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## Schellenberg's Ultimism as the Proper Object of Non-Doxastic Religion: A Reply to Palmqvist

### Abstract:

Carl-Johan Palmqvist (forthcoming) recently examines a well-known form of non-doxastic religiosity called ultimism, which comes to us from J.L. Schellenberg. He contends that traditional forms of religion are better candidates for non-doxastic religion for two reasons. First, their specificity makes them more likely to put one into contact with transcendental reality than ultimism. Second, religious experience can only be had on traditional forms of religion, not on ultimism. I argue that Palmqvist's rejection of ultimism is wrong. It's false that ultimism isn't specific enough to put one into contact with transcendental reality (if there is one). It's also false that there aren't religious experiences consistent with ultimism, but not with traditional forms of religion. There might be reasons for preferring traditional forms of religion to ultimism, however, Palmqvist fails to demonstrate that this is the case.

### I. Introduction

There is a growing literature on the nature of religious faith. Some philosophers suggest that religious faith need not include propositional beliefs. Indeed, perhaps religious faith or commitment is perfectly consistent with a *non-doxastic pro-attitude* such as hope or acceptance. Such non-doxastic accounts of faith are thought to be compatible with scepticism about the truth of religious *belief*. In a recent article, Carl-Johan Palmqvist expresses sympathy for non-doxastic accounts of religious faith and I share in his sympathy for such accounts. With Palmqvist (and also for the sake of argument), I'm going to assume that non-doxastic accounts of faith are possible. My focus is on Palmqvist's evaluation and subsequent rejection of one non-doxastic account of religion, ultimism, in favour of non-doxastic religion about traditional forms of religion.

According to Palmqvist in order for an agent *S* to have a non-doxastic pro-attitude toward some state of affairs *p* the following two conditions need to obtain:

- ND1: *S* desires that *p* or judges that *p* is an overall good thing.
- ND2: *S* believes *p* to be epistemically possible (Palmqvist forthcoming).

Palmqvist explains that non-doxastic attitudes are often considered voluntary. However, ND1 is intended to be consistent with voluntary and involuntary non-doxastic attitudes. With respect to ND2 it simply needs to be the case that while *S* believes *p* is false, she believes that it is epistemically possible. In other words, while we can't reasonably believe *p*, for all we know it could turn out to be true (Palmqvist forthcoming).

Palmqvist's argument against ultimism is that traditional forms of religion are better candidates for non-doxastic religion for two main reasons. First, their specificity makes them more likely to put one into contact with transcendental reality than ultimism. Second, religious experience can

only be had on traditional forms of religion, not on ultimism. I argue that Palmqvist's rejection of Ultimism is wrong. It's false that ultimism isn't specific enough to put one into contact with transcendental reality (if there is one). It's also false that there aren't religious experiences consistent with ultimism, but not with other traditional religions. There might be reasons for preferring traditional forms of religion to ultimism, however, Palmqvist fails to demonstrate that this is the case.

## II. What is Ultimism?

Before outlining Palmqvist's argument it is important to understand what constitutes ultimism. According to Palmqvist, Schellenberg is attempting to capture a generic or 'core' form of religion. Schellenberg believes that this reduces to the claim that "there exists a 'triple' ultimate, a deepest level of reality that is metaphysically, axiologically, and soteriologically ultimate. The concept of the ultimate is supposed to be found in the world's great religious traditions" (Palmqvist forthcoming). Ultimism is consistent with both personal forms of traditional religion (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) and impersonal forms of religion (Hinduism, Buddhism). **For those unfamiliar with Schellenberg's work, it will be helpful to have slightly more detail** about ultimism than offered by Palmqvist.

According to Schellenberg the divine is something 'more' "not just (i) in factual terms but also (ii) in value and (iii) in what we might term importance, by which I mean its value for *us*. In philosophical terms: the first sort of transcendence is metaphysical transcendence, the second axiological transcendence, and the third soteriological transcendence" (Schellenberg 2013, 94). *Triple transcendence* obtains if (i)-(iii) obtains. Theism is a clear example of specific religion that has both details and ultimacy. On this characterization triple transcendence is triple ultimacy (Schellenberg 2013, 96). Schellenberg explains that "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)" (Schellenberg 2013, 99). Ultimism is hidden throughout the history of religion in more detailed concepts like theism. Schellenberg concludes that:

Ultimism refers quite generally to the accessibility of an ultimate good springing from something ultimate in reality and value, rather than specifically to salvation found in a personal relationship with a perfect creator who loves us like a parent, or to any other extant religious details. Given its breadth and our immaturity, we must admit that ultimism may well be true... even if we think that many existing attempts to fill it out, including traditional theism, are provably false. In part this is because many other detailed ways of filling it out may well remain undiscovered. Ultimism invites doubt rather than disbelief (Schellenberg 2013, 99-100).

