serve his purposes. It does not show that God is or could be subject to deontological demands of any sort, whether they be ordinary moral obligations or more fundamental moral requirements. Therefore it falls short of establishing that God does or can have the moral standing of a speaker in an unrestricted way.

Wolterstorff of course thinks otherwise. When he summarizes his conclusions at the end of Chapter 6, he says this:

> **In summary: we have found no reason to conclude that God cannot have the rights and duties – or rights and requirednesses – necessary for participating fully in the community of discoursers. In fact, we have found two ways of so construing or elaborating that particular theory of moral obligation which is the divine command theory as to render it compatible with God's full participation in that community; the elaboration which I have just outlined, and the construal mentioned earlier, according to which the scope of application of (some of) God's legislation includes God.** (112–113)

The elaboration just outlined to which the quoted passage refers is Wolterstorff's

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argument about the consequences of character-requirements. I think I have shown that Wolterstorff's arguments fall short of securing for him an entitlement to assert the second sentence of this very strong conclusion.

Are we entitled to believe God has spoken?

Chapter 15 starts off as if Wolterstorff intends to answer the second question of my title. The last sentence of its first paragraph says this: 'Now at last we are face to face with the question: *does* God speak?' (261). But the discussion quickly takes an epistemological turn, and he never gets around to addressing this question. The first sentence of the chapter's last paragraph draws the following conclusion: 'So, yes: it is possible for an intelligent adult of the modern Western world to be entitled to believe that God has spoken to him or her' (280). Wolterstorff reaches this conclusion by a valid inference from the actual to the possible. He argues that a certain woman, to whom he gives the pseudonym 'Virginia', actually was entitled to believe that God had spoken to her. He does not, however, tell us how Virginia's being entitled to believe that God had spoken to her bears on the question of whether God actually did speak to her. I shall eventually discuss this issue.

But, first, was Virginia really entitled? In order to address this question, we must be clear about Wolterstorff's notion of entitlement. This notion is part of a family of concepts of epistemic deontology whose logical structure is the same as that of the textbook concepts of moral deontology.[3] Suppose we take as primitive the notion of actions being morally obligatory. We can then define morally wrong or prohibited actions as actions it is morally obligatory not to perform. And we can also define morally right or permissible actions as actions it is not morally obligatory not to perform or, equivalently, as actions that are not morally wrong. If we set aside the possibility of moral dilemmas, we may assume that all morally obligatory actions are morally permissible. We should not, however, assume that all morally permissible actions are morally obligatory. When I dress in the morning, it is morally permissible for me to put my right shoe on first. But it is also morally permissible for me not to do so and to put my left shoe on first instead. Hence, it is not morally obligatory for me to put my right shoe on first. The same goes for putting my left shoe on first. Either way of getting dressed is morally permissible; neither is morally obligatory.

Wolterstorff leaves open the question of whether or not epistemic deontology is distinct from moral deontology, and I shall follow him in this. He introduces its concepts in the following way:

> **Some believings of a person are ones that he ought not to have, some are ones that he ought to have, and some – the ones for which it is *not* the case that he *ought not* to have them – are ones that he is permitted to have, *entitled* to have.**[4] (267)

So suppose we take as primitive the notion of believings being epistemically

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obligatory, ones a person ought to have. We can then define epistemically wrong or prohibited believings as believings it is epistemically obligatory not to have, ones a person ought not to have. And we can also define epistemically entitled or permissible believings as believings it is not epistemically obligatory not to have, ones for which it is not the case that a person ought not to have them. Following out the parallel with moral deontology, we may assume that all epistemically obligatory believings are epistemically permissible or, in other words, that all the believings a person ought to have are believings the person is (or at least would be) epistemically entitled to have.[5] The parallel suggests an intriguing question. Are there believings it is epistemically permissible but not epistemically obligatory to have or, in other words, are there believings such that a person is epistemically entitled to have them but it is not the case that the person ought to have them? I shall return to this question in the course of my discussion of Wolterstorff's story about Virginia.

