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ULTIMISM: A PHILOSOPHY THAT WANTS TO BE A RELIGION*

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of the traditional analytic philosophy of religion is to provide justification for religious beliefs.¹ John L. Schellenberg thinks that the philosophical study of religion is stuck in a dead end because it is usually conducted within a particular religious tradition. This approach makes philosophers preoccupied with rationalizing religious doctrines rather than seeking knowledge about the existence and nature of ultimate reality. Schellenberg proposes a new scheme for the study of religion, in which the study of religion is intertwined with religiosity itself. This new form of religion is ultimism.

Schellenberg introduced the term “ultimism” to describe the view that there is a metaphysically, axiologically and soteriologically ultimate reality in relation to which the ultimate good is possible. He consistently developed this view in three books: *Prolegomena to a Philosophy of Religion* (2005), *The Wisdom to Doubt: A Justification of Religious Skepticism* (2007) and *The Will to Imagine: A Justification of Skeptical Religion* (2009). A comprehensive account of ultimism is presented in *Evolutionary Religion*, published in 2013.

Schellenberg makes a number of assumptions about the nature of propositional attitudes such as belief, doubt and faith, and believes that there is

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¹ Alvin PLANTINGA, “Advice to Christian Philosophers,” *Faith and Philosophy* 1, no. 3 (1984): 253–71.

a progression in religion analogous to that in the natural sciences. What is also essential to his philosophical methodology is the adoption of a “deep time” perspective. It means doing philosophy while keeping in mind the perspective of the possibility of a complete change in our knowledge in the distant future. Schellenberg argues that if there is progress in religion, we can assume that we are in the early stages of investigating the nature of the ultimate reality. And since, given all our cognitive limitations, we can have no beliefs about the ultimate, then the only justified attitude towards it is faith. This conclusion is seemingly trivial because, on the basis of the epistemology developed by Schellenberg, faith entails doubt. In this context, the best religion is the most skeptical one. According to Schellenberg, only by accepting a minimal set of claims and adopting religious skepticism do we retain intellectual openness in the study of the nature of the ultimate.

This is the ultimist project in brief. The number of questions that can be raised against it is proportional to the momentum with which Schellenberg unfolds his vision. The aim of this paper is to present the assumptions of ultimism and to point out the philosophical problems of Schellenberg’s vision. In the first part I will try to discuss the corpus of concepts that make up ultimism: imaginative faith and evolutionary skepticism. In the second part I will point out the weaknesses of ultimism. I will present an epistemological argument, pointing to the cognitive limitations of imagination, and a methodological argument, questioning the feasibility of Schellenberg’s project.

2. IMAGINATIVE FAITH

In the first six chapters of *Prolegomena to a Philosophy of Religion* Schellenberg weaves an intricate web of interrelated definitions. The distinctions he makes there recur in his subsequent works essentially unchanged.

Central to his conception is the juxtaposition of belief and faith: the most important distinction is between involuntarism of belief, namely the assumption that belief is independent of our will, and voluntarism of faith, which is the assumption that we are able to decide what we take on faith. Not only is this view not controversial, it is also not new. We can find similar distinctions already in St. Thomas Aquinas. What is interesting, however, are the consequences Schellenberg draws from them. For Aquinas, the believer chooses to have faith in the propositions which he thinks have been revealed by God. Schellenberg argues that no religious doctrine has a privileged position, meaning that it is not more reliable than others. Since none of the existing

religions are reliable, they should not be the object of faith. In his view we merely have an intuition that there is some ultimate reality, but we do not yet know what the nature of that reality is. Because with faith is correlated a disposition to act in a certain way, we should be very careful in choosing the object of our faith.²

Schellenberg, referring to the views of William James, claims that our beliefs about the world are the direct result of a “sense of reality.” Having beliefs depends on evidence, and since evidence are “in the world,” they are independent of our will. Schellenberg defines beliefs as dispositions, to emphasize the fact that most of our beliefs are not currently in our consciousness. Most of our beliefs are non-verbal (e.g., I hold the belief that $2+2=4$ even if I am not thinking about it at the moment). Schellenberg treats as uncontroversial the assumption that our sense of reality is reliable. The intuition that the world exists and that we can adequately know it is something we cannot prove, but which we consciously accept for pragmatic reasons.

