Two important books propose revisions to the philosophy of religion—Schellenberg’s *The Wisdom to Doubt* and Moser’s *The Elusive God*. The former has fourteen densely textured chapters divided into three parts. Part I lays out the nature of, and arguments for, suspending belief that Ultimism or its denial is true. (Generic) Ultimism, the propositional content of minimalist religion, is the view that there is an ontologically and evaluatively ultimate (not necessarily uncaused) reality, proper relationship to which constitutes the human *summum bonum* (p. 3). Part II (the shortest) argues that while naturalism entails that Ultimism is false, it is unavailable to the sceptic since naturalism itself is unjustified. It also contends that religious experience does not justify religious belief. Part III (surprisingly) argues that theism is false. It is important to separate the essential argument and the argument that is said to prove theism false. We read:

> What we find, then, through careful reasoning and consideration of the heart and soul of love, in the context of more general considerations about God and creation and the need for thinking unrestricted by traditional theology, is that the existence of non-resistant belief shows the non-existence of God. (p. 206, my italics)

This claim is stronger than the author needs, as he recognizes when he says ‘even if the skeptical theist is not required to hold that disbelief with respect to theism has been justified by my arguments, he will be required to reconcile himself to doubt’ (p. 304). The author’s overall argument requires arguments that render scepticism about theism justified.

Talk of what arguments (presumably that one understands) ‘require’ is itself tricky—is one always required to believe in accord with whatever conclusions are found at the end of one’s current best arguments? If one’s current best arguments support scepticism regarding P, is scepticism regarding P ‘required’? What exactly are one’s epistemic duties? Do claims about these duties fall within this author’s circle of beliefs that properly escape...
scepticism? Do claims about which beliefs escape scepticism themselves escape it? These are questions worth remembering as the criteria for what one may properly believe are presented. Such matters are clearly relevant to a book that begins its opening chapter with the sentence ‘Reason requires us to be religious skeptics’ (p. 1).

The other book is Paul K. Moser’s The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology. He argues that it is a mistake to judge the evidence for theism on grounds foreign to its own content, for which mere spectator knowledge that involves no volitional response is of little significance. Moser contends that Judeo-Christian theism has its own epistemology regarding the sort of knowledge of God that it takes to be the summum bonum. Judging theism in terms of what is available without following its own epistemological path will result in unfairly judging theism negatively.

Each book is clearly written, argued in detail, and serious in purpose. A single essay cannot begin to convey their nuanced depth. Neither is enthused about natural theology. Somewhere around there the agreement ends. The following attempts to briefly but fairly present the core of each view, and raise some basic questions concerning each. Both are concerned with the ‘hiddenness argument’ which moves from the alleged fact that There is no public third person, or private first person, evidence that is anything like sufficient for theistic belief. It adds If God exists, then there will be public third person, or private first person, evidence that is sufficient for theistic belief and concludes God does not exist. Our two books take the issues this argument raises to an entirely new level. Theistic evidentialists typically reject the first premiss, as does Moser. He adds that by far the most important evidence includes a call for positive response to the demands of a personal God — it is first person evidence of which the subject is directly aware and by which she is directly challenged. Evidentialist critics of theism typically accept both premisses, as does Schellenberg, though strictly his claim to justify scepticism regarding Ultimism, as noted, requires only something like We are not justified in thinking both (perhaps either) premiss(es) of the argument to be false as opposed to We are justified in taking both premises to be true.

The development of Schellenberg’s scepticism

The Wisdom to Doubt begins ‘Reason requires us to be religious skeptics’. Neither the theist nor the naturalist will rejoice if this is true. If we are sceptics regarding Ultimism, we are not to hold that there is a being that satisfies the description Ultimism offers nor are we to suppose that, if there is such a being, it must be one or another of the currently available candidates. Nonetheless, it seems we can make some sort of profundity-ranking among the candidates.

