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## Schellenberg, THE WILL TO IMAGINE: A JUSTIFICATION OF SCEPTICAL RELIGION

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on every occasion, so not every case of failing to help observed in these experiments is contrary to virtue.

Adams claims that there is a great deal of moral luck in the development of any person's character so that virtue is to a very large measure a gift, rather than an individual achievement; nonetheless, virtue is excellent and admirable.

This is an *outstanding* book, one of the very best books ever written on this most important topic. It is required reading for anyone interested in the virtues or ethical theory. Adams's many examples are very apt and helpful; some of his observations about them are gems—marvels of insight and good sense. Adams's book is also very clear and lucid, unusually clear and accessible for such an important contribution to philosophy. This makes it very suitable for use in upper division undergraduate courses. This book deserves a wide readership by philosophers and students of philosophy.

*The Will to Imagine: A Justification of Sceptical Religion*, by J. L. Schellenberg. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 2009.

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*The Will to Imagine* (henceforth *Will*) is the latest installment in J. L. Schellenberg's trilogy on philosophy of religion. In the two previous books, *Prolegomena to a Philosophy of Religion* (2005) and *The Wisdom to Doubt: A Justification of Religious Scepticism* (2007), Schellenberg strongly criticised most classical and contemporary arguments for belief in God. In philosophy of religion circles, Schellenberg is probably best known for his earlier work *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (1993), in which he presents his famous argument against theism from the hiddenness of God. The argument from hiddenness has since created a great deal of debate and Schellenberg himself has defended it in several different forums. The reader of these books and his other works might easily get the impression that Schellenberg seeks to abandon all possible forms of religion and advocate some form of naturalism. But this, as *Will* shows, is far from being the case.

The book is basically what the title says it is: an attempt to defend a certain kind of religious attitude—an attitude that is neither belief in some sort of God nor belief in the non-existence of God or gods. Schellenberg has set out to formulate a third position between these two alternatives. This middle position, however, is not strictly speaking an agnostic one as one might first think but a religious one—a sceptical religious attitude. Instead of religious or non-religious *belief*, Schellenberg suggests that *faith* would be a more proper attitude. The proper object of faith is what he calls *ultimism*. Ultimism is what

all . . . religious propositions can be seen as gesturing toward: that what is deepest in reality (metaphysically ultimate) is also unsurpassably great (axiologically ultimate) and the source of ultimate good (salvific). (xii)

Ultimism, according to Schellenberg, is the common core of most religions and it can be extracted from the particularities and historical claims of individual religious traditions. Faith in ultimism can survive the philosophical challenges that belief in God cannot, and it can also provide grounds for a truly religious way of life. Such are the claims that Schellenberg seeks to defend in his book.

The book consists of five parts. In the first part, "Purifying Faith," he clarifies the notion of ultimism, examines objections to it and lays the groundwork for understanding the difference between believing and having faith. Here he devotes a considerable number of pages to establishing that faith in ultimism can support a robust religious form of life and religious commitment. In part 2, "Testing Faith," Schellenberg introduces his criteria for justified faith commitments and argues that his sceptical religion and faith in ultimism are indeed justified as far as reason can judge.

Parts 3 and 4 ("Renewing Faith") do most of the philosophical heavy lifting. There Schellenberg cleverly uses most traditional arguments—both epistemic and non-epistemic—to argue for ultimism instead of theism. He is convinced that when understood properly the arguments for belief in the existence of God actually turn out to be arguments for faith in ultimism. Finally, in the last part, "Keeping Faith," Schellenberg pulls it all together and examines different modes of religious attitudes. His argument there is that faith in ultimism can provide a kind of religious vision that unifies personal, moral, aesthetic and intellectual aspects of life.

