

Schellenberg's evolutionary religion: how evolutionary and how religious?

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Abstract: In *Evolutionary Religion*, J. L. Schellenberg synthesizes his previous impressive contributions to an understanding of religion by formulating an account of religion supported by a Darwinian evolutionary theory understood as a science of the deep future. Such a future enables the realization that our present understandings of religion are immature, that future understandings of divine reality may be radically altered and that religious practice may become the centre of human well-being. In this article, I argue that Schellenberg's evolutionary religion represents at best but half the evolutionary story, its epistemic side. Ontologically, it remains fundamentally non-evolutionary. Positively, I suggest naturalistic alternatives to Schellenberg's Ultimate. I conclude that Schellenberg's evolutionary religion is neither adequately evolutionary nor adequately religious.

Introduction

In major recent works (*Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (1993), *Prolegomena to a Philosophy of Religion* (2005), *The Wisdom to Doubt: A Justification of Religious Skepticism* (2007), *The Will to Imagine: A Justification of Skeptical Religion* (2009), and *Evolutionary Religion* (2013)), J. L. Schellenberg has made impressive, innovative contributions to our understanding of religion and religious practice.¹ In his most recent volume, ER, he has synthesized this work under the framework of Darwinian evolutionary theory. Darwinian evolutionary theory reveals not only a deep past but also a deep Darwinian future. Schellenberg's focus on deep Darwinian time with its emphasis on the possibilities for epistemic advance represents a significant new suggestion about the nature of the religious enterprise and the promise of religious epistemic and non-epistemic endeavours and provides a scientifically based way to understand his previous work concerning religious scepticism and sceptical religion. When applied to

religion, deep Darwinian time appears to be especially significant because it re-focuses discussion about the understanding of religion and the transcendent, opening up, it seems, new possibilities for religious inquiry. Schellenberg argues that traditional religious inquiry faces the challenge that it has moved too quickly to conclusions that raise serious problems, for instance, those concerning the hiddenness of the theistic God. And, perhaps more importantly, in Schellenberg's view, evolutionary religion turns the tables on secular critiques that understand religion as part of humanity's immaturity and, as such, something to be grown out of. And, it opens up the possibility that the practice of religion, with its attendant commitments to the transcendent, will be central to what constitutes mature humanity. Indeed, if Schellenberg has got it right, philosophy of religion will serve the role of queen of the sciences (as theology was thought to be) – or at least the queen of all the philosophical disciplines – in so far as philosophy of religion seeks an understanding of the Ultimate which is metaphysically, axiologically, and soteriologically unlimited, while the objects of other philosophical and scientific inquiries are derivative. If Schellenberg is on track, the elimination of religion, à la Freud or Marx, the reduction of religion à la Durkheim, and the secular functionalizing of religion, either biologically or culturally, may be revealed as juvenile or infantile understandings of religion, ones that when the total evidence about religion and its pursuit are brought to light might show themselves as such. Religion, contrary to predictions, might not fade away or be absorbed into secular practices. Indeed, if Schellenberg's take on what the total evidence might make clear is correct, then religion will not disappear because being religious is the most fundamental way of being human. Coming with Darwinian credentials, these sorts of premises make their bases worth investigating.

As a scientifically informed synthesis of his major contributions, ER provides the opportunity to examine critically Schellenberg's entire project for understanding religion and religious practices from the perspective of Darwinian evolutionary theory. While most students of Schellenberg have focused on the *epistemic* bases for his arguments for religious scepticism, sceptical religion, and Ultimism (the proposition that a metaphysical, axiological, and soteriological Ultimate exists), the introduction of a Darwinian perspective for understanding his views invites an examination of the *ontological* bases for his positions, one based on Darwinian ontology.² Though, in doing so, I shall argue that Schellenberg's evolutionary religion does not fulfil its promises, concluding that it is neither adequately evolutionary nor adequately religious, an examination of his proposal enables a further development of naturalistic religious alternatives to his fundamentally non-evolutionary conception of the Ultimate.

I shall proceed as follows. In the next section, I outline Schellenberg's argument for evolutionary religion, drawing out its implicit premises and their bases. This will involve understanding his overall project for philosophy of religion. In particular, I will lay out his reasons for (1) embracing *religious scepticism*, (2) rejecting *total* religious scepticism, (3) advocating *sceptical religion*, and (4) his proposal

that, given the current epistemic status of the human religious pursuit, what I shall call *Ultimism* (the sceptical religious stance of those who embrace as central to their religious inquiry the proposition that there is an Ultimate) is the best version of sceptical religion to pursue.³ Though I believe that his arguments for religious scepticism and sceptical religion face serious, if not fundamental, epistemic problems, I shall grant them for the sake of argument. Thus, in the section, 'Concerning the missing Darwinian half of evolutionary religion', I present my contention that even if Schellenberg's story is adequate to the epistemic half of an account of evolving religion, it is only an epistemic one, leaving out as it does a story of an evolving transcendent and settling for an evolving religious epistemic process. This omission not only leaves a half-told tale but also both raises questions about the extent to which Schellenberg's retelling of the evolutionary theory and religion relationship is really about evolution at all and heightens concerns about how representative it is of religion's possibilities. I address these concerns in the section, 'Putting evolution back into evolutionary religion'. To flesh out the ontological side of an evolving religion story, I lay out a fuller array of sceptical religious options, including an evolution-based naturalistic option that I call Darwin's Hegelian Spirit. My aim is *not* to argue that one or another of these alternatives involves claims that have some epistemic justification. For that would go beyond the bounds deemed appropriate by Schellenberg for present-day would-be adherents of evolutionary religion. I set my sights only on demonstrating that, even if Schellenberg is right about what is epistemically appropriate for religionists in this perhaps still very early period of religious investigation, he has without sufficient justification narrowed the future possibilities for investigation. In the final section of the article, I compare the prospects of Schellenberg's Ultimism with one naturalistic alternative, Darwin's Hegelian Spirit, and argue that, on the criteria suggested by Schellenberg for appropriate religious practice at this currently early stage of development, the latter is superior. I conclude that Schellenberg is still too much ensconced in the religions of the past and has not sufficiently embraced the Darwinian ontology that he needs for understanding the current epistemic situation of religious practitioners. Thus his evolutionary religion is neither adequately evolutionary nor adequately religious.