Wolterstorff accepts what is currently the received view that most of our beliefs are not under direct voluntary control. He pictures us as having a doxastic constitution made up of various dispositions that produce beliefs in us willy-nilly. We can, however, steer our doxastic constitutions by implementing doxastic practices, which are under our voluntary control. They are such things as ways of finding out about new things, ways of ousting false beliefs, and ways of diminishing the frequency with which false beliefs emerge from the operations of our belief-producing dispositions. According to Wolterstorff, we have epistemic obligations to implement doxastic practices. He says that:

> **… it is often the case that one is *obligated* to try to use one of them to find out about so-and-so, or *obligated* to try to use one of them so as to sort through one's present beliefs with the aim of detecting and ousting false ones, or *obligated* to try to use one of them so as to form beliefs on a more reliable basis. (271)**

Such obligations are person-relative or, as Wolterstorff puts it, situated; they depend on such things as the doxastic practices available to a person, the abilities of the person, and the totality of the person's other obligations. Wolterstorff's conception of doxastic practices is, as he points out in a note (322), quite different from the conception developed by Alston.[6] Making use of it, he proposes necessary and sufficient conditions for being entitled to a belief one has. He claims: 'A person S is *entitled* to his belief that *p* just in case S believes *p*, and there's no doxastic practice D pertaining to *p* such that S ought to have implemented D and S did not, or S ought to have implemented D better than S did' (272).[7] This is the criterion by which we are to judge whether Virginia was entitled to her belief that God had spoken to her.

Virginia is a woman who had an uncanny experience that contributed to producing in her the belief that God had spoken to her. Wolterstorff quotes at some length from her narrative about that experience and subsequent events. His conclusion is that 'at least by the time she wrote this narration, Virginia was entitled

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to believe that God had spoken to her' (278). A crucial element in his case for this conclusion is that Virginia did exactly what he thinks she ought to have done, namely, 'she seriously entertained the possibility that her experience was a symptom of mental disorder rather than a case of God inwardly appearing to her as speaking, and took steps to check it out' (277). Eventually she consults a psychologist, who, in Wolterstorff's words, 'in response says ''You're OK''' (277). The part of her account of this consultation that Wolterstorff quotes goes as follows:

> **I met with a psychologist at Harvard Community Health Plan and told her everything that had happened. After listening to my story, she said that these kinds of things happen all the time, and why was I surprised. She suggested a book that I might read, and thanked me profusely for sharing my experience with her. She did not feel that I required any further sessions … .** (275)

Presumably we are supposed to think that, in consulting the psychologist, Virginia was implementing a doxastic practice pertaining to the proposition that God had spoken to her, which she ought or was obligated to have implemented. Suppose that is correct. We may, nonetheless, have doubts about whether she implemented it as well as she ought to have done. I think the part of Virginia's narrative Wolterstorff quotes does not provide enough information to settle such doubts, and so I believe his argument is inconclusive.

The part of Virginia's narrative that Wolterstorff quotes, and I have reproduced, concerning the visit to the psychologist is consistent with the following elaboration. Virginia arrives at the psychologist's office in the middle of a very busy afternoon. The waiting room is crowded, and some of the people in it seem to be quite perturbed. When the psychologist finds time to see Virginia, she quickly but correctly arrives at the diagnosis that Virginia has suffered a mild delusory episode. However, she also concludes that Virginia is perfectly harmless, a threat neither to herself nor to others. Virginia is, she muses, quite like all those nice people who wander into the office to report receiving communications from space aliens. Thinking she ought not to spend any more time on a case of this sort when there are others who obviously need her help more in the waiting room, the psychologist tries to reassure Virginia, thanks her for sharing, and then moves briskly on to a case in more urgent need of her immediate attention. Nothing in the part of Virginia's narrative Wolterstorff quotes rules out a scenario of this kind. So, given just the evidence he has provided, I think he has fallen short of showing that Virginia implemented the doxastic practice she used as well as she should have.

In my opinion, then, given just the evidence Wolterstorff has furnished to his readers, it is not the case that they are epistemically obligated to believe, or ought to believe, that Virginia is entitled to her belief that God has spoken to her. Indeed, I doubt that, given just this evidence, Wolterstorff's readers are even entitled to believe, if they do believe, that Virginia is entitled to her belief about divine speech. But, of course, Wolterstorff may know more about Virginia's story than he tells us in the book, or there may be relevant facts about her visit to the psychologist that

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Virginia has not recorded her narrative. It may thus turn out that the evidence Wolterstorff has presented could be beefed up.