Given Schellenberg's minimalist account, triple ultimacy (or just 'ultimacy') says that *divine reality is something ultimate in factual terms, value terms, and in its importance for us*. Schellenberg concludes with some practical advice on which doxastic attitude we should take toward ultimism, along with how to live this style of faith out in one's life. Schellenberg recommends that we have imaginative faith about ultimism. This means adopting a policy of imagining the world in a particular way, but does not entail believing it to be that way

(Schellenberg 2013, 103). He suggests that imaginative faith is directed at ultimism, it's an unrestricted and freeing sort of faith. Schellenberg writes that this type of faith "is content with possibility... In having faith that ultimism is true, I train my thought on the idea that what is deepest in the nature of things is also unsurpassably the greatest and that its wonders are in some way transformatively accessible to me and the world" (Schellenberg 2013, 105-106). He continues:

If ultimism is true, then indeed it is the dimension of reality transcending nature that is most fundamental and important. If it is true, then the core of reality is on the side of the good, and may indeed in some sense *be* the good. If it is true, then – even though we might have a hard time seeing exactly how – the universe or our environment in the largest sense is not indifferent to our deepest needs. If ultimism is true, furthermore, then it is through associating ourselves with the reality of which it speaks that we can best make contact with value." (107)

To conclude, it's important to note that this section isn't intended to defend the truth of ultimism (such a question isn't relevant to this discussion). Rather, this is meant only as a general description of the main features of ultimism.

### III. Palmqvist's Experience Argument

In this section I outline Palmqvist's argument for preferring detailed accounts of religion to Schellenberg's ultimism.

#### 1. The Experience Argument

Here's the standardized version of Palmqvist's Experience Argument:

- (1) When choosing an object for non-doxastic religious commitment, we should *ceteris paribus* prefer a choice that is specific and contains religious experience.
- (2) Simple ultimism is not specific, and does not contain religious experience.
- (3) Traditional forms of qualified ultimism are both specific and contain religious experience.

Therefore,

- (4) When choosing an object for non-doxastic religious commitment, we should prefer a traditional form of qualified ultimism over simple ultimism (Palmqvist forthcoming)

Palmqvist explains that the argument is logically valid and that premise (1) is the only controversial premise. Let's examine his defense of (1).

#### 2. Palmqvist's defense of the first conjunct of premise (1)

Palmqvist offers a number of reasons in defense of the first conjunct of premise (1), namely that specific versions of religion should be preferred to less specific versions like ultimism. Here's

why: According to Palmqvist, the “basic problem with Schellenberg’s view is that it is far from clear that engaging in ultimistic religion will have any chance of getting the subject in touch with transcendent reality, if there is one” (Palmqvist forthcoming). Palmqvist is careful to point out that this is not the objection that genuine religiosity is impossible on ultimism. Nor is it the objection that Ultimism is unlikely to be true. For if any more detailed and qualified version of the ultimate is true (e.g. traditional forms of personal or impersonal religion) then Schellenberg’s basic (or as Palmqvist calls it, ‘simple’) ultimism is necessarily true. Rather, the problem is “that even if simple ultimism turns out to be true, it seems doubtful at best that it will put us in any contact with ultimate reality. And what good is a vague but true religious view if it is too abstract to let us experience religious reality?” (Palmqvist forthcoming). Here are the details that Palmqvist offers in support of this objection:

[S]uppose that Christianity is the true religion. In this scenario, the claims of many Christians of living in a relationship with God would be true; in other words, Christians would have contact with ultimate reality. Since Christianity is a form of qualified ultimism and as such entails the truth of simple ultimism, simple ultimism would obviously be true as well in this thought experiment. However, the important question is not whether simple ultimism is true in this scenario, but rather if its adherent, the ‘ultimist’ so to speak, would be in contact with ultimate reality. Would his commitment, confined to the abstract theses that there exists a triple ultimate, put the ultimist in contact with God? I very much doubt that. The ultimist would be no more in a relationship with God than someone who only holds the abstract view ‘there is something on the other side of my hedge’ would be in a relationship with his neighbour” (Palmqvist forthcoming).