Evolutionary religion: Schellenberg's proposal

It will be helpful first to put ER within the context of Schellenberg's overall scholarly project, one that he has developed over the course of a number of years and in writing four previous important volumes. ER can be understood as a sequel to Schellenberg's remarkable trilogy in philosophy of religion, itself springing from an original contribution to discussions about the hiddenness of the theistic God. In DHHR Schellenberg raises the question of why, if there is a loving God, there are *reasonable* non-believers. And he argues that their existence presents strong grounds for rejecting the existence of such a God. In the first volume of his trilogy, PPR, he sets out

in systematic fashion an agenda for philosophy of religion. In particular, he sets the groundwork for both his advocacy of *religious scepticism* and *sceptical religion*. Thus, he argues against pursuing philosophy of religion in the cognitive mode of belief assertion and defence, thereby arguing for religious scepticism. But, rejecting total religious scepticism, he advocates the pursuit of sceptical religion, arguing for a non-belief-based cognitive faith approach involving voluntary acceptance of religious propositions, in particular Ultimism, as well as intellectual, emotional, and practical commitment to the Ultimate. A detailed defence of religious scepticism follows in the second volume of his trilogy, WD, while the third volume, WI, presents a fine-grained argument for sceptical religion, in particular, Ultimism. In ER Schellenberg puts this entire project into an evolutionary context, arguing that evolutionary theory provides us with a basic understanding of our current epistemic situation with respect to our religious investigations and practices. Deep Darwinian time reveals not only a deep past but also a deep future; and shows our current state as religious practitioners to be juvenile, if not still infantile. In doing so, it reveals the appropriateness of the pursuit of sceptical religion and, in particular, the appropriateness of a particular form of sceptical religion, Ultimism.

We can now formulate Schellenberg's case for evolutionary religion where that takes the form of the pursuit of sceptical religion that on its epistemic side has as its object the understanding of the Ultimate. Schellenberg maintains that the features of diachronism, developmentalism, religious scepticism, and religious pragmatism mark evolutionary religion. Religious inquiry is a historical enterprise that has both a deep past and a deep future. And that temporal expanse displays a pattern in its movement. It is going someplace. It is developing. At this stage, however, it is not ready for religious belief. Finally, evolutionary religion is pragmatic in its inquiry shaping its epistemic activities to goals appropriate to its current stage of development. Diachronism and developmentalism lead to religious scepticism and sceptical religion. Religious pragmatism leads to Ultimism.

In summary form, the major conclusions of his detailed arguments for each conclusion form a series of steps leading to his major claim about Ultimism.

- I. Deep Darwinian time leads to a deep Darwinian future for religious practice; that is, it leads to evolutionary religion.
- II. A deep Darwinian future for religious practice leads to religious scepticism.
- III. Religious scepticism leads to sceptical religion.
- IV. Sceptical religion leads to religious practice in the faith rather than the belief mode, one form of which is Ultimism.
- V. Ultimism is the best current form of sceptical religion for adherents of evolutionary religion.

Schellenberg bases his first conclusion on the claim that if the findings and theories of cosmology, geology and evolutionary biology are reasonably correct, then

much less than half the course of cosmic history has occurred (ER, 9–19). On that basis, he argues, focusing on life on earth, that there is a deep future that opens up the prospect of substantial advance in both scientific and religious practice and inquiry. Evolutionary religion involves, then, the acceptance of a deep Darwinian time and consequently both a deep Darwinian past and a deep Darwinian future. This gives us Step I in Schellenberg's argument.

Since religious inquiry ought to be guided not only by its past record but also by both its future prospects and a realization of its current immature stage of development, the commitments to religious belief, both pro and con, ought to be measured by these selfsame guidelines. Both the indecisiveness of the debates between pro- and anti-religionists thus far and the fact that given a deep Darwinian epistemic future we are far from having a grasp of the total evidence about religion and the divine, if ever we will, should lead us to the conclusion that a *believing* stance with respect to either religious propositions or their denial or to naturalistic claims or their denial is premature. Religious scepticism is the proper epistemic stance for religious inquiries of the twenty-first century. So we have Step II.

But religious scepticism ought not to imply total religious scepticism. What is required is religious epistemic inquiry in a different cognitive key, one suited to the current temporal situation, that is, to religious pioneers. Religious scepticism finds the epistemic state of *believing or not believing* in the objects of religious inquiry inappropriate for this stage of religious inquiry because we are probably far from possessing total evidence and because of the current lack of sufficient evidence to support either stance, as well the past and current stalemate between proponents and opponents of religious belief. But, for the same reasons, especially our distance from possessing total evidence, it also finds the state of total religious scepticism (rejecting the appropriateness of any cognitive stance – whether in the belief mode or some other cognitive mode – with respect to religious matters) unacceptable. That leaves us, Schellenberg claims, with sceptical religion. Sceptical religion adopts a *faith* stance, a *cognitive attitude of non-believing, voluntary acceptance, or rejection* of the object of religious pursuit. In the case where the object of sceptical religious pursuit is the Ultimate, a practitioner of religious scepticism has *faith that* there is an Ultimate and *faith in* the Ultimate.⁴ Thus one who embraces sceptical religion in the form of Ultimism, recognizing the goodness and desirability of the state of affairs implied by the truth of Ultimism, commits herself both intellectually and practically to the pursuit of the Ultimate and acts on these commitments, while lacking evidence that would allow her to conclude that Ultimism is true. So we have got to Step III.

Thus far we have focused on the characteristics of religious *practice* and *inquiry* for the twenty-first century (and, indeed, beyond). To get to Step IV, we need to consider the *object of religious* practice and inquiry. How do we identify the object of religious faith? Schellenberg maintains that the object of religious faith is captured by the conception of the transcendent. On Schellenberg's view, we get a genuinely religious concept of the divine, by making the referent of that

concept some reality beyond anything natural. Nothing natural can be the object of religious belief or acceptance. Only a transcendent reality is a religious reality.⁵ The conception of the object of religious faith, the divine, takes two forms – two forms of transcendence: (1) the conception of something *more than* anything material (that is, natural) and (2) the conception of something *ultimately or in an unlimited way* more than anything natural.⁶ In addition the transcendence of the transcendent occurs in three dimensions: (a) the metaphysical, (b) the axiological, and (c) the soteriological. As Schellenberg describes them:

To fill out a bit those three kinds of transcendence, we can say that if something is metaphysically transcendent, its existence is a fact distinct from any natural fact. If something is axiologically transcendent, its intrinsic value – its splendors, its excellence – exceeds that of anything found in nature alone. And if something is soteriologically transcendent, then being rightly related to it will make for more well-being, fulfillment, wholeness, and the like for creatures than can naturally be attained. (ER, 94)

Schellenberg maintains that the Ultimate possesses these three dimensions of transcendence ultimately or in an unlimited fashion (PPR, 17–18; 26–28).

If my proposal were accepted, the fundamental idea of evolutionary religion would be an idea of something deepest in reality (metaphysically ultimate) that is also unsurpassably great (axiologically ultimate) and the source of our deepest good (soteriologically ultimate). . . . The claim that such a reality exists is Ultimism. (ER, 99)

These distinctions lead us to a further set of conceptual distinctions about the transcendent, that is, about the object of religious faith. Schellenberg tells us: One's conception of the transcendent can be either thick or thin.

Thick: a thick concept of the Divine says the Divine is triply transcendent *and also gives details* as to the nature of its threefold transcendence.

Thin: a thin concept of the Divine says that the Divine is triply transcendent and offers *no* additional details as to the nature of its transcendence. (ER, 95)

In addition, a conception of the divine might differ with respect to whether it is transcendent in all or just some of the three dimensions of transcendence. Thus, we get a further set of distinctions between strong and weak notions of transcendence.

