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HOW TO BE A CHRISTIAN ULTIMIST?  
ON THREE LESSONS J. L. SCHELLENBERG  
AND THE CHRISTIAN THEIST CAN LEARN FROM EACH OTHER\*

J. L. Schellenberg is mainly known for his “hiddenness argument.” The argument (if it is sound) refutes the claim that there is the personal God of traditional (in particular Christian) theism. The denial of the existence of such a God, however, does not lead Schellenberg to a total rejection of the idea of God, but to its reformulation into “the idea of something at once deepest in the nature of things and possessed of the greatest possible inherent value and significance” (SCHELLENBERG 2017, 122). In other words, ultimism, and not metaphysical naturalism, would be “the safest and also most intellectually adventurous next move” (123) after the rejection of the traditional (Christian) theism.

Is it possible to be a *Christian ultimist*? If by this term we understand a version of ultimism in which an Ultimate Reality is identified with the Christian God, then the answer is yes. If, however, we have in mind a nonqualified or simple ultimism (preferred by Schellenberg)—the ultimism which does not specify the nature of Ultimate Reality while removing from it the constitutive elements of Christian theism—the concept of *Christian ultimism* is inherently contradictory. Below I propose an intermediate understanding of *Christian ultimism*; it consists in such a transformation, or purification, of Christian theism which, while preserving its identity, learns some lessons from Schellenberg’s analyses. The lessons in question concern the idea of Ultimate Reality, the idea

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of divine hiddenness, and the idea of deep time. In modifying Christian theism (in the spirit of Schellenberg), I intend to simultaneously modify Schellenberg's ultimism (in the spirit of Christian theism), as I believe that both parties have something to offer to each other. From pure (simple) and questing ultimists, Christian theists should learn that their ignorance is greater than their knowledge. At the same time, pure (simple) ultimists should learn from the Christian theists that they can expect the personal God the Redeemer to act.<sup>1</sup>

Is my project feasible? Let us examine the three above-mentioned ideas: the idea of Ultimate Reality, the idea of divine hiddenness, and the idea of deep time, to show that it is indeed possible for a "thesis" and a (relative) "antithesis" to turn into a "synthesis."

#### ULTIMATE REALITY

What is "Ultimate Reality" as described by ultimism? It is a reality ultimate in three ways: in the nature of things (metaphysically), in inherent value (axiologically), and in its importance for our lives (soteriologically). (Schellenberg 2017, 18)

As to its metaphysical aspect, the Ultimate Reality can be defined as something whose category is impossible to determine (because it is "far outside the grasp of evolved humans at an early stage of investigation" [SCHELLENBERG 2018, 16]) and, at the same time, as something which is "most fundamental" to all things. To use philosophical terminology, one can say that the something in question is that "in terms of which everything else is properly explained" (SCHELLENBERG 2017, 19). Naturalists may certainly identify the Ultimate Reality in this sense with, for example, elementary particles but, as ultimism and naturalism are mutually exclusive, the Ultimate Reality must be "a reality transcendent of a natural world" or "a dimension of reality transcending nature" (SCHELLENBERG 2009, 19).

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<sup>1</sup> The Christian ultimist is not a former Christian who has become a (simple) ultimist and wishes to maintain the ties with their original Christian community (Schellenberg presents the attitude of such an ex- or post-Christian ultimist by describing the quest of a person called Sophie [Schellenberg 2009, 56–60]). Rather, the Christian ultimist is the Christian philosopher who wishes to purify, or ultimize, Christian theism in the belief that ultimism pertains to the natural roots of the latter. In this process, the Christian ultimist considers Schellenberg as their ally. Incidentally, of the two strategies adopted by Sophie—the strategy of metaphorization of Christian doctrine and the strategy of seeking implications shared by Christianity and ultimism—the latter is closer to my view.