Palmqvist’s objection, then, is that Ultimism is too abstract in order for it to align someone with transcendental reality, even if it turns out that such an alignment is impossible on more detailed forms of religion too. In sum, “[h]aving a view that is too abstract will not enable one to act upon it properly, since it will fail to imply a concrete course of action” (Palmqvist forthcoming). Finally, Palmqvist claims that an individual is better off if both one’s cognitive content and actions are aligned with reality as opposed to just one’s actions.

Palmqvist concludes by asking “what level of detail is required to make alignment with reality possible?” (Palmqvist forthcoming). He answers that he finds “it reasonable to suppose that one’s view must be detailed enough to postulate concrete entities of the right kind, like God or the impersonal Brahm. For example, theism would constitute such a minimally detailed view” (Palmqvist forthcoming). All of this suggests that more detailed forms of religion are to be preferred to Schellenberg’s Ultimate.

### 3. Palmqvist’s defense of the second conjunct of premise (1)

If the above reasoning is correct then Palmqvist only needs to defend the second conjunct of premise (1) in order to complete his defense of the Experience Argument. In defense of the claim that we should prefer instantiations of religion which contain religious experience Palmqvist argues that reports of religious experience are the best indicator of transcendental reality that we currently possess. He writes, “[i]n a tradition where veridical religious experience is thought to

occur, it is part of the view that contact with religious reality is not only possible in principle, but a recurrent phenomenon. Therefore, it seems reasonable to suppose that if such a view turns out to be true, the experiences associated with it will be veridical as well” (Palmqvist forthcoming). Palmqvist seems to believe that even if ultimism is true, we don’t have any reason to think it will put us into contact with religious reality, and hence it won’t offer anything by way of religious experience. Hence, he writes that “[c]laims about contact with a transcendent, religious reality are widespread in the major world religions. Simple ultimism, being a product of philosophical reasoning only, comes without any such claims” (Palmqvist forthcoming).

Palmqvist’s main defense of religious experience on a non-doxastic approach is by defending the possible verticality of such experiences against two objections. The first objection to religious experience is based on the existence of religious diversity. The second objection arises from the existence of alternative and competing naturalistic explanations of such experiences. While Palmqvist concedes that these objections might make belief in the verticality of such experiences irrational, they don’t make taking a positive non-doxastic stance toward them unwarranted. After all, the epistemic bar for a non-doxastic commitment is only that such experiences are an epistemic possibility (Palmqvist forthcoming). I’m not going to outline Palmqvist’s defense of religious experience in any detail since I will not challenge his argument on that basis. I’m going to assume, with Palmqvist, that it’s at least epistemically possible such experiences are veridical. Indeed his defense of religious experience is another part of his paper that I’m very sympathetic toward.

#### IV. Objections: Why the Experience Argument Fails

##### 1. An initial objection to the Experience Argument

Palmqvist explores a challenge to premise (1) which suggests that some other objective “should guide our choice of non-doxastic religious object” (Palmqvist forthcoming). He wonders whether an objector would protest Schellenberg’s ‘aim of openness’. According to Schellenberg, we should be open because we should be sceptical about the truth of any of the religions, and also about the truth of naturalism. Belief in religion or naturalism isn’t justified so we should adopt scepticism. We’re also in the very early stages of human development and hence intellectually immature. Palmqvist explains that:

Woven together, these strands provide the rationale for the openness aim, which states that we should prefer simple ultimism over any qualified version because it makes us maximally open to any future discoveries in the field of religion. If in doubt over the reasonableness of this argument, remember that all qualified versions of ultimism entails simple ultimism, which will be true as long as any version of qualified ultimism is true ( Palmqvist forthcoming).