Schellenberg divides beliefs into propositional beliefs (referring to propositions describing states of affairs) and affective beliefs (expressing an emotional attitude towards some value). A propositional belief is expressed by the formula “S believes that p,” which for Schellenberg is synonymous with “S is disposed to apprehend the state of affairs reported by p, when that state of affairs comes to mind, under the concept reality.”³

According to Schellenberg S has a propositional religious belief that p when:

- (1) S is disposed to apprehend the state of affairs reported by p, when that state of affairs comes to mind, under the concept reality;
- (2) p entails the existence of an ultimate and salvific reality;
- (3) p is independently capable of informing a religious practice;
- (4) S recognizes the religious character of her belief.⁴

Schellenberg argues that every religious belief presupposes ultimism—the thesis that there is some ultimate reality. This is so even when different religions describe this reality in different ways. Moreover, the recognition of the existence of an ultimate reality is correlated with the adoption of a certain attitude towards this reality, which is expressed by religious practices.

² J. L. SCHELLENBERG, *Evolutionary Religion* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 115.

³ J. L. SCHELLENBERG, *The Will to Imagine: A Justification of Skeptical Religion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 255.

⁴ SCHELLENBERG, *The Will to Imagine*, 256.

The structure of religious and non-religious beliefs is similar. The main difference is, according to Schellenberg, that there are no non-religious practices to which non-religious beliefs should lead. But when do we acquire a particular religious belief? Schellenberg claims that a belief is justified when it has no better alternative. So, according to him, the belief that *p* is justified if *p* is more likely than not-*p*. However, if both assertion and negation with respect to *p* are not justified, and this is the case if there is no evidence in favor of either belief, or the evidence is mutually exclusive, then we adopt the attitude of doubt.

In Schellenberg's schema, *S* is a religious skeptic when *S* doubts or withholds judgment because of the non-conclusiveness of the available evidence. Giving vent to his love of sophisticated distinctions, Schellenberg introduces a number of varieties of skepticism:

1. Common skepticism: doubting some particular religious belief or some set of them.
2. Categorical skepticism: doubting the existence of an ultimate reality.
3. Capacity skepticism: doubting the possibility of acquiring knowledge of the ultimate reality.
4. Complete skepticism: the conjunction of categorical and capacity skepticism.

According to Schellenberg, the correct attitude towards religious beliefs is complete skepticism because we currently have no evidence to justify our religious beliefs. For example, in the case of the sentences like "God has a personal nature" and "God has a non-personal nature," there is no conclusive evidence for neither of them. Each is equally (im)plausible. The same is true of other philosophical oppositions: "God exists" vs "God does not exist." So in a situation where there is no conclusive evidence either for or against a given position, that is, in a skeptical situation, we adopt an attitude of doubt. Only then, according to Schellenberg, do we gain the right to have faith. Doubt therefore precedes the act of faith.

But what should we have faith in? In Schellenberg's view, faith is imaginative. Imagination serves as an active tool for producing representations that we would like to be true. This means that such faith is not a belief, because it does not depend on evidence. Nor is it acceptance, but rather it expresses the hope of achieving a certain good. This imagined good state of affairs should be epistemically possible. Schellenberg characterizes this notion as follows:

To say that a claim about the world, a proposition, is epistemically possible is roughly to say that even though it hasn't been established, for all we know it's true. Epistemic possibilities are claims we don't have any good reason to believe false, given our present evidence.⁵

Epistemic possibility expresses the subjective impression that a particular proposition is true. It is expressed in the attitude: because of everything I know, I cannot rule it out. The imagined object, in order to become an object of faith, must therefore not contradict what one currently knows. The person of faith must also submit to cultivate the behavior that would be appropriate if the imagined object of faith turned out to be true. The object of faith thus understood entails specific religious practices, which Schellenberg calls evolutionary religion.

