

The Power of Humility in Sceptical Religion: Why Ietsism Is Preferable to J.L. Schellenberg's Ultimism

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Abstract: J.L. Schellenberg's vision for Philosophy of Religion argues for a specific brand of sceptical religion that takes "Ultimism" – the proposition that there is a metaphysically, axiologically, and soteriologically ultimate reality – to be the object toward which the sceptical religionist should assent. In this paper I shall argue that Ietsism – the proposition that there is merely *something* transcendental worth committing ourselves to religiously – is a preferable object of assent. This is for two primary reasons. Firstly, Ietsism is far more modest than Ultimism; Ietsism, in fact, is open to the truth of Ultimism, while the converse does not hold. Secondly, Ietsism can fulfil the same criteria that compel Schellenberg to argue for Ultimism.

A good youth ... ought not to despise humility, but should love forbearance and modesty.
-- St. Ambrose, on the intellectual formation of children in the church.¹

Introduction

It would be an understatement to claim that J.L. Schellenberg's ground-breaking work in the last decade has deserved the attention it has received in the analytic philosophy of religion.² Among the commotion it has caused is a 2011 symposium in *Philo* (dedicated to his trilogy specifically), and an excellent *Religious Studies* issue (on his philosophy of religion in general).³ Although many have weighed in on the question as to *why* Schellenberg's thought has been so heavily-discussed⁴, one clearly undisputed reason is the sheer originality and novelty of his vision: unlike doing 'business as usual' (which, in the analytic philosophy of religion, has roughly been discussion of the rationality and justification of religious belief, the coherence and cogency of traditional theism, topics in natural theology, and the problem of evil), Schellenberg proposes an entirely revisionary outlook that aims to broaden the scope of the philosophy of religion – indeed, religious thinking in general.

Schellenberg's thought revolves around a model of what he prefers to call 'sceptical religion' (or, in his 2013 summation, 'evolutionary religion'). In short, this is the proposal that, being led by reason and argument, one can (and should⁵) endorse an intellectually virtuous *scepticism* toward religious issues, while also adopting an existentially fulfilling religious *optimism* – a zeal that has healthfully (and productively) driven and oriented the lives of the many religious folk throughout history. His project is thus a research programme in establishing a Goldilocks form of religious faith: to vindicate the most epistemically virtuous form of religious scepticism (the topic of *WD*), and to then defend the most epistemically virtuous form of 'religious imagination' in light of this religious skepticism (the topic of *WI*). Some have thus characterized Schellenberg's position as 'faith without God', or as 'belieflless faith . . . that does not play favorites among the world's religions'.⁶

Schellenberg's form of sceptical religion, hereafter ER (for 'evolutionary religion'), is propositional.

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That is to say, the object towards which one's religious disposition is oriented, in ER, is a proposition. The object, which serves to 'offer a framework appropriate for religious investigation far into the future', is what he dubs 'Ultimism'.⁷

ULTIMISM: There exists a metaphysically, axiologically, and soteriologically ultimate reality (and very little more can be said regarding its nature).⁸

ULTIMISM, and the role it plays in Schellenberg's ER, has certainly received a good deal of scrutiny in the literature; however, I am inclined to opine that it hasn't, as of yet, received enough.⁹ In this paper I shall argue that an alternative propositional object for sceptical religion, IETSISM (from the Dutch word '*ietsisme*', meaning, literally, 'somethingism'), is preferable to ULTIMISM as the object of ER.

IETSISM: There exists a soteriologically transcendent reality that may or may not also be axiologically and/or metaphysically transcendent (and very little more can be said regarding its nature).¹⁰

That is, I will argue that the proposition that there is merely *something* worth committing ourselves to religiously, IETSISM, is a better object for ER than ULTIMISM. This is for two primary reasons.

First, IETSISM is far more modest than ULTIMISM. One incredibly attractive aspect of ULTIMISM, a point which Schellenberg spends a good deal of time developing, is its epistemic modesty.¹¹ Other than noting that ULTIMISM is 'triple ultimate', Schellenberg stresses the importance of our remaining open to the many possibilities that can further detail the ultimate reality. Ultimism is, simply put, intellectually humble; however, Ietsism is humbler yet. IETSISM, in fact, is open to the truth of ULTIMISM, while the converse does not hold. That is to say, IETSISM includes ULTIMISM (along with other positions that ULTIMISM excludes), and so from a probabilistic standpoint, IETSISM is *necessarily* more likely to be true than ULTIMISM.¹² Moreover, IETSISM only requires soteriological transcendence, and requires mere transcendence alone rather than ultimacy. In short, ULTIMISM is conjunctively ultimate, and IETSISM merely soteriologically transcendent. The intellectual modesty garnered by the switch from Ultimism to Ietsism is thus a primary motivation to prefer IETSISM over ULTIMISM.