Palmqvist’s main objection to this is that Schellenberg’s wrongly uses truth as the main criteria for a non-doxastic religion. This would be appropriate for evaluation of doxastic religion, but not non-doxastic religion (Palmqvist forthcoming). It’s tempting to pursue this line as an objection to the Experience Argument further. I’m doubtful that Palmqvist fully appreciates the sceptical nature

of Schellenberg's account. Likewise, I'm equally doubtful he appreciates the function that deep time, and specifically the role that the deep future is meant to play in support of ultimism. While these topics deserve more attention, I'm instead going to take a more direct approach in objecting to the Experience Argument.

## 2. Problems for Premise (1)

The main problem with the Experience Argument is, simply put, that premise (1) is false. It's false that a non-doxastic stance toward ultimism will not put us in touch with transcendental reality. It's false that we should prefer a religion which contains a religious experience (or if we should ultimism isn't excluded on the basis of lacking such experiences). The problem isn't so much that these aren't things worth preferring, it's just that they don't establish a relevant difference between ultimism and more specific versions of religion. Thus, specificity and experience aren't reasons to prefer one form of religion over another. Or, at least they aren't reasons to reject ultimism in favour of more specific traditions (and this is enough to defeat the argument since ultimism is Palmqvist's target).

### A. Specificity

Recall that Palmqvist writes "that even if simple ultimism turns out to be true, it seems doubtful at best that it will put us in any contact with ultimate reality. And what good is a vague but true religious view if it is too abstract to let us experience religious reality?" (Palmqvist forthcoming). I argue that this is false. Ultimism is not too abstract to put one in touch with transcendental reality.

Consider the four most important components of Schellenberg's sceptical religion. The first feature is *Religious Diachronism* which is represented by a willingness to consider the future, not just the present and the past. According to Schellenberg, we must be willing to reinterpret our religious attitudes in light of the future (Schellenberg 2013, 75). In other words, it's wrong to ignore the fact of the deep future in our current thinking on religion (Schellenberg 2013, 76). This is important because it means that Schellenberg's account cannot be properly evaluated all at once *right now*. That would be giving a synchronic evaluation to something intended to be evaluated diachronically. Affirming more specific religious claims is perfectly consistent with ultimism, but will only be possible in the future. This is because such affirmations currently "only stand in the way of the complete shift of orientation required to make deep human progress in matters religious more likely. One day we might be able to make epistemic judgments about religious truth claims that we aren't well-positioned to make right now" (Schellenberg 2013, 77). Right now, there's no reason to suppose we'll discover either the truth or falsity of any specific religious claim (Schellenberg 2013, 77-78). If anything, then, Schellenberg's account is silent about just how specific the religious claims are that it will be rational to accept in the future. To say that it is too abstract and unspecific is to make a synchronic judgment about an account that consistently appeals to the deep future (thought we will see that ultimism can survive the synchronic judgment).

The second feature is *Religious Scepticism*. In light of the deep future and our intellectual immaturity, we should express nonbelief or scepticism about the most profound and controversial matters, including religious ones (Schellenberg 2013, 75). The third feature is *Religious Developmentalism*. This attitude should be marked by a patient, forward looking attitude which is

“concerned for the development of greater religious maturity and insight rather than preoccupied with the past and depending on the authority of founding figures” (Schellenberg 2013, 75). Schellenberg continues to ask: “what if many other small changes in the intellectual, social, moral, emotional dimensions of life over an incredibly long time, guided by the restlessly curious human mind... will [lead to]... a much richer and deeper picture of ultimate things?” (Schellenberg 2013, 84). Again, Schellenberg’s account leaves open the possibility for even more specificity than current religions offer. But such specificity likely won’t be achievable without adopting the sceptical attitude advocated for by Schellenberg. Yet even when evaluating ultimism only *right now* it has enough specificity.

Finally, the fourth feature of Schellenberg’s sceptical religion is religious pragmatism. By pragmatism Schellenberg means that we should be “thinking about how religion itself might help us evolve toward ever greater maturity in all areas of human life, in particular functioning as part of the solution to our evaluative immaturity instead of part of the problem (religious pragmatism)” (Schellenberg 2013, 75). Religion has the potential to be a source of great good, rather than being responsible for human deficiency (Schellenberg 2013, 85).

