

Beyond Divine Hiddenness: Schellenberg's Trilogy

John Schellenberg is professor of philosophy at Mount Saint Vincent University, in Nova Scotia. His DPhil thesis at Oxford, published in 1993 as *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, Cornell University press, stimulated what is now a lively, growing debate and has made him a much-cited representative of atheism. But, though still negative on the God question, Schellenberg has recently been investigating more fundamental questions pertaining to the philosophy of religion. The result is a series of books – a trilogy – leading ultimately to a new reconciliation of reason and religion: *Prolegomena to a Philosophy of Religion* (2005), *The Wisdom to Doubt: A Justification of Religious Skepticism* (2007), and *The Will to Imagine: A Justification of Skeptical Religion* (forthcoming 2009).

Evidence of Excellence

First, Schellenberg is singlehandedly responsible for turning the argument from divine hiddenness, as Paul Draper notes, 'into a major issue of contemporary philosophy of religion.' The argument from divine hiddenness meticulously argues that the fact that there exists non-resistant non-belief in the world – the fact that some persons satisfy the description of being a reasonable non-believer – provides decisive evidence against theism. *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, along with a host of key articles on the problem of hiddenness, have made this claim in various nuanced ways which continue to invite discussion both in academic journals and all over the internet.

Of *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, Richard Swinburne of Oxford, the world's leading proponent of argumentative theism states: 'I consider this book one of the six or seven most important books on the philosophy of religion published in the last fifteen years.' We agree and are proud that its author is Canadian and works in Canada.

Beyond Hiddenness

But although Schellenberg's claim to philosophical fame is largely based on the hiddenness argument for atheism – which stretches back to the 1990's, his most thorough, interesting and important works have all come out in the last 5 years. We are thus interested in focusing on the mature Schellenberg, which is one reason why we propose to title the symposium –'Beyond Hiddenness.'

But there is another reason for the theme, which is that it reflects the tone of the trilogy in question: Schellenberg has gone far beyond the atheism that his concerns about hiddenness led him to (and urges others to do the same). In particular, he argues, quite uniquely, that all of us should be religious sceptics – that is sceptics about any grand religious reality – but that there is another sense in which we should have a form of religious faith. It is in this sense that his trilogy offers up a powerful, but non-orthodox, way of forging a reconciliation between reason and religion.

Such a project is major, and *Prolegomena to a Philosophy of Religion* (2005), starts it off by clarifying and correcting the basic terrain of philosophy of religion. Here we have novel definitions of foundational distinctions and concepts – from to the nature of faith, religious belief, disbelief and religious scepticism to the nature of religion or rather the religious. But we also get a fresh sense of what the aims of philosophy of religion should be in the 21st century, and where it is headed.

A major aim of *The Wisdom to Doubt* (2007), which builds on the conceptual foundation of the *Prolegomena*, is to defend religious scepticism and to cash out worries and prospects for a view called Ultimism – a religious possibility which transcends theism, and thus isn't touched by concerns about theistic hiddenness. Here we have Schellenberg taking on the role of an optimistic sceptic: one deeply sensitive to the fact that philosophy and science are always practiced by limited beings, but one that is

perhaps equally confident that we have yet to scratch the surface of religious reality. If Schellenberg is correct, then debates about theism, naturalism and atheism do little to take us closer to religious truth.

Lastly, *The Will to Imagine: A Justification of Skeptical Religion* which is to be released this year, explores the kind of religious faith which is appropriate and warranted by our present epistemic situation vis-à-vis religion. Since this last work is due to be out in 2009, we take this to be a timely indication that a symposium in 2010 is in order.

Ce symposium porte sur la récente trilogie de J.L. Schellenberg, publiée chez Cornell University Press. L'auteur est bien connu pour son premier ouvrage *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, qui, selon Paul Draper, a rendu le thème de la déité cachée «une question majeure de la philosophie de la religion de nos jours». La récente trilogie de Schellenberg nous mène bien au delà de l'athéisme du premier ouvrage. Selon Schellenberg, l'immaturation de l'espèce humaine suggère que nous devrions tous être sceptiques quant à la religion, mais, en même temps, que nous devrions tous avoir une forme de foi religieuse. Cette foi doit être non-doxastique, non pas un théisme traditionnelle (car le théisme s'est montré épistémiquement impossible), mais plutôt un « ultimisme » – l'idée selon laquelle il existe une réalité insurpassable mais non personnelle, dont la poursuite constitue le bien suprême des êtres humains.

Le premier volume de la trilogie, *Prolegomena to a Philosophy of Religion* (2005) organise le terrain conceptuel de la philosophie de la religion. *The Wisdom to Doubt* (2007) prône une attitude sceptique envers la religion et le naturalisme. Et, finalement, *The Will to Imagine: A Justification of Skeptical Religion* (2009) discute de la forme de foi religieuse qui est appropriée à notre situation épistémique très limitée. Ceci constitue la solution évolutionniste de Schellenberg au problème de la foi et la raison.

Guests include:

John Schellenberg, Professor of Philosophy, Mount Saint Vincent University
Paul Draper, Professor of Philosophy, Purdue University
Stephen Wykstra, Professor of Philosophy, Calvin College,
Jack Macintosh, Professor of Philosophy, University of Calgary