So, for charity's sake, suppose this can be and has been done. Assume we readers ought to believe that Virginia is entitled to her belief that God has spoken to her. We are now in a position to return to a question I raised earlier. Is she merely entitled to believe, without also being epistemically obligated to believe, that God has spoken to her, or is she both entitled and epistemically obligated to believe as she does? Wolterstorff nowhere addresses this question. As far as I can tell, everything he says is consistent with the view that Virginia is entitled but not epistemically obligated to believe as she does or, in other words, that, though she is entitled to her belief, it is not the case that she ought to have it. Moreover, it seems to me the burden of proof lies with someone who proposes to reject this view in order to adopt the stronger thesis according to which Virginia has an epistemic obligation to believe as she does. Absent an argument that successfully bears the burden, we should stick with the default position that she has no such obligation. Hence, even when we have exercised charity toward Wolterstorff's position, it is best to conclude that, though Virginia is entitled to her belief that God has spoken to her, it is not the case that she ought to have it.

Finally, let us come back to the issue of the bearing of all this epistemology on the question of whether God does speak. For a wide range of epistemic merits, for example, being justified or being warranted, possession of the merit by a belief does not entail its truth. Entitlement is such a merit. From our assumption that Virginia is entitled to her belief that God has spoken to her, it does not follow that God did speak to her. And we would not be able to derive this conclusion even if we were to assume that Virginia is epistemically obligated to believe that God has spoken to her. It may be that there are epistemically obligatory beliefs which are infallible in the sense that they cannot be falsely believed. The Cartesian *cogito* and certain beliefs about one's own present conscious mental states are the standard candidates for the status of infallibility. But a person's belief that God has spoken to him or her is not a belief of this kind. From the stronger assumption that Virginia is epistemically obligated to believe that God has spoken to her, it still does not follow that God did speak to her. Hence Wolterstorff's arguments fall short of establishing the conclusion that God does speak, and even if we make an epistemological assumption stronger than anything secured by those arguments, we still cannot validly derive this conclusion.

Can God speak? Does God speak? My conclusion is that Wolterstorff's arguments fail to establish, or even to provide strong grounds for accepting, a positive answer to either of these difficult but perennially fascinating questions of philosophical theology.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412501005650 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Notes

1. Nicholas Wolterstorff *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Page references to this book will be made parenthetically in the body of my text.
2. Wolterstorff cites three papers by Robert M. Adams: 'A modified divine command theory of ethical wrongness', and 'Divine command metaethics modified again', both collected in Robert M. Adams *The Virtue of Faith* (New York NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 97–122, and 128–143, and 'The concept of a divine command' which was unpublished at the time Wolterstorff wrote but is now available in D. Z. Phillips (ed.) *Religion and Morality* (New York NY: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 59–80. The most recent statement of his view is to be found in Robert M. Adams *Finite and Infinite Goods* (New York NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Alston's advice is contained in William P. Alston 'Some suggestions for divine command theorists' in M. D. Beaty (ed.) *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 303–326.
3. As set forth, for example, in Fred Feldman *Introductory Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 18–20.
4. I have corrected a typographical error in the quoted sentence.
5. The reason for the parenthetical qualification is this. As we shall see, according to Wolterstorff's criterion for entitlement, one is entitled to have only beliefs one actually has. However, he allows that there may be beliefs a person does not have which are epistemically obligatory for that person (167). Yet I suppose he would agree that a person who had all the beliefs that were epistemically obligatory for him or her would be entitled to have all these beliefs. In any case, I do not think anything important for my argument turns on this small epicycle.
6. Alston's conception of a doxastic practice is developed in William P. Alston *Perceiving God* (Ithaca NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1991). See especially Ch. 4, whose title is 'A "doxastic practice" approach to epistemology'.
7. A minor quibble: Wolterstorff's criterion is grammatically ill-formed. If we are to turn his schema into a grammatically well-formed sentence, we must substitute for the first occurrence of the letter 'p' an English declarative sentence, and substitute for its third occurrence an English noun. This flaw would, of course, be easy to correct.

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