

Die vielen Fragen, die das Buch von Höhn somit aufwirft, sprechen nicht gegen dieses, sondern zeigen im Gegenteil, dass es sich hierbei um eine Fundgrube handelt, deren Schätze gehoben werden müssen, will man sich einen Überblick über die komplexe Thematik und Problematik heutiger Gottrede verschaffen. Eine systematische Theologie, die sich der Sachfrage nach Gott im Kontext von heute ernsthaft stellt, wird somit an Höhns Buch nicht vorbei kommen. Es bleibt zu hoffen, dass der Autor selbst sich an dieser Debatte mit seiner sachlichen Kompetenz und Entschiedenheit beteiligen wird.

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Paul MOSER, *The Elusive God*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. xi + 292p. ISBN 978-0-521-88903-2.

There are different ways of conceiving the relation of philosophy to religion; two of which have been prominent during the revival of the subject within analytical philosophy over the last four decades. The first corresponds to a familiar understanding of natural theology and consists in the gathering of evidence of sorts taken to be obvious, or to require no special volitional or affective disposition to discern. From these it is argued that it is certain, or probable either that there is or that there is not a deity (typically conceived of along bare monotheistic lines). The second more recent way of relating philosophy and religion is through the philosophical explication and defense or criticism of religious concepts or doctrines. Again this corresponds to an older practice, namely the analytical phase of systematic theology.

What has not so far been much explored is the attempt to use general religious concepts in the treatment of broad philosophical issues, or to apply particular theological claims in the resolution of specific philosophical questions posed by religious ideas. One reason for this neglect is that these third and fourth approaches assume greater familiarity with, and at least some sympathy for religious conceptions. Also they involve taking religious ideas seriously as potential sources of philosophical illumination.

For all that there has been a flourishing of philosophy of religion as natural theology much of this often rigorous and sometimes technical work seems existentially disengaged and concerned to maintain the methods and assumptions of secular analytical philosophy. Precisely on this account, however, it has failed to have had much influence on philosophy more broadly, and occupies the role of a domesticated specialism. For religious believers, especially those heir to rich theological traditions this position should be an uncomfortable one for it involves an imposed self-denying ordinance that is at least impoverishing, arguably spiritually corrupting, and neglectful of the promises and demands of revelation.

Given this background, Paul Moser's book on the apparent absence (and real presence) of God is both intellectually refreshing and represents a combination of religious seriousness and professional courage that is all too rare but which should serve as a challenge to others. Moser subtitles his book 'Reorienting Religious Epistemology,' and the description is fully justified. His argument, in brief, is that philosophy of religion has adopted a spectatorial stance, orienting itself toward a commonly conceived world and as a result produced a few uncertain observations.

Whatever positive evidences might seem visible there is also the fact of moral and natural evil. Besides these latter, however, is the seeming absence, or at least hiddenness of God. Evil calls for some formal or substantial reconciliation with God's goodness and with the conditions and purposes of creation; but allowing for possible responses to this familiar challenge there is still the fact that God remains at best an unseen playwright rather than a narrator, let alone a character in the perennial human search for an encounter with a personal deity. Moser's response is radical: subverting epistemological and methodological assumptions, and giving expression to a sensibility and to accompanying responses that will strike analytical Anglophones as being as embarrassing as a charismatic evangelist. This is its great merit: it surprises, it disturbs, it challenges and occasionally it embarrasses the reader.

Moser drives a sharp blade deep into the heart of the assumption that the matter of God's existence might be determined according to lowest common epistemological expectations. It is not for us to set the terms of adequate revelation; rather we should consider what we know about our epistemic, volitional and affective frailties and consider what is said by way of explaining and an addressing these in Judaeo-Christian scripture, and most deeply, I sense, in the transformational writings of St Paul. Evidence of God's existence and creative and redemptive power are available but we look for them in the wrong place – as if seeking evidence of being loved we stared up at the sky rather than noticing the attentive actions of other persons.

