

University Press, 2002), and responds, ‘Of course this condition cannot be met’ (171). I certainly agree that it cannot – but, *pace* Rogers, what this shows is that the Anselm/Rogers view does not, as they both claim, make it possible for libertarian free will to co-exist with the presence of all future events in God’s eternity.

Whatever one’s view on the points in contention, Rogers deserves our thanks for this well-researched and finely crafted study. And in view of the current popularity of the four-dimensionalist view of time, it is very much to the point for Anselm’s views on these topics to become an active part of the current discussion of the relationship between God and time.

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Paul K. Moser *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology*.
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 (Hbk). ISBN 978 0 521 88903 2.

In this important and challenging book, Paul Moser proposes a ‘seismic shift in issues concerning human knowledge of God’s reality’ from the question ‘Do I know that God exists?’ to the question ‘Am I *willing to be known* by God in virtue of being authoritatively challenged by God for the sake of my being transformed toward God’s moral character via my being led by God in volitional fellowship?’ (10). This reorientation, Moser thinks, has major implications. First, it reveals that sceptics have overlooked ‘purposively available’ evidence – evidence fit for the saving purposes of ‘a perfectly authoritative and loving God’. Second, it explains the elusiveness of God, and so rebuts the atheistic ‘argument from hiddenness’. Third, it makes available a ‘distinctive argument from volitional transformation’ for the existence of God that carries greater religious force than the speculative arguments of natural theology. Fourth, it enables a fair hearing for a ‘robust’ Christian theism that deals with the human predicament ‘of destructive selfishness and impending death’. Fifth, it entails a ‘revolution’ in which philosophy becomes ‘kerygma-oriented’: ‘cognitive idolatry’ is left behind, and philosophers move from ‘discussion mode’ into ‘obedience mode’, respecting the divine ‘love commands’. Finally, this epistemological shift has ‘unsurpassed benefits’ in overcoming both our selfishness and death itself: we thus have a *grounded* hope against the ultimate triumph of futility.

What is this evidence that Moser thinks we have for God’s existence? It is evidence provided on God’s terms, not ours; it may therefore fail to meet our

expectations. We expect that, if there is to be such evidence, it will indicate the existence of the ‘metaphysical’ God – the first cause, the intelligent designer – and we are comfortable enough sagely weighing whether we actually have such evidence. True, we have heard tell of a God who calls us to align our wills with the divine will for the sake of achieving the supreme good. But we think that a God with such purposes would be more plainly manifest than is actually the case. It seems probable, then, that no such existentially vital God exists. But this line of thought, Moser argues, ignores the kind of evidence a perfectly authoritative and loving God would provide in accordance with God’s own purposes – purposes which would be undermined if our basis for belief were either the kind of evidence appealed to in natural theology or the evidence provided by some putatively unmistakable divine manifestation. Moser’s account of what this ‘purposely available’ evidence is forms the focus of his argument from volitional transformation, which is worth quoting in full. The argument uses the notion of ‘the transformative gift’, defined thus:

The transformative gift = *df.* via conscience, a person’s (a) being authoritatively convicted and forgiven by X of all that person’s wrongdoing and (b) thereby being authoritatively called and led by X both into noncoerced volitional fellowship with X in perfect love and into rightful worship toward X as worthy of worship and, on that basis, transformed by X from (i) that person’s previous tendencies to selfishness and despair to (ii) a new volitional center with a default position of unselfish love and forgiveness toward all people and of hope in the ultimate triumph of good over evil by X. (134–135)

The argument itself proceeds as follows:

- (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)

The ‘purposely available evidence’, then, is experience that prompts an attitudinal and volitional change in the individual person. So Moser’s argument is an ‘argument from religious experience’ – in particular, from the Christian baptismal experience of ‘being born again’. (Moser might perhaps agree, on reflection, that Christians continually and falteringly seek to appropriate unselfishly the benefits of their baptism, so that this experience is not well represented by the past perfect tense of premise (2), nor by the use of ‘default position’ to characterize the ‘new volitional centre’ in the description of the transformative gift.)