4. EVOLUTIONARY SKEPTICISM

Schellenberg's starting point in arguing for ultimism is a trivial empirical observation: our knowledge changes over time. While there may be some optimism that this is usually a change for the better, we still do not have complete knowledge of reality. According to Schellenberg, the reason for that is our biological and cultural immaturity. We are biologically immature because we have various cognitive limitations: our senses, as skeptics have reminded us since the ancient times, often lead us astray. Cultural immaturity, on the other hand, manifests itself in widespread disagreement, especially in the areas of religion, politics and morality. Because we are immature, most of our beliefs are premature.⁶ This does not mean, however, that we are threatened by a global skepticism according to which no knowledge is possible. What protects us from such a threat is a pragmatic assumption that our cognitive faculties are working correctly. In other words, knowledge is possible, but achieving it is a complex and lengthy process, and we are only at the beginning. We still have a long way to go.

Schellenberg's argument resembles the reasoning of pessimistic meta-induction, popularised by Larry Laudan in 1981. According to this idea, since past scientific theories have often turned out to be false, we can infer from this a pessimistic conclusion that current scientific theories will also

⁵ SCHELLENBERG, *Evolutionary Religion*, 42–43.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

turn out to be false. And if we accept this conclusion in the case of science, then it seems that the same reasoning can also be applied to religious doctrines. According to Schellenberg, the history of religious discourse, where so many (from today's perspective) false and immoral ideas have emerged, proves that religions are constantly changing. Laudan, in the conclusion of his famous article, admitted that we all want to believe that realism is true, that is, that our current scientific theories objectively describe reality, but for the moment this is merely "wishful thinking."⁷ Schellenberg believes that Laudan's reasoning, supplemented by a "deep time" perspective, extends to metaphysical questions. For this reason, in his view, it is epistemically possible that religions will also change in the future.⁸

What is most important for Schellenberg for justification of evolutionary religion is "the temporal argument." Schellenberg proposes that reflection on religion should be conducted from the perspective of the distant future, that is, from the perspective of "deep time." In his view, from this distant temporal perspective, e.g. from the perspective of a million years from now, our current ideas will seem completely primitive. Although we do not and cannot know specifically what ideas the future will bring, this approach can be a useful rhetorical device in the fight against the "chauvinism of the present." For through our imagination we can become aware of the enormous disparity between what we already know about the world and what we as humanity can still learn.

5. ULTIMISM

Schellenberg declares himself an atheist, but using a popular distinction in the philosophy of religion, he should rather be called a weak atheist, or non-theist. Strong atheism expresses the belief that God does not exist. Schellenberg does not think that God does not exist. He believes that a personal God does not exist, hence he rejects both metaphysical naturalism, which entails strong atheism, and classical theism with its concept of a personal God. He calls his non-theistic position ultimism.

Ultimism boils down to the thesis that there is some ultimate reality (ultimate metaphysically and axiologically) in relation to which it is possible to achieve the ultimate good. Ultimism is thus a conjunction of three kinds of

⁷ Larry LAUDAN, "A Confutation of Convergent Realism," *Philosophy of Science* 48 (1981): 48.

⁸ SCHELLENBERG, *Evolutionary Religion*, 43.

the ultimate: metaphysical, axiological and soteriological. In Schellenberg's terminology, something is metaphysically ultimate when it is the foundation of all existence, axiologically ultimate when it is perfect, and soteriologically ultimate when it is the source of ultimate good for humanity.

