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BOOK REVIEWS

Prolegomena to a Philosophy of Religion, by J. L. Schellenberg. Cornell University Press, 2005, 226 pages. \$45 (hardback).

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This work serves both as a foundation for J. L. Schellenberg's own projected work and as a proposal for the general field of philosophy of religion. As he sees it, work in the area needs to be placed upon a better footing, and this is largely because of inattention to prolegomena. These include careful analysis of several concepts—religion, belief, disbelief, skepticism, faith—that are widely discussed but do not enjoy wide agreement, as well as careful reflection on the proper aims of the discipline.

Philosophers of religion tend to share a basic set of assumptions—"the received view"—regarding those aims, which are typically thought principally to involve inquiries into the meaning (e.g., coherence) and justification of religious truth claims or propositions (p. 184). According to Schellenberg, the received view is incomplete if not incorrect. He argues that the various *responses* to religious truth claims (belief, disbelief, faith, skepticism), as well as the *persons* who respond in one or another of those ways, are proper objects of assessment. And there are legitimate and higher-level aims that go beyond such assessment. For example, philosophers of religion commonly suppose that the results of work in metaphysics, epistemology and ethics may be brought to bear in the assessment of religious conceptual systems. But what implications might religion have for those disciplines (p. 187)? And perhaps philosophers of religion who are concerned to evaluate religious *practices* and *persons* in addition to propositions should give "careful consideration" to "the ideas of experiential and non-truth-oriented support for religious belief" and faith (p. 188), as perhaps either of these positive responses to religious claims may be justified even in the absence of any truth-oriented support.

Further, there is a rather myopic concern only with those religious conceptual systems that have been articulated in the past. Should not philosophers of religion be more open to religious beliefs "that have not yet been articulated by anyone, or made the basis of a form of religious life in the actual world, but await our discovery" (p. 190)? (This suggestion may strike some as rather odd. Perhaps the time is ripe for a scholarly tome exploring a collection of possible but non-actual religions—



things that people *might* have believed but never did. One's imagination runs wild!)

With this challenge to the received view, Schellenberg hopes to stimulate further discussion regarding those aims and, perhaps, to rouse some of us from our dogmatic slumbers (p. xi). His interesting and original (sometimes novel) ideas and supporting arguments are likely to do just that.

Chapter one is given to an analysis of the concept of "religion." Having surveyed the literature, Schellenberg finds little agreement. Following William James and Wilfred Cantwell Smith, he notes that the term "religion" is ambiguous between the "personal" and "institutional" senses, where the former refers to individual "spirituality" and the latter to publicly identifiable traditions. He also follows James and Smith in their contention that the personal expression is the more basic of the two. And so, the chapter aims primarily at an analysis of "Person S is religious." (His motive for this emphasis becomes clear later when he argues that philosophy of religion should be concerned with *responses* to religious truth claims, as well as to the religious *responders*, over and above the truth claims themselves).

One potential obstacle here is the "family resemblance approach," which has it that, though there are typical shared characteristics among major religions, no one combination is necessary and sufficient for inclusion. Schellenberg argues that even proponents of this theory may be seen, despite themselves, to be operating with just such a criterion as that sought in his own analysis. If it is possible to *disqualify* an activity (croquet?) or an attitude (my penchant for India Pale Ales?) from being characterized as religious, then, on the flip side, we have the means for determining what *qualifies* something as a religion (pp. 10–11).

Without claiming to have established a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for defining "religiosity," Schellenberg urges the following common features: "(1) Frequent thoughts of a transmundane reality; (2) an emphasis on a significant good, for oneself and others, that may be realized through a proper relation to this reality; (3) the cultivation of such a relation; and (4) a disposition or tendency, when attending to matters in which they are implicated, to . . . *totalize* or *ultimize* in some way the central elements of features (1) to (3)" (p. 12).

For the purposes of doing philosophy of religion, Schellenberg urges that the notion of *ultimization* in (4) be made central. Thus, he suggests that a person S is religious just in case (1) S takes there to be a reality that is ultimate, in relation to which an ultimate good can be attained, and (2) S's ultimate commitment is to the cultivation of dispositions appropriate to this state of affairs. He argues that all religions—including essentially atheistic ones like Buddhism—identify some transcendent reality as both axiologically and metaphysically ultimate, and a religious person is one who displays a positive and committed response to such a claim. Thus, "ultimism" is his term of choice for capturing the essence of religion.

While I think that his "technical definition" is promising, one may wonder whether the *philosopher* of religion (as opposed to someone in Religious Studies) should be *especially* concerned with such definitional matters. First, it is not clear to me that this bit of prolegomena *has* been neglected. Three standard texts are handy to me: Peterson, et al., Taliaferro, Yandell.