Ultimism also has important practical implications for religious inquiry. Since we’re near the beginning of religious intellectual and spiritual development, Schellenberg’s sceptical religion represents faith seeking understanding in its purest form. Inquiry is part of the religious life itself. Furthermore, “it is written into ultimism and its implications that there is fundamental pattern of meaning and order in things, and the religious person is therefore called to ‘get it together’: using ultimism as a point of stability, she boldly orders her life in accordance with what she sees when she imagines it true, courageously navigating through apparent chaos with its support on her mind” (Schellenberg 2013, 109).

The sort of ignorance and limitation implied by Schellenberg’s account could have good consequences. For instance, there could be ways to solve problems that we can’t see right now (Schellenberg 2013, 109). Schellenberg holds that if we give way to long-term thinking we will naturally seek goods that are deeper and more enduring than mere material possessions (Schellenberg 2013, 109-110). With respect to our specific actions, he explains that:

[I]f ultimism is true, then what might otherwise appear as unduly risk-taking behavior on behalf of the good in fact only more fully aligns us with the deepest nature of reality. It follows that we act on our faith that ultimism is true if we leave our comfort zone and move out into a world still rich in chaos and calamity, involving ourselves in (what would be called) risk-taking behavior on behalf of the good when the opportunity to do so arises (Schellenberg 2013, 110).

We should risk helping people even though things will be made right in the end because ultimism is held in conjunction with moral principles that are (almost) psychologically unavoidable. This sort of risk-taking behaviour is a possible way to connect to transcendental reality. Negative risk-taking behaviour such as acts of terrorism are ruled out by ultimism because such acts tend to arise from a much narrower view of the world and also with narrower loyalties. Terrorists aren’t sceptical enough of the claims of their religious beliefs such that their beliefs overpower common sense morality (Schellenberg 2013, 111). Schellenberg concludes that “through imaginative

evolutionary faith we are best able to *express* and *honor* and also *further develop and support into the future* the beautiful but fragile, multi-faceted and value-laden complexity that can be seen in the process of becoming human, as realized at various levels in individuals, communities, and the species at large” (Schellenberg 2013, 156).

In light of the scepticism implied by Schellenberg’s view Palmqvist writes that “[p]resumably, the only course of action a highly abstract view will suggest is that one should try to get more information (which is exactly what Schellenberg envisages when he claims that religious investigation will be a big part of the ultimist’s religiosity)” (Palmqvist forthcoming). But given the above comments about religious pragmatism, this isn’t true. Schellenberg is concerned with religious inquiry into the future, but right now ultimism still provides enough detail to put one into contact with transcendental reality. It provides action guidance and the cognitive content Palmqvist wrongly claims can only be associated with more specific forms of religion. While it might be less detailed than more specific religions, ultimism is detailed enough to be emotionally satisfying in the ways a traditional religion can satisfy. We therefore don’t have a reason to think specificity is a relevant difference which should make us prefer a traditional form of religion to ultimism. If this is still in doubt, consider the next section on religious experience.

## B. Religious Experience

Religious experience is a wide-ranging phenomenon which is studied by many different disciplines. This can make it difficult, if not impossible, to offer necessary and sufficient conditions for what constitutes religious experience. Still, it would have been helpful if Palmqvist had at least provided some examples of the types of experiences he had in mind. For instance, there seems to be a genuine and important difference between corporeal visions and intellectual visions. This difference is important because there are instances of intellectual visions which are clearly compatible with ultimism. Likewise, Phillip H. Wiebe observes that intellectual visions have been seen as the most important type of religious or mystical experience since the Ancient Greeks. He explains that “[t]he intellect came to be seen as capable not only of intuiting the reality of natural laws, a moral order, and an ontological order that includes God, but also of proving our immortality” (Wiebe 2015, 2-3) Augustine held that intellectual visions always provided some type of intuitive knowledge. In other words, one reason to value intellectual visions above corporeal visions is that they necessarily provide intuitive knowledge. As already mentioned, it’s difficult to define religious experience. Thus, working from a few examples will help make clear the difference between the types of experiences I have in mind, even if the boundary between such experiences is vague. Here’s an example of a corporeal vision:

**CORPOREAL:** “Suddenly there was a man in white standing in front of the [baptismal] font about eighteen inches away. He was a man but he was totally, utterly different from the rest of us. He was wearing something long, like a robe, but it was so white it was almost transparent... He was just looking at us. It was the most wondering feeling. Not a word was spoken; various people began to touch their arms because it felt like having warm oiled poured over you. The children came forward with their mouths wide open. Then all of a sudden – I suppose it was a few seconds,

but time seemed to stop – the angel was gone. Everyone who was there was quite convinced that an angel came to encourage us” (Wiebe 2015, 47).<sup>1</sup>