The Christian theist may agree that, based on natural knowledge (prior to Revelation), it is actually impossible to say anything more about the metaphysical aspect of Ultimate Reality than what has been said above. The Ultimate Reality is characterized with (ontological and epistemological) transcendence, serves us as an ultimate *explanans* and is (at least to us) extra-categorical, remains beyond, or hardly within, our conceptual grasp. Note that all these characterizations can be found in St. Thomas Aquinas who, in calling God “*ipsum esse subsistens*,” emphasized (in the specific language of his system) its transcendent, explanatory, and extra-categorical character: the “*ipsum esse*” is radically different than the “*esse*” of anything in the world; the “*ipsum esse*” explains the “*esse*” of every being; the “*ipsum esse*” does not belong to any genus (cf. *De potentia*, q. 7 a. 3, or *Summa Theologiae*, I q. 3 a. 5).<sup>2</sup> Any other claims about the Ultimate Reality must be derived from the above statements. One of such claims identifies (in a way) the Ultimate Reality with the fullness of perfection.

By referring to the fullness of perfection, we move on to the axiological aspect of Ultimate Reality. From this aspect, the Ultimate Reality appears as “the deepest possible value,” “the greatest possible reality” (SCHELLENBERG 2017, 19, 20)—as something which “manifests everything good ... ten thousand times more deeply” (SCHELLENBERG 2009, 105) than what we are experiencing now or are able to experience. In his discussion of this aspect, Schellenberg uses intuitions drawn from St. Anselm of Canterbury (the intuitions related to the so-called ontological argument), but also observes that “although Anselm might wish us to think otherwise, ‘that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought’ cannot be taken as equivalent to ‘*the-personal-being-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought*’” (SCHELLENBERG 2009, 101–2; emphasis in original). Actually, Anselm considers the “that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought” being as a personal being, even though, as Schellenberg suggests, “there are other possible ways of filling out his general notion than by reference to a personal being” (101).

I agree with Schellenberg that the maximally great and ultimately valuable being may be understood in many ways, including non-personalistic ones. I also agree that the personal character of such a being may, if juxtaposed with

<sup>2</sup> Nick N. Trakakis (2018, 192–203, esp. 198) attempts to show that the above characterization of divinity is a common good of many traditions, from Aquinas (and the Thomists) to the Upanishads. On this view, God is “Being itself” and not a “being among other beings.” On the other hand, Thomas interweaves the above description of God with one that is more categorial. Perhaps he developed two concepts of God: one of them is more ultimistic, while the other gives an approximation of God in terms of personal and Christian analogies. These two ideas must be distinguished from one another.

the hiddenness argument, lead to difficulties. However, one must not forget that, in the light of our knowledge, being-a-person is greater than being-a-non-person. If this were not so, such values (taken in themselves) as intellectual cognition, free will, and artistic creativity would not precede in our value hierarchy such values as physical strength, biological prowess or usefulness. If one seriously believes that being-a-non-person may be greater than being-a-person, it is probably because they understand *being-a-non-person* as something above the person, and not below her. In this case, however, the alleged supra-personal entity must virtually include certain essential characteristics of a personal entity in the same way as an airplane includes (enhanced) capabilities of a car. As a matter of fact, Schellenberg arrives at similar conclusions; in one of the latest expositions of his ideas, he writes:

Perhaps such a[n ultimate] reality would even in some way include personal elements—it need not be *impersonal*. (SCHELLENBERG 2017, 122; emphasis in original)

I would accept such a statement of the issue on condition that the phrase “it need not be *impersonal*” be replaced with the phrase “it cannot be absolutely *impersonal*”; the character and status of its being personal can remain an open question.<sup>3</sup> Thanks to the perspective offered by ultimism, a theist is confirmed in the belief that their theism should be apophatic rather than personalistic.<sup>4</sup> One cannot deny, however, that although God is not a person in the categorial sense of being such a person or another person, he is a person in the sense of being the ontic basis and transcendent source of all personal beings, perfections, and values.<sup>5</sup>

The axiological-personal aspect, or element, of Ultimate Reality is related to its soteriological aspect. The latter consists in that “in relation to that reality, the deepest or ultimate human good can be attained” (SCHELLENBERG 2017, 122).