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Second, IETSISM can fulfil the same criteria that compel Schellenberg to argue for ULTIMISM. ULTIMISM is the idea of a truly *ultimate* reality, as opposed to a limited transcendent religious reality (however transcendent it may be); ULTIMISM thus depicts something truly magnificent. Jeanine Diller points this out aptly: ‘if we could really grasp the idea of [ULTIMISM] . . . it would for that moment take our breath away’.¹³ It is this potency to drive and foster a healthy religious zeal that compels Schellenberg to prefer ULTIMISM over some limited reality. As Schellenberg states,

If evolutionary religion aims, among other things, to promote our evolution into a more mature state, it will need to *challenge* us . . . so as to facilitate enlarging ourselves. The religious idea needs to be big enough, surely, to embrace both reality and value. It needs to be *worthy* of our imaginations, and therefore must present to us more than [a] limited deity . . .¹⁴

It is clear that what motivates Schellenberg’s endorsement of ULTIMISM over something like IETSISM is the existential panache and fecundity that the assent toward ULTIMISM gratifies. This, along with the assertion that ULTIMISM is more fit to explain the deep profundity and tenacity of religious experience recorded throughout human history, summarizes Schellenberg’s two criteria for picking ULTIMISM over something like IETSISM. That is to say, ‘evolutionary religion will need to find some place for powerful religious experiences [while] also remembering that it should challenge us’.¹⁵

I shall argue in this paper that IETSISM can both (1) give us the existential panache Schellenberg seeks and (2) do justice to the incredible spectrum of religious experience we find in the world. My primary motivation for saying this is simply that ER only needs to aim for a transcendent reality to fulfil these criteria, rather than a full-fledged ultimate reality. That is to say, a transcendent reality is all that is needed in response to Schellenberg’s two quotations above.

There is a tertiary reason why IETSISM is preferable to ULTIMISM as well. Some have raised concern that Ultimism just simply isn’t an epistemically tenable religious position.¹⁶ That is, roughly, that it simply isn’t realistic to assume we can direct our religious imagination upon something so simultaneously nebulous and spectacular. Although IETSISM is more nebulous than ULTIMISM, it is far less spectacular. I

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will argue that, granting the fact that IETSISM has a much higher likelihood of being true, adopting IETSISM alleviates some of these pragmatic concerns; it's a lot easier wilfully to assent to a reality that has a much higher chance of really existing!

Thus, in a nutshell, IETSISM is preferable to ULTIMISM because it is more modest, epistemically tenable, and can yet challenge our passions and imaginations in a significantly robust way. In the sections that follow, I will flesh out these considerations more fully. I'll first gloss over Schellenberg's argument for ER, so that the reader is familiar with its scope and aims, and explain the pertinent bits for our discussion. I will then proceed to argue for my thesis in more detail. I will conclude with some speculations as to how Schellenberg might respond to my concerns, building on his 2013 book *Evolutionary Religion* and his responses to Diller and others.¹⁷

Schellenberg's Understanding of Evolutionary Religion

The work encompassed in Schellenberg's trilogy, which is summarized (with a new, evolution-themed twist) in *ER*, is exceptionally broad in scope. In these works, Schellenberg offers a probing critique of the 'business-as-usual' form of philosophy that dominates the analytic philosophy of religion (the topic of *PPR*), a superb defence of religious scepticism (the topic of *WD*), and a bold proposal for a new form of religiousness (the topic of *WI*). Ultimism, the most crucial tenet of ER, isn't as central in *PPR* and *WD* as it is in *WI* and *ER*. That being said, the form of sceptical religiousness that Schellenberg offers in *WI* and *ER* can only be understood in light of *PPR* and *WD*. As such, the following paragraphs will attempt to tease out the important aspects of Schellenberg's ER that are pertinent to my critique of ULTIMISM.

Schellenberg's argument for ER is twofold: a defence of religious scepticism (he uses 'religious pessimism' in *ER*), and a defence of religious optimism – having 'the will to imagine'. It is crucial to stress the priority of the *scepticism* over the *optimism*. Schellenberg opines that neither religious belief nor religious

disbelief is entirely justified by our current body of evidence. Only after understanding this exceptionally austere form of scepticism can we come to appreciate his form of religious optimism.

Although his defence of both religious scepticism and optimism is quite robust, and his arguments for each are manifold, Schellenberg summarizes his case for religious scepticism and optimism well in ER. In ER, Schellenberg offers several reasons for being so broadly sceptical of religious claims, all of which suggest that we're in no position to evaluate either the truth or falsity of grandiose religious propositions, such as ULTIMISM or IETSISM. He starts by delineating the criteria for what sorts of religious claims we should find suspect, detailing what he calls the 'sufficient condition of incredibility'. Propositions which are precise, detailed, ambitious, profound, controversial, and attractive (or at least a good mix of these qualities) are, according to Schellenberg, the sorts of propositions we should be sceptical of. Religious propositions – at least as traditionally understood – fulfil these criteria snugly.

Next, Schellenberg asks us to feel 'deep time in the gut' – to grasp our relatively juvenile position in evolutionary and cosmological history. Granting the vast swaths of time that both precede and succeed our incredibly limited history in cosmological time (think, for example, from the time of the Big Bang to the time of the supposed 'Big Crunch'), the amount of time that *homo sapiens sapiens* has been critically engaging in religious and metaphysical matters is a mere infinitesimal blip. How realistic is it, suggests Schellenberg, to suppose we've received the right answers to the deepest metaphysical questions philosophy and religion can ask in a mere 6,000 years of thought? Furthermore, why suppose we're *able* to grasp such a deep concept, granting our relatively youthful status in evolutionary history? Perhaps in the distant future – say a million years from now – humans will be so psychologically advanced that they will be able to conceive of religious and philosophical concepts currently outside our ken.

