Robert McKim *Religious Amgibuity and Religious Diversity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).*

Robert McKim has written a terrific book dealing with the topics of the hiddenness of God (it seems as though it could be more obvious that God exists if God does exist), religious pluralism, and the epistemic implications of these two facts.

The book is divided into two parts. The first is called "The Hiddenness of God", and the second "Religious Diversity." The overall argument of the book is that the fact that God is hidden (from most of us at least), and the presence of deep and widespread disagreement about the truth of worldviews ought to lead us to consider carefully the truth of our own worldview beliefs, and ought to cause us to hold them in a tentative, non-dogmatic fashion. McKim is a very careful and meticulous philosopher, and he deals with these issues with great care.

In Part I McKim begins by arguing for the proposition that the existence and nature of God are hidden to a significant extent from most people. He says, "the central idea is just that it is not clear whether the claims that theists make about God are true; and this applies both to the claim that God exists and to numerous theistic claims about the character, purposes, will, and so forth of God" (6). This claim seems obviously true to me, but he gives a series of compelling arguments for those who aren't at first convinced.

Most of Part I focuses evaluating various *goods of mystery*—goods that come about if and only if God is hidden. (Goods of mystery have a counterpart, *goods of clarity*—goods that come about if and only if the existence of God is clear.) McKim looks at three goods of mystery in great detail: the ability to act morally, the ability to freely choose to believe in God, and the ability to have significant trust in God. He concludes that each of these go some way towards explaining why it is that God should be hidden. McKim also considers whether the hiddenness of God provides a plausible basis for atheism. In particular he examines and rejects J.L. Schellenberg's main argument that the proper conclusion to draw from apparent divine hiddenness is that God doesn't exist.

He concludes in Part I that though the hiddenness of God doesn't give us strong reason to believe that God doesn't exist, neither is there a very plausible explanation of the hiddenness of God. He uses these facts to draw an interesting conclusion: If God exists, it's not very important for us to have a much closer relationship with God, and it's not even important for many more of us to believe in God. He reasons as follows. If God exists, then the goods of mystery must outweigh goods of clarity (such as having a much closer relationship with God or having many more people believe in God). But the goods of mystery examined in

Part I don't amount to very much. Thus, the cumulative weight of the goods of clarity must not amount to very much, either (111).

Part I contains an impressive investigation of the topic of divine hiddenness. This is a topic that hasn't received nearly enough treatment, and McKim's careful work on it will be of considerable benefit to philosophers of religion. One is tempted to take the conclusions of Part I as a *reductio* of McKim's argument. Surely if God exists it is important that we have a closer relationship with him and that more people come to believe in him. (This certainly is the position of Western monotheism.) So somewhere McKim has gone wrong. But it's awfully difficult to know where to jump off the train; so much of what McKim says about divine hiddenness seems exactly right.

I suspect that one thing that the Christian religious believer, especially those of a Reformed bent, would want to say is that it doesn't follow from the fact that goods of mystery aren't all that impressive that the goods of clarity aren't impressive. Perhaps the goods of clarity do outweigh the goods of mystery, but there is some explanation for why God is hidden that doesn't involve the weighing of various goods. In particular, I'm thinking of the "noetic effects of sin", both sin that affects us from the Fall, and immoral acts which we commit in our own lives. Christians, especially Reformed ones, tend to place emphasis on the extent to which sin has warped our ability to perceive reality correctly. So the problem might be with *us*; we're just not in an appropriate cognitive or perceptual state to see clearly that God exists and what he is like.

I don't expect this response to impress McKim. But the Christian might respond in a *Plantingaesque* fashion that she is well within her rights to draw from elements of her own world view in explaining phenomena like the hiddenness of God, and the fact that others of different world views aren't impressed by this need not concern the Christian.

I don't advocate this as a refutation of what McKim has to say at the end of Part I, and I have some questions of my own as to how satisfactory such a response would be. But I can well imagine it being offered, and I think it has something to be said for it.

Part II is entitled "Religious Diversity", and it largely is an argument for and a defense of an epistemic position that McKim calls "the Critical Stance." The core of the Critical Stance is captured in two epistemic principles. The first of these is the "E-principle",

> Disagreement about an issue or area of inquiry provides reason to think that each side has an obligation to examine beliefs about that issue(140).

The second principle is called the "T-principle"

> Disagreement (of the sort under discussion) about an issue or area of inquiry provides reason for whatever beliefs we hold about that issue or area of inquiry to be tentative (141).