Strong: a strong concept of the Divine says the Divine is ultimate in all three spheres of transcendence.

Weak: a weak concept of the Divine says the Divine is not in all three spheres ultimate. (ER, 96)

These two sets of distinctions lead to four different types of concepts of the divine: thick/strong (for instance, theism), thick/weak (for instance, Mill's conception of the divine), thin/strong (Schellenberg's conception of the Ultimate), and thin/weak (perhaps, Aristotle's prime mover).

Given these conceptions of the divine, what forms of religious practice are appropriate for humans at this early period of their religious development? Recall

that sceptical religion is a religious practice whose cognitive mode is not belief, but faith, an intellectual and practical commitment to a religious claim such as Ultimism. Consequently, sceptical religion of its very nature leads to various religious claims only if they are held in a faith mode. It does not lead to theism or naturalism or other religious stances *as traditionally understood*, that is, stances whose cognitive mode is belief. On the other hand, sceptical religion is compatible with these and other religious stances if they adopt the cognitive mode of faith. Thus, given the inappropriateness of both religious belief and total religious scepticism for this stage of our evolutionary religious journey, the pursuit of the Ultimate or some other form of sceptical religion becomes the right option for religious practitioners. So we have secured Step IV.

However, Schellenberg argues that there are reasons why Ultimism (as embodying a strong/thin conception of the divine) is especially congruent with a faith stance relative to other possible faith stances. It is the form of sceptical religion of choice for this of stage of our evolutionary journey.

First, *strong* conceptions of the divine are more appropriate for reasons of *descriptive* adequacy. Schellenberg finds that the strong conception of the divine best approximates the ordinary conception of the divine and that a proper definition of religion – something the discipline of philosophy of religion should develop – ought to take as the object of religious inquiry a strong conception of the divine. Schellenberg also maintains that strong concepts of the divine are more appropriate than weak ones because some religious experience is of a transcendent reality that is so in all three dimensions.⁷ Second, strong conceptions are *normatively* more appropriate. Schellenberg maintains that a strong conception is more of a challenge to our intellectual development. And such a conception is appropriate since it makes the divine a worthy object of a religious response (ER. 97–99).⁸

On the other hand, Schellenberg argues that a *thin* conception of the transcendent is preferable to a thick one because it is epistemically minimal. Epistemic minimalism is appropriate at this stage of our evolutionary development. Thick concepts rule out too many open possibilities. Our immature epistemic situation means that whatever current evidence we might have for some religious or secular claim is more than likely – relative to the anticipated *total* evidence that may become available over the deep Darwinian epistemic future – insufficient for belief formation. Thus, because of commitments to deep Darwinian time and its implications about the current status of evidence for either supporting or disconfirming beliefs, the epistemic project for practitioners of sceptical religion should not be focused on either discarding falsehoods or acquiring truths. It is too early for that. The investigative situation indicates that the job for current religious inquirers is to develop the epistemic possibilities of various views of the transcendent rather than to discard seemingly unjustified ones and to pursue seemingly confirmed ones.⁹ Thus, the precision, detail, comprehensiveness, ambitiousness, and controversy-inciting character of the claims about the transcendent

made in the major religious traditions (for example, theism on the one hand and impersonal transcendence on the other) – their thickness – lay open many ways in which current or further evidence and the total evidence might render their respective beliefs concerning the transcendent false.¹⁰ The fact that claims of the major religious traditions involve these traits (call them endangering traits) not only renders a *belief* stance with respect to their various objects inappropriate, it also indicates that a *faith* stance towards them, though not inappropriate, is not as rationally warranted as a sceptical religious practice whose object is Ultimism. For Ultimism is a necessary condition for the truth of these religious traditions. Consequently, its epistemic possibility appears superior to its elaborations in these traditions. There are more potential falsifiers of claims made about the transcendent in these traditions than of Ultimism. For Ultimism still stands if one or the other of the more specific claims with endangering traits made in these traditions accumulates falsifications in the future. Ultimism is a kind of minimal faith stance that allows for the most development. So Sceptical religion finds Ultimism to be the epistemically superior form of faith for this stage of our evolutionary religious practice.

And even more importantly, when we turn to axiology and soteriology, Ultimism's object is superior to its alternatives because Ultimism offers more advantages in improving human choices generally than do its competitors. It best fulfils the criterion of religious pragmatism, which is one of the necessary features of evolutionary religion. If this is so, then from both the descriptive and evaluative perspectives Ultimism is the most appropriate form of sceptical religion at this stage of our epistemic religious endeavours. So we then have Step V.

A Darwinian deep future has both epistemic plusses and minuses. It portends the possibility of great epistemic advances. The path from religious scepticism through sceptical religion to the religion of the deep future might compare favourably with past and future histories of scientific advance. But that is then and now is now. From our current perspective, the epistemic past and current situation demand, on the one hand, religious scepticism and on the other hand, the pursuit of sceptical religion. Both these assessments might well be challenged.¹¹ But let us concede, for the sake of argument, Steps I, II, and III and move on to revising Step IV by enlarging the currently available sceptical religious options with naturalistic alternatives and challenging Step 5 by making a case for the relative superiority of one of those naturalistic options to that of Ultimism.

The missing Darwinian ontological half of evolutionary religion

Epistemic futures do not come for free, at least if one is a realist, as is Schellenberg.¹² For realists ontology precedes and determines epistemology. The existence and nature of a deep *Darwinian* future depend upon cosmological, physical, chemical, biological, social-cultural, and historical factors.¹³ These constitute, bring about, and enable the cognitive capacities that are the proximate

sources of any future epistemic developments, including religious. That is to say, to be Darwinian, Schellenberg's deep time and its potential deep epistemic future require Darwinian *ontology*. How can he obtain that?

Organisms come to have cognitive capacities in environments where environmental features that are important for their fitness change at a pace that cannot be matched by genetic mutation or the genetic variations possessed by an organism (those represented by an organism's norm of reaction to its environmental variation). The temporal variations in such environments, as well as the nature of the correlations between environmental features and organism fitness in such environments, can enable various cognitive achievements, innate, individually learned, or socially/culturally acquired. Such environments include the environments in which organisms find themselves in, move into, and those they create when they manufacture their own niches. *Static* environments do not produce cognitive creatures; in those environments there is no need for cognition. More specifically, biological, cultural, and individual environmental factors – very importantly natural selection and social cultural selection, along with individual learning – shape human cognitive and agential capacities, their evolution and development.¹⁴ And an important part of these advances involves the activities of humans themselves who construct the epistemic and agential environments that then continue to reshape their activities and the cognitive capacities that enable them.