In *Will*, Schellenberg in building on the conclusions he made in his two previous books. There he argued that religious scepticism is the only reasonable alternative for people in our situation. His scepticism consists of two components: categorical scepticism and capacity scepticism. First of all, our limitations as human beings preclude us from having knowledge about religious issues. Our epistemic situation is such that there are no reasons available to us to warrant religious *belief*. Schellenberg calls this categorical scepticism and says that it consists of having an attitude of doubt or disbelief towards the proposition that "there is truth in religion." Capacity scepticism, on the other hand, is a view according to which we are at a point in our development as humanity such that we do not have the cognitive capacities and other relevant properties required to obtain basic truths about either the existence of ultimate reality or the details concerning its nature. Schellenberg sees human knowledge, both scientific and religious, as works in progress: there might be "hundreds of millions of years that may remain for reason and also religion to be developed further" (xii). In the light of the future development of religion, Schellenberg claims that the detailed claims about God and gods of current religious traditions are premature and scepticism is the proper attitude with respect to such propositions. Schellenberg's view is that with respect to truth in

religion, reason leads to the conclusion that we are unable to know whether there are such truths. As a consequence, we should refrain from believing anything about religious matters.

Thus, Schellenberg's religious scepticism does *not* correspond to atheism, if we define atheism as a view according to which we should believe that God does not exist. Nor does it amount to metaphysical naturalism. Schellenberg thinks that

the popular bipolarizing stance that says one must accept either a conservative believing form of religion or an irreligious naturalism has embraced a misleading and false antithesis. . . . If I am right, naturalistic belief is every bit as unjustified as believing religion. (252)

Belief in naturalism is not where reason leads us, but rather it leads us to scepticism. Such scepticism, Schellenberg claims, is not the end of rational religion, but its beginning. A set of core claims can be extracted from religions—a purified religious vision—that we can have faith in, but not belief. This is what he means by ultimism. Let us now look at what exactly Schellenberg means by “faith in ultimism” and how it differs from both religious belief and religious disbelief.

Schellenberg sees a common core in all religion. According to this core set of propositions—what Schellenberg calls ultimism—there “is (metaphysically and axiologically) ultimate reality in relation to which an ultimate good can be attained” (15). He distinguishes this simple ultimism from qualified versions of this view of particular religions that add different sorts of details to the simply ultimist picture. Theism, for example, conceives the ultimate reality as personal, causally efficacious and maximally powerful. The reason why simple ultimism is better than its qualified competitors is that qualified ultimism leads to sectarianism and exclusivism. There are big differences not only among religions, but inside religions as well. In addition, adding more properties to ultimate reality makes it more liable to contradictions and instability. By removing the details of particular qualified ultimistic views, Schellenberg claims that we get a purified form of a core set of religious propositions that is open to different kinds of interpretations. But religion is not just having faith or belief in certain propositions, but rather

religion should . . . be understood as involving a commitment fundamental among one's commitment to cultivate dispositions appropriate for the states of affairs represented by ultimism, which either in belief or in faith one takes to obtain: religious persons . . . make central to their lives the project of conforming how they live to the standards suggested by there being an ultimate reality in relation to which an ultimate good can be attained. (18)

The proper attitude towards simple ultimism is *faith*, not belief. Much of *Will's* argument rests on this—quite unorthodox—distinction of faith and belief, so let us examine it next. In short, Schellenberg understands belief as a passive attitude and faith as an active, imaginative attitude. To have a belief that *p* is for a subject *S* to think that the state of affairs

reported by  $p$  obtains. Such an attitude is passive:  $S$  automatically experiences the world in such a way that  $p$  obtains: Schellenberg would say that the evidence causes  $S$  to see the world in a certain way. *Faith*, however, is a more active attitude for  $S$  than belief. For  $S$  to have faith that  $p$  is for  $S$  to wilfully assent that  $p$  in a situation where  $S$  believes that the state of affairs that  $p$  represents is good and desirable, but where one lacks belief in  $p$ . To assent to a proposition, according to Schellenberg, is to adhere to a certain policy: going along with the propositions and imagining that the world is like that. This assent is an act of will in the face of insufficient evidence; it is not passively caused by evidence like belief. Thus in belief you accept  $p$  passively, in faith you wilfully and imaginatively represent to yourself that  $p$  obtains and behave accordingly. To have ultimistic religious faith means for  $S$  that  $S$

finds herself without evidence sufficient to cause belief in these propositions [ultimism] (recognizing that they may be false or perhaps even in some hidden way incoherent), but positively evaluating the states of affairs they report, she nonetheless tenaciously pictures or imagines the world to herself as a world in which they are true and committedly gives her assent to what is thus held before the mind. (35)

Ultimistic religious faith can then be taken as a ground for religion and religious practices of different kinds. If the faithful ultimist will then commit to shaping her life to align with the standards that flow from ultimism, then the faithful ultimist is indeed religious in Schellenberg's sense. Faith in ultimism is, thus, a genuine religious attitude, but regardless of her commitment, the faithful ultimist, if asked, would not say that ultimism is true.