Arguments from religious experience typically exhibit a certain kind of circularity, and Moser's argument is no exception. The experience appealed to – feeling that one has been forgiven and turned away from destructive selfishness – does indeed provide good evidence for God's saving agency (and, therefore, God's existence), but only granted an already religiously theory-laden interpretation of that experience. Interpreting the (ongoing) overcoming of one's guilt and selfishness in terms of the agency of an 'X', and identifying that X as divine, may be both correct and subjectively compelling. But this Christian interpretation is not the only reasonable interpretation of such an experience – as Christians who are also reflective philosophers must surely acknowledge. The experience of 'dying to self' and 'rising to new life' free of selfish anxiety may be given a Buddhist interpretation, for example, with reverence for the Dharma and its teachers replacing the worship of a divine saviour. Furthermore, behavioural evidence of selfishness overcome is to be found among atheists and agnostics. So the experience a Christian interprets as receiving the transformative gift may be undergone by people who offer no (realist) religious interpretation of it at all. One might suggest, perhaps, that those who offer other interpretations must be resisting the only reasonable – namely the Christian – interpretation of that experience. But such a view does not easily fit the actual evidence of unselfish behaviour amongst people with diverse commitments – and, besides, hardly accords with the charity expected of Christians who aim to participate in a divine love that, as Moser repeatedly emphasizes, extends even to enemies.

It may, then, be questioned whether it is *justifiable* to interpret in terms of divine agency one's experience of being freed from guilt and turned away from selfish concerns. This 'justifiability' question is *external to* an overall Christian interpretation of experience. So, as a reflective Christian philosopher, I may unfeignedly commit myself to the truths of the Christian Gospel while also recognizing that this justifiability question applies to my commitment. That question cannot be answered without epistemic circularity by appealing to my experience as interpreted from within the framework of Christian understanding – yet that seems to be how Moser's argument proceeds. Indeed, his re-orientation of religious epistemology might rather seem a recommendation for *replacing* religious epistemology as philosophical inquiry with a theological inquiry into knowledge of God. For, if the key question is whether we are willing to be known by God, it is already being supposed that there is a God who seeks to know (and save) us. The argument from volitional transformation thus makes the valuable *theological* point that what matters is our 'filial knowledge' (126) of God graciously at work in our lives, knowledge attainable only by our letting ourselves be known and changed by God. But the question remains whether it is indeed justifiable to commit overall to an evangelical theology with these epistemological implications.

Moser's answer to that question may be intended to emerge in the Appendix, which deals with the sceptical challenge to justify the reliability of our sources of belief-formation without begging the question. Here Moser acknowledges that his 'volitional theistic epistemology' will be 'in big trouble if this challenge cannot be met' (265). Moser focuses on visual perceptual beliefs: 'what non-question-begging reason [do] we have, if any, for thinking that our ordinary visual beliefs have a reliable source?' (273), where it is to be understood that such a reason may be experiential rather than propositional. Moser's main response is that we find a 'durable ultimate place to stand' against scepticism in our '*semantic, concept-forming intentions*' (274). '[I]t is now *part of what we* [non-sceptics] *mean* by "epistemic reason"', he says, 'that the kind of ascription in question [of a certain visual experience in the absence of defeaters] captures an epistemic reason for a visual belief that X exists' (277). Of course, as Moser acknowledges, the concept of a good *enough* epistemic reason may be contested, but sceptics had better not beg the question themselves by trying to 'hold non-sceptics to a [contestably strong] specific concept ... that settles the dispute in favor of scepticism' (276), and so, he thinks, they will then not plausibly be able to charge non-sceptics with question-begging.

Moser now adds: '[a] directly analogous point holds regarding an epistemic reason for an experiential belief that a perfectly loving God has intervened authoritatively in human conscience' (277). He thus concludes that the sceptic bears the burden of overturning the presumption that the relevant religious experience is reason enough for belief. The fact that *the believer* cannot show the objective reliability of the kind of evidence which, under the salient semantic intentions, counts as good enough for justification need not matter – indeed, Moser argues, slack between what's justified and what's true is just what we want. A brain in a vat, for instance, may be thoroughly justified in massive doxastic error. But it does not follow that we may tolerate just any kind of slack between what's true and what counts as justification under a specific choice of epistemic concept. The plurality of viable competing interpretations of the experience which a Christian interprets as receiving the transformative gift suggests that sceptics *may discharge* the burden which Moser has (we may concede, fairly) placed upon them. There is nothing comparable to this plurality of viable interpretations in the case of perceptual beliefs, where the interpretation of experience in terms of an independent external world is, in practice, simply 'built in' (whether by God or nature) for normally functioning human cognition. For this reason, if no other, arguments such as Moser's that suggest parity between the epistemology of perception and the epistemology of religious belief need to be treated with caution.