We can formulate the ontology of these scientific findings in various ways, as one of interacting agents with certain sorts of capacities or as processes, for instance. But whatever turns out to be the best formulation, the Darwinian future will present an ontology of natural, material entities, or processes that come in and out of existence, an ontology of causing and being caused, and an ontology of becoming. A deep *Darwinian* epistemic future must be characterized by a Darwinian ontology of *becoming*.¹⁵

However, when we now reflect on the ontology of Ultimism and that implicit in the Darwinian evolutionary perspective we find a startling contrast. The latter, as we have seen, involves the progressive becoming of natural entities and/or processes. But the former concerns a metaphysical, axiological, and soteriological transcendent (and so *non-natural*) *static* phenomenon.¹⁶ Schellenberg's epistemically evolving religion does not have a corresponding evolutionary ontology with respect to its object, the transcendent. Indeed, its ontology appears to be antithetical to Darwinian ontology. What would happen if we put evolution back into evolutionary religion? And how would that affect Schellenberg's conclusion that Ultimism is the most appropriate form of sceptical religion at this stage of our religious pursuit? I turn now to answering those questions.

Putting evolution back into evolutionary religion

Schellenberg focuses on the *epistemic* possibilities that Darwinian deep time opens up. But he neglects the ontological bases for the epistemic possibilities

that he wishes to exploit.¹⁷ Cognitive capacities arise from, are maintained by, and change because of selective processes that are constituted by and constitute an ontology of becoming. But deep Darwinian ontology is neither sufficient nor necessary for Ultimism. The postulation of an unlimited metaphysical, axiological, and soteriological being has been and can be made quite independently of Darwinian ontology. As Schellenberg himself has argued, Ultimism is a necessary condition for theism, multiple proposals for which have been made quite independently of any reliance on evolutionary theory. Nor is Darwinian ontology sufficient for Ultimism since the latter postulates a transcendent (non-natural) being while Darwinian ontology concerns *only* natural changing beings. If Deep Darwinian ontology were sufficient for the transcendent, then the transcendent would involve naturalistic factors, but, on Schellenberg's account of the Ultimate, it is thoroughly non-natural and cannot involve naturalistic factors. If Deep Darwinian ontology were necessary for the transcendent, then the transcendent would of its nature involve naturalistic factors. But on Schellenberg's account of the Ultimate this cannot be the case.

If this critique is sound, then Schellenberg must either give up the ontological bases of his evolutionary religion, thus rendering it non-genuinely evolutionary, or expand his understanding of religion and the object of its practice and intellectual pursuit, thus giving up his definition of the divine (and, consequently, of religion), rendering it non-religious. Of course, Schellenberg can maintain that his Darwinian perspective need only apply to the natural realm.¹⁸ There it can be both epistemically and ontologically Darwinian. However, the evolutionary religious naturalist finds this restriction problematic and question begging. It is problematic because it arbitrarily creates a dualistic ontology of becoming and static being. It is question begging since without adequate justification it offers an account of what it means to be religious that rules out religious naturalism.¹⁹ The evolutionary religious naturalist challenges the adequacy of Schellenberg's account of what it means to be religious, in particular, Schellenberg's account of what is required for a descriptively and normatively adequate philosophical account of the object of religious inquiry, whether that be in the belief or the faith mode. She can then go on positively to propose that there are naturalistic religious alternatives to Schellenberg's ontologically *manqué* Darwinian evolutionary sceptical religion and suggest that one or other these might be more appropriate than Ultimism as the object of sceptical religious practice at this stage in human development. This is what I shall now do.

The objects of religious inquiry and practice have not and need not be ontologically transcendent, that is, they might be ontologically natural (that is, using Schellenberg's definition, possible objects of scientific study). The historical practice of religion reveals such naturalistic religious phenomena. Some versions of Buddhism may well fit as one case, as well as Mormonism. The history and current practice of philosophy of religion reveal such objects, for instance, the

gods of pantheism and panentheism. For instance, in Spinoza's pantheism, the absolute has a material attribute. And, in panentheism, all of nature is a part of the transcendent, and, as nature changes, the transcendent changes and is enhanced. Absent too in Schellenberg's descriptive assessment are the many current forms of scientifically based religious naturalism.²⁰ Thus, Schellenberg's descriptive analyses of the object of religious practice and claims, both those concerning the ordinary notion and those concerning the philosophical notion, fail. They do not provide an analysis of all the major understandings of the divine.

Moreover, Schellenberg's normative claim about what constitutes the appropriate metaphysical, axiological, and soteriological character of the object of religious claims is problematic. Schellenberg argues that his ultimizing definition is the proper one for philosophy of religion because it fits with philosophy's aim to address the most general and fundamental matters. Let us assume for the sake of argument that the discipline of philosophy is concerned, as Schellenberg puts it, with the most general and fundamental of matters. Let us also grant him that as such it requires that its accounts be adequate to the phenomenon in question, have explanatory power, and have investigative stability or, to put it another way, predictive power. Let us also concede that a theory of the Ultimate is *one* way to achieve these philosophical goals. But, I see no reason for thinking that it is the only way. Such a theory, if successful, may be sufficient to attain philosophy's goals; but it is not necessary. How should we assess non-ultimizing understandings of the object of religious pursuit? Certainly, there is no conceptual incoherence in definitions of the object of religious pursuit that fail to fit the characteristics of the Ultimate. Moreover, *prima facie*, some such approach could meet the explanatory, empirical adequacy, and stability criteria postulated by Schellenberg. And it seems to be both theoretically and empirically implausible to count all such historical and current definitions of the object of religious pursuit as not being about religion because they fail to make its object metaphysically, axiologically, and soteriologically ultimate. Thus, Schellenberg's ultimizing condition unduly restricts philosophers of religion, *qua philosophers*, in attaining the very goals of philosophy. Or it begs the question against non-ultimizing theories in the philosophy of religion.²¹ Thus it problematically rules out any naturalistic religion, that is, one that is ontologically natural and open to scientific investigation.

If the objects of sceptical religious practice and claims can include natural realities, then the options available for scrutiny and adaptation by practitioners of sceptical religion are more than the two explicit ones adverted to by Schellenberg, namely Ultimism and modified Ultimism, that is, a transcendent reality that is not unlimited in all three dimensions, ontologically, axiologically, and soteriologically.²²

Thus, accepting Schellenberg's stance of sceptical religion for the sake of argument, as well as the above Darwinian ontology and its implications with respect to the objects of religious practice, we can expand the options for sceptical religious practice to include:

1. **Pure religious scepticism:** The acceptance of total religious scepticism and the rejection of any *faith* stance, either religious or secular.
2. **Ultimism:** *Faith* that there is an Ultimate reality and faith in that reality (Schellenberg's choice).
3. **Personal Transcendent:** *Faith* that there is a personal transcendent reality (e.g. a theistic God) and faith in that reality.
4. **Impersonal Transcendent:** *Faith* that there is an impersonal transcendent reality (e.g. an impersonal pantheistic God) and *faith* in that reality.
5. **Secular sceptical religion:** *Faith* that there are moral ideals that can better the human condition and that these ideals can be embodied in human communities and institutions.²³
6. **Naturalistic sceptical religion:** *Faith* that individuals can become members of larger ontological natural wholes that themselves display in some form ontological, axiological, and soteriological features, though necessarily in limited ways – features that in Schellenberg's view are characteristics proper only to the religious transcendent. Such unities, existing at higher more complex ontological levels, have an ontological primacy with respect to their constituents and represent current and ongoing axiological and soteriological achievements. As such, they are subject to scientific investigation and to human construction and intervention.²⁴

Probably, there are many other possible versions of naturalistic sceptical religion. Indeed one such option can be drawn from a surprising source, Schellenberg himself. Here I briefly sketch that option.