And, of course, Spinoza’s God is also infinitely more profound than the traditional theistic God, who is… fleshed out in terms of only one of Spinoza’s infinite number of modes, this time mentality. (p. 52)
Given that it is not clear that Spinoza’s concept of ‘God or Nature’, a being conceivable under an infinity of attributes of which only two are known to us, is so much as logically coherent, the judgement concerning profundity, leaving obviousness aside, is surprising and dubious.

It is important here to capture at least the gist of Schellenberg’s scepticism. Consider a case in which person S has good evidence E for proposition P—good in that if E is all the evidence that needs to be considered then P is proved, or shown to be probably true (p. 15). But is E representative of the total evidence? If this is uncertain, then belief that P should be withheld. In Part I, Schellenberg states a general principle for determining when sceptical ‘withholding’ is required, and uses this principle to build a four-‘mode’ case for scepticism about Ultimism.

There is the issue of whether we now, or will ever, have the capacity to find the truth we seek. (Second order) beliefs concerning such a capacity are subject to the condition that our evidence for them must be properly thought to be representative. I take it that something like the following captures a fundamental part, at least, of his conception of epistemic ethics:

(SO) Even when S has good evidence E for proposition P, S must suspend belief regarding P if S has meta-evidence that:

(C1) gives S good reason to think S lacks some relevant evidence E*

(C2) gives S good reason to doubt whether the conjunction of E and E* together would still underwrite the same positive verdict for P

Using (SO), or something very like it, Schellenberg’s first four chapters adduce four ‘modes’ of evidence that he thinks require scepticism about Ultimism. They are grounds for thinking (C1) and (C2) to be satisfied.

His Subject Mode considers us—those who believe, disbelieve, or withhold judgement—considering claims about the Ultimate. We are finite, prone to pride, intellectual greed, insecurity, and a host of other foibles that incline us to overrate evidence for claims we like, and to disregard alternatives. Our finitude and foibles make for evidential distortion, especially regarding propositions that are precise, detailed, profound, and attractive. Such propositions have many alternatives, any of which may have much unrecognised evidence on their behalf. Such evidence may be known but its relevance unnoted, accessible now but unknown, inaccessible now but accessible in the future, or inaccessible even in the future. Profound and attractive propositions, given our foibles, lead us to misperceive the evidence we have, and to neglect evidence easily available to us. Our views regarding Ultimism exhibit all of these characteristics. The Subject Mode alone, Schellenberg concludes, ‘can make short work of the claim that religious belief, or that irreligious belief, is justified’ (p. 47).

The second, Object Mode, concerns the nature of Ultimism. The proposed Ultimate would be ‘infinitely profound’ and thus ‘beyond belief’ (p. 51). The
depth and complexity of the ultimate, if it exists, are grounds for scepticism as to purported knowledge thereof.

The third, Retrospective Mode, comments that humanity has had only a relatively short period in which to (in some sense) ‘investigate’ Ultimism. Even that has been characterized by narrow loyalties, intellectual hubris, partisan violence, mistaken values, authoritarian institutions, emotional attractions that have no positive relation to evidence or truth-seeking, and poor intellectual practices. It has been so riddled with intellectual, moral, psychological, and social flaws as to scarcely qualify as inquiry. Thus we have sufficient reason to doubt whether any current evidential ground for or against Ultimism is representative of the full evidence.

The fourth, Prospective Mode, asserts that even if our present evidence supported one sort of Ultimism, this would not justify the claim that our present evidence was representative. The prospective mode anticipates future ecumenical communities comparing the results of their cognitive lives and the effects of their religious practices, thereby reasoning about and testing their varieties of Ultimism. All those versions might fail to pass the sceptical test, but perhaps some one version would succeed, and perhaps its content might be completely opaque to us at present. ‘Might’ here, I take it, is something at least very like epistemic possibility, where proposition P is epistemically possible to person S at time t if and only if, so far as S knows at t, P might be true.