<sup>3</sup> Trakakis (2018, 196–203, esp. 201–2), mentioned above, stresses that different religious and philosophical traditions also point to a mind-like character of deity, which can be described in terms of “supra-personal consciousness,” while Schellenberg (2018, 17) does not rule out that “the concept of person will evolve in the future of culture in such a way as to allow for possibilities that our present concept does not allow for.”

<sup>4</sup> On the ideas of apophatic Thomism see Thomas J. White (2016, 260). Cf. also Roger Pouivet (2018), where we can find some interesting critique of theistic personalism or (strongly) personal theism.

<sup>5</sup> I realize that Schellenberg responds to a similar (personalistic) objection, when he states, among other things, that “the critic would need to provide a detailed specification (and comparative evaluation) of all the possibly relevant ideas” (SCHELLENBERG 2009, 49, cf. 48–50). However, I cannot see any possibility of recognizing the axiological primacy of Ultimate Reality other than considering it as personal or supra-personal (and not as infra-personal). In my opinion, moreover, a personalistic (and traditional, or familiar) religion need not be a “religion for infants.”

As can be seen, the soteriological aspect of Ultimate Reality has a relational dimension: it is unsurpassably great, good or valuable not only *in itself*, but also *for us*. Thanks to our contact with the Ultimate Reality, we may be salvaged or redeemed—*salvaged* or *redeemed* in the sense of our life reaching its fullness. This is possible because “the unsurpassable greatness of the divine” is “in some way communicated or channeled to us and ... through us to the rest of the world” (20).

Simple ultimism does not tell us much about a salvific good which may be attained through communication with the Ultimate Reality. In the worldly dimension, the good in question consists in “a completely integrated life” in which personal, moral, esthetic, and intellectual aspects are united in diversity (SCHELLENBERG 2009, 241–50), while in the supraworldly dimension, the salvific good means that there is, or at least there should be, “some sort of afterlife for at least some of us” (32, cf. 229–30). By and large, Christian theists cannot add much to these claims; however, with one reservation: as philosophers, they believe that the possibility of our attaining the salvific good is primarily a result of God’s anticipatory redemptive action. At the same time, as theologians, they identify such action with particular events in the history of humankind.

The latter theological claim will be discussed later. At this point, I wish to observe that the philosophical claim is a consequence of a strong interpretation of the axiological-soteriological dimension of Ultimate Reality. This dimension, if taken in its weak sense, can be compared to gold, which—being valuable in itself and for us—must be sought and found. If taken in its strong sense, however, the dimension in question resembles a wealthy and good individual who makes the first step towards us. I believe that an analysis of the concept of ultimate and highest good should lead us towards the strong interpretation because a good that voluntarily shares itself in some way is essentially higher than a good that does not. On the other hand, I am aware how difficult it is to decide between our modal and axiological intuitions. Therefore, instead of refuting simple ultimism, I propose to extend it by such a factor as a (supra)personal and anticipatory action.

As can be seen, Christian theists do not have to go far beyond the main claims of simple ultimism on the philosophical plane. It suffices to emphasize in the Ultimate Reality the moment of transcendence (metaphysical aspect), to bring out the (inseparable) moment of supra-personality (axiological aspect), and to enhance the moment of communication seen as anticipatory action (soteriological aspect). The first of these moments is a consequence of rejecting naturalism, while the others follow from axiological-modal analysis.

## DIVINE HIDDENNESS

How is the above concept of Ultimate Reality, or God, related to “the hiddenness argument”? The argument consists of two parts: the analytical-preparatory part and the argument proper. In the former, Schellenberg states that “God is the *greatest* possible person” and that what it takes to be such a person is (among others) to be “perfectly loving” and “always open to a personal relationship with any finite person” (SCHELLENBERG 2017, 95, 103, 130; emphasis in original). This and similar analyses lead Schellenberg to formulate the following argument:

- (1) If God exists, then “no finite person is ever nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists.” (53)
- (2) Some finite persons are or have been nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists. (87)
- (3) God does not exist. [1, 2 by *modus tollens* (103)]<sup>6</sup>