However, if one were to raise the objection that the above characterization is too general and would like to know what the foundation of reality is, what perfection is, and what the ultimate good of all humanity consists in, one is already demanding to go beyond ultimism. Ultimism is about leaving these questions open, modestly acknowledging that today we are unable to answer them satisfactorily. The proponent of ultimism will at the same time encourage constant research and new interpretations.

We have at our disposal a whole range of alternative conceptions of God, but as Schellenberg points out, we have no good criterion for choosing one of them. For something can be the foundation of all existence in different ways:

- 1) Compositional, when everything, whatever exists, is made of it.
- 2) Explanatory, when everything, whatever exists, is explained by it.
- 3) Genetic, when everything, whatever exists, comes from it.
- 4) Teleological, when everything, whatever exists, tends towards it.

With axiological ultimate, it is similar. The ultimist suspends judgment on the question of what God's attributes are, whether He is a personal or non-personal being, and on soteriological ultimate, he suspends judgment on the question of what the ultimate good is.

Schellenberg believes that ultimism is the backbone of every religion, while the differences between religions are largely due to different views of what is ultimate in them. In the Christian religion, for example, God is metaphysically ultimate in the sense that He is, to use Aristotle's terminology, the causal cause of the world, meaning—He is fundamental in an explanatory sense. However, He is not a material cause, which means He is not fundamental in a compositional sense. He is axiologically ultimate because He contains all personal perfections, and soteriologically ultimate in the sense that our highest good depends on coming into a personal relationship with Him. In Hinduism, Brahman is metaphysically ultimate in an exploratory and compositional sense (everything comes from it and everything is part of it), axiologically ultimate because it contains non-personal perfections, and soteriologically ultimate because the highest good consists in losing our identity in Brahman. So what all religions have in common is precisely ultimism, or,

as Schellenberg puts it, “the smooth core, the capacious heart of our most powerful religious visions.”⁹

Schellenberg sets aside the question of what might be the essence of individual religions in an attempt to find the lowest common denominator for all religions. In his perspective, the variety of forms in which individual religions manifest themselves is merely noise that hides the proper ultimist essence. From the point of view of ultimism, the most characteristic claims of the Christian religion, the doctrine of the incarnation or the concept of a personal God, should be rejected. The same should be done with regard to the doctrines of other religions.

6. ULTIMISM AS A RELIGION

Even if we agree that ultimism is the essence of any (or most) religions, Schellenberg goes a step further and argues that ultimism itself is really the only religion worth following. Schellenberg understands religiousness in a minimalist way, where the definition of religion includes at least two elements: (1) a set of representations and (2) a set of attitudes taken towards these representations. According to Schellenberg, a person is religious if he or she simultaneously has faith that the ultimate reality exists and the ultimate good can be achieved in relation to it, and the ultimate obligation of this person is to cultivate dispositions appropriate to this ultimate reality. If, on the other hand, the attitude of faith is justified only in the context of a lack of belief, then the only justified religious attitude is to have doubts.

Schellenberg therefore argues for the adoption of a “sceptical religion.” Its minimal content would be determined by ultimism, while the attitude to be adopted towards the ultimate would be constant doubt. In other words, a truly religious ultimist has fervent faith that ultimism is true, although he doubts that it is. The ultimist doubts the truthfulness of religious content, but nevertheless consciously chooses to live as if ultimism were true. Since religious faith, as Schellenberg constantly stresses, is not a belief, and its fuel is imagination, to profess ultimism means to experiment in one’s imagination with various possibilities, holding on to the hope that in time one will find the most appropriate course of action. It is, says Schellenberg, “a faith for beings who wish to experiment with a fuller maturity, willing to sweat their way to enlightenment—to show others and themselves what they’re really made of.”¹⁰

⁹ Ibid., 100.

¹⁰ Ibid., 106.