**Epistemic principles**

Consider two epistemic principles:

(1) If person S has evidence E for proposition P, and S has reason to doubt, or insufficient evidence to believe, that E is representative of the total evidence regarding P, then S ought to suspend judgement regarding P

(2) If S believes in accord with the evidence S has regarding P, then S believes properly if S believes that P

If one accepts the Argument from Four Modes, it is unclear that one can opt for either of these principles over the other. How could you know that your rational intuition was correct when equally intelligent people’s intuitions favour the principle you reject? Even if one or the other of them is a necessary truth, it is informally necessary and hence necessary in the more controversial sense.

One currently popular view recommends suspending judgement about propositions believed by some and rejected by others, each group seeming on an epistemic par with the other. Another current view is that if things seem one way after careful reflection and examination, then one is within one’s epistemic rights to believe that things are that way. Embracing either
would rule out accepting Schellenberg’s program, which requires (1) or its near kin.

Safer Ground (?)

Schellenberg wants to privilege a set of beliefs that includes ‘self-evident’ propositions such as If A is taller than B, then B is shorter than A and $2 + 2 = 4$. The standard empiricist view of such propositions is that they are grounded in our linguistic conventions, the deep grammar of our discourse, the ways our brains happen to work, certain social conventions, or something else that might never have existed and may be changed. This seems incompatible with the ‘luminosity’ that Schellenberg thinks shines from them; his notion of necessary truths seems to include the idea that necessity is not conventional. We have a highly controversial understanding of the first two examples. The same will be true of any account of propositional necessity. The second examples are Universal justice is good and Respecting persons is good. That there are any moral truths, and that if there are they are necessary as Schellenberg asserts when he says that they fall in the same class as the first two examples, again are highly controversial (p. 32). It seems problematic to appeal to these examples without any discussion of the relevant controversies, since it is this sort (or these sorts) of propositions that he gives safety from scepticism. Further, the moral claims are, if necessary, then necessary in the informal, ‘broad’ sense of logical necessity, a class of propositions doubly controversial — some deny that there is any such class, and the membership of particular propositions in that class, assuming there is one, is typically controverted. The final examples concern a small room in which there is no hippopotamus (if you do not see it, it is not there) and that Mrs. Schellenberg loves her son. Schellenberg grants that while there are logically possible worlds in which someone might be deceived in such cases, we know that ours is not one since we are properly sure that our evidence is representative. Classical sceptics will disagree, and the claim that in our world these claims are not afflicted by any mode-relevant considerations does not shine with luminous necessity.

Regarding what we may properly believe even given his brand of scepticism, Schellenberg says that we must go along ‘with what is universal and unavoidable, and thus to restrict ourselves, at least initially, to such practices as those we call sensory, introspective, memorial, and (rationally) intuitive’ (p. 170). He considers the question as to whether this is not arbitrary and answers:

I would argue that it is precisely because of requirements of an investigative stance and an investigative aim that it is non-arbitrary. If we really are would-be investigators, concerned for the truth and seeking understanding, then we will ascribe epistemic innocence — even an initial innocence — only where we have to: assuming that we have to pick certain belief-forming practices as innocent until proven guilty to get started, we will still pick only what we have to pick, in order to
minimize the extent to which non-inquiry-based factors influence the direction of inquiry. (p. 170; italics in original)

The idea seems to be this: let sensory perception, introspection, memory, and rational intuition be the basic faculties. Then something like the proposition

\[ (P) \text{ A deliverance of a basic faculty is to be regarded as innocent rather than guilty unless it is incompatible with some other deliverance of the same, or a different, basic faculty} \]

is to be accepted as normative for our practice of properly believing. The justification of this claim is that only if it, or something much like it, is accepted is rational inquiry possible.

This claim seems pragmatic rather than transcendental. It is, in the present sense, transcendental if what is said is offered as an argument that (P) is true and that this is so because the deliverances of the basic faculties are generally true. The argument, good or bad, would be Investigation is possible; if investigation is possible, then the basic faculties are reliable; thus the basic faculties are reliable. The assumption then is that our basic faculties are suited to our discovering a good deal of truth about the world — that there is an epistemic ‘fit’ between our minds and the world. It is pragmatic, in the present sense, if the justification of going along with (P) — believing in accord with it — is what we must do if we are going to investigate at all, with no assumption made as to whether any such ‘fit’ holds. The claim is conditional: if any (to whatever degree successful) investigation is available to us, then our basic capacities are reliable.