Assuming that premise (2) is empirically true, one must ask whether premise (1) is also true. Now the discussion on Schellenberg’s argument has taught us that it is difficult to question the validity of this premise if we accept the categorial-personalistic conception of God. In order to reject premise (1), one must accept additional controversial claims concerning a (radically) personal God and His intentions or adopt a position similar to simple ultimism. Christian ultimists would endorse the latter strategy as they believe that God as Ultimate Reality—which is transcendent, explanatory, supra-categorial, perfect, and supra-personal—does not have to be “always open to a personal relationship with any finite person” in such a way that “no finite person is ever nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists.”

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<sup>6</sup> For a complete and more formal version of the argument see Schellenberg 2018, 24-25. I have presented here a simplified version of the last steps of the argument (I also introduced new numbering of the premises and the conclusion). In an as yet unpublished paper, I have advanced (together with Marek Dobrzeńcki) a theistic counterargument, which is a *reversal*, or a mirror-image of Schellenberg’s argument. Our argument goes as follows: (1’) If God does not exist, then no finite person is ever resistantly (or, in another version, reasonably) in a state of belief in relation to the proposition that God exists. (2’) Some finite persons are or have been resistantly (reasonably) in a state of belief in relation to the proposition that God exists. (3’) God exists. We believe that Schellenberg’s atheistic argument and our theistic argument are dialectically equivalent: they would meet with analogous objections as to their premises and present an analogous defense of these premises. If we are right, Schellenberg’s argument does not settle the dispute between atheism and (personalistic) theism. However, we shall not take into account our reversal of Schellenberg’s argument in further considerations because, even if the arguments are dialectically equivalent, the existence of nonresistant nonbelievers presents a serious challenge to theists.

So far so good. In my modified version of ultimism, however, God is not only the Ultimate Reality in the metaphysical and axiological sense (with an admixture of a supra-personal component), but also in the strong soteriological sense. God as Ultimate Reality in the weak sense is a silent God who *reveals* himself through His hiddenness; it is a God whom we need to discover or attain—like gold—through our specific activities or attitudes (cf. TRAKAKIS 2018, 203–9). But “if God were silent, we would be left to our own resources ... there would be little hope of salvation” (DAVIS 2009, 31–32).

Upon a strong soteriological understanding of God—who makes a first step towards us—premise (1) should appear to us as true. If, however, premise (2) is also true, “the hiddenness argument” shows that such a God does not exist. Is it possible for the Christian ultimist to maintain their position in such a case?

I believe that it is but on condition that the openness of God or His anticipatory action towards us can take different forms, and not always ones we expect.<sup>7</sup> In the same way as people come into contact with one another or communicate in various manners (including a silent language of the body or communication with symbols), God and human beings can enter a variety of relationships. Moreover, as in human relationships there may be (through no one’s fault) misunderstandings as to whether communicated messages are real and what their meaning is, in the same way there may be misunderstandings about divine revelation. It is true that from the omniscient and all-powerful God we expect perfect communication. We must remember, however, that omniscience and omnipotence is to be understood in the context of divine transcendence and that the beings at the receiving end of a communication process are finite and imperfect. Thus not all of us would always have a *clear* knowledge that God exists, *that* he reveals himself, *how* he reveals himself, and *what* it is that he reveals.

Does the above move mean that the difference between the weak concept of the soteriological aspect of Ultimate Reality and the strong one has been eliminated? No. It merely shows that the latter concept is broad and allows for borderline cases. As a philosopher, the Christian theist believes that God can come to us discreetly; as a theologian, the Christian theist believes that God, by covering himself with the created world and becoming “a marginal Jew”<sup>8</sup> in ancient Palestine, acts exactly in this way.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. the principle of “humility about expectations” (REA 2018, 55–56).