This is a notably fanciful conjecture, but the intuition behind it illustrates a substantial point. By adopting an evolutionarily nuanced vantage point, we can see how fallible our judgements are when

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discerning the truth or falsity of religious propositions. It is this intuition that motivates Schellenberg's *Total Evidence Argument*. 'Total evidence', for Schellenberg, means something quite different from what it normally means in contemporary analytic philosophy. For Schellenberg, the 'total evidence' relative to some proposition p is the set of all facts that support either the truth or falsity of p (whether they are known or not).¹⁸ The argument, in a broad sketch, goes as follows: if the total evidence for p supports p , then p is true (the same goes for $\sim p$). It is epistemically possible that the total evidence for ULTIMISM supports ULTIMISM, and it is also epistemically possible that it supports the falsity of ULTIMISM.¹⁹ Therefore, we are unjustified in asserting either the truth or falsity of ULTIMISM in our current state of affairs; we can only say to a certain degree which is more probable.²⁰

So, according to Schellenberg, there are ultimately three reasons supporting this scepticism, which all suggest that we are at a much-too uninformed epistemic vantage point concerning religious hypotheses. The first is that, as of yet, religious enquiry (e.g. the great arguments of Natural Theology, or arguments for reductive materialism) has been relatively unsuccessful in establishing indubitable religious or philosophical propositions. The second is that we have good reasons to doubt that we have sufficient knowledge of the total evidence for or against religious propositions. The third is that we have good reasons to doubt that we can sufficiently assess the relevant knowledge *we do have* regarding various religious propositions.

We now come to a critical aspect of Schellenberg's philosophy: the *belief vs assent* distinction.²¹ Schellenberg takes himself to have established that propositional 'belief-that' in ULTIMISM clearly isn't tenable, granting his defence of religious scepticism. This is where his argument in *WI* picks up, which attempts to justify the religious imagination *sans* belief. Ultimism, for Schellenberg, is not *belief in* the object that ULTIMISM depicts: rather, it's an imaginative *assent toward* the truth of ULTIMISM. As Schellenberg describes his case,

Belief is thus involuntary, involving a feeling or sense, whereas [assent] is voluntary. And thus even where one is involuntarily in doubt about p , neither believing nor disbelieving it, one can still graft onto one's

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doubt, as it were, a state of [assent]. . . . [For example, consider that] you're still trying to find a lost toddler after weeks of fruitless searching and accept that success is not out of reach. Here there may be little support for belief – indeed, you may be unable to believe – and yet there is something positive, mentally, that you can do and perhaps should do in relation to the proposition at issue.²²

The case of the lost toddler, although quite disconcerting, is a wonderful analogy for describing the sort of assent Schellenberg thinks the religious sceptic should endorse. Even though we are more or less in an epistemic stalemate regarding the truth or falsity of ULTIMISM, Schellenberg contends, we should nonetheless live our lives *as if* ULTIMISM were true. We should assent to ULTIMISM without taking a doxastic stance on its contents. This way, we can live in a state of intellectually virtuous religiousness that Schellenberg calls ‘the new optimism’: a disposition to live our lives more fully by appreciating the existential zeal and fecundity that only assent to religious propositions, such as ULTIMISM, can offer.

Or so Schellenberg claims: now that we've covered the basis of Schellenberg's understanding of ER, we can assess whether or not ULTIMISM is the best object of assent for ER. In what follows, we will quickly address Schellenberg's argument for ULTIMISM itself, and see how IETSISM compares. I will then move to my core argument (viz. that IETSISM is preferable to ULTIMISM for ER) and conclude with a possible response on Schellenberg's behalf.

ULTIMISM as Thin/Strong, IETSISM as Thin and neither Strong nor Weak

As stated in the introduction, Schellenberg takes ULTIMISM to be the Goldilocks sort of religious proposition for ER – it's very vague, akin to a large disjunctive set of possible fundamental realities (which would include concepts such as Christian trinitarian theism, Muslim unitarian theism, Zoroastrian dualism, or the Brahman); it also, though, isn't as vague as it could be – it requires that the reality be *ultimate*, and moreover *triple* ultimate. I'll here use Schellenberg's ‘Thin vs Thick’/‘weak vs Strong’ heuristic he employs in *ER* to illustrate his position.

Schellenberg's two primary motivations for ULTIMISM are its

- (i) epistemic modesty, and
- (ii) assent-worthiness.²³

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Schellenberg argues – I think correctly – that the epistemic modesty of a religious proposition is crucially important in sceptical religion. The fewer details we build into a proposition, the more likely it is to be true. There are of course other reasons to prefer a more modest religious proposition: it is also more inclusive and allows for greater doxastic freedom. For example, someone could be drawn to a concept such as the Brahman, say, and still assent to ULTIMISM, just as someone drawn to Christian theism might.²⁴ As for Schellenberg, he seeks an epistemically modest religious proposition because it is more amenable to the broader concerns of ER; granting our relatively juvenile epistemic capacities, we need to remain open to what the future may hold. (I think this point ultimately boils down to modesty making a proposition more likely to be true, however; in any event, Schellenberg doesn't explicitly note this.) A detailed religious proposition Schellenberg dubs *Thick*. A *Thin* religious proposition, on the other hand, offers no more details other than stating that the object is transcendent itself.

Modesty, however, is far less important than a proposition's being assentworthy – that is, its being worthy of 'stretching us' and motivating our religious imaginations and hopes. The proposition 'there is something transcendent', Schellenberg contends, just won't cut it. The central distinguishing feature of *religious* propositions is that they have an enormously profound ability to motivate, invigorate, and drive those who uphold them. 'So', asks Schellenberg, 'what do we need to build into our religious proposition to garner this level of assentworthiness, while being as modest as possible'? His answer, obviously, is ULTIMISM.

Ultimism, remember, is triply ultimate. That is, it depicts a reality which is unsurpassable metaphysically, axiologically, and soteriologically. Here's how Schellenberg defines these transcendental terms:

MT: A religious reality is metaphysically transcendent iff 'its existence is a fact distinct from any natural fact and in some way a more fundamental fact about reality than any natural fact'.

