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## Paul K. Moser, THE ELUSIVE GOD: REORIENTING RELIGIOUS EPISTEMOLOGY

Chad Meister

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doctrines and their supporting considerations. This is a work in philosophy of religion that manages to include the *philosophy* side of that equation. Readers new to philosophy may find portions of the book—chapters 4 and 5, in particular—to be challenging, but the fruit of such labor is not merely a grasp of what Buddhist doctrines might or do mean, but also a sense of what it is to offer careful and respectful assessment of those doctrines, for this book is a model of such. One wishes that the publisher would see fit to regard this text as but the first in a collection of similar books on world religions.

*The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology*, by Paul K. Moser. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Pp. xi + 292. \$90.00 (hardback).

CHAD MEISTER, Bethel College

The objective of *The Elusive God* is bold—no less than a “Copernican Revolution” in cognitive matters with respect to divine reality. The primary thesis is that one should expect that evidence of divine reality is available to human beings only in a manner fitting to the purposes of an authoritative and perfectly loving God. Given that such evidence is only *purposively* available, we should not be surprised, argues Professor Moser, that it is (oftentimes, at least) subtle, incognito, or elusive, for it entails volitional surrender to divine authority and “attunement” to the will of God. It is only when we turn from our selfish ways, through divine aid, that we advance evidentially and therefore cognitively—learning to entrust ourselves to the One who can save us from selfishness and imminent death. This reorientation of religious knowledge also shifts the explanatory burden to skeptics, Moser contends, and removes the threat of skepticism to the central argument of this book for the reality of the elusive God.

The book centers around three questions about evidence for God’s existence: 1) If God’s existence is elusive, why should we believe that God exists after all? 2) If God does exist, and if God desires to commune with us and to guide us into a mature, moral life, why is God elusive? 3) What are the implications of divine hiddenness with respect to knowledge of God? The opening chapter begins by arguing that religious skeptics—those who maintain that the evidence for God is inadequate for belief in God—have been focusing on “spectator evidence” and have overlooked “perfectly authoritative evidence” of divine reality. The former points to a particular truth but does not demand that the recipients of that truth yield their wills to its source. The latter is evidence that requires an authoritative call on one’s life, most significantly on one’s will to non-coercively yield to God’s moral character and perfect love. Spectator evidence is the kind proffered by natural theology, and Moser dismisses it as the kind of evidence unfitting the Jewish/Christian God. For one, he maintains, it is nonbiblical.

The main biblical passage often quoted by natural theologians, Romans 1:19–20, is not meant to indicate that “nature *alone* reveals divine reality,” but rather that “‘God has manifested’ divine reality to people.” Spectator evidence, even if cognitively effective, would merely lead one to “casually knowing that God exists,” whereas the more significant purpose of God is “bringing humans into lasting reconciliation with God, in loving and obedient fellowship with God” (48). Furthermore, spectator evidence “omits any authoritative call from God for humans to enter into fellowship with God via human repentance and obedience”; it “allows us to treat God as just another undisturbing object of our casual reflection and speculation”; it “allows us to easily ignore a God of redemptive judgment who seeks reconciliation of humans”; and it “replaces such a God with a deadly idol” (53–54).

While Moser’s distinction between spectator and perfectly authoritative evidence is a perspicacious delineation—one which has been overlooked by religious epistemologists—natural theologians have something with which to take issue here. Suppose, for example, as some proponents of a recent fine-tuning argument maintain, that the combination of physical constants observed in our universe is more plausible on theism than on naturalism. This could provide (spectator) evidence for theism over naturalism. Is it not possible that for some particular skeptical astrophysicist, say, this cosmological evidence turns out to be instrumental in moving her will toward reception of belief in God? Testimonies of this kind of event are not in short supply. In such cases, it seems that even spectator evidence could at least be one of the evidentiary means by which an individual is eventually brought into loving and obedient fellowship with God.