Each devotes a section to the definition of “religion.” I suspect that these are typical. Schellenberg is correct in observing that there is nothing like a consensus here (though the differences are not exactly as the East is to the West). Does the addition of his own definition alter that fact? Further, I am inclined to think that whether a conceptual system qualifies as religious under some plausible criterion is secondary to the question of whether its essential truth claims are likely true. If the system is reasonably influential, has some degree of plausibility (thus precluding, say, Scientology and the Raelian “faith”), and is *deemed* religious, then this may well be sufficient for its truth claims being taken up for assessment. As Keith Yandell has urged, philosophers are in the business of constructing and assessing “categorical systems.” The move to *religious* categorical systems is, seamless. I suppose that here I reveal my own dogmatic slumber, and do so despite Schellenberg’s attempt to wake me.

Chapters two through six are concerned with analyses of belief—religious and otherwise—as well as religious disbelief, religious skepticism—including both passive and deliberate suspension of judgment, and religious faith. We learn (later) that (propositional) belief, disbelief, faith and doubt (as a suspension of judgment) are mutually incompatible. If they together exhaust the possible responses to religious propositions (Schellenberg entertains other possibilities in a footnote), then it follows that one, and only one, of these responses to a given religious claim will be justified for a given person.

As with his discussion of religion, Schellenberg observes that “belief” has both internal and external senses: the believing states of individuals and the propositions believed. Unlike many writers in the field—philosophers, anyway—his focus is on belief as a psychological state—“*how it feels from the inside to be a believer*”—because “such a phenomenological approach can yield some important insights about belief and also about the justification of religious and irreligious belief” (p. 41). He argues that believing states have *states of affairs*—not propositions—as their object. More to the point, to believe is to apprehend some state of affairs under the concept “reality.” Strictly speaking, our propositional beliefs are directed at the world itself—not propositions that purport to describe it—and so beliefs are “world-thoughts” (p. 50). “I am not...thinking of a proposition and under the impression it is true; rather, I am thinking of a state of affairs and under the impression that it obtains” (p. 44). He adds, “conscious believing is not *self-conscious*” (p. 44).

This strikes me as a plausible account of the phenomenology of belief when considering everyday waking experiences and the often unconscious beliefs that attend them (e.g., my interaction with students presupposes my belief that they are present, but only rarely do I attend to the proposition, “There are people present.”) The plausibility stands, I think, despite the fact that having the belief would seem to entail the conscious affirmation of the proposition once attended to. One is reminded of Chesterton’s observation in *Orthodoxy* (chap. 6) that it is easier to defend those beliefs of which we are only *partly* convinced than those of which we are *entirely* convinced. “Thus, if one asked an ordinary intelligent man, on the spur of the moment, ‘Why do you prefer civilization to savagery?’ he would look wildly round at object after object, and would only be able to answer

vaguely, 'Why, there is that bookcase . . . and the coals in the coal-scuttle . . . and pianos . . . and policemen.'"

Further, Schellenberg argues that such beliefs are had involuntarily. There are no immediate steps that I may take to bring it about either that I do or do not believe that my students share the classroom with me. The belief is engendered by the experience.

Religious belief, then, is a matter of taking there to be some metaphysically and axiologically ultimate reality, or, to have a *world-thought* of such a reality. And religious *disbelief* is thus a matter of taking some state of affairs S to obtain, where the corresponding proposition entails the nonexistence of any such reality. Schellenberg explains that religious disbelief is "about as opposed, intellectually, to religious belief as anything could be" (p. 39). But belief and disbelief do not exhaust the possible responses to claims regarding the Ultimate. The religious skeptic doubts or suspends judgment regarding such claims. Interestingly, Schellenberg holds that religious propositional *faith* is a variety of such skepticism. With pure religious skepticism, it shares this suspense of judgment with respect to belief and disbelief, but unlike its skeptical cousin, doubt, it involves a positive response to the claim. Despite a lack of supporting evidence, the faithful voluntarily represent the world to themselves as including that reality.

As mentioned above, Schellenberg takes the various responses to religious claims to be mutually incompatible, and this, of course, includes religious propositional faith and religious propositional belief. Thus, one of the more striking proposals of this book is the claim that propositional religious faith not only does not require religious belief, but that the two are incompatible (p. 132). Schellenberg thinks that belief *is* compatible with what he terms *operational* faith, which refers to a lifestyle of commitment, loyalty and trust. But those who manifest *propositional* faith "will respond in the negative to the question, 'Do you believe that *p*?' and also to the question 'Do you think it is true that *p*?' (p. 137).