Schellenberg entitles the epilogue of ER 'Darwin's Door and Hegel's Hinge'. On his view, Darwin opened the door to the future of religion by showing us that because we are creatures of evolution we have not only an epistemic religious past but also a deep epistemic religious future. He also suggests that Hegel provides the hinges by which that Darwinian door swings. In particular, Schellenberg tells us that applying Hegel's dialectical method to the course of the history and future of religious thought, we find a thesis stage in which religion and its transcendent objects are posited and pursued. This stance is followed by an antithesis stage (perhaps our current stage) in which that pursuit and its object are rejected and denied. But Hegel's hinge enables a third stage of synthesis in which religion and the objects of its pursuit will find their home. My positive proposal for an alternative to Schellenberg's Ultimism can be viewed as an attempt to put Darwin's door and Hegel's hinge right side up. This involves, using another analogy, putting the ontological horse ahead of the epistemic cart. Darwin and Hegel, I suggest, open up and enable a fully naturalistic account of sceptical religion *and* its object(s), thus providing another naturalistic option for its practitioners.

Thus, inspired by Schellenberg's purely epistemic suggestion, we can call this option Darwin's Hegelian Spirit. It envisages emerging higher-level phenomena constituted by physical, biological, and cultural systems that possess increasing, though finite, metaphysical unity, axiological value, and soteriological power. Natural selection in the broad sense that includes biological and social/cultural selection, as well as individual learning conceived as a selection process, is the fundamental process that enables evolutionary transitions to higher levels of ontological unity. Thus, each new level emerges as a result of heritable variation, differential fitness, and environmental selection. These levels include transitions from prokaryote to eukaryote cells, unicellular to multi-cellular organisms, multi-cellular organism to societies, and societies to larger cultural units.²⁵ Each new level constitutes a new level of individuality. As such it involves new levels of agency and value. Moreover, individuals are not only selected for but fashion, via niche construction, the environments that select for them. Values, including moral values, arise through selection processes and are constituted by adaptations at each level of individuality, adaptations that promote fitness understood broadly to include biological and social/cultural survival and reproduction (Rottschaefer (1998)). Such values constitute the axiological aspect of the emerging and changing ontological levels; while the soteriological aspect is found in the extent to which the components of each individual level themselves attain their good within the whole. Just as the ontological feature is finite and always in the process of becoming, so too the axiological and soteriological aspects are limited and never perfect.

This Darwinian picture can be used to provide a scientifically informed metaphysically and epistemically naturalistic understanding of Hegel.²⁶ On this interpretation, we can take Hegel's account of Spirit to include continuing social/human cultural achievements, including religious. These are historically, socially, and culturally conditioned. And they represent the current state of humankind in its achievement of axiological and soteriological value. On this Darwinian interpretation, its progressive character is contingent (not inevitable), relative to its social/cultural environments (not absolute), and conditioned by the finite adaptive features of the levels of agency involved.²⁷ In addition, the dialectical process is to be understood in terms of the central Darwinian process of natural selection.²⁸

I conclude that while sceptical religion includes Ultimism as one of its possible forms, it also allows for other, naturalistic religious alternatives. The task of elaborating these options and assessing their relative merits is, of course, part of the practice of sceptical religion that Schellenberg envisions. However, it will be helpful to examine Schellenberg's positive argument for the superiority of Ultimism and give a preliminary assessment of its status relative to Darwin's Hegelian Spirit. How good is Step V of Schellenberg's argument?

What form should evolutionary religion take today? A preliminary assessment of the relative merits of Ultimism and Darwin's Hegelian spirit

In this final section I examine Schellenberg's argument that Ultimism is the superior form of sceptical religion for this immature stage of religious practice and argue that Darwin's Hegelian Spirit fares better on the distinctively evolutionary criterion of pragmatism that for Schellenberg sets the norms for us immature religious investigators and practitioners. I turn first to a preliminary consideration that faces any practitioner of sceptical religion. How can the relative merits of various forms of sceptical religion be assessed? What sorts of support are appropriate for arguments that are held not on a belief basis, but on a faith basis?

The key to answering these questions is the fourth feature of Schellenberg's evolutionary religion: its religious pragmatism.²⁹ According to Schellenberg, it is considerations of human fulfilment and maturity and the extent to which the forms of sceptical religion enable their attainment that provide the criteria in terms of which we can judge Ultimism and its competitors. Consequently what is decisive is the relative superiority of the soteriological character of the Ultimate.

We can formulate Schellenberg's argument as follows:³⁰

1. The best form of sceptical religion for our current immature state of human development is the one that pursues values that best promote overall human fulfilment and maturity. It is the form of sceptical religion that is soteriologically superior.
2. Some values that best promote overall human fulfilment and maturity are those found at the core of the classical arguments for the existence of God associated with Anselm, Leibniz, Paley, and James, the values of enlargement (Anselm), understanding (Leibniz), respect for beauty (Paley), zestful productivity, the reconciliation of competing duties, and respect for what ought to be true (James).³¹
3. Ultimism provides a better way to pursue these values than do its competitors, pure scepticism and a sceptical naturalism.
4. Therefore, Ultimism is the best form of sceptical religion for our current immature state of human development.
5. Consequently, evolutionary religion, considered as a diachronic, developmental, sceptical, and pragmatic pursuit of the transcendent, understood as the Ultimate, is the best form of sceptical religion for our current state of human development.
6. As such this argument shows that, for anyone who takes human fulfilment and maturity as the most important of values, the pursuit of the religious life as expressed in Ultimism is currently superior to any secular way of life.

Clearly, the normative character of the argument for Ultimism takes centre stage. Schellenberg takes as a central religious value the mature development of individual humans, communities, and the human species, 'human dignity' as he puts it. He does not provide an argument for the centrality of this value, but rather argues that if one finds this value to be desirable and admirable, then certain consequences follow.

I shall concede for the sake of argument Premises 1 and 2 of Schellenberg's argument. I shall contest Premise 3. If I am successful in doing so, then the conclusion formulated in line 4 is not adequately supported nor are the conclusions in lines 5 and 6. Given limitations of time and space, I shall focus on the values ascribed to William James. I shall take that focus because I contend that Schellenberg fails to discern the depth of the central value of human *agency* embodied in James's view, one that connects closely with the sceptical religious alternative that I have argued is missing on Schellenberg's list of Ultimism's competitors, namely Darwin's Hegelian Spirit.