**Anti-Theism**

There is space only to look briefly at one example of Schellenberg’s anti-theistic arguments. Consider these claims (1.199):

- (A) The divine creation must express … a personal-relational love … for now the creator has elected to make available to other beings an experience of reality, and in a perfect personal being contact with other personal beings would necessarily express whatever belongs to relational personal love
- (B) God’s relational-personal love must indeed be the most perfect possible
- (C) The creativity God exercises in producing finite personal creatures must itself be expressed in pursuit of value in and through and by them

Given (A)–(C) as background, Schellenberg takes these claims to be true:

- (N1) Necessarily, if God exists, anyone who is (i) not resisting God and (ii) capable of meaningful conscious relation with God is also (iii) in a position to participate in such relationship (able to do so just by trying)
(N2) Necessarily, one is at a time in a position to participate in meaningful conscious relationship with God only if one believes that God exists

Hence:

(N3) Necessarily, if God exists, anyone who is (i) not resisting God and (ii) capable of meaningful conscious relationship with God also (iii) believes that God exists

Then he adds this empirical claim:

(C1) There are (and often have been) people who are (i) not resisting God and (ii) capable of meaningful conscious relationship with God without also (iii) believing that God exists

Claim (C1), we are assured, is one for which there is ‘overwhelming support’ (p. 205) that escapes from modal threat.

Then the conclusion is drawn:

(5) God does not exist

I find it hard to see how (C1) can be properly said to dwell in the charmed circle of sceptic-proof beliefs. Why think that, say, the first mode does not make us well-advised to withhold judgement concerning it? Must ‘resisting God’ be conscious resistance to God — conscious rejection of trust in God (or however exactly ‘resisting God’ should be understood) — or can it be commitment to some beliefs or practices which are incompatible with trust in God? Perhaps the varieties of ‘resisting God’ are multifarious and it is not easy to discern its presence. Such considerations make it far less clear that we know that (C1) is safe from sceptical cancellation.

The core of the claim that (N1), (N2), and (N3) are necessary truths is obviously false if we have in mind formally necessary truths — propositions whose proper logical notations have contradictory forms. But presumably they are offered as examples of, broadly, semantically necessary truths or ‘conceptual truths’. This conforms to the claim that ‘our everyday understanding of the language of which pushes us in this direction’ (p. 202). There is considerable reference to how we do, and would, act insofar as we are loving. Two things should be noted here. First, as suggested earlier, presumably more is involved than simple appeal to ordinary usage unless ordinary usage is normative regarding the nature of love. There must be a discernible ontology of love — another controversial matter — in which (A)–(C) and (N1)–(N3) are grounded. Second, what we would do in so far as we are loving plays a large role in deciding what God will do if God is loving. This sort of point is a bit tricky. Allowing for great difference in power and knowledge it seems correct to say that, in so far as we get such matters right, the good that we wish for those we love will accord with what a perfect loving God would wish for them. There nonetheless might be
significant differences in how best to act so that those wishes are fulfilled. The same ends may be best sought in one way by one being and in another way by another, even among human persons, let alone human persons and God.

As noted, belief that (N1)–(N3) are true is said to escape scepticism because they are said to follow from (presumably broadly) necessary truths—necessarily true given what we mean by ‘love’. So presumably for Schellenberg the nature of love is an objective matter, and must be fit into any view of things that will sustain examination. Thus an ultimately impersonal view of the world must be such that in it there are accessible necessary truths about love and beings capable of giving and receiving love. The impersonal explanation of such truths and beings must be at least as good as its competitors. Whether this is or not so seems, for a scepticism of the sort outlined here, at best an appropriate matter for ‘withholding’ belief. In any case, this is a strong commitment, especially so for a sceptic. The assumption, apparently, is something like this:

\[(L1)\] Love has a mind-independent essence or nature which we are able to discern

\[(L2)\] We are able to discern that essence or nature sufficiently to see that Schellenberg’s (N1)–(N3) are necessary truths