According to Schellenberg, it is best, for intellectual and moral reasons, to have faith in the most minimal set of assertions, because to embrace a religion with a richer content than ultimism is already an intellectual and moral gamble. In his view, ascribing truthfulness to religious claims is not only exposing oneself to the possibility of being wrong, but also taking the risk of acting immorally.

Doubt can be passive or active. It is passive when we realize that we are full of doubt, and active, when doubt begins to leave us, so we take action to regain it, e.g. we analyse the arguments of skeptics. Hence, it is a particularly desirable state to be a passive skeptic, because it is only from here that one can reasonably begin to have faith that ultimism is true. In turn, by having faith in such a minimal set of claims and adopting religious skepticism, one approaches religious matters with intellectual openness. In practice, this involves rejecting all the sacred texts and traditions of all previous religions and engaging in the communal activity of imagining a religion that will best enable us not only to explain ourselves and our relation to the world, but also to overcome all moral evil. So if we are interested in what is the truth about ultimate reality and at the same time want to maintain intellectual and moral integrity, then ultimism is the best option.

7. THE LIMITS OF IMAGINATION

The idea of suspending judgement on what we know so far and undertaking research anew in an unprejudiced way is to some extent reminiscent of John Rawls' thought experiment "the veil of ignorance."¹¹ In the experiment we are encouraged to imagine that we are in an "original situation," that is, a situation where no social contracts yet exist. We then assume that we are behind a veil of ignorance, that is, that we know nothing about our intelligence, character traits, health, occupation, material resources, political views, ethnicity and gender. Rawls thinks that by being in the original situation under the veil of ignorance we will be able to remain impartial in deciding by what rules the society should be organized. Rawls believes that by making such assumptions and following the principle that every person has similar motivations, i.e. wants to be a subject of law, wants to be free, wants to have self-respect, we will create a system in which even the most disadvantaged

¹¹ John RAWLS, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

person will be as well off as possible. According to Rawls, this thought experiment is one of the best methods of creating a just society.

The similarity between the veil of ignorance and Schellenberg's evolutionary skepticism is apparent at first glance. The crucial difference is that whereas for Rawls the method of the veil of ignorance is a purely philosophical tool, Schellenberg's project requires engagement on the practical side. For ultimism is not just a philosophy. It is first and foremost a way of life which, if adopted, would have consequences both on an individual and social level. And because the stakes of adopting ultimism are so high, it is to be expected that it will be supported by strong arguments.

Schellenberg believes that the study of ultimate reality begins with the work of imagination. But how do we distinguish between plausible imagination and pure fantasy? Let us take as an analogy the discussions around the possibility of inventing a better social system. It seems that for the proponents of this or that ideal political conception, they describe scenarios available within reach, while opponents see in these projects a potential disaster. Perhaps for this reason advocates of radical social change often accuse supporters of the "old order" of finding it easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. A world where no one has to work, where everything is free and everyone does what they want? The capitalist logic of profit and loss brutally invades the pleasant fantasy and makes us ask questions about the costs of such a project. The point, the revolutionaries reply, is to imagine a world that operates on different principles. For if such a utopia were possible, it would after all be a goal worth pursuing. This seems to be the answer that Schellenberg would also give. But how to assess the credibility of such an imagined project? The recourse to imagination as a tool for establishing epistemic possibilities cannot, after all, be unlimited.

A reasonable criterion seems to be the requirement of a detailed description of the situation presented. If someone, formulating an argument, wants to accept in the premise the possibility of some state of affairs and justifies it by the fact that he can imagine such a state of affairs, it will be incumbent on him to provide a sufficiently detailed description of this situation.

If we agree that the imagined situation gains or loses credibility in proportion to the degree of detail of its description, this puts the project of ultimism in a troublesome position. Since, holding to Schellenberg's assumptions, we know nothing about the nature of the ultimate, then necessarily our depiction of it will not be very detailed. The problem with accepting the possibility of such a representation is addressed by Peter van Inwagen in his

article *Modal Epistemology*, where he argues for the adoption of modal skepticism. Modal skepticism is the position according to which we do not and cannot have knowledge about the truth of modal sentences concerning metaphysical questions.