CORPOREAL is a sensory experience of an apparition, not an intellectual vision of intuitive knowing. This experience occurred in a church, and is perhaps specific enough to support theism. Some Christians would very likely take such an experience to be directly from the Christian God. If one is sceptical that this is so, there are many other corporeal experiences where the connection to a detailed religion can be made clearly. Next, consider a report of intuitive knowing:

INTUITIVE KNOWING: “I looked up at the snows, but immediately lost all normal consciousness and became engulfed as it were in a great cloud of light and ecstasy of knowing and understanding all the secrets of the universe, and sense of goodness of the Being in whom it seemed all were finally enclosed, and yet in that enclosure utterly liberated. I ‘saw’ nothing in the physical sense... it was as if I were blinded by an internal light. And yet I was ‘looking outward’. It was *not* a ‘dream’, but utterly different, in that the content was of the utmost significance to me and in universal terms. Gradually this sense of ecstasy faded and slowly I came to my ordinary sense and perceived I was sitting as usual and the mountains were as usual in daily beauty.” Carol says that the aftermath of the experience was in the form of a wonderful mental and spiritual glow, and then adds: “I became convinced later that a spiritual Reality underlay all earthy reality, and the ultimate ground of the universe was benevolent in a positive way, surpassing our temporal understanding. This conviction has remained with me, but in an intellectual form; it has not, however, prevented me from feeling acute personal depression and disappointment time and again, throughout my life.” She also relates that later in life in she developed a strong interest in Buddhism, but after that felt that it was founded on a negative premise, whereas the universe seemed to her to be positive (Wiebe 2015, 71).

A specific religion in Buddhism is mentioned at the end of this report. But nothing in the report of the experience itself suggests that it directly supports any of the personal or impersonal traditional religions. And yet it appears to constitute a genuine experience that puts one into contact with transcendental reality (if there is one). In a recent interview, Schellenberg describes one his religious experiences:

Perhaps the most interesting and powerful religious experience I have had occurred sometime after I no longer believed in God. It was powerfully numinous but not theistic. I did not feel as though I was in the presence of a personal being but rather as though I had broken through to another dimension of reality which was flooding my ordinary reality with a strange and wonderful light. (The experience occurred for perhaps half an hour, first while I was driving and then while I was walking back and forth in a grocery store.) Everything felt immeasurably fuller, deeper, richer. I remember thinking “So *this* is it.” If I had become a believer on the basis of that experience, I suppose I would have become some sort of pantheist. But I did not

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<sup>1</sup> See also Emma Heathcote- James, *Seeing Angels: True Contemporary Accounts of Hundreds of Angelic Experiences* (London: John Blake, 2002), 46-47.

become a believer; I knew too much about my own psychology and the associated philosophical problems!<sup>2</sup>

Schellenberg takes this experience to support pantheism but notice that he ‘supposes’ that is what one ought to conclude from the experience in question. But slight differences in the experience or Schellenberg’s disposition suggests that this or a similar experience could support ultimism and not necessarily a specific religion. Notice too, that while Schellenberg is sceptical about the verticality of his experience neither Palmqvist nor I need to share his scepticism. Finally, if one worries about the proponent of ultimism (i.e. Schellenberg) being used to defend the view, it’s noteworthy that Schellenberg is hardly the only atheist or agnostic to have such an experience. Consider what philosopher Eric Steinhardt says:

Much of my interest in philosophy of religion has been driven by a series of religious or mystical experiences. I have had five or six of these. Of them, three have been overpowering, ego-shattering experiences, while three have been gentler. But all have been profoundly moving. None of them have involved God. Other philosophers, such as Wittgenstein, Hick, and Plantinga have reported their own mystical experiences. So it’s worth thinking more about how such experiences inspire philosophies.

I would not say that I really gained much new knowledge during these experiences. The content of my experiences was shaped by what I had already studied and found interesting in philosophy, theology, and mathematics. I already thought that reality was a certain way, but my thoughts were merely very abstract outlines of that way. During my mystical experiences, I saw with intense vividness that reality is this way. Much of what I have written philosophically is an effort to verbally express the content of these visions. I regard all these efforts as failures. The vision really is ineffable.