<sup>8</sup> The expression I have used here is the title of J. P. Meier’s work devoted to the historical and cultural aspects of the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

## DEEP TIME

Having learnt the lesson of apophaticism and the lesson of hiddenness from ultimism, the conception of theism proposed above is immune to the hiddenness argument. The price to pay for such immunity is the fact that this conception differs only slightly from simple ultimism. Schellenberg might even consider my theism as an acceptable version of simple ultimism—the version in which some personalistic and Christian-soteriological sentiments are harmlessly still present; *harmlessly* because, while actually going out to meet us, God does (or can do) this in such a way as to remain unknown also to people who offer no apparent resistance to him. Besides, in situations where contact with God demands special dispositions on our part, the concept of resistance (or lack thereof) becomes hardly operative.

Things become complicated, however, when we move from a purely philosophical plane to a theological one. The Christian theist, claiming that God not only could, but actually did reveal Himself through a local Incarnation, cannot work without the theological plane. Yet it is on this plane that the problem of the lack of universal availability of Christian revelation arises. Actually, the problem of the lack of universal access to revelation (or to an analogous event or message) occurs in almost every religion and concerns even the common “core” of the revelations present in all theistic religions (similar as to their content or origin). The problem of the lack of universal access is thus a serious challenge to any religious, and particularly Christian, theist.

The problem of the lack of universal availability is a certain (perhaps the most important) variety of the problem of divine hiddenness. The problem does not concern God’s hiddenness to philosophers (who, unless they are naturalists or radical skeptics, tend to believe in the existence of Ultimate Reality, which they understand in many different, albeit abstract, ways), but God’s hiddenness to ordinary people who begin their religious lives thanks to clear signs which they can interpret as manifestations of God’s action. As Schellenberg (2017, 76–86) has shown, there are three groups of people who did not receive such signs:

- (i) those who lived before the emergence of monotheistic religions;
- (ii) those who rejected monotheism under the influence of rational doubt;
- (iii) those who were brought up in a radically secularized context.

Simplifying slightly, one can say that the first group did not have access to (alleged) signs of divine revelation for temporal reasons. The second group

did not (or does not) have access to such signs for intellectual reasons.<sup>9</sup> The third group—for cultural reasons. The list may be expanded by adding other groups who have not obtained the access in question for other (e.g., geographical) reasons; perhaps in some cases reasons are many and intertwined. The most important, however, is that the reasons are independent from the will of those who have no theistic religious faith. The existence of such people undermines the claims of theistic religions (including Christianity) to revealing God universally and thus also undermines the very existence of God as someone who clearly reveals himself to everyone.<sup>10</sup>

The problem of the lack of universal availability becomes even more serious when we consider “the discovery of deep time” (SCHELLENBERG 2017, 76). This discovery tells us, among other things, that the history of religion to date constitutes probably about a quarter of the past history of humankind (as *Homo sapiens*), while the history of monotheistic religions to date is at most one tenth of the history of religion.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, keeping in mind that “there is a Great Disparity here between past and potential future” (SCHELLENBERG 2018, 13), we may confidently assume that the history of religion to date (and in particular the history of monotheistic religions) makes an infinitesimal particle of the whole (past and future) history of religion and humanity. From this it follows that religious monotheism (and all the more so, Christian monotheism) may turn out just a very short episode in the history of religion and humanity. Such a scenario is becoming increasingly plausible by an increase in the size of groups (ii) and (iii). Regardless of which scenario is going to unfold, one thing is (almost) certain in matters of religion: there is more ahead of us than behind us. In that case any attachment to past or present religious ideas or alleged revelatory signs, which are local by nature, seems irrational.

I believe that the idea of deep time is ambivalent. On the one hand, it supports the hiddenness argument by enhancing the argument from the lack of universal availability. On the other hand, the idea in question may serve the

<sup>9</sup> Strictly speaking, in this case the access was discontinued or irreversibly disturbed, invalidated or falsified.

<sup>10</sup> One might argue with Schellenberg about what proportion of humankind belonged (or belongs) to groups (i)–(iii) or to similar groups of nonresistant nonbelievers. According to some scholars, religious theists (in a broad sense of the word) of different sorts prevailed in the history of humanity. (This was sometimes used as a basis for the argument for the truth of theism). However, premise (2) of Schellenberg’s argument does not (and needs not) state that there are *many* nonresistant nonbelievers. For the argument, it suffices that there are *some* nonresistant nonbelievers (see SCHELLENBERG 2017, 78). Indeed, even *few* nonresistant nonbelievers would pose a challenge to theism.