In reply to the question of what kind of evidence a perfectly loving God would provide for human beings regarding God’s existence, Moser says that “God as perfectly loving toward all people would seek to communicate with people if this was in their best interest, and this God would offer in that case some kind of evidence of God’s reality” (37). Moser’s own answer to the question of what evidence would look like that is suitable to a perfectly loving and moral God is “any kind of evidence indicating that God, as an authoritatively and morally perfect being worthy of worship, is real” (38). But why could not some of this evidence be of the spectator sort? While fine-tuning evidence may not indicate a God who is morally perfect and worthy of worship, why must evidence for God be all of a piece? Natural theologians commonly argue that there are various kinds of evidence which, cumulatively, provide a plausible case for the existence of God—even God as omnibenevolent and worthy of worship. I see no reason why a God who wants to be revealed could not or would not include in God’s evidentiary repertoire a wide spectrum of evidences—especially given the variegated temperaments, experiences, and attitudes of human beings—through which an individual is ultimately brought into volitional fellowship with God.

Despite his disdain for spectator evidence, Moser makes clear that his view is not fideistic. He is not claiming that theistic commitment need not be supported by evidence, for “belief that God exists would be *evidentially* arbitrary and thus *cognitively* irrational in the absence of supporting evidence, even if it’s *true* that God exists” (33, emphasis in original). The reality of God should be tested by every capable person, “by willingly and attentively considering, with due sincerity, humility, and moral seriousness, the reality of authoritative evidence from God in conscience” (134). This evidence is offered on God’s own terms and in accord with God’s own purposes, and if one is willing to yield to God and God’s perfectly loving ways, the evidence for God is “conclusive” as evinced in one’s conscience as a “transformative gift.” Moser describes the transformative gift in terms that are oftentimes called a “born again experience” in Christianity, whereby a person is authoritatively convicted, forgiven, and led into non-coerced fellowship in perfect love and proper worship of God, and transformed from sinful, selfish tendencies and despair to unselfish love and hope (134–135).

From the experiential basis of this divine gift, Moser develops a new argument for God’s existence:

1. Necessarily, if a human person is offered, and unselfishly receives, the transformative gift, then this is the result of the authoritative leading and sustaining power of a divine X of thoroughgoing forgiveness, fellowship in perfect love, worthiness of worship, and triumphant hope (namely, God).
2. I have been offered, and have willingly unselfishly received, the transformative gift.
3. Therefore, God exists. (135)

Skeptics may challenge the argument, claiming that it is circular and question-begging. Moser responds to this challenge, and to the skeptical challenge of his overall volitional theistic epistemology, by examining ordinary visual beliefs and epistemic reasons for affirming that their source is reliable. “Skeptics,” he maintains, “can’t cogently mandate an epistemic concept or strategy for us that undermines the aforementioned kind of epistemic reason (for visual beliefs) grounded in semantic intentions regarding ‘epistemic reason’” (276). These semantic intentions, from a cognitive perspective, should “be in agreement with the undefeated truth-indicators in our experience” (275). As such, we have an analogous position with respect to an epistemic reason for believing that God has authoritatively interrupted conscience experience, and the burden of the argument shifts to the skeptic.

Notwithstanding the available and even conclusive evidence for God, Moser grants that God’s existence is in some sense hidden, and he explores issues of divine elusiveness and the ambiguity of the universe. He argues that there may well be good reasons for God’s being incognito, including cognitive commitments that impede apprehending evidence of

God—what he calls “cognitive idols,” such as demanding that available evidence of reality be reproducible or sensory. He uses the analogy of a radio scanner to argue that one needs to be *attuned* to God and to God’s moral character in order to access knowledge of divine reality. Just as a radio scanner searches for frequencies which are active in order for the listener to hone in on the desired station, so too in order to find God’s “hiding place” one needs to be willing to look seriously for God on God’s terms, and this entails volitional transformation such that one’s will and beliefs become attuned to the purposes, character, and will of God.