In van Inwagen's view, an analogy can be drawn between modal judgements and judgements about physical phenomena observed from a certain distance. Judgements such as "This mountain is approximately thirty miles away" or "This tree is approximately three hundred yards from the foot of that mountain" may be wrong, but very often turn out to be quite accurate. However, there are cases far removed from everyday situations where such judgements are completely unreliable. For example, it is practically impossible to estimate even approximately the distance separating us from the Sun or the Moon with just the naked eye.

The situation becomes even more complicated when we consider statements that describe states of affairs that we think we can imagine. For at first glance it seems perfectly easy to imagine that there is a levitating piece of metal in front of us. One can even make the task more difficult and say that this piece of metal is completely transparent. It seems that we are entitled to conclude from this that if we can imagine such an object, it is not completely impossible. Peter van Inwagen disagrees with this reasoning. If someone, says van Inwagen, claims to be able to imagine a piece of transparent metal levitating in the air, and on this basis concludes that such a substance is possible, then this person is either deceiving himself or is a victim of his "poor imagination."

According to van Inwagen, poor imagination consists in an inability to imagine all the relevant details of a given situation. If someone declares that he can imagine a levitating piece of transparent metal, we should be entitled to ask such a person whether he can also imagine what physical structure enables this object to levitate and to be transparent. A person of "rich imagination" will know that such an object is not possible because its existence would contradict the known laws of physics. Someone who declares that in his imagination he sees such an object, although he cannot describe it in enough detail to make its existence consistent with the existing laws of physics, is in fact the victim of an illusion caused by his poor imagination. Hence, as van Inwagen argues, his modal beliefs are unreliable. Similarly, it is beyond the reach of our cognitive powers to have knowledge of the possibility of the existence of a perfect being or an immaterial soul. What our imagination "produces" in such a situation is not what it seems.

According to van Inwagen, the illusory character of these beliefs is hidden by some philosophers under the guise of talking about logical possibility.¹² In his view, reasoning in which from the impossibility of proving that something is impossible one concludes that this something is possible is a logical fallacy. It seems that van Inwagen's objection is correct. Someone could, for example, claim that since it is impossible to prove that the conjunction of the planets does not affect climate change, then it is possible that it does. However, an inference from one's knowledge of a possibility can all too easily turn into a claim about a possibility due to gaps in knowledge. So if, as Schellenberg suggests, we accept that we have no knowledge of the ultimate, then trying to imagine what such an ultimate reality might look like, taking the criterion of detailed description, will always be unreliable.

8. DO WE REALLY NEED TO START FROM SCRATCH?

Schellenberg's impressive project seems in some respects to be Cartesian in spirit. At the beginning of his "Discourse on Method," Descartes shares his frustration with the divergence of opinions in all spheres of science. This state of affairs led him to search for a foundation on which to ground the edifice of knowledge. Schellenberg's ambitions, however, do not concern all our knowledge of the world, but "only" the knowledge of the ultimate matters. Like Descartes, he encourages us to question, at the starting point, everything we know about religion. But whereas Descartes' aim of methodical doubt was to find an unquestionable support for our beliefs about the world, hence Cartesian doubt was temporary, Schellenberg definitively rejects everything we know about religion, holding on to the fleeting hope that perhaps we can imagine something better in its place. This stance raises a number of questions. When would this process end? In a million years? And how would we even know that this is the moment to get rid of all these doubts?