If this is what having ultimistic religion means, why should we practice it? If there is no evidence for ultimism, why have faith in it? Schellenberg's answer is that there are positive arguments that reveal how valuable and good the states of affairs that ultimism reports actually are. If we have good reasons to think that the existence of a metaphysically ultimate reality that is also unsurpassably good is indeed an extremely good thing (that is, valuable human goals are fulfilled if the world turns out to be like that), then ultimistic faith should follow. This is the function of parts three and four of *Will*. The interesting thing here is that Schellenberg basically refits classical evidential and non-evidential arguments for belief in God to arguments for having ultimistic faith. He discusses the ontological, cosmological and teleological arguments as well as the non-evidential arguments of Kant, Pascal and James. Next, I will describe just a few points about these arguments so as to give the gist of Schellenberg's reasoning.

In the hands of Schellenberg, Anselm's ontological reasoning, for instance, leads to the idea that since our alignment with the maximally valuable ultimate reality is intrinsically so incredibly valuable, we should assent to the possibility of such a reality. With respect to the cosmological argument, Schellenberg claims that its underlying principle is the

complete rationality and the possibility of a complete understanding of the world. If ultimism is the case, then the world is indeed rational and understandable and this state of affairs would be extremely valuable to us humans. The existence of a complete and accessible truth would promote a relentless human pursuit of truth. If “no human form of life is rationally sufficient unless it allows one to pursue the conjunction of our various understanding related aims in the best possible way” (123) then ultimistic faith is, again, a justified response to such propositions. Similar reasoning is applied to the teleological argument as well: having faith in ultimism preserves our concern with the beauty and order of the natural world and would motivate us to protect the natural world.

Non-evidential arguments for belief in God are also absorbed into Schellenberg’s argument. Schellenberg’s own faith in ultimism is very close to that of William James: the title of Schellenberg’s *Will* is an homage to James’s *The Will to Believe*. *Will* describes James’s idea of the *faith-ladder* that begins from the acknowledgement of the possibility of an extremely valuable states of affairs (such as ultimism in some form or another) and concludes that since such states ought to be true, one should hold that such states of affairs “shall be true, at any rate true for *me*.” For James, it is our good will that is the source of our religious attitudes, not our intellect. This, of course, is something with which Schellenberg agrees wholeheartedly. In addition, Schellenberg highlights the fact that at no point in his defence of wilful religious attitude does James invoke the truth of religious propositions. Finally, Schellenberg also praises James for the fact that, instead of theism, his religious attitude was directed towards a more general “religious hypothesis” according to which there is an ultimate reality in communion with which we will achieve our ultimate goal. Although James is very difficult to interpret at some points, Schellenberg sees him as his closest ally in the search for a new, sceptical but passionate religious alternative.

Since simple ultimism and the “religious hypothesis” of James ought to be true because they satisfy human desire for certain goods, we should passionately and imaginatively assent to them. If simple ultimism is true, then it will realise a wide array of human goods: the alignment with the ultimate and the possibility of understanding and the respect for beauty, for instance. As these goods realise valuable human goals, they are so desirable and valuable to us that their possible existence warrants us to have faith that they really exist and that we should live as if ultimism were true (although knowing that we can never believe it to be true). It is simply the extremely great value of the states of affairs represented by ultimism that should drive us wilfully to assent to ultimism.

Next I will raise some questions and issues that seem to me to be problematic in the argument of *Will*. The first question has to do with the justification of religious scepticism. Of course, *Will* simply begins by assuming that Schellenberg’s case for scepticism is sound. But *Will* nevertheless rests on the inevitability of religious scepticism. If it turns out to be

the case that there is indeed good evidence for certain religious beliefs, say, theism, then belief that God exists would be a more appropriate attitude, not faith. Faith comes into play only when there is no evidence available, or rather when there is good reason to think that no evidence *will ever be* available for propositions about ultimate reality because of our cognitive and developmental limitations. Several of Schellenberg's arguments for religious scepticism (the divine hiddenness argument, for instance) have been critically discussed in the philosophy of religion literature and their conclusions do not seem self-evidently clear. But this is not really the topic of *Will*, so it need not be discussed here.