One important argument for this rather novel position is that, whereas faith is widely thought to be voluntary assent and under one's direct control, belief is not. Faith is a matter of *intentionally* representing the world to oneself in a certain way (p. 134). Faith requires a paucity of evidence, is viewed as meritorious, is intentionally sustained (and is vulnerable if not) and may be abandoned at will. Belief, says Schellenberg, has none of these characteristics. He draws support for his account of faith as voluntary and beliefless from ordinary language and practice. People speak of "stepping out on faith," of "walking by faith," and "taking it on faith" that some claim is true. Such language, he suggests, is "best interpreted on the assumption that faith is voluntary in our sense [and] provides substantial support for that view" (p. 150).

It is not clear to me that Schellenberg establishes his case for beliefless faith. First, one may wonder whether his notion of faith as a state of mind that may be taken up or terminated at will is either paradigmatic or meritorious. Perhaps we move in different circles, but I cannot say that I've encountered any mature practitioners who seemed to regard faith in this way. Many may be found who would affirm that they *believe*, say, the "great things of the gospel," but do not *know* of their truth with certainty. Many more may be found whose faith is without evidential support. But

is it common to find someone professing propositional faith in such things while denying that they "take them to be true"? More typical, I think, is the person who "takes it on faith *that it is true*," which may just be to believe it in the absence of sufficient evidence. Even the small child, whose faith is, not surprisingly, *childlike*, when asked, "Do you believe what Mommy says is *true*?" will most likely respond in the affirmative. One would be stunned to hear, "No, but I am voluntarily representing it to myself as though it is."

And we may ask whether the apparent involuntariness of belief does indeed put it at odds with faith as typically manifested. I do not see that it does. There are (many) other accounts of faith and belief that accord with the more traditional notion of faith as involving propositional belief. One's propositional faith regarding a claim might be *indirect*, having as its direct object the integrity and sensibility of someone who earnestly believes. We can imagine active and expectant participation in a *séance*, say, solely on the grounds that (a) the sought phenomenon is not thought to be impossible, and (b) one's believing host is highly regarded and deemed reliable. Here, one's involuntary "world-thought" that one's host is credible would seem to be at the core of whatever "faith" is manifested. Thus, "I believe that *whatever he believes is true*." Similarly, I might come to faith on the grounds that the faithful around me demonstrate lives of integrity and attribute this to their religious belief. Though I do not see whatever evidence they seem to see, I believe on the basis of their testimony and then, perhaps, grow into a mature faith or belief of my own. (My current belief in the recent discoveries of molecular biologists may be analogous here.)

Or the basic outlines of some claim may just "ring true" to me in such a way that the possibility of its being true seems worthy of pursuit. My first inklings based upon the "starry heavens above me"—or, perhaps, the moral *corruption* that I perceive *within* me—are not thus groundless even though I may be incapable of stating a compelling case for my developing faith. Many believers whom I have known have been in just this position.

And perhaps such believers are in this position for good reason. Alvin Plantinga has reminded us of Calvin's account of a *sensus divinitatus* which, though marred by sin, may be engaged upon an encounter with "what has been made." Perhaps the voluntariness, accessibility, vulnerability, terminability and merit of belief are explained on a model quite unlike that apparently presupposed by Schellenberg. Plantinga's Aquinas/Calvin Model of warranted Christian belief consciously rejects the seemingly deontological assumptions that animate Schellenberg's discussion of propositional religious belief and its justification. Perhaps the faithful believe in the absence of public evidence precisely because their belief is basic, and properly so. If Plantinga is correct, then it is possible that such beliefs are well grounded though non-inferential. Such belief may well be involuntary in that it follows ineluctably in the wake of what seems true to such believers, but the Christian tradition seems to suggest that belief and unbelief are a function of one's underlying moral and spiritual disposition. They are thus voluntary insofar as we are responsible for such dispositions. According to that particular tradition, unbelief is the result of "suppressing" the truth (and I take it that this need not always be conscious or episodic). Those who are genuine in their search will find what they seek, and this

is precisely because He is not far from each of us. Schellenberg claims that faith might be had as a result of some deliberate action that one may take. Perhaps the action is the equivalent of opening one's eyes.

Schellenberg also appeals to a number of secular examples of what he sees as faith without belief. A runner doubtful that he will win the race understands that the doubt itself can lead to defeat. Never quite abandoning the doubt, he focuses on the proposition that he *will* do well. A woman learns that there is a strong possibility that her friend was in one of the Twin Towers on 9/11, but it is not certain either way. Unable to learn her friend's actual fate, she focuses on the idea of her friend's having escaped harm, and spends that September day affirming "So be it, so be it" (pp. 130–131). I find such examples utterly unconvincing. "Visualizing" a desired outcome as a device for success or serenity does not seem to me to correspond to what is *typically* found in religious faith, even if, for want of a better word, we may describe the runner and the concerned friend as manifesting "faith."