Schellenberg finds in James's position three core soteriological values, all of which are important means to attaining human dignity. These are what he calls the aims of zestful productivity, reconciling competing duties, and respect for what ought to be true.³² I shall focus on his use of the third value. Schellenberg elaborates on the third value (the respect for what ought to be true) that James's religious option enables using his discussion in *Some Problems in Philosophy* (James (1911)). In that work, James enunciates a faith ladder. It goes like this:

1. There is nothing absurd in a certain view of the world [a religious one in this case] being true, nothing self-contradictory.
2. It might have been true under certain circumstances.
3. It may be, true, even now.
4. It is fit to be true.
5. It ought to be true.
6. It must be true.
7. It shall be true, at any rate true for me. (*ibid.*, 224)

Consider the 'shall be true' of the last step of the ladder. Schellenberg provides secular examples of what he has in mind. Suppose that one is lost in a snowstorm on the Canadian prairie. Suppose that one's child is suffering from depression or addiction. Suppose that a totalitarian regime holds power. He argues that in each of these cases successful resolution requires faith. In each of these cases, though Schellenberg does not advert to it explicitly, it also requires *action* on the part of the parties involved. Schellenberg contends that a similar sort of faith stance should apply in religious cases, in particular to Ultimism. He asks rhetorically: 'So why would we deny that such faith is appropriate when we see how very much it ought to be the case that ultimism is true?' (ER, 154).

Schellenberg argues that since human flourishing or redemption is of such great value, it ought to be something that comes about.³³ The 'shall be true' is the faith (the intellectual and practical commitment to the) claim that if there is an Ultimate – a transcendent non-natural being that can bring about such a great soteriological value, then that being ought to exist. Indeed, on Schellenberg's interpretation, the last step of the faith ladder involves a bold a priori value claim that if human well-being and maturity is valuable, then a necessary condition for its existence, the Ultimate, ought to exist. Ultimism is the acceptance of the claim that the Ultimate does exist. If redemption comes, it comes because there is an existing Ultimate that brings it about.

But questions arise. What do religious faith and its accompanying practice embody? Does this faith lead to any action? Schellenberg tells us that faith and its accompanying practice stand as acts of respect and a serious moral gesture. In terms of action, a religious practitioner can and should fulfil her moral duties, such as helping those in distress (ER, 155).

Now recall James's striking secular examples in the 'Will to believe': the young suitor who by his actions changes the mind of the person he is pursuing and the train riders who turn on the robbers and prevent the robbery (James (1897)). In these examples, like Schellenberg's secular examples, participants *act* to bring about what they express 'shall be true'. However, the secular examples stand in sharp contrast to the religious practice of Ultimism. The former are statements of determination leading to action. Participants *act* in order to bring about a reality. Their actions are at least partly responsible for the subsequent truth of the proposition in question. *I escaped* the storm. *My child overcame* her depression and addiction. *We overthrew* that totalitarian regime. But, in the case of Ultimism, the religious practitioners merely express their faith that and faith in the existence of the soteriological Ultimate and do what they can to help their fellow human beings. They do not bring about their own redemption. The Ultimate is the fundamental source of redemption or human fulfilment. Moreover, no actions of the practitioners of Ultimism can affect the metaphysical, axiological, or soteriological Ultimate.

But there is no such difference between the 'shall be true' of the secular and religious examples in James's account. Recall James's description of religious reality: 'First, she [the religionist] says that the best things are the more eternal things, the overlapping things, the things in the universe that throw the last stone, so to speak, and say the final word' (*ibid.*, 13). Given this very vague and open account of religious reality, there is a role for human action not only in creating a better moral world but also in creating a better *religious* world. The faith ladder concludes with 'shall be', not 'is'. Thus, James, I contend, is closer to Darwin's Hegelian Spirit than to Ultimism. Jamesian religious practitioners and those of the Darwinian Hegelian spirit arguably are productive of soteriological good, if there be such, while the practitioners of Ultimism can at most align themselves properly to an unsurpassable soteriological good. The practitioners of Darwin's Hegelian spirit act both to

bring about their own salvation and to increase the soteriological value of the whole of which they are a part.³⁴ In stark contrast, the activity of the practitioners of Ultimism leaves the Ultimate unaffected.

But, whether this difference between James and Schellenberg holds up on more extensive analysis, this reflection on Schellenberg's use of James illustrates that his narrow conception of religious options stands in tension with evolutionary religion's pragmatic and soteriological feature. When the evolutionary religion's deep Darwinian epistemic time is given its required ontological bases, naturalistic religious options, such as Darwin's Hegelian spirit, open up. And the latter reveals pragmatic features that challenge the soteriological superiority of Ultimism. Ultimism's concept of human fulfilment and maturity as a right relationship to a transcendent that is unaffected by the actions of humans because it is metaphysically, axiologically, and soteriologically unsurpassably transcendent, limits humans' range of soteriological accomplishment to the natural realm. Practitioners of Darwin's Hegelian spirit, however, bring into being a natural religious reality that serves, though in finite ways, the functions that Schellenberg ascribes to his Ultimate. This contrasts sharply with the limited role of human action as envisioned by Ultimism. At a minimum these considerations raise questions about the soteriological superiority of Ultimism. Similarly, questions arise concerning the relative ontological and axiological superiority of the Ultimate to that of a naturalistically based transcendent that is progressively superior in being and value. But these questions take us into issues that are beyond the compass of this article.³⁵

Conclusion

The work of J. L. Schellenberg presents us with a distinctive and innovative account of religious thought and practice, one that is worthy of careful examination. I have argued that his recent synthesis of that account in terms of Darwinian evolutionary theory and its consequences – one that incorporates the results of his earlier investigations – fails to be adequately religious and adequately evolutionary. This is so, I maintain, because Schellenberg's evolutionary religion represents at best only the prospects for religion of a deep Darwinian *epistemic* future. But it lacks the Darwinian ontology that would make such a future possible. Filling in the missing Darwinian ontology and assuming, for the sake of argument, Schellenberg's premises of religious scepticism and sceptical religion, along with the latter's rejection of the current appropriateness of a belief stance with respect to religious matters, I have argued that Schellenberg has failed to make his case that Ultimism is the most appropriate form of religious cognitive and practical commitment available to contemporary religious practitioners. Indeed, a naturalistic alternative, one that makes use of two of Schellenberg's heroes, Darwin and Hegel, not only provides a naturalistic religious alternative not recognized by Schellenberg but also one that is more compatible with the naturalistic ontological views of these two thinkers. And I have suggested on the basis of

Schellenberg's own pragmatic criterion that this alternative is arguably a more appropriate form of religious practice available to contemporary religious practitioners than his Ultimism.³⁶

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Notes

1. Henceforward I shall refer to these volumes respectively as DHHR, PPR, WD, WI, and ER.
2. As far as I can determine, epistemic concerns constitute a large part, if not the entirety, of the worries about Schellenberg's project. Moreover, they are primarily limited to proponents of a theistic alternative that Schellenberg rejects. See Howard-Snyder et al. (2013), a special issue of *Religious Studies* devoted to Schellenberg's thought including a response by Schellenberg.