About tentative belief, he says

> Tentative belief has a number of components. It involves a recognition that the belief may need revision and may be mistaken. It also involves a concomitant openness to alternative beliefs and an awareness that some of these alternatives may be plausible, and that one of them may even be correct…Belief of this sort permits you to entertain as live hypotheses various alternatives to your own position. It involves an attitude such as this: here is how I see things, but views that are quite different from mine may instead be right (154-55).

There probably are several objections to these principles that have already occurred to the reader, and many more that would upon thinking carefully about the T and E principles. McKim does a very careful and skillful job of responding to a whole host of objections to these two principles. For instance, one might think that the E-principle surely can't apply to everyone, or even most people. Much of the world is busy trying to avoid being killed in a war, or trying to find something to eat. How can these sorts of people have any sort of obligation to examine, especially in any sort of detail, their beliefs on a contentious issue?

To this McKim replies

> The E-principle applies most clearly to intelligent, educated, reflective, well-informed adults who have the leisure, ability and opportunity to subject their beliefs to scrutiny. I will refer to such a person as a *privileged* person (149).

So it appears as though the E-principle won't apply to many, if not most, people in the world. There is perhaps another way of looking at this that will yield the same result. One might think that the E-principle gives rise to a *prima facie* epistemic obligation on everyone. However, this epistemic obligation may be overridden by other obligations (of an epistemic or particularly non-epistemic sort). The person who is starving has obligations that supercede her obligations created by the E-principle.

Another objection that springs to mind is that it seems that religious belief by its very nature isn't tentative. It involves a "whole-hearted" sort of commitment. McKim has much to say on this issue. He spends much time carefully investigating how tentative belief might fit into a sincere believer's life. Ultimately, though, McKim is willing to jettison those parts of the religious life which aren't compatible (psychologically or otherwise) with holding one's beliefs tentatively. But he shows tentative belief is much more compatible with sincere religious commitment than one might otherwise have thought.

A third objection that might arise is that surely the epistemic status with respect to worldview questions must bear on what sort of obligation one may derive from the T-principle. Imagine a world in which a large group of unreflective 5-year olds disagreed with some subject S with respect to which is the correct worldview. Surely the disagreement here shouldn't give rise to obligation on behalf of S to examine her worldview beliefs.

McKim has something to say about this sort of case. He says

> It is not just the fact that there are diverse beliefs that is striking: it is the fact that wise people who think carefully and judiciously, who are intelligent, clever, honest, reflective, and serious, who avoid distortion, exaggeration, and confabulation, who admit ignorance when appropriate…hold these diverse beliefs. Let us say that such a person has *integrity*. I want to focus on the implications of disagreement

One of the goods that McKim sees arising out of people adopting the Critical Stance is tolerance towards those who disagree with you. Tolerance *per se* isn't a virtue; clearly some things shouldn't be tolerated. But tolerance can lead to many states of affairs that are good, in particular treating fellow human beings in a decent manner. (One would think it would have done much good if warring Catholics and Protestants throughout history had adopted the Critical Stance with respect to their own beliefs.)

The last two chapters of the book deal with religious experience. In chapter 10 McKim investigates how religious experience might bear epistemically on our religious beliefs. He has much insightful to say here. In particular he makes the point that typical religious experience doesn't seem to give justification to many of the beliefs in one's religious world view. So, how does the fact that I hear a voice which I take to be from God give me reason for thinking that God is Triune, (unless the voice happens to say, "This is God, and I am Triune"). McKim's last chapter deals with William Alston's Perceiving God. McKim wants to show that nothing in Alston's work undermines any of his own conclusions the he takes himself to have established in the rest of the book. In arguing for this claim,

however, McKim says much that will be of worth to anyone who is interested in thinking about Alston's religious epistemology.

I find McKim's book to be very impressive, and I recommend it highly to those in philosophy and religious studies who are interested in the hiddenness of God and the epistemic implications of religious pluralism. I have used it as a text for an upper-division undergraduate philosophy of religion class. The main problem I had in teaching the text was that there was very little of substance to disagree with (and my students seemed to think so, too). I did find points of disagreement, but the issues generally were peripheral to McKim's project. It isn't always that his points immediately strike one as correct. Many of them do, but some don't. But for those that don't, McKim does a superb job of careful philosophical sifting and through this work usually is able to provide convincing grounds for his claim. In teaching this book, I felt like I was teaching philosophy that has much in the way of "cash value" as to how one lives one's life. This isn't always the case in philosophy of religion.

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