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AT: A religious reality is axiologically transcendent iff ‘its intrinsic value – its splendour, its excellence – exceeds that of anything found in nature alone’.

ST: A religious reality is soteriologically transcendent iff ‘being rightly related to it will make for more well-being, fulfilment, wholeness, and the like for creatures than can naturally be attained’.²⁵

So, the sort of religious propositions worthy of our assent are all metaphysically, axiologically, and soteriologically transcendent (MT, AT, and ST for shorthand) according to Schellenberg. Importantly, Schellenberg thinks that a reality which is only one or two of these – say, something AT and ST but not MT – isn’t the right sort of object for ER. Although he isn’t explicit on why, I believe his reasoning is more or less as follows: since the primary purpose of ER is to stretch our imaginations in the grandest way possible, only a triply-transcendent object is appropriate. Since I will be critiquing this claim shortly, let’s call this his ‘triple transcendence thesis’.

Triple transcendence: Only a reality that is conjunctively MT, AT, and ST is assent-worthy.

This move alone might already cause some to raise concerns, but in fact Schellenberg argues that triple transcendence isn’t spectacular enough; it’s not enough to warrant the strong sort of assent that he seeks for ER. Schellenberg also claims that the reality needs to be ultimately MT, AT, and ST. Taking a cue from Anselm (and, frankly, the entire history of Perfect Being Theology), Schellenberg thus moves from triple transcendence to triple ultimacy: the object for ER must be metaphysically, axiologically, and soteriologically ultimate – ‘that than which nothing greater can be conceived’. It will encapsulate the *deepest* metaphysical truth possible, the *most intrinsically valuable* truth possible, and our *deepest good* possible. Call this the ‘ultimacy thesis’.

Ultimacy: Only a reality that is ultimate in its triple-transcendence is assent-worthy.²⁶

These qualities, those of being triply-transcendent and ultimate, are what give us (ii) – viz. a religious proposition’s being assent-worthy. Since ER’s object needs to be both (i) and (ii), we are left with

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ULTIMISM. Going back to Schellenberg's heuristic, then: he refers to an ultimate proposition as 'Strong', and anything less than such as 'Weak'. We can thus construct the following table of possible religious propositions for ER:

Thick/Strong	A detailed, triply-transcendent, and ultimate proposition
Thick/Weak	A detailed, triply-transcendent, and non-ultimate proposition
Thin/Strong	A non-detailed, triply-transcendent, and ultimate proposition
Thin/Weak	A non-detailed, triply-transcendent, and non-ultimate proposition. ²⁷

An exemplary candidate for a Thick/Strong concept would, obviously, be traditional theism. Candidates for a Thick/Weak option are not so obvious, but there have been many such proposals in the history of philosophical thought. Schellenberg picks J. S. Mill's deistic sort of deity as being of the Thick/Weak sort: a transcendent reality for which we can give some detail, but is not triply ultimate (say, Theism *sans* Omnipotence, Omniscience, and/or Omnibenevolence). A sort of pantheism or panentheism could also be tailored to fit this position. ULTIMISM is Thin/Strong. IETSISM (contrary to what the reader might have been expecting) isn't quite of the Thin/Weak sort: this is because it denies the triple transcendence thesis. A Thin/Weak sort of concept is thus a near cousin of IETSISM, which requires MT, AT, and ST conjunctively as opposed to merely requiring ST. ULTIMISM and this Thin/Weak concept are thus both different species of IETSISM, as IETSISM is Thin and neither Strong nor Weak.

Why IETSISM is Preferable to ULTIMISM for ER

We have now come to the central thesis of my argument, that IETSISM is preferable to ULTIMISM as considered within the scope of ER. What follows is thus a fuller argument than what was presented in the introduction.

The thesis I wish to defend is that Schellenberg prefers ULTIMISM over something like IETSISM because he seems to hold an uncharacteristically monochromatic view of human religiosity (and what makes it so valuable). I contend that religiosity is profoundly affective for two reasons, viz. its 'epistemic comfort'

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and its ‘existential zeal’. Religiosity’s ‘existential zeal’ – how religious motivation invigorates our passions and desires – is, for Schellenberg, the hallmark key of religiosity that he wants to maintain with ER. What I call ‘epistemic comfort’ pertains to how *believable* one’s religious proposition is.²⁸ In order for one to robustly assent to a religious proposition, I think its epistemic modesty – and thus believability – is just as crucial as its ability to excite and motivate us to ‘stretch our imaginations’. This, I think, is ultimately where Schellenberg’s and my intuitions diverge. The existential zeal that comes from thinking religiously is indeed an important aspect to what makes religiosity religiosity; however, I think religiosity is also fundamentally an enterprise in truthseeking. The object for ER should thus be amenable to both of these aims, rather than prioritize the former over the latter.

Consider the case of the lost toddler. Schellenberg sets up the analogy so that what’s seen as pertinent is the ability of the object of assent – that the toddler will yet be found – to profoundly motivate and psychologically comfort us. But this overshadows the importance of the object’s believability. We can imagine fully assenting to the proposition that ‘my toddler will be found’ because it is also *believable*; it doesn’t make any exceptional or metaphysically outrageous claims. Contrast this with assenting to the proposition that ‘my toddler will be found tonight on my living room couch with the ability to speak five languages’; this proposition is much more existentially gratifying, in one sense, but its unbelievability renders it otiose. Not too dissimilar from this extremely unlikely-to-be-true proposition, ULTIMISM makes some *incredibly* exceptional claims; it is thus less believable than IETSISM. IETSISM is exceptionally more believable than ULTIMISM – in fact, necessarily so (recall, IETSISM is open to the truth of ULTIMISM, while the converse does not hold). Due to this fact, it is much more plausible to imagine assenting to IETSISM in the robust way that Schellenberg suggests we should assent to ULTIMISM.