Despite this relegation of a key epistemological issue to the Appendix, there is much to admire and to learn from in Moser's book. Much of what is admirable is 'straight' Christian philosophical theology. Moser's work will delight those for

whom Christianity is the religion of inclusive love, and of the unfathomably great, if paradoxical, power of that love: consider, for instance, his views on the atonement (174–177) with its excellent explanation of why we cannot be (fully) divinely forgiven unless we ourselves forgive (176). But Moser does not simply retreat into philosophical theology: he contributes significantly to wider debate in religious epistemology, by arguing that, once philosophers of religion recognize that Christians believe in a God who calls for repentance and willing acceptance of self-transformation, it follows that the sort of evidence appealed to in natural theology, or in arguments from miracles, is peripheral to the justification of Christian commitment, and even, perhaps, inimical to its fostering. Pauline pneumatic epistemology, as Moser makes clear, is a *theological* epistemology. The Resurrection faith is based on the testimony of *the Holy Spirit* in the hearts of believers that God has raised the crucified Jesus, and, *pace* Richard Swinburne and N. T. Wright, cannot be reached evidentially on the basis of the empty tomb and the disciples' experiences of meeting with their risen Lord (189–197).

Moser's explanation of divine hiddenness coheres with this emphasis on *God's* providing the – one might almost say, 'secret' – evidence that fits divine purposes. Moser rejects familiar explanations, such as that divine obviousness would compromise human freedom and/or provoke wrongly motivated responses (109–110). For Moser, divine hiddenness is an antidote to our cognitive idolatry (104): patent evidence on our terms of God's reality would pander to our desire to be in control, which God needs to break through to achieve salvific purposes. Moser also deploys the 'sceptical theist' claim that God's specific purposes in remaining incognito will, quite expectedly, not always be apparent to us (see 111 and 124) – consonantly, Moser relies on sceptical theism in response to the argument from evil (see 140–143).

Let me conclude with a challenge. Moser's claim that God would crucially avoid letting us think that we had got God sorted out as an established item of human knowledge is most familiar, surely, coming from existentialist and fideist philosophers. Isn't Moser's 'seismic shift', for example, pretty much what Kierkegaard had in mind when, in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, he maintains that faith must abandon 'objective' for 'subjective' reflection concerned with *how I am related* to the object known? And doesn't Moser's warning against cognitive idolatry amount to the claim that we are called to commit ourselves to God's existence beyond any epistemic guarantees we can ourselves generate? And isn't that a way of emphasizing the importance of faith as *doxastic venture* – a willingness to commit ourselves in practice to (religious) belief beyond anything we could count as adequate supporting evidence from an initially neutral, pre-committed, point of view?

I suggest, then, that the logic of Moser's religious epistemology leads to the need to defend a certain kind of fideism – yet Moser roundly rejects fideism, characterizing his position as a 'distinctive version of volitional theistic

evidentialism' (11). But the fideisms Moser rejects are *irrationalist* fideism (that approves commitment to religious truth-claims contrary to the weight of one's available evidence) and *arationalist* fideism (that approves religious commitment independently of epistemic concern). Those kinds of fideism, very probably, all good philosophers should reject. Yet a modest *suprarationalist* fideism is exactly what Moser's own position would seem to need. Moser endorses the view (46–49) that, from a perspective that seeks 'spectator evidence', there are no compelling grounds for accepting God's existence (nor for denying it) – even though he thinks that, from the perspective of the committed Christian, everyone may potentially acquire the 'purposively available' evidence on which authentic faith is grounded.

Such 'purposively available' evidence, recognized as such, would seem to count in William James's terms, as a 'passional' cause of belief: it secures genuine belief in the believer even though it cannot serve as evidence rationally sufficient to overturn an external scepticism. And then the answer to the question of the external justifiability of religious commitment may come to something like the 'justification of faith' that James proposed in 'The Will to Believe'. Moser may be understood, then, as a modest fideist, for whom religious commitment can be in accord with the proper exercise of our rational epistemic capacities even when it cannot be evidentially justified from a neutral perspective. Indeed, Moser provides the tools for recognizing, from the perspective of faith anyway, that total attachment to the anti-fideist evidentialist tendency ('commit yourself only so far as your evidence rationally compels you') is a form of cognitive idolatry.

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W. Glenn Kirkconnell *Kierkegaard on Ethics and Religion: From Either/Or to Philosophical Fragments*. (London/New York NY: Continuum, 2008). Pp. 192. £65.00 (Hbk). ISBN 978 1 8470 6078 5.

Rather than taking his reader on another journey along the well-worn furrows and tangents of postmodern Kierkegaard scholarship, W. Glenn Kirkconnell seeks to present us with a fresh rehabilitation of Kierkegaard's early authorship, hoping to get closer to how these works would have appeared to the contemporaries of nineteenth-century Copenhagen. Since Kierkegaard has been read during the subsequent 150 years through the occasionally partisan lenses of atheism, Christianity, and post-structuralism, such an endeavour to return to the