As necessary truths, they fall within the charmed circle of propositions that can be accepted in a sceptic-proof manner. It is further required that:

\[(L3)\] There are no conditions under which an omnipotent, omniscient God could properly express love through a process that includes allowing the sorts of evils that occur in our world

It is at least controversial (L3) can be conceptually teased out of an analysis of the concept of love. It is worth remembering that theists typically appeal to the claim that there is a lot of information as to how a loving God can permit harsh evils the details, perhaps the outlines, of which are unavailable to us — perhaps even beyond our capacity to understand. At least in some cases, perhaps modes are theism-friendly.

But are (N1)–(N2) necessary truths? On Schellenberg’s view, they entail:

\[(6)\] Necessarily, at no time does a person capable of participating in a meaningful conscious relation with God, who is not wilfully rejecting God, fail to participate in a meaningful conscious relation with God

One can respond by distinguishing between participating in a meaningful relation with God and a meaningful conscious relation with God—‘conscious’ meaning not merely that the person is conscious, but that the person is conscious of it being God that is the other relatum in the
relationship—contending that the former may be intact in the absence of the latter. The idea is that (6) be replaced by something like:

\[(6^*) \text{Necessarily, at no time does a person capable of participating in a meaningful conscious relation with God, who is not wilfully rejecting God, fail to participate in a meaningful relation with God, though the person may not be able to identify the other relatum of the relationship as God}\]

(There is not space here to go into exactly what the relevant conditions of identification may be.)

One might add a further change, and affirm not (6) or (6*) but:

\[(6^{**}) \text{Necessarily, at no time does a person capable of participating in a meaningful conscious relation with God, who is seeking a relationship with God, fail to participate in a meaningful relation with God, though the person may not be able to identify the other relatum of the relationship as God}\]

(This may bring the topic of libertarian freedom into view, and then chapters eleven and twelve are directly relevant, the author arguing, among other things, that the appeal to libertarian freedom makes things worse for the theist. But we have not space to say more than that the arguments there are extremely interesting, fresh, and controversial.)

Consider further:

\[(6^{***}) \text{Necessarily, at no time does a person capable of participating in a meaningful conscious relation with God, who does not hold dear some set of propositions, or some practice, that prevents having such a relationship with God, fail to participate in a meaningful relation with God, though the person may not be able to identify the other relatum of the potential relationship as God}\]

There is no space here to engage in much discussion of these and similar otherwise nuanced versions of (6). Suffice it to note that, once one considers (6), or its relevant alternatives, it is not obvious that any escape the concerns expressed by the modes.

To pursue the varieties of (6) slightly more, consider the claim that (as Moser contends) God does ‘call’ every person through conscience and a sense of absolute obligation which, if properly responded to, will bring one to belief in God. Does Schellenberg know that this does not happen? Perhaps a ‘call’ through conscience develops into an awareness of God only in those who properly respond, God (per Moser) wanting personal relationship and not particularly valuing ‘spectator’ knowledge (a point on which Schellenberg and Moser seem also to agree). Perhaps (per Moser) many people construct their beliefs and practices in such a fashion as to be ‘protected’ from experience of an independent absolute authority.
In simplest terms, suppose Mary is an atheist, an agnostic, or simply someone who has never heard of God. Is it impossible that she nonetheless recognize that there are moral demands that she is not meeting, have a sense of absolute moral obligation, and in response make a choice to obey those obligations, and come over time to believe that the obligation is to a morally perfect person rather than an abstract principle or simply to her fellow creatures? She comes to recognize that all along she has been at least endeavoring to obey that person. If that is so much as possible, then it is false that in order to enter into a ‘meaningful conscious relationship’ to God one must believe that God exists, at least at its outset. Does Schellenberg know that in no possible case could this be the best, or just as good overall, a way for Mary to come into her meaningful conscious relationship to God, or even that it cannot be this in our world?