<sup>11</sup> In light of the foregoing footnote, estimations may vary. However, if we consider “potential future”—which we will discuss in a moment—this is of no particular importance.

Christian theist to defend their faith. The Christian theists may say that the conditions (temporal, geographic, cultural, intellectual, etc.) in which they have found themselves helped them recognize and accept divine revelation. The fact that there is a great number of people who have not found themselves in such conditions does not mean that those people would *never* find themselves in such conditions. Considering the deep time of the future worldly history of humankind, one cannot rule out that *one day* humanity would universally recognize and accept Christian revelation. On the other hand, considering the deep time of the afterlife of each individual non-Christian (or non-theist)—which is a kind of life allowed for or even entailed by ultimism—one cannot rule out that they would come to know (Christian) God in that time (cf. HOWARD-SNYDER 2018, 127).

The Christian theist, by looking at how Schellenberg applies the idea of deep time to philosophy of religion, learns to maintain a necessary distance from (the universality of) their faith. The theist, however, can say to Schellenberg: *tu quoque*. By saying this, the theist does not undermine the argument from deep time but expands it. From the perspective of deep time, every religion may prove infinitesimally small (as to its attractiveness or durability). Yet it is also impossible to exclude that a religion may turn out to be great in the sense that humankind would give it their universal and permanent acceptance in the deep future. Moreover, from the perspective of such possible final consensus about the cognitive value of a religion (Christianity, for instance) some past processes or states may be given a new interpretation. It may turn out that the periods of nonresistant nonbelief in the life of individuals and all humanity were episodes aimed to prepare those separate individuals or humanity as a whole for the acceptance of signs from God which were made gradually (but not necessarily in a linear fashion) clear. Here an analogy can be drawn with a history of the human love; such a history which may consist of different stages: the stage of future lovers separately developing to reach maturity (think of groups (i) and (iii) which lived or live without God); the stage of staying close, but not paying attention to each other (think of “anonymous Christians”); the stage of becoming interested in the opposite sex in general (think of those who are fascinated with the divine in general, but not with the particular Christian God); the stage of delight and admiration at a fancy dress ball (think of those who worship God under other name or description); the stage of falling in love (think of those who recognized God’s signs and responded to them with enthusiasm); the stage of breaking up and getting back together (think, for example, of C. S. Lewis who was in group

(ii) but returned to faith), etc. In fact, in different human, and thus also in divine-human stories, different scenarios may be played. It suffices to assume (against Schellenberg and in connection with the above analogies) that although God is “always open to a personal relationship with any finite person,” His openness (and relationships) need not evolve in the same way every time.<sup>12</sup>

I do not claim here that at the end of deep time the truth of Christian revelation *will become apparent*; my claim is only that it *may become apparent*. Also, I do not claim that we currently have grounds to expect such an occurrence. It is rather the case that the perspective of deep time makes all probabilistic calculations—even if some of them (e.g., predictions about the decline of theism) seem credible today—highly fallible or even irresponsible.

If my beliefs—inspired by Schellenberg’s skepticism—are so minimal, how can they provide any support to Christian theism? Now the belief that we do not know what the end of the spiritual history of human beings will be leads to the conclusion that each of them has a right not to change the faith they have adopted. Therefore, if someone is in possession of data which have made them accept the Christian message as God’s revelation, they should retain their faith.<sup>13</sup> Who has recognized clear signs coming from God in certain events or words need not be concerned about others not having made such a discovery or even about their having no access to those events or words. Also, someone who has recognized such signs need not worry that, in the (known to

<sup>12</sup> I believe that different responses to the hiddenness argument, e.g., the response referring to good reasons God has for being hidden (see, for example, HOWARD-SNYDER and MOSER, 2002, 9–11; MOSER 2002, 129–40) or that based on the distinction of *de dicto* faith and *de re* faith (see HOWARD-SNYDER 2018, 138), are sound only if they are considered as (i) responses that indicate certain possibilities of which some may be actualized in different cases and at different times; (ii) responses based on analogies to human relationships, while keeping in mind that the human being is an immature party to a relationship with God; (iii) responses in which it is assumed that the God-human relationship takes the form of a long process whose transitory (!) stage may consist in the intentional “hiding of God’s face,” absence of *de re* faith, etc.; (iv) responses which may be verified only *ex post*, at the end of that process.