Schellenberg, recall, is correct to suggest that the object for ER should be epistemically humble. It needs to be open, granting our immature evolutionary state, to many potential religious concepts. But he

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backs off the importance of epistemic modesty when it comes to ULTIMISM, because its ability to ‘stretch us’ in the utmost sense is more pertinent than its being an accurate representation of reality. As I’ve been arguing, however, one of the most crucial aspects of religious assent is the relevant proposition’s believability: we can more robustly *be moved* by something we find *more likely to be true*. It’s simply impractical, I think, to assume the sceptical religionist can so robustly assent to something like ULTIMISM, because it just seems far too immodest. The proposition that there’s a reality that is *ultimate* soteriologically, metaphysically, *and* axiologically is much more difficult to accept than IETSISM, which only requires mere soteriological transcendence. So IETSISM is first preferable to ULTIMISM by its sheer modesty.

Second, IETSISM is a preferable object for ER than ULTIMISM because it can fulfil the same criteria that compel Schellenberg to argue for ULTIMISM – viz. those that give us (ii), or its assent-worthiness. In other words, the reasons Schellenberg says he prefers ULTIMISM over another option aren’t going to give us any substantial reason to prefer ULTIMISM over IETSISM. Recall that, as he argues, there are two primary reasons why ULTIMISM is better for ER than anything else: its ability to ‘*challenge us . . . so as to facilitate enlarging ourselves*’, and its being able to ‘*find some place for powerful religious experiences*’.²⁹ He argues that the triple transcendence thesis and the ultimacy thesis are therefore required for ER’s object, since they will maximally fulfil these two categories.

I have no qualms with the fact that the triple transcendence thesis and the ultimacy thesis will maximally *fulfil the criteria* of ‘stretching us’ and making good on explaining the tenacity and profundity of various religious experiences (though qualms *could* be had); rather, I think ER could sufficiently ‘stretch us’ and make good on explaining religious experiences without the triple transcendence thesis and ultimacy thesis. (In fact, it seems that Ietsism may be able to ‘stretch us’ even more than Ultimism, because it provides a better combination of ‘epistemic comfort’ and ‘existential zest’.) This is actually a rather simple point: if the supposed religious reality were, say, ultimately AT and ST without being ultimately MT, why would it

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not thereby be worth robustly assenting to? Assent to this reality would undoubtedly fulfil Schellenberg's plea for requiring its ability deeply to drive and motivate our religious imagination.

'Sure', one might say, 'but it could be better fulfilled if the reality were also ultimately MT'. I'm not immediately opposed to this thought, though I do think it should give us some pause. The crux of the issue is the ultimacy of MT here. Suppose said reality were not ultimately MT, but really close to it (say, something along the lines of Aristotle's unmoved mover, which still required pre-existing matter in order to get things going). It seems to me that, even if assenting to said being will bring less 'existential zest' than assenting to one that doesn't depend on pre-existing matter, the difference is minuscule. Moreover, the epistemic tenability gained by assenting to something that isn't necessarily metaphysically ultimate vastly outweighs this shortcoming. Wouldn't it be more cogent to assent to something ultimately AT and ST, but remain agnostic on its being ultimately MT, granting our broad sort of scepticism? This seems obvious to me. If I were a pupil of ER, I'd be more motivated to seek out this object, seeing as it is more probable, and yet remain open on the matter of whether or not it is ultimately MT.

Requiring that the reality must necessarily be ultimately AT may seem to be a bit more intuitive, but my argument above still stands. Consider a different case from the one mentioned above: what if the reality were ultimately MT and ST, but merely AT? This might be something akin to Hegel's notion of God, where God's AT is only maximized once human consciousness comes into the picture. Since Hegel's concept of God isn't ultimately AT – that is, it requires an additional component to reach maximal AT – does this mean assenting to it wouldn't sufficiently motivate our deepest religious imagination? I don't think so. It might seem necessary that the reality should be axiologically transcendent in order for it to sufficiently 'stretch us', but saying it must be axiologically ultimate (which is a very, very strong claim) seems to do more harm than good. Again, leaving it an open question as to how and to what extent the religious reality

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manifests its axiological transcendence, even if it might seem to weaken its rhetorical gusto, is an epistemic move for the better.

One may be more inclined to say that the religious reality does need to be ultimately ST; and I thoroughly appreciate this sentiment. But that being said, I would still be uncomfortable with the sheer specificity of requiring that ER's object must be *ultimately* ST. But is assenting to a reality ultimately ST necessary to fulfil Schellenberg's 'existential zeal' requirement? I don't think so. It seems like we need the reality's ST to be significantly better than that which can be attained naturally, but it doesn't need to be ultimate. Imagine the following scenario: perhaps it is, logically speaking, possible to attain maximal well-being without assenting to IETSISM, but in all practicality, this is a near-impossible state to achieve. If assenting to IETSISM gets one very close to that state of well-being (all the while getting one there through a much more pragmatically realistic route), then it seems obvious that we should feel compelled to assent to IETSISM. It thus seems clear that the object for ER needn't necessarily be *ultimately* ST.