There is certainly much room for discussion of Schellenberg's account of beliefless faith, but, among those who see any relevance in such a discussion, it is likely to meet a great deal of resistance.

More generally, one might challenge the wisdom of Schellenberg's shift of emphasis away from the assessment of religious truth claims to that of *responses* to those claims. To be sure, he suggests, "considering the challenge that *nonreligious responses to religious claims are rationally preferable to religious ones* should be deemed paramount" (p. 193). Those "nonreligious responses" include either disbelief or doubt, as mentioned earlier. But unless one is already sold on his account of beliefless faith, which introduces a fourth possible response to the recognized set of belief, disbelief, and agnosticism, then one might suppose that the ongoing task of assessing religious propositions is adequate for this goal. (With the introduction of Schellenberg's skeptical version of faith, we might look to further—perhaps non-epistemic—grounds that would justify faith over doubt in the case of an epistemic tie.)

Further, Schellenberg asks, "Why focus on just propositional belief or propositional faith when your main interest is in the way of life it may inform?" (p. 189). But one wonders whether it *is*, in fact, true that the "way of life" is the concern, much less the "main interest," of the philosopher of religion *qua* philosopher of religion. The *person* who happens to be a metaphysician may be keenly interested in the practical implications that his conclusions regarding free will have for, say, moral responsibility, child rearing or the penal system. And the question of whether his disagreeing colleague is fulfilling his epistemic duties may be a consideration should that colleague apply to become a fellow member of the Drones Club. But as a *metaphysician*, he is concerned primarily, if not exclusively, with the question, "Which *view* gets this stuff right?" To imagine the metaphysician or the epistemologist or the philosopher of science to perceive her task as that of evaluating *responses* (belief, disbelief, faith, doubt) to functionalism, reliabilism or sociobiology is to set oneself up for parody. The concern in these cases is and ought to be with the *views themselves*, and the objects of assessment are the ideas and their supporting arguments. Why should anyone think that the task should be any different for the philosopher of religion?

Schellenberg observes that there *is*, in fact, a body of literature focusing on the rationality or irrationality of *persons* in holding religious beliefs, and he footnotes Plantinga's *Warranted Christian Belief* as an example (p. 178). But even the question of whether the individual believer is warranted in his belief is not considered for its own sake. It is set within a more general context: are there any good *de jure* objections to Christian belief? Have we reason to suppose that Christian belief is merely the product of some belief-producing mechanism that is not truth-aimed? In all of this, I suggest, the real item of interest is the epistemic status of the truth claim itself. This no more indicates a concern for the justification of *responses* or *respondents* than does Reid's reply to Hume regarding beliefs about one's own cranial composition. (Indeed, Plantinga argues that nearly *any* token belief may be *justified*—and the individual justified and/or internally rational—depending upon what *seems true* to the individual who has been epistemically dutiful. If this is correct, then a concern for the justification of responders and responses would seem even less grave.)

I am inclined to think that the "received tradition," which itself includes wide disagreement, has been conducting business roughly as it ought.

In Search of the Soul, ed. Joel B. Green and Stuart L. Palmer. InterVarsity Press, 2005. 215 pages. \$20.00 (paper).

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When I was a student I met a man who was a sweet, gentle, Pentecostal Christian. He later sustained a closed head injury in a snowmobile accident through no fault of his own. When he emerged from his coma, his personality was thoroughly changed: no longer sweet and gentle, no longer a Christian. He had become, through a bump on the head, a bitter, angry atheist. For this firmly committed mind-body dualist of the most crass Cartesian variety (here I mean the caricature of Cartesian dualism that bears little resemblance to the dualism of Descartes), a bump on the head should not affect beliefs, emotions and attitudes. The mind, after all, exists in the non-physical world and is only connected to the body temporarily and uni-directionally—the mind rules the body but is unaffected by the physical stuff of the brain. And I began to wonder, could this man's eternal salvation hang upon a bump on the head (or any other physical processes over which he has no control)?

At that time, and for a long time thereafter, I thought that THE Christian view of the person, on which hung all of the Law and the Prophets, was mind-body dualism. And to reject mind-body dualism was at best heresy and at worse a repudiation of the Christian faith. I have since come to believe that nothing of importance, other than understanding our nature as persons, hangs on mind-body dualism: not orthodoxy, not salvation, not moral responsibility, not human dignity, not free will, and not post-mortem existence (after all, we confess to the resurrection of the *body* not the immortality of the soul); and not, for crying out loud, forgiveness and hospitality (this will become apparent later).