<sup>13</sup> Schellenberg seems to allow for such a scenario as he writes: “Of course, if someone has a powerful theistic religious experience and is caused by it to believe invincibly—she simply cannot help it—even though she previously had been convinced by an atheistic argument, we won’t criticize her” (Schellenberg 2017, 116). In this way, he admits that “someone’s state of [theistic or Christian] belief is excused” (Schellenberg 2017, 116), despite the person being aware of reasons against it. I believe that, apart from Christian religious experience, there may be other factors thanks to which someone can be caused to believe invincibly in the Christian God. For instance, someone may be part of a chain of Christian testimony and have great trust in their parents who they have received their faith from. Moreover, the power of such trust may be greater than that of possible doubts, in particular of the doubts aroused by results of historical studies of the origins of Christianity. Our Christian may believe that the results of such studies are not unambiguously conclusive.

us) history of humankind, they belong to a minority. Indeed, they may wonder why God has revealed Himself in that particular way, why His revelation is not available to all human beings, and how and to whom it will be available in the future, but they cannot abandon what they have recognized as revelation and sufficiently strongly believe to be true. In addition, if the revelation speaks of God “who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4), the Christian theist may hope that the end of deep time would be the full revelation of God to all people. Everyone can hope for something which has not been (and cannot be) ruled out, all the more so because this something follows from beliefs based on one’s own discernment. Let us remember that that the idea of deep time is also a biblical and Christian idea. Christian theists believe that time and eternity belong to God and that the complete and universal fulfilment (the beginnings of which have been given to them) of His promises is still ahead of us.<sup>14</sup>

#### CONCLUSION: MUTUAL LESSONS

I have attempted to show that a reading of Schellenberg’s texts by the Christian theist can help improve the philosophical and theological layer of the latter’s view. What is more, the Christian theist who, thanks to reading these texts, has become aware that he or she is an ultimist, absconditheist,<sup>15</sup> and deep time eschatologist, may suggest that Schellenberg should make some changes in his philosophy. These improvements and changes can be comprised in three lessons.

First, the Christian theist should recognize that any characterization of God, in order to be appropriate, must be limited to a formula similar to simple ultimism. The tradition of Christian theism includes an important apophatic current (and a part of Aquinas’s thought can be regarded as pertaining to it)

<sup>14</sup> In Wojtysiak (2019, 83–85) I consider different strategies which the Christian may adopt to tackle the issue of unavailability and I suggest a standpoint I have called “Christian pluralism.” I make a hypothesis that all religions or cultures (including non-Christian ones) probably contain Christian themes or motifs (e.g., the motif of sacrificial love or the motif of Divine solidarity with people) to such an extent that it is possible for non-Christians to enter into a relationship with Christian God. These motifs make present—through various forms of anticipation or repetition etc.—the founding Christian events for everyone. In this way, all people have access to them. I believe that the eschatological fulfilment of deep time can make that access clear and complete.

<sup>15</sup> The term has been coined by Miłosz Hołda under the influence of a theistic (re)reading of Schellenberg’s texts. Cf. the phrase *Deus absconditus* in the Book of Isaiah (45:15).

which considers God—the metaphysically Ultimate Reality—as being which is first in the order of explanation, transcendental, and extra-categorical. This characterization stops the theist from providing more detailed and categorical descriptions of God, while enabling them to recognize in God the supra-personal element (axiological aspect) and the communication element in its stronger sense (soteriological aspect). An appreciation of these elements might enrich Schellenberg’s ultimism.