Further, what must the cognitive content include to count as ‘belief in God’? Would God count a sense of absolute obligation to what is thought of as a finite personal being on the part of someone theologically illiterate be enough for a ‘meaningful relation to God’ — even though it is not strictly belief in God? If this is even possible, then Schellenberg’s supposed necessary truths are not true. If so, this argument against theism fails, whether or not we are Schellenbergian sceptics.

A different matter: suppose Universalism is true (God gives salvation to each person in that way which is in accord with their way of being a person). Why think that (N1)–(N3) are necessary truths when they rule out Universalism, which might be compatible with the right replacements for (N1)–(N3).

I wish to emphasize that I do not think poorly of Schellenberg’s book. It presents a detailed defence of a type of scepticism. The arguments for it are detailed and worthy of more attention than I have given here. In my view, the anti-theism in Part III is best viewed as independent of the earlier scepticism. It is philosophy of religion of the ‘usual sort’ done with admirable care and detail. It may well be the best presentation of the problem of evil as reason to reject theism that we have; certainly it is one of the very best. There is a complex, densely developed overall view here. (The Definitions and Principles at the end of the book, taken from the earlier Prolegomena, are relevant here.) It deserves discussion that matches its precision and depth. Right or wrong, it is first class philosophy of religion. I remain, however, doubtful of the success of the argument for scepticism, suspect that (despite the author’s protest) much of its defence is incompatible with its own content, and I am convinced that at times the author relies on highly controversial claims. Nonetheless, this is not a book to be safely ignored by philosophers of religion, or philosophers generally.

**Moser’s theistic evidentialism**

In The Elusive God we have a radically different perspective. Moser, at least until turning his attention to philosophy of religion, was known as an
epistemologist. He offers *The Elusive God* as more epistemology. He rejects the view that \( S \) knows that \( P \) is to be analysed along the lines of \( S \)’s belief that \( P \) is caused by \( S \)’s belief-forming mechanism functioning in a truth seeking manner and in accord with its design plan in an environment of the sort in which the mechanism was designed to work, and \( P \) is true. (This, abstractly put, is a typical sort of externalist, non-evidentialist epistemology; like Plantinga’s.) Also rejected is the view, like Alston’s, that the proper target of evaluation in epistemology is doxastic (belief-forming) practices in terms such as their ability to capture empirical facts, internal consistency and coherence, flexibility to new data, and practical effectiveness, with the salient question as to whether this does not introduce doxastic relativism.

Moser remains stoutly evidentialist, requiring evidence for knowledge. (What will count as evidence differs greatly from case to case, and this is not the place to enter into that.) He also holds that evidence that God exists is available, albeit not where we usually look. Where we look is a function of what we think God should provide, and our desire to make the issue of God’s existence the object of an objective, uninvolved inquiry after which we may properly go on to other things.

The typical practice in philosophy of religion is to consider public, third person evidence, asking whether there is enough of this evidence to justify theistic belief. Moser regards this as expressing secular bias. Contrary to common belief, the God of Judeo-Christian monotheism is not obligated to provide such evidence as a consequence of being a loving God. In fact, God is not much, if at all, concerned with sheer assent to the proposition God exists. God’s interest is in persons freely responding in obedience to God’s purposive, authoritative, accessible call through conscience to repentance and progressive transformation in resemblance, in so far as possible, to God’s unselfish love, even to one’s enemies. Concentrating on third person public evidence keeps God at arms length, and puts one in the position of judge over whether there is a God; it keeps one in charge of one’s own destiny and in that respect does not recognize God’s authority. Given God’s status — as not possibly dependent on anything else for existence, as omnipotent and omniscient, as a free being who has chosen moral perfection over any other alternative, as the creator of free persons capable of loving obedience to God’s will — God is perfectly authoritative. God’s purpose is to transform human persons by their growing more and more into people characterized by love, even of their enemies. This goal requires — not third person, spectator evidence, which does not call for any volitional response — but a call to persons, through their consciences, to recognition of their self-centredness and to a transforming change of their orientation to obedience to God’s will. The bottom line here for philosophy of religion is that it is unfair and unhelpful to assess the rationality of belief in God on criteria foreign to the view of God inherent in the view being assessed.
The view just described is (quite properly) not presented as the product of philosophical reflection. It is offered as a report of Biblical content — of the central Judeo-Christian account of how God can be known. God’s being known is both propositional and personal, involving theistic belief and personal trust. (This does not rule out a person coming to know God by the sort of process described above in which theistic belief is little, if at all, in evidence in the earliest stages of the process.) Thus Moser holds that there is a distinctive epistemology inherent in Judeo-Christian monotheism that is typically ignored, and that it allows the theist to escape currently popular criticisms that there seems to be no public evidence that sufficiently supports theism as a reasonable option. It is unjust to assess Judeo-Christian theism other than in terms of what it actually claims.

