Book Reviews

Robert C. Koons and George Bealer, eds., *The Waning of Materialism*  
JOSEPH GOTTIEB 463

Robert Cummings Neville, *Realism in Religion: A Pragmatist's Perspective*  
SAMUEL J. YOUNGS 468

Paul K. Moser, *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology*  
R. DOUGLAS GIVETT 474

Mary Leng, *Mathematics and Reality*  
WILLIAM LANE CRAIG 479

News and Announcements
one. And when great minds throw their dares out for all to imbibe, there are often mighty rewards to be had.


The “problem” of divine hiddenness tempts contemporary religious skeptics to deny that God exists. “God,” after all, is an honorific title for a being who is utterly worthy of worship and who is, therefore, perfectly loving. Such a being would desire that human persons believe that God exists. And it would be possible for such a being to make its own existence obvious. But none of the available evidence makes it at all obvious that God exists.

In its strongest form, religious skepticism motivated in this way holds that God does not exist and that belief in God is not justified—for anyone. The problem is not person-relative, so that, for those who believe that God’s existence is obvious, it is reasonable to believe that God exists, and for those who believe that God’s existence is not obvious, it is reasonable to believe that God does not exist. For if God existed, then God would make this truth evident to all.

A natural initial question for these skeptics would be: “What sort of evidence would make God’s existence obvious, to you and to everyone else?” Whatever the answer, the theist should be prepared to ask whether evidence that would make the existence of God obvious would leave humans free to deny the reality of God. If even the best evidence for God’s existence permitted free denial of God’s existence, then such evidence would not coerce belief. But then a persistent skeptic must acknowledge that the evidence for God’s existence is adequate, or report, again, that God’s existence is not obvious.

So must the evidence for God’s reality be coercive? And would thinking so be compatible with our conception of God as perfectly loving? Let us put it this way: Is the mere fact that some do not believe that God exists conclusive evidence that God does not exist?

Paul Moser develops a detailed account of religious epistemology that confronts the skeptic with these and other questions. His thesis is that religious skeptics, as well as many defenders of theistic belief, have neglected important aspects of a proper epistemology of belief in God. Most important is the element of “purposively available evidence” and the volitional reception of such evidence. Purposively available evidence is the direct evidence of God’s self-revelation to an individual when that individual
is prepared to enter into submissive fellowship with God on God’s terms. This evidence is conditionally available. Its availability depends, first, on God’s own desires with regard to human knowledge of God, and, second, on a person’s willingness to yield his will to God’s perfectly authoritative will. Any person who thus submits to God’s will is bound to experience transformation of the self and fellowship with God.

The envisioned epistemology of belief in God is rooted in a conception of God as utterly worthy of worship. As worship-worthy, God is perfectly loving. From this it follows that God would desire more than mere propositional belief or knowledge that God exists. God would desire a redemptive relationship that rescues an individual from the twofold human predicament of impending death and destructive selfishness. It also follows that God would not coerce belief, whether of the propositional sort or of the deeper relational sort that God most cares about.

Only God is capable of providing conclusive evidence that God exists. As perfectly loving, God would want to provide this evidence to anyone who is volitionally responsive to God’s authoritative call. This call is experienced via human conscience in the recognition of moral failure and of the need for God’s assistance in experiencing moral transformation from selfishness to radical unselfishness, in the likeness of God’s own self-giving love for others, including love of one’s enemies. Such knowledge of God’s reality is thus epistemically foundational, experiential, noncoercive, and conclusive. It does not depend on argument or inference, but a direct person-to-person experience of God, when one responds freely and positively to the perfectly loving God’s conviction of moral failure, that constitutes conclusive evidence of God’s reality, such that there are no defeaters for this evidence.

The availability of such evidence should be a sincere skeptic’s dream come true.

The lineaments of this epistemology of belief in God are set forth in chapter 1, “Doubting Skeptics,” where the model is applied directly to the problem of divine hiddenness. Chapter 2, “Knowing as Attunement,” further develops the account, and relates it to ancillary evidence of the explanatory sort, such as we find in abductive versions of cosmological and teleological (or design) arguments. Chapter 3, “Dying to Know,” focuses the account through the lens of God’s specific redemptive strategy of establishing fellowship with human persons by means of the Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ, the resurrected Lord whose death was for our sake, both morally and cognitively. The whole of this “volitional pneumatic epistemology” has radical implications for the discipline of philosophy, which should be practiced in obedience to God’s “definite love commands.” Chapter 4, “Revamping Philosophy,” sorts through these implications. Chapter 5, “Aftermath,” revisits the two primary aspects of the human predicament—destructive selfishness and impending death—and ends with a bold challenge for
readers to respond to God’s perfectly loving and authoritative call “to entrust ourselves to the Giver of the Good News or to continue with dying business as usual.” In a final appendix, titled “Skepticism Undone,” Moser answers skeptical worries about epistemic circularity with an account of “epistemic reasons” that is grounded in our semantic, concept-forming intentions, which turns the tables on the skeptic and neutralizes broad skeptical objections. Here, as in his other writings, Moser’s general epistemology is seen to be fallibilist and internalist.