Adopting a deep time perspective, while it may be inspiring, is totally unhelpful in practice. We can readily agree with Schellenberg that it is probable that a million years from now, if humanity still exists and the development of science continues without the disruptions caused by a global catastrophe, scientific theories will be different from those of today. It also seems likely that future generations will see in us similar cognitive limitations that we see in the first scholars of ancient times. But even if our current scientific

¹² Peter VAN INWAGEN, "Modal Epistemology," *Philosophical Studies* 92 (1998): 71.

theories turn out to be false in the future, this does not mean that we should abandon them now and start our research all over again. It is not the possibility of error that makes scientists abandon their concepts. Theories are abandoned in the light of new discoveries that falsify previous knowledge. As long as there is no evidence for their falsifiability, there is no reason to abandon what has already been worked out.

Here the fundamental weakness of ultimism is revealed. Schellenberg would like ultimism to fulfil at the same time the functions of religion and the philosophy of religion. It should enable us to know the ultimate better, but at the same time it should inspire religious practices. As Schellenberg himself puts it: "Religious inquiry (inquiry concerning religion) is in this way turned into religious inquiry (inquiry that instantiates religion)."¹³

However, in such a view, ultimism becomes either a philosophically trivial or religiously unsatisfactory position.

9. CONCLUSION

If one treats ultimism as philosophy, then Schellenberg's demand to reject the content of the sacred writings is trivial. Philosophy is an activity based primarily on rational argumentation and, in principle, does not appeal to Revelation. If, on the other hand, one treats ultimism as a religion, it fails to live up to the hopes placed in religion. Religions are not only an essential part of culture. It seems an uncontroversial view that people accept a particular religion because it provides a sense of meaning. Ultimism, on the other hand, is not a ready-made set of claims, but rather an invitation for further research. In this sense, it is more like philosophy than religion. From a philosophical point of view, it offers no new arguments, but only the hope that by starting the research afresh, we will arrive at better results. If, on the other hand, philosophy is a science, and if we agree that the possibility of error is not enough to abandon a particular theory, the positive function of ultimism is to remind philosophers to keep an open mind in their research. However, this is a recommendation that philosophers do not need to be reminded of. It is, after all, quite obvious.

¹³ SCHELLENBERG, *Evolutionary Religion*, 108.

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ULTIMISM: A PHILOSOPHY THAT WANTS TO BE A RELIGION

Summary

Ultimism is the view that there is a metaphysically and axiologically ultimate reality in relation to which it is possible to achieve the ultimate good. John Schellenberg believes that ultimism is the backbone of every religion, while the differences between religions arise from different views of what the nature of the ultimate is. Schellenberg tries to show that if there is progress in religion, then it is most reasonable to assume that we are only at the beginning of the inquiry into the ultimate. The aim of the paper is to show that epistemological and methodological objections can be raised against ultimism. It will present an epistemological argument, pointing to the cognitive limitations of imagination, and a methodological argument, questioning the feasibility of Schellenberg's project.

Keywords: J. L. Schellenberg; ultimism; philosophy of religion; epistemology; imagination.

ULTYMIZM – FILOZOFIA, KTÓRA CHCE BYĆ RELIGIĄ

Streszczenie

Ulymizm to pogląd, wedle którego istnieje metafizycznie i aksjologicznie ostateczna rzeczywistość, w stosunku do której możliwe jest osiągnięcie ostatecznego dobra. J. L. Schellenberg uważa, że ulymizm jest podstawą każdej religii, podczas gdy różnice między religiami wynikają z różnych poglądów na to, jaka jest natura rzeczywistości ostatecznej. Schellenberg próbuje wykazać, że jeśli w religii jest postęp, to najrozsądniej jest założyć, że jesteśmy dopiero na początku badania rzeczywistości ostatecznej. Celem artykułu jest wykazanie, że można podnosić zastrzeżenia epistemologiczne i metodologiczne wobec ulymizmu. Prezentuję argument epistemologiczny, wskazujący na poznawcze ograniczenia wyobraźni, oraz argument metodologiczny, kwestionujący wykonalność projektu Schellenberga.

Słowa kluczowe: J. L. Schellenberg; ulymizm; filozofia religii; epistemologia; wyobraźnia.