There are many responses to this epistemology even as an appropriate alternative in philosophy of religion. Among them are social- and natural-science explanations of theistic experiences whose existence allegedly shows that theistic experiences are non-veridical (particularly if very similar experience can be elicited by some procedure), anti-theistic arguments concerning the alleged inconsistency of one or more of the attributes typically ascribed to God, singly or in combination, the problem of evil, and the argument that the diversity of religious traditions disqualifies each. Devotees of religions that make ‘enlightenment’ experience central — Jainism, Hinduism, Buddhism — will want their religion’s epistemological content treated analogously to Moser’s treatment of theism. This pinpoints the question as to whether Moser’s proposed revolution in philosophy of religion will not illegitimately privilege theism. If the change made is to consider the merits of Judeo-Christian epistemology in philosophy of religion classes this need not privilege theism. But that would be the return to the spectator stance, asking the second-order question as to whether that epistemology is itself reliable, or at least defensible.

At the centre of the epistemology Moser champions are an authoritative ‘call’ and, after an accepting response, a transformed life. There are two more aspects of the account. One is the relevance of undefeated defeaters — evidence that a proposition is false that are not themselves defeated by other considerations. Moser grants that ‘call’ experiences, subjectively described, are not self-authenticating — it is not logically impossible that one have an experience with a ‘call’ phenomenology that is deceptive (p. 149). Thus the question of possible defeaters is not held to be irrelevant. Further, it has significance whether there is an ultimate explanation of things on which such experiences are veridical — an explanation that is at least as good as its competitors (pp. 87–8). (This consideration is third-person.) Considerations of defeaters and explanations are central to the philosophy of religion as it is now practised.

Moser’s claim is that theistic believers, sophisticated or not, have — whether they ever think in these terms — evidence for God’s existence of
the kind one rightly would expect if the God of their tradition exists. The lack of any other sort of evidence is evidentially insignificant, save in so far as consideration of defeaters and explanations are relevant.

Moser’s book is written at a high level of philosophical expertise by a highly competent philosopher. It does not suffer by comparison with the level of argument offered by Schellenberg. Among other things, it raises again a long-standing question as to how, exactly, philosophy and theistic religious traditions are properly related—in this case how they are related in terms of epistemology. In part, Moser’s book is an excellent presentation of one answer to that question.

Revolutionizing or Expanding?

On the face of things, a professional natural theologian who read both Schellenberg and Moser might well consider changing jobs. But I have suggested that things are not quite what they seem. The final section of Shellenberg’s volume goes back to philosophy of religion as usual, offering anti-theistic arguments of great sophistication—arguments well worth some hard theistic thinking. His epistemic ethic can be challenged as can his view of what propositions escape scepticism. Moser grants that one’s being called by God is not self-authenticating—it is not logically impossible that one have an experience with the proper phenomenology for such experiences, subjectively described, and yet they be non-veridical. Thus even belief that one has had such an experience may have defeaters (which may in turn give rise to defeater-defeaters, and so on). It is of some importance that the best explanation of one’s having such an experience, or at least as good an explanation as any other on offer, is theistic in content. Thus, while both works make important contributions to the philosophy of religion, deserving wide discussion, each seems to have place for a bridge to current philosophy of religion.

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