Second, we might grant Schellenberg that it would be desirable that ultimism obtained in some form or another. But then a question arises: even if it would be extremely desirable that ultimism obtained, would we not deceive ourselves somehow if we wilfully assented to ultimism and lived *as if* it were true? The intuition that many people, especially philosophers, have is that non-evidential arguments are never enough to warrant such a commitment. It seems quite difficult to resist the idea that the religion of the faithful ultimist is simply a fancy form of wishful thinking: the faithful ultimist looks at the world and by the use of her reason concludes that there is no good evidence for the existence of an ultimate reality, but nevertheless she considers the existence of such a reality and our alignment with it so valuable that she nevertheless decides to imagine that this is how things really are and lives accordingly. It is difficult to see how the arguments of *Will* could dislodge this intuition; religious scepticism, thus, does seem to lead to the rejection of all religious (and anti-religious) attitudes. Some believing atheists openly confess that the existence of a god, gods, God or some other ultimate might be preferable to naturalism, that is, the world would be better (more valuable or good) if such things existed. Without such entities or realities, extremely valuable human goals and desires might very well be left unfulfilled (justice, love, peace, progress, for instance), but since they do not see how the existence of such realities could be possible, they reject both faith and belief in anything "ultimate" behind the natural world. Atheists such as the British philosopher John Gray see religious scepticism as true, but not intrinsically valuable. In order to convince such atheists, Schellenberg would need to show that their response to ultimistic propositions is flawed. But it is difficult to see how this would happen without Schellenberg resorting to reasons for the truth of such propositions (which he cannot do because of his scepticism), not just to considerations about the desirability or value of the possible truth of ultimism.

Finally, reasons for faith have to be quite strong to provide motivation for the continuous exercise of the will and imagination. In belief, as Schellenberg understands it, the evidence causes the subject to see the world in a certain way, so there is no need for exercising the will to assent to propositions that are believed. In faith, however, the subject has to continuously wilfully assent and imagine that ultimism is true even when the



subject knows that there is really no evidence for ultimism. If there is no evidence for the truth of ultimism, questions can be raised about whether such wilful assenting is psychologically too demanding to uphold. Our reasons for belief in the desirability of ultimism need to be extremely good to make the continuous effort of exercising our imagination worthwhile. Schellenberg answers this objection to some extent (chapter 3) by claiming that imagination combined with different kinds of religious practices is enough to support commitment in ultimism without belief. But if this is the case, what would motivate the faithful ultimist to engage in (sceptical) religious practices in the first place, if not some kind of belief? It is difficult to see where the initial motivation comes from if not from some kind of intuition or evidence "that there might be (some) truth to religion."

Despite these open questions and issues, it must be acknowledged that Schellenberg has indeed been able to create a truly alternative position to those currently motivating most philosophy of religion. By doing so, he is deeply grounded in a tradition of Western philosophy that emphasises the pragmatic and non-evidential aspect of religion and also represents a contemporary reinvigoration of this tradition.

*Metaphysics and God: Essays in Honor of Eleonore Stump*, edited by Kevin Timpe. New York: Routledge, 2009. 262 pages. \$126 (hardback).

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The fourteen essays in this collection illustrate the range of interests of Eleonore Stump, in whose honor they have been written. While it would be impossible in a review to give a proper assessment of every paper, I shall pick out some contrasting examples with a view to saying something about the development of the discipline under Stump's influence, illustrated by the collection as a whole.

Some of the essays here display a degree of precision which even the most demanding analytic philosopher could not fault. Brian Leftow's "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity and Divine Freedom" and Thomas Flint's "Fittingness and Divine Action in *Cur Deus Homo*" are careful, dense, and acute discussions of some very knotty problems.

In order to get to grips with his chosen problem, as a problem within the Thomist system (though certainly not only within that system), Leftow has to get to grips with Aquinas's logical presuppositions, which include the idea that events become necessary when they are in the past. Leftow is to be commended for making clear (if not simple) the relationship between what Aquinas says, and the way we might express it.

This is a mere prologue, however, to the actual problem of divine simplicity and freedom, which turns on whether and in what precise way, God might differ in different possible worlds, on Thomist principles. This