So IETSISM rejects the ultimacy thesis, and can do so without necessarily losing any of the 'existential zeal' that Schellenberg thinks only ULTIMISM can garner. In IETSISM, ULTIMISM is one among many contenders that, I've argued, could sufficiently motivate our religious imaginations; indeed, perhaps IETSISM motivates our imaginations better. It's more intellectually humble, and thus more epistemically and practically tenable. And since it is more tenable, I'm inclined to say, it can overcome any shortcomings it may have *vis-à-vis* ULTIMISM because it's easier to assent robustly to something more likely to be true.

What about IETSISM's rejection of the triple transcendence thesis? Can a religious object that requires only ST 'stretch us' in the robust sense that ER requires? It might seem intuitive that MT and AT are needed to maximize the 'existential zest' garnered through religious assent, but I see no reason to assume that this maximization, as argued above, is necessary for garnering the most pragmatically robust religious zeal – particularly when we take epistemic tenability into consideration. Also, although it may seem intuitive

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that a soteriologically transcendent reality would also, *ipso facto*, be both MT and AT, I see no reason why it would have to be.³⁰ Imagine that a religious reality is indeed ST: being rightly related to it will make for a greater well-being than what can otherwise ‘naturally be attained’. Imagine also, however, that it doesn’t simultaneously constitute a supernatural metaphysical principle, or represent something of intrinsic supernatural value.³¹ Why assume that such won’t garner a robust religious zeal? It seems that what’s fundamentally pertinent to garnering existential zeal in religious assent is ST; the object of ER needs to pose a transcendent value *for us*, as opposed to constituting some transcendent value or metaphysical category *simpliciter*. Also, it’s important to note that the lion’s share of existential zeal in religious assent comes solely from ST. For example, if the object of ER were ultimately MT and AT, but not ST, it’s unclear if it would warrant characteristically religious assent. The point is that IETSISM’s requiring mere ST – while remaining agnostic on whether or not the reality is AT or MT – doesn’t give us a substantial reason to prefer the triple transcendence thesis over IETSISM. Even if the triple transcendence thesis may seem to have the capacity to ‘stretch our imagination’ more than IETSISM, it’s unclear how much more it stretches our imaginations. And the fact that IETSISM is far more intellectually humble, and thus more epistemically and practically tenable, is again likely to overcome this potential shortcoming. Again, it is much easier to assent robustly to something far more likely actually to be true.

So much for IETSISM sufficiently fulfilling Schellenberg’s criteria of ER’s needing to ‘challenge us’. What about his other reason for preferring ULTIMISM, that it ‘makes room’ for the great tenacity and profundity of religious experiences? As Schellenberg says,

One reason for taking something like ultimism more seriously [than something like IETSISM] comes *straight out of* much religious experience, including especially the most powerful such experiences (in particular much so-called mystical experience). It’s precisely the sense of an absolutely limitless richness . . . ideas that want to burst all limits . . .³²

This seems to me to be a rather simple case to argue against. In essence, the quality or magnitude of religious experiences isn’t so easily verifiable. That being said, there is no reason to suppose that religious experiences

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entail the idea of a triply-ultimate reality, or even that they necessarily entail the idea of a triply-transcendent reality. My point here boils down to the classic ‘problem of the criterion’ (or, similarly, Plato’s famous ‘Meno’s Paradox’): unless we already know how an ultimate (or triply-transcendent) reality will present itself, we cannot say whether or not we have been presented with an ultimate (or triply-transcendent) reality. The issue is, we humans aren’t too existentially perceptive: I for one have no idea what an experience of the ultimate – specifically *the* ultimate, and not something simply transcendent – would necessarily feel like. (The same can also be said for a triply-transcendent reality.) It’s clear to say that a transcendent (be it MT, AT, or ST) reality would make good on explaining mystical religious experiences, but there is simply no way to suggest that these experiences entail that the object towards which they are responding is *ultimate*. How would we be able to judge what metaphysical, axiological, and soteriological ultimacy feels like *vis-à-vis* mere metaphysical, axiological, or soteriological transcendence?

So we have no reason to assume that mystical experiences give us good evidence for an ultimate reality over a transcendent one. But it may seem that mystical experiences give us a reason to prefer the triple transcendence thesis over IETSISM.³³ It’s important to note, however, that mystical experiences indicating transcendence *simpliciter* is one thing; and mystical experiences indicating something triply-transcendent is another. As per my argument above, I think our sheer imperceptiveness when it comes to transcendence only warrants the assumption that there is something transcendent *simpliciter*, rather than the assumption that said experiences entail transcendence of some particular sort. ‘Aha’, you might say, ‘but IETSISM requires ST, and remains agnostic about only MT and AT. You need to explain how mystical experiences support mere ST alone!’ This is, of course, a reasonable assertion. In its traditional form, Ietsism does just that; it remains agnostic about MT, AT, and ST. But, remember, we are tailoring IETSISM as an object for ER, which is an active religious enterprise. As such, we are committed *ex hypothesi* to affirm ST in IETSISM, but not committed to affirm AT or MT. As intuitively as AT or MT may seem to mesh with the

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reality IETSISM depicts, it's preferable not to commit ourselves to unnecessary addendums. IETSISM does, in fact, affirm transcendence, and thus makes good on the evidence offered by mystical experiences. It does this, however, in the most epistemically humble and parsimonious way possible.³⁴

So, let's recap where we've come thus far. Schellenberg offers, most fully in *WI*, a defence of what he calls 'religious optimism', 'the will to imagine', or 'evolutionary religion'. In light of his austere scepticism set forth in *WD*, the religious disposition he suggests isn't a doxastic one, but one of assent. Now, in formulating the ideal proposition towards which the sceptical religionist will assent, Schellenberg aims at finding a Goldilocks form which is epistemically modest – so that it can accommodate our relatively juvenile place in cosmological evolutionary history – while sufficiently satisfying two criteria. These two are the 'existential zeal' criterion, which argues that the object must profoundly 'challenge and stretch us', and the 'fitting with religious experience' criterion, which says that the object must sufficiently explain the tenacity and profundity of various religious experiences. ULTIMISM, claims Schellenberg, is the only way to fill these criteria. IETSISM, I have argued, is preferable to ULTIMISM because it can, in fact, fulfil those criteria while being more modest. Moreover, assenting to IETSISM can make ER more practically and epistemically tenable. This is because IETSISM is *far* more modest than ULTIMISM, and thus more likely to actually be true.