The heart of Moser’s cognitive revolution with respect to knowledge of God is, “in short, God would seek to know us in a way that reveals to us the reality of our dire moral situation if we’re left to ourselves, apart from fellowship with God” (118). He thus shifts the question from “Do we know that a perfectly loving God exists?” to:

*Are we humans known by God in virtue of our freely and agreeably being willing (i) to be known by God and thereby (ii) to be transformed toward God’s moral character of perfect love as we are willingly led by God in volitional fellowship with God, thereby obediently yielding our wills to God’s authoritative will? (119)*

Moser continues his argument from volitional transformation for God’s existence by examining the transformation process, and he maintains that it entails a divine invitation to fellowship with God in perfect love and selflessness as demonstrated by God’s redemptive gift through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It is here that his religious epistemology becomes Christian epistemology and thus becomes a philosophical position which will certainly be offensive to many of other faiths or nonfaith and will perhaps seem provincial and insufficiently global (the scandal of the cross). But this should be expected, he argues, given an authoritative and perfectly loving God who seeks to awaken us from our moral slumbers and to rescue us from our destructive predicaments by killing (and helping us kill) destructive attitudes in us. So it should at least be given a fair hearing.

Perhaps one facet of his position which might help non-Christians and non-religious persons give it such a hearing is his religious inclusivism (in contrast to exclusivism) whereby God loves all persons and thus is at work in all geographical locations to bring all into perfect fellowship with God. It is universal character transformation of life from death that God is after with human beings, and this occurs both bodily (in the future resurrection) and spiritually (beginning now). But a fundamental question remains: Are we ready to receive this kind of spiritual resurrection—one that requires the moral and cognitive transformations noted above? This is essential to Moser’s cognitive challenge, and it is indeed revolutionary; it is the “hinge on which we turn to life or turn to death” (17).

Some disciplines will be affected more than others by this cognitive reorientation, but “truth-seeking” disciplines, especially philosophy, will

be challenged most, for they will need to become “kerygma-oriented,” which is to be reoriented under the divinely appointed lordship of Christ. As such, there is no place for “lone-ranger philosophers who choose their questions apart from the philosophical needs of the community of God’s forgiven and redeemed people,” nor for “an exclusive or competitive ‘smarter-than-thou’ spirit,” for they will be “united in a common Good News ministry of unselfish redemptive love” (232). This is truly philosophy revamped!

Inherent within the general argument of the book is the point that human beings have a grave predicament: destructive selfishness and impending death. The only solution is reception of divine aid—the power of perfect love—and Moser’s concluding chapter argues that this aid and power is not flaunted to those who will use it for harmful or disparaging purposes. It is received only as one is freely willing to allow cognitive and spiritual transformation of oneself toward divine goodness and love. In so doing, there is the unmatched benefit of a “grounded hope” in defeating selfishness and entering into eternal fellowship with the One who offers perfect love, both now and beyond the grave.

This is an impressive, indeed momentous work—one already receiving wide attention in journals, classroom discussions, and the blogosphere. It is a much-needed clarion call to a renovation of our understanding of evidence for God, and I am confident that it will in many respects reorient epistemological discussions regarding the possibility of knowledge of divine reality.

*Kierkegaard: An Introduction*, by C. Stephen Evans. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. 195. \$27.99;

*Kierkegaard*, by M. Jamie Ferreira. Blackwell Great Minds. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. Pp. 196. \$29.95.

PEDER JOTHEN, St. Olaf College

What makes a good introduction? Two works by noted Kierkegaard scholars take very different approaches towards this endeavor. Evans’s *Kierkegaard: An Introduction* is structured thematically. Themes such as selfhood and the stages of existence delimit the contours of Kierkegaard’s overall project. Evans presents Kierkegaard as a philosopher of selfhood, one who seeks to move a reader from an inauthentic to an authentic existence grounded in a reasonable faith as the basis for selfhood. Ferreira introduces Kierkegaard by examining the texts of the authorship chronologically, with her introduction intended to aid a reader reading Kierkegaard. She utilizes both the pseudonymous texts and the upbuilding or religious discourses side by side to lead a reader through the unfolding of Kierkegaard’s