According to Moser, the hiddenness of God is not a general fact but a relational situation: God is hidden for x if and only if for x God's existence fails to be obvious and is not beyond reasonable doubt. But that is not an unmovable condition, for x may proceed to a state in which God's activity becomes evident through the efficacy of the Holy Spirit in X 's life. Setting aside special cases of particular revelation that transformation involves X in coming to orient him or her self volitionally so as to receive the gift of faith. In a way this is to jump ahead since Moser has more general points to make about our moral responsibility for the questions we choose to pursue, or remain focused upon. This point deserves to be meditated upon quite apart from its role in his general argument. Academics regard themselves as radical freethinkers but for the most part are deeply conventional functionaries approving of what is approved of. Moser provides a welcome wake-up, calling philosophers of religion to take religion and its claims seriously, looking not for approval to a secular philosophy peer group but to authoritative religious sources – in this case Christian scripture and the lives and testimonies of apostolic saints.

I am reluctant to summarise Moser's argumentation, in part for reasons of its complexity, but also because it demands to be read and assessed on its own terms. Let me, though, give at least a central sample of his thoughts. He writes 'By way of summary, we can sketch a rough cognitive portrait at this point. Conclusive evidence of God's existence would be purposively available to humans, given God's purpose to engage humans in terms of what they truly need and thus to avoid trivializing (evidence of) divine reality as a matter of casual human speculation ... A central divine purpose, characteristic of a perfectly loving God, would aim non-coercively but authoritatively to transform human purposes to agree with divine purposes, including a goal of divine-human fellowship in perfect love. God would aim, accordingly, to have us willingly

attend to the relevant evidence in such a way that it would emerge saliently for what it is intended to be: an evident authoritative call to volitional fellowship with God' (p. 23).

This is a significant passage, both for giving the general philosophical character of his favoured approach and for hinting at a prose style that suggests the work of an applied research committee. This latter aspect, I fear, gets occasionally worse, as when he writes that [God's powerful self-revelation of perfect love] would be an agent-to agent power transaction that moves us non-coercively from selfish fear to shared divine unselfish love, and from death to life' (p. 145). In the context of a genuinely inspiring book a certain leadenness of prose is unfortunate but surmountable. More problematic is the failure to connect the revelation of spirit to the general forms of natural theological proof, given the traditional view that the latter constituted preambles to the reception of revelation. Even if that order of priority is put in question more needs to be said about the relation and interplay of general revelation-specific argument.

Returning to the stylistic there is also a pervasive repetitiveness, and the book would have lost nothing dialectically and gained much rhetorically from being half as long and twice as crafted. These criticisms, however are voiced not in the usual professional spirit of automatic criticism but rather in one of gratitude but frustration for a work that is genuinely important, truly courageous but intermittently boring. My overall verdict is simple and brief: this is a book that every Christian philosopher of religion should read and from which they cannot fail to profit. I also suspect that while it may burn like a slow and occasionally faltering fuse it will produce further detonations.

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Christian PIAN, *H. Richard Niebuhr*, (Collection Initiations aux théologiens), Paris: Ed. du Cerf, 2009. 346p. ISBN 978-204-08795-7.

Le grand théologien Helmut Richard Niebuhr a joué avec son frère Reinhold Niebuhr, une place essentielle dans le débat public et politique aux Etats-Unis; de surcroît, il fut reconnu comme un théologien et éthicien chrétien original, spécialiste de l'histoire religieuse de son pays. Pourtant, il reste quasiment inconnu en Europe et spécialement en France. Aucun ouvrage de H. Richard Niebuhr n'a jusqu'à présent été traduit en français. Et je n'en ai trouvé qu'un seul sur Internet en allemand: *Der Gedanke des Gottesreichs im amerikanischen Christentum*. On ne peut donc qu'être gré à Christian Pian de nous proposer avec le présent ouvrage une introduction substantielle dans le format de la collection «Initiations aux théologiens» qui a déjà consacré le même type de travail avec une sélection de textes de l'auteur de référence à De Lubac, Rahner, Moltmann, Bonhoeffer, Barth, Möhler et Congar. Christian Pian était d'autant mieux placé qu'il avait déjà consacré sa thèse de doctorat en 2005 à notre auteur sous le titre: *La présence de Dieu au monde. Apports et limites d'une théologie de l'histoire chez H. Richard Niebuhr pour penser l'éthique sociale*.

Qui fut H. Richard Niebuhr? Ce fut un théologien dans une famille de théologiens, qui fit sa thèse sous la direction de Macintosh sur «Ernst Troeltsch's Philosophy of Religion». Il fit toute sa carrière à la Divinity School de Yale, jusqu'à sa mort brutale, à un an de sa retraite, en 1962.