The Elusive God is replete with challenges to philosophers of all persuasions, and to theists and nontheists alike. Moser gently chastens all who have ignored or otherwise neglected God’s own strategy for realizing God’s own purposes in bringing men and women into redemptive knowledge of God. Readers who are religious skeptics may be haunted by the need to forsake idolatrous demands for evidence that makes no demands on them personally. Some theists reading this book may wonder whether, if the approach developed here is correct, they actually know God. This may even be true for some Christian theists. The message is sobering and convicting. It cannot be fully absorbed without self-examination and personal response.

Individual readers will linger over some passages more than others. The following positive comments and critical notes concern ideas and proposals of special interest to me.

The Starting Point. Moser begins his project with an analysis of the concept of “God.” Embedded in this concept is the idea of God as utterly worthy of worship. From this it follows that God is perfectly loving. An analysis of God as perfectly loving grounds Moser’s entire epistemology of belief in God. In effect, he sets forth a job description for any claimant to the title “God.” He then considers what such a God would require of us and would be prepared to do for us, if we should come to believe in God as God would rightly intend. This is a promising strategy.

The strategy is carried further by historical investigation of claimants to deity reflected in alternative religious traditions. Moser argues that “an initially plausible candidate”—“the God of Jewish and Christian theism and the avowed Father of that disturbing Galilean Jewish outcast, Jesus of Nazareth” (87)—is, in the final analysis, the best candidate.

I believe Moser is right about this, and for the reasons he presents. But his reasons are not set forth with the systematic clarity that might be needed to convince most readers. Reasons include, among other things, the testimony of those who have been transformed in their redemptive relationship with this God, and the likelihood that a perfectly loving God would provide self-sacrificing assistance to rescue humans from their predicament if this was needed. The reasons are forcible, but they might be articulated more fully and brought together in systematic fashion for the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus to come into view as the best candidate for Godhood.
The Place of Natural Theology in Relation to Purposively Available Evidence. In agreement with Moser, I hold that there is value in the arguments of natural theology but that this value is limited. Moser seems more reluctant than I would be to deploy such arguments. He rightly fears that stressing evidence of this kind may play to the idolatrous disposition to believe in God on our terms, and then only to believe that God exists. Moser allows that evidence frequently embedded in traditional arguments for the existence of God may contribute to the case for God’s existence, but he holds that this evidence “can’t adequately underwrite epistemically reasonable belief that a personal perfectly loving God exists. The cognitive foundation lies elsewhere” (86).

Moser identifies the following two specific limitations of even the best of cosmological and teleological (or design) arguments (see 87–88): (1) they “yield at most theoretical support for theistic belief”; (2) they leave us with a persistent explanatory mystery reflected in the unanswered question: “Why is reality such that God exists rather than being such that God does not exist?”

The first point is true, though it may need to be qualified. First, as theoretical support for theistic belief, abductive arguments for theism purportedly count as support for the existence of a personal being of great power and intelligence who created the universe and apparently acted purposively in creating human persons. Thus, they do provide some (admittedly nonconclusive) support for the existence of “a personal perfectly loving God” (assuming the arguments are sound). Second, if “God” stands for an utterly worship-worthy being, the God implied by such reasoning is at least a plausible “theoretical” candidate for this title. If this candidate’s nature conforms to a satisfactory degree with the most plausible candidate turned up in historical investigation and personal experience, surely this is to be welcomed. And third, in contemplation of the evidence of natural theology one might feel constrained, as a theoretically and pragmatically rational person, to investigate the question of God’s existence along more self-involving lines, such as those outlined by Moser.

The second point might be worrisome if the theist’s explanatory project was to identify the absolutely ultimate explanation for everything. But this is not typically the case, even if theists are naive about the point. For their objective is to establish that God exists as the best explanation for such phenomena as the existence and apparent design of the universe. If the existence of God is the best explanation for these and like phenomena, residual questions, however interesting and important, are, well, residual. If explaining why the universe should be such that there is a God is at all urgent, it seems this would be no less urgent on the purposively available evidence that Moser describes in his book.