I will conclude this paper by first supposing how Schellenberg might respond to my concerns. I'll then follow up with a response.

A Possible Schellenbergian Response and Conclusion-by-Reply

In a 2013 *Religious Studies* issue devoted to the work of Schellenberg, Jeannine Diller raised several complaints about Schellenberg's ULTIMISM that I think were spot-on.³⁵ Though her main thesis was that ULTIMISM shouldn't be the central object of enquiry in Philosophy of Religion, she also suggests some modifications to ULTIMISM at the end of her article, when discussing it as a religious object. My IETSISM

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is, in effect, an encapsulation and systematization of her suggestions – a religious object that rejects the triple transcendence and ultimacy theses. She does little in defending the claim that something like IETSISM is preferable, *ceteris paribus*, to ULTIMISM, however. Schellenberg offers a short response in the same issue, in which he is mildly sympathetic to her first point (viz. that ULTIMISM shouldn't be the main object of enquiry for Philosophy of Religion), but outright rejects her second point. My argument can thus be understood as building on her suggestions, and taking account of Schellenberg's reply to those suggestions (which were, to be candid, more or less him digging in his philosophical heels).

I can imagine three potentially substantive responses that Schellenberg might consider in response to my argument. The first two are a response to my arguing that IETSISM can fulfil the 'existential zeal' requirement for ER, and the third is a response to my position on religiosity being fundamentally twofold (that is, its being comprised of 'epistemic comfort' and 'existential zeal').³⁶

What I imagine Schellenberg first will want to say is that ULTIMISM is preferable to IETSISM because IETSISM is just simply (1) too weak and (2) too broad. What makes religious objects religious, he might say, is that they are profoundly deep and potentially insightful. IETSISM, *vis-à-vis* ULTIMISM, is neither deep nor potentially insightful. We should take a cue from our religious history, perhaps, and note that ULTIMISM is much more at home with how the overwhelming majority of world religions have interpreted and revered their objects. Since ultimistic thinking is such an integral part of how we understand religiosity – taken in consideration with how relatively immature our current state of religious thinking is (recall his stressing of the evolutionarily nuanced vantage point) – we have no reason to give up on such an integral part of human religiosity. See what Schellenberg himself says in response to Diller: 'If we see that we've just got started in religious investigation and that theism is *merely a species from a broader genus*, then I think we can also see there's no reason to scale back yet.'³⁷ Thus, IETSISM simply doesn't do justice to acknowledging our place in evolutionary history, as it ignores a crucial aspect of how religiosity has come to

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be understood up until now. This, at least, is what he might (and seems to) say regarding IETSISM's supposed weakness. Let's call this objection 'O1'.

He may say IETSISM is too broad in that it 'is compatible with so much that it threatens to go quite out of focus'.³⁸ In other words, ER needs to have an object specific enough to be realistically assented to. We can't meaningfully assent to something so broad, because – for whatever psychological reason – we humans need to have some particular sort of grasp over what it is we're assenting to (and IETSISM doesn't cut it). Let's call this 'O2'.

The last objection is of a different, and deeper, kind. Recall what I stated a few pages back: it seems like, at a fundamental level, Schellenberg holds what I called 'an uncharacteristically monochromatic view of human religiosity (and what makes it so valuable)'. There I suggested that what makes religiosity such a fecund and profound human phenomenon is twofold – the 'epistemic comfort' and 'existential zeal' it provides. Schellenberg, I noted, is heavy on the second point. Perhaps he thinks that the 'epistemic comfort' of religious thinking isn't as pertinent of an issue, seeing as we are at such an evolutionarily immature state. Supporting this intuition is the fact that he is interested only in religious assent, rather than belief, for ER. 'Since we're not talking about belief in the religious object', Schellenberg may say, 'the believability of a proposition is irrelevant – the fact that IETSISM is more believable than ULTIMISM thus gives us no reason to assent to IETSISM over ULTIMISM'. Let's call this 'O3'. O1 and O2 I have tried to tease out of Schellenberg's response to Diller, and O3 is something new – something that I am suggesting Schellenberg might say in response to my argument specifically.

What are we to say regarding O1–O3? Let's address them in turn. I think O1, which is the spirit behind much of Schellenberg's response to Diller, is not only paradoxical, but doubly paradoxical (and thus fails). The first paradox is that it charges IETSISM as being 'too weak' in the sense that it isn't inclusive of

ultimistic concepts. This move seems to understand IETSISM as *ruling out* ULTIMISM, which, as I hope is clear, couldn't be further from the truth.³⁹ Note what Schellenberg states:

Because of our early place in time, we need to be open to the possibility that our best religious ideas are still ahead of us. (Talk about inclusiveness!) And what could provide a better framework for their exploration than the most broad and deep and capacious and interesting idea religion has yet produced?⁴⁰

The issue here is that this response obviously misses the point of IETSISM. IETSISM is 'open to the possibility that our best religious ideas are still ahead of us,' and then some. ULTIMISM, rather, is only open to one idea, 'our best idea' – viz. triple ultimacy. To answer Schellenberg's question, IETSISM would provide a better framework for religious exploration, because it is far more inclusive; it takes far more religious positions into consideration than ULTIMISM.