To some, the term “vision” might suggest hallucination. But I would not say that I have hallucinated. Rather, my visions are more purely mathematical. During one, which came close to the violence of a seizure, I saw the iterative hierarchy of pure sets. I had been studying a lot of set theory; but then I saw it. Along with this vision there was an extreme flood of joy, as well as a kind of pain that comes from being cognitively broken up. Another vision involved something like the totality of recursive functions on the ordinal number line, and the recognition that these functions are the meanings which produce reality as they generate themselves. The forest dissolved into a network of computations. I had already experienced something like this while reading Josiah Royce. This vision was again extremely joyous, and I knew that death is nothing.

On the basis of these experiences, as well as plenty of discursive reasoning, I identify myself as a religious naturalist. However, I do not take this naturalism to entail simply materialism or logical positivism. Unfortunately, religious naturalism today is mostly intellectual, and has little in the way of social practice. So I am primarily interested in developing social practices for religious naturalism. Rather than my practices driving

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<sup>2</sup> This taken from an interview of Schellenberg for the American Philosophical Association’s blog. See <https://blog.apaonline.org/2018/06/21/recently-published-book-spotlight-the-hiddenness-argument/>.

my beliefs, my beliefs are driving my search for practices. And much of my search is for practices which cohere with my mystical experiences.<sup>3</sup>

The best way for Palmqvist to respond to these experiences, which are counterexamples to his view, is to argue either (i) intellectual visions are epistemically impossible or (ii) corporeal visions are superior to intellectual visions. Let's examine each of these strategies in turn. With respect to (i) Palmqvist has to show that intellectual visions are epistemically impossible *while simultaneously claiming corporeal visions are epistemically possible*. But recall the standard for epistemic possibility is just that the assertion in question isn't known to be false (or impossible). It's difficult to imagine how Palmqvist could use the challenge of religious diversity or possibility of naturalistic alternative explanations as reasons to reject intuitive knowing but not also corporeal visions. I only need to defend a positive non-doxastic stance toward intuitive knowing, not a positive rational *belief* about it. It therefore seems doubtful that strategy (i) is one that Palmqvist would want to pursue.

If intellectual visions aren't precluded on ultimism then Palmqvist could pursue strategy (ii) and attempt to demonstrate that corporeal visions are to be preferred to experiences of intuitive knowing. But we have a *prima facie* reason to think that this will be difficult because intuitive knowing is thought to be a superior kind of religious experience. This doesn't make such an argument impossible, but I can't see how Palmqvist could save one type of experience without losing the other. Perhaps such an argument is on offer, but I can't think of a way to motivate one. In sum, I've shown that religious experience is possible on ultimism, and hence the second conjunct of premise (1) is false. At the very least, religious experience isn't a way to establish a relevant difference between ultimism and traditional forms of religion. The burden of proof is now on Palmqvist to show why this is wrong.

## V. Conclusion

Schellenberg's work on sceptical religion, and in particular his defense of ultimism, is worthy of serious reflection. His work on divine hiddenness has been widely appreciated, and philosophers are beginning to recognize his work on ultimism. Palmqvist claims that traditional forms of religion are more appropriate objects of non-doxastic religion than ultimism. This is because given their specificity they are more likely to put one into contact with transcendental reality (if there is one), and because they contain religious experience while ultimism does not. But this is false. Specificity and religious experience aren't good reasons to prefer traditional forms of religion to ultimism. This is because nothing on ultimism precludes it from providing the same cognitive content and action guidance that more specific religions provides. While it might be less detailed than more specific religions, it is still detailed enough to be emotionally satisfying. Finally, it is false that there aren't religious experiences consistent with the undetailed form of ultimism. There may very well be reasons to prefer non-doxastic religion in traditional forms of religion over Schellenberg's ultimism, but not for the reasons offered by Palmqvist.

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<sup>3</sup> I discovered this quote on a philosophy of religion trade blog: <http://exapologist.blogspot.com/2015/04/fascinating-interview-with-eric.html?m=1>. The original interview was posted to another philosophy of religion blog, the Prosblogion (which is now defunct which prevents me from providing the original source of the interview).

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