The Epistemology of Resurrection Belief. Some Christian apologists hold that belief in the resurrection of Jesus may be adequately grounded by
historical evidence alone. Others hold that this evidence must be conjoined
with background evidence for theism. Moser makes the compelling case that
resurrection belief is at its cognitive and relational best when it is mediated
by the Spirit in experience of God’s resurrection power. This is not to be
confused with so-called power encounters that consist mainly in “signs
and wonders.” God’s resurrection power is, rather, the power experienced
through transformation of the self into the likeness of Jesus as unselfish and
loving (see page 125 and chapter 3). Moser’s argument here is buttressed
with close consideration of New Testament data.

The present generation—of believers and nonbelievers alike—“asks for
a sign” of the sort that begets awe and wonder at the supernatural presence
and miraculous intervention of God in the world. But even believers, to say
nothing of nonbelievers, have more than neglected the singular evidence of
God’s existence via God’s power in changing the hearts of men and women
with their volitional cooperation. The Church and the world have suffered
from this malignant neglect.

**Foundationalism and Belief in God.** I concur with Moser that for
a belief to be epistemically justified is for it to be grounded in evidence.
Unfortunately, many have supposed that having evidence for God’s existence
must involve inference or argument. Reformed epistemologists, for example,
er when they suppose that an evidentialist account precludes the possibility
of “properly basic belief in God.” And it is a distinct weakness of Reformed
epistemology that its account of properly basic belief in God leaves direct
person-to-person evidence of God’s reality out of account. (This may seem
to some a shocking irony.)

There are at least two varieties of what I call “theistic foundationalism.”
The theistic foundationalism of Reformed epistemology identifies properly
basic belief in God with the merely propositional and accounts for it in
impersonal causal terms. When the belief that God exists is formed in the right
way, the believer may simply “find himself believing in God.” The occasion
for this need not be (or, perhaps, it simply never is) direct acquaintance with
God; nor is it specially self-involving so that a person’s motivational center
is interpersonal challenged by God.

For the evidentialist, theistic foundationalism identifies foundational
belief in God (indeed, foundational knowledge of God), with relational
knowledge of God and accounts for it in terms of direct acquaintance with
God. Moser’s “theistic foundationalism” specifies direct acquaintance with
God in ways that have gone unnoticed by most theologians and philosophers.
On some perceptual accounts, God is self-revealing, without regard for one’s
moral and cognitive condition. But for Moser, God’s self-revelation to a
would-be believer is conditional in the ways described above. Here, belief in
God is self-involving, and the particular way in which it is self-involving sets
it apart from most accounts of religious experience.
Paul Moser, more than any contemporary philosopher, has sought to
develop in detail a biblically and theologically grounded epistemology of
religious belief that does not beg questions in response to religious skeptics
under the spell of overwrought arguments from divine hiddenness against
the existence of God. Though theoretically revolutionary in certain respects,
much of its merit lies in its plausibility relative to the action and self-
revelation of God throughout history. Thoughtful assimilation of the main
ideas would be revolutionary for the disciplines of philosophy and theology,
for engagement in Christian apologetics, and for life itself. Moser has staked
out a refreshing approach to knowledge of God. May his tribe increase.

Review by R. Douglas Geivett
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Mathematics and Reality. By Mary Leng. Oxford: Oxford University Press,
2010. 278 pages. $65.00.

Mary Leng’s new book is a very thorough and closely argued response
from a nonrealist perspective to W. V. O. Quine’s “indispensability argument”
for the existence of abstract objects, specifically sets. Incredibly—given its
enormous influence—Quine never clearly articulated or defended at any
length his argument for the reality of mathematical objects, leaving it to us
to reconstruct the argument as best we can. Here is Leng’s formulation of
Quine’s indispensability argument (7):

1. We should look to science, and in particular to the statements that
are considered best confirmed according to our ordinary scientific
standards, to discover what we ought to believe. (Naturalism)

2. The confirmation our theories receive extends to all their statements
equally. (Confirmational holism)

3. Statements whose truth would require the existence of mathematical
objects are indispensable in formulating our best confirmed
scientific theories. (Indispensability)

4. Therefore, we ought to believe that there are mathematical objects.
(Mathematical realism)

Unfortunately, this formulation of the argument suppresses a distinctive
Quinean metaontological thesis, namely, Quine’s “criterion of ontological
commitment,” by folding it into indispensability. Since Leng thinks that
mathematical statements are indispensable to our best confirmed scientific
theories, she does not think to challenge Quine’s criterion. The reason this is
unfortunate, I think, is that a truly fundamental critique of Quine’s argument
will proceed, not merely on the ontological level, as Leng’s does (1), but on
the metaontological level, that is to say, it will examine critically Quine’s
prescription for settling ontological disputes.