3. Schellenberg uses the term 'Ultimism' to name the proposition that there exists a metaphysical, axiological, and soteriological Ultimate. I shall use the term to apply also to the religious stance of those who embrace as the central proposition of their religious pursuit the faith that there is an Ultimate and faith in that Ultimate. The context should make it clear to the reader what the referent of the term is. I thank an anonymous reviewer for reminding me of this distinction.
4. Cf. Schellenberg's precise definitions of both faith in and faith that in Appendix A of either WD (pp. 315–316) or WI (pp. 257–258). The bases for these definitions are elaborated in PPR (Chapters 5 & 6).
5. In PPR, while developing a normative, technical philosophical definition of religion, Schellenberg offers a detailed argument that the object of religious inquiry and practice at this stage of evolutionary religion ought to be the Ultimate.
6. Though Schellenberg employs a quantitative characterization of the two forms of the transcendent, it appears that he is thinking in qualitative terms, given his contrast between the transcendent and anything natural.
7. Of course, some of both ordinary and extraordinary (mystical) experience does not have a transcendent being as its object. Indeed their object is sometimes the natural world. So the persuasiveness of Schellenberg's argument is minimal at best.
8. Schellenberg maintains that a strong conception of the transcendent enables intellectual, emotional, and practical commitment. It might be reasonably objected that theism and other religious stances, as well as naturalism, offer similar possibilities. There is nothing special about Ultimism in this regard. I do not find Schellenberg explicitly replying to this sort of objection. But, as we shall see, his argument for Step 5 that Ultimism is the superior form of sceptical religion at this point in our evolutionary history is a value-based argument that Ultimism best achieves the enablement of emotional and practical commitment because of its axiological and soteriological superiority. I address that argument in the last section of the article.
9. I remain puzzled about the nature of evidence in Schellenberg's epistemology. On the face of it, it appears that Schellenberg has in mind empirical findings and confirmed scientific theories. Yet, given his generally a priori approach to both descriptive and evaluative issues, it is not clear to me whether and to what extent such evidence might play in belief-based research programmes if and when the time comes for that sort of thing.
10. Multiple epistemic issues arise here that would need resolving. Since I am granting Schellenberg's epistemic stance, I will not pursue that task here. But it is worth noting that in his positive argument for the soteriological superiority of Ultimism, Schellenberg invokes William James's will to believe and the value of finding truth at the risk of error. Urging the avoidance of falsifications might appear to be a recommendation to avoid error at the risk of losing the truth. But appearances are deceiving here because Schellenberg's focus is on a voluntary acceptance of a claim without believing it, while James can be read as urging in certain situations, including religious, the legitimacy of voluntarily based belief. Indeed, Schellenberg holds that beliefs, qua beliefs, are held involuntarily.
11. An assessment of Schellenberg's epistemic stance is important since it might well be argued that the most innovative aspect of his project is the advocacy of sceptical religion on the basis of a deep Darwinian epistemic future. Setting aside concerns about his assessment of the current *status quaestionis* with respect to contending religious claims, as well as the relative epistemic standing of religious versus non-religious claims, the question of the role of total evidence in his project looms large. Suffice it to say that one might worry that deep Darwinian time and the lack of total evidence that it brings might lead to total scepticism with respect to not only religious claims but also the *scientific* claims upon which the notion of total evidence is itself founded, that is, deep Darwinian time itself. But I also set this worry aside.
12. One, of course, need not be a realist about religious epistemic pursuits. Indeed, one might be a non-cognitivist, maintaining that religious pursuit is not a cognitive matter and so religious claims can be neither true nor false. Or, even if one is a cognitivist, one might be an error theorist. On the error-theoretic view, religious epistemic pursuit is aimed at truth and religious claims can be true or false. It just turns out that none are. Or one could be an instrumentalist with respect to theoretical religious claims. They are neither true nor false, but are nevertheless helpful ways of organizing ordinary religious claims. These latter claims might be about ordinary everyday affairs, not directly about divine entities, and, if so, capable of truth or falsity. Or, if these ordinary religious claims are non-inferentially based claims about the divine, they might be held to be (a) not capable of truth or falsity, (b) capable of such, but all false, or (c) possessing some degree of justification. Given both his realism and his view of the current religious epistemic situation, Schellenberg seems committed to ruling out all of these options.

13. Difficult scientific and philosophical issues surround the nature of time. Deep biological time has its basis in the nature of living systems as open thermodynamic systems. These themselves, if we take the current science as the best account we have, are themselves based on physical processes that extend into a deep cosmic past and, perhaps, into a deep cosmic future. But it is not at all clear how the reversible processes of non-biological physical systems are to be related to the apparently non-reversible processes of living systems. Thus, taking time to be a feature of the systems in question, it is not clear how to relate cosmic and biological time. Even more uncertain is the relationship between time as understood in quantum mechanical systems, on the one hand, and time as understood in the theory of general relativity, on the other. Schellenberg does not address these issues and I shall set them aside.
14. Following a widely accepted view, I am taking 'natural selection' to name a generic process that includes not only biological natural selection but also social/cultural selection and individual learning. Not only can selection processes select for genetically based biological traits, they can also select for social/cultural ones. And, indeed, individual learning can also be conceived as a selection process in which an individual's cognitive background (environment) selects for various cognitive stances. The kinds of social/cultural changes that are the focus of Schellenberg's investigation, changes in religious pursuit, are centred on the social/cultural and individual learning levels, rather than the biological. Thus, these involve mostly those sorts of selection processes. But those broadly cognitive processes (both epistemic and evaluative) share an ontology that is common to all selection processes: (1) variable traits, (2) heritable varying traits, (3) differentially fit heritable varying traits, and (4) selecting environments.
15. Schellenberg claims that though not inevitable there is evolutionary progress in nature and a way to estimate it. In discussing progress, he focuses on human progress, in particular, cognitive or epistemic progress. These claims, especially concerning ontological progress, are far from being uncontroversial. Although I cannot argue for it here, I believe that the goal directedness of the biological and social/cultural processes that build on them enable only *relative* assessments of progress, relative to both agents and the environments in which they act. They allow for increases in ontological complexity, degrees of organization, and specialization of function, all relative to given selecting environments. As for progress on the level of the divine, Schellenberg's Ultimism, as we have seen, excludes it.
16. An anonymous referee asks why the Ultimate must be static, as well might an alert reader. That of course, is precisely the question that a religious naturalist also raises. As we have seen, Schellenberg rules out the naturalist by requiring by definition that the proper object of religious pursuit be beyond the natural. It is transcendent. Moreover, the Ultimate is not only beyond the natural, it is unsurpassably beyond the natural. It is ultimate with respect to metaphysical, axiological, and soteriological characteristics. This seems to mean that it stands at the apex of these characteristics. As such, any change would seem to be a diminution or a revelation that it was not really at the apex. Can the Ultimate surpass itself? Schellenberg does not address the question – if indeed, it is an intelligible one for him.
17. At most, I find implicit reference to the ontological processes that are requisite for the evolution of cognitive capacities and their biological and cultural development.
18. I thank an anonymous referee for emphasizing this point.
19. In PPR, Schellenberg argues against a family resemblance definition of religion and for an essentialist one that gives primacy to the personal rather than institutional aspect of religion. He then attempts to capture what he calls the common concept of religion, one that includes as a key feature an ultimizing disposition, that is, the tendency to understand the object of religious inquiry and practice as metaphysically, axiologically, and soteriologically ultimate. Though he argues that multiple religious traditions and their adherents exhibit this ultimizing disposition or should be interpreted as intending it even when not displayed, as for instance, in the cases of the Greek or Norse gods, in the end he concedes that the ultimizing condition may not be a necessary feature of the common understanding of religion. So he turns to philosophy of religion to establish the necessity of that condition. In doing so, Schellenberg defines what it is for someone to be religious in what he describes as a technical and satisfying philosophical sense as follows:

'S is religious (or exhibits religion)' should be viewed as synonymous with the conjunction of the following propositions:

- (1) S takes there to be a reality that is ultimate, in relation to which an ultimate good can be attained.
- (2) S's ultimate commitments to the cultivation of dispositions appropriate to this state of affairs. (PPR, 23)

He provides the same definitions in WD, 313 and WI, 255. See also ER, 93–100.

20. Mikael Stenmark (2012) clarifies the relationships between religious naturalism and its rivals, non-religious naturalism, atheism, and theism, though he does not delineate the kind of option that I am suggesting, a scientifically based (including both the natural and social sciences) religious naturalism. The works of philosophers Karl Peters (2002), Donald Crosby (2012), and biologist Ursula Goodenough (1998) provide some current examples of that sort of option. Articles taking that perspective also appear on a regular basis *Zygon: The Journal for Religion and Science*. The general thrust of the recently formed Religious Naturalism Association (<http://religious-naturalist-association.org/>) is the promotion of religious naturalism.
21. Schellenberg seems to assume that the sciences cannot address issues of value. He thus neglects the efforts of Darwin (1871) himself to understand human moral agency and the many subsequent attempts to develop scientifically based naturalistic accounts of moral value and moral agency (Rottschaefer (1998)).
22. Schellenberg refers to this option as second-tier Ultimism, an option that, if conceptually possible, is to be pursued if unmodified Ultimism falters.
23. See, for instance, philosopher Philip Kitcher's account of religion (2014) and that of religious studies scholar, Loyal Rue (2006).
24. In contrast with secular sceptical religion, naturalistic sceptical religion finds its moral ideals in objective ontological realities, the larger wholes of which individuals are members. Kitcher holds a pragmatic account of moral values that denies moral realism, while Rue has a subjectivist account of moral values.
25. For a detailed account of the biological aspects, see Bourke (2011). For the social/cultural side, see Richerson & Boyd (2005). On the evolution of religion, see Bubulia (2009).
26. Roughly, Hegel scholars have assessed his overall position in three different ways: (1) a return to pre-Kantian idealistic metaphysics, (2) a completion of the critical Kantian project, and, most recently (3) a naturalistic metaphysics of becoming. I make use of this third assessment. Cf. Fritzman (2014) and Redding (2015).
27. I also envision that in attempts to pin down a naturalistic account of the Hegelian Spirit proponents of Darwin's Hegelian Spirit will make use of recent scientifically informed philosophical speculation about the 'extended mind', 'distributed cognition', and extended moral agency, along with recent accounts of the major evolutionary transitions as the emergence of higher-level biological and social individuality. For an introduction to the former, see Tollefsen (2015) and Schmidt (2003). For the latter, see references in note 25.
28. Whether or not this can be done, and, if so, to what extent, remains as part of the intellectual work of a proponent of this form of sceptical religion. Of course, the same goes for the other Hegelian elements that I have mentioned.
29. Sceptical religion's fourth characteristic, religious pragmatism, provides the key for assessments of the various possible forms of sceptical religion, including Ultimism and the two competitors that Schellenberg finds wanting, naturalism and pure scepticism. Schellenberg is not entirely clear about the nature of his critique of these alternatives. Both naturalism and pure scepticism can be viewed as belief-based epistemic pursuits or as acceptance-based epistemic pursuits. Schellenberg finds them unsupported in the former mode, but it is not always clear in his comparisons of them with Ultimism that he conceives them as possibilities in the latter mode. (He does explicitly refer to naturalism in the non-believing mode in ER, 139.) However, I will interpret him as doing so because, as we shall see, he treats them as competitors of Ultimism when advancing his positive pragmatic arguments for the latter. That leads one to believe that he is rejecting them on the bases of the value considerations that are central to his religious pragmatism and that he seems to hold as central not only for all religious pursuits, but for all human endeavour.
30. WI constitutes an extended and detailed rendering of this argument. A briefer version can be found in ER.
31. Though Schellenberg contends that these arguments fail as attempts to established justified *beliefs* in the existence of a divine being, they nevertheless reveal human values that promote overall human maturity. WD contains an extended critique of these arguments, as well as non-inferential approaches aimed at establishing religious *belief*.
32. As mentioned, Schellenberg reinterprets James as adopting a voluntary, cognitive, but non-believing attitude towards these value claims. The first of these values seems to capture James's requirement that a religious hypothesis be living and momentous. The second value is probably the one that most immediately comes to mind for those familiar with James. It involves the issue of how to balance the values of avoiding error and seeking the truth. James's solution suggests that in cases when the evidence does not

force one to take a stand pro or con, one has the right to choose between contending options. Specifically, one has the right to make a religious choice. Of course, James's formulation of that option is not specific. But Schellenberg has narrowed the religious options to one and that religious option is more specific than James's. On Schellenberg's interpretation, the religious option is Ultimism.

33. 'For it would be sad were the wonder of human conscious experience to cease just when individuals are starting to realize its benefits (or even before); and sad were the species – the whole project of human consciousness – to flicker out instead of flourishing ever more fully over the longest of runs. Consider especially the former matter, and let us put the point here more positively: ultimism, which tells us that the ultimate reality is ultimately valuable and the source of an ultimate good in which we can participate, leaves open the door to some sort of redemption, for all those lives that have been and continually are being crushed, often before they have had a chance to be fully formed and for this reason alone ultimism ought to be true' (ER, 155).
34. Indeed, in *Some Problems of Philosophy*, James is arguing for an empirically based, melioristic account of the world in which humans produce genuinely novel advances, as opposed to a static world in which everything, including human actions and their consequences, is laid out ahead of time.
35. Hartshorne & Reese (1953) remains today one of the best, if not the best, exploration of these questions, despite their a priori epistemological commitments, ones that a proponent of a scientifically based religious naturalism would lay aside for the more reliable epistemic tools plied by scientists.
36. I thank the editor of this journal for his very prompt and helpful responses to my queries, an anonymous reviewer for very helpful comments and suggestions, my colleague John Fritzman for helpful comments on an earlier version of this article, and, for their stimulating questions and comments, the audiences at a Lewis and Clark College colloquium and a session at the Pacific Northwest American Academy of Religion meeting where versions of this article were presented.