Second, thanks to the hiddenness argument, the Christian theist confirms the belief that their theism (if it is to be rationally maintained) should be more ultimistic or apophatic rather than personalistic. The consequence of such a shifting of emphasis is a broadened concept of communication. Such broadening of this concept would make Schellenberg’s soteriological ultimism more consistent. It is true that the idea of God who communicates with other beings in an anthropomorphic (or similar) manner has been rejected by the hiddenness argument. On the other hand, however, the idea of God who does not communicate (or communicates only in a metaphorical sense) with other beings is incompatible with soteriological ultimism. One should seek a middle way between these two ideas.

Third, the hiddenness argument combined with the idea of deep time makes the Christian theist aware of the problem of a lack of universal access to Christian revelation. The idea of deep time, however, provides the Christian theist with a means to solve this problem: the fact that someone does not have (sufficient) access to Christian revelation at a given time does not mean that they will never have access to it. If so, Christians can enjoy their present (and sufficient for them) access to revelation, while hoping that non-Christians will share it in the future, and particularly when deep time has been eschatologically fulfilled. If Schellenberg had considered such a possibility, he would not have suggested that the Christian theism was outdated and untenable. Perhaps, “the hiddenness of the *traditional* God” will allow “the *real* God ... to be more clearly revealed” (SCHELLENBERG 2017, 123; emphasis in original). It is also possible, however, that the *real*—and clearly revealed—God should prove the same being (or principle of being) as the *traditional*—and revealed long ago, although differently—God of Christian theism.

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HOW TO BE A CHRISTIAN ULTIMIST?  
ON THREE LESSONS J. L. SCHELLENBERG  
AND THE CHRISTIAN THEIST CAN LEARN FROM EACH OTHER

S u m m a r y

In this text, in discussion with J. L. Schellenberg, I develop a position that I call Christian ultimism. This position lies between Schellenberg's simple ultimism and traditional Christian theism. Christian ultimism is more apophatic than personalistic, though it more clearly emphasizes the presence of a supra-personal and communicative element in the Ultimate Reality. The proposed position

is resistant to a philosophical version of the hiddenness argument, but it must answer to the challenge of the theological problem of the lack of universal access to Christian revelation. Schellenberg's idea of deep time both magnifies this problem and provides the tools for solving it: the awareness of deep time does not allow us to judge the future, but it does allow us to hope for a revelation accessible to all at the eschatological end of time.

**Keywords:** ultimism; theism; Christianity; Ultimate Reality; hiddenness argument; deep time; J. L. Schellenberg.

JAK BYĆ CHRZEŚCIJAŃSKIM ULTYMISTĄ?  
O TRZECH LEKCJACH, KTÓRYCH MOGĄ SOBIE WZAJEMNIE UDZIELIĆ  
J. L. SCHELLENBERG I CHRZEŚCIJAŃSKI TEISTA

Streszczenie

W niniejszym tekście – dyskutując z J. L. Schellenbergiem – rozwijam stanowisko, które nazywam chrześcijańskim ultimizmem. Stanowisko to znajduje się pomiędzy prostym ultimizmem Schellenberga a tradycyjnym chrześcijańskim teizmem. Chrześcijański ultimizm jest bardziej apofatyczny niż personalistyczny, choć wyraźniej akcentuje występowanie w Ostatecznej Rzeczywistości elementu ponad-osobowego i komunikacyjnego. Proponowane stanowisko jest oporne na filozoficzną wersję argumentu ze skrytości, ale musi się zmierzyć z teologicznym problemem braku powszechnego dostępu do chrześcijańskiego objawienia. Schellenbergowska idea głębokiego czasu nasila ten problem, ale również dostarcza narzędzi do jego rozwiązania: świadomość głębokiego czasu nie pozwala nam wyrokować o przyszłości, ale pozwala mieć nadzieję na objawienie dostępne dla wszystkich w eschatologicznym końcu czasu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** ultimizm; teizm; chrześcijaństwo; Ostateczna Rzeczywistość; argument ze skrytości; głęboki czas; J. L. Schellenberg