The second reason this response is paradoxical is because it seems like Schellenberg himself is falling victim to what he dubs 'temporalism', or overemphasizing the importance and indubitableness of philosophical concepts established in our recent history.⁴¹ Granting our relatively immature state in cosmological evolutionary history, why should we be so compelled to restrict ourselves to a concept that has kept us preoccupied in the last few thousand years? There are innumerable places in Schellenberg's writings that illustrate his using the past's preoccupation with ULTIMISM to vindicate ER's focus on it. (This is seen most blatantly in *WI*, where Schellenberg devotes a good deal of time to discussing how important the work of Anselm, Leibniz, Paley, Pascal, Kant, and James is in 'getting us closer' to grasping the religious reality.⁴²) The suggestion that we should 'not give up' on ultimistic thinking is thus a bit of a quagmire. What's important here, though, is that IETSISM *doesn't* give up on ultimistic thinking, it just considers other options as well.

O2 – the 'broadness charge' – is interesting, and there might be something to it. I am not convinced that it is as powerful an objection to IETSISM as one might think it is, however, mainly because you could object to ULTIMISM in the same way.⁴³ That is to say, I don't see ULTIMISM as being significantly less

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epistemically nebulous than IETSISM. Ontologically, yes – IETSISM covers far more ground than ULTIMISM.

But they both entail an indeterminable series of possible realities that are far beyond our ken. Schellenberg doesn't require pupils of ER to assent to a specific manifestation of ULTIMISM; in fact, he suggests we should consider ULTIMISM as an indeterminately long disjunction of potential manifestations.

Analytical philosophers may immediately be inclined to make this notion of an ultimate reality more precise, but as it appears in the actual practice of religion, the notion is far from precise and probably should be seen as representing a disjunction of possibilities. At this point I do not wish to speculate as to how large a disjunction this might be . . .⁴⁴

Why wouldn't he require the same of IETSISM then? The fact that IETSISM makes room for more specific manifestations of the reality than ULTIMISM is neither here nor there, granting Schellenberg's point above. Sure, the 'disjunction of possibilities' will be longer, but we are still assenting to the 'disjunction of possibilities' *itself*, not any particular disjunct. If we're just conceptualizing the object of assent on the basis of its being in the class of an 'indeterminately long disjunction' of possibilities, why is assenting to a class of 'triple ultimate' realities significantly less nebulous than assenting to a class of 'soteriologically transcendent' ones? If I were a sceptical religionist, I would personally find the broadness of IETSISM to be an asset; it's not much more epistemically nebulous than ULTIMISM, and it's far more likely to include something that actually exists. Nothing 'out of focus' there!

Perhaps one might resist my point that IETSISM is insignificantly more epistemically nebulous than ULTIMISM, though. After all, the set of realities that IETSISM represents is indeed far more diverse than the set ULTIMISM represents. Even if this is so, however, I don't see a major worry here. If IETSISM is too broad for our psychology to latch onto – that is, too broad to induce a sincere sort of religious seeking *per se* – then perhaps one could *religiously seek* something like ULTIMISM, while maintaining that IETSISM is the fundamental object towards which one's religious assent is oriented. Assenting towards IETSISM doesn't mean you can't *hope* ULTIMISM is true. Similarly (in the case of the lost toddler), although assenting to the proposition that 'the lost toddler will be found' would be fundamental to one's enlivening his or her state

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of mind, there's no reason one couldn't simultaneously hope that the toddler will be found safe at home as a polyglot.

We come now to addressing O3. I think that this is a subtle objection; recall, I am claiming that the 'epistemic comfort' gained by switching from ULTIMISM to IETSISM gives us one reason to prefer it over the other. This is because IETSISM is more pragmatically assent-able, since it is more modest (and thus more likely to be true) than ULTIMISM. The defender of O3 seems to disregard this point: since we are talking about non-doxastic forms of religious assent, he might want to say, the fact that IETSISM is more likely to be true than ULTIMISM is irrelevant. As the defender of O3 might state, 'We're supposed to, on ER, think *as if* ULTIMISM were true without actually believing it.' My point, however, still stands. How robustly one *will be able to* assent to a religious proposition still depends on how realistic – or epistemically modest – the religious proposition itself is.

Consider again the case of the lost toddler. Assenting to the idea that the toddler will be found is incredibly uplifting – this is because it is both hopeful *and* believable. It's far less comforting to assent to the idea that the toddler will be found that very night, on your living room couch, with the ability to speak five languages – even though that idea is, strictly speaking, *more* hopeful. Likewise, IETSISM is a preferable object for ER than ULTIMISM. It may be less 'hopeful' in a sense, but it is a far more sustainable religious outlook.⁴⁵

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Notes

¹Ambrosius (2013), 70.

²See Schellenberg (2005), (2007), (2009), and (2013a). These works will be referred to in the main text as, respectively, *PPR*, *WD*, *WI*, and *ER*. See Draper (2011) for an introduction to the trilogy, and Schellenberg (2013b) for a brief introduction to his philosophy of religion as a whole.

³See *Philo* 14.1 (2011) and *Religious Studies* 49.2 (2013).

⁴See Draper (2011), Chignell (2013), and Pehelhum (2013).

⁵See Morrision (2013) and Schellenberg (2013c) for a debate regarding the apparent deontological nature of Schellenberg's thought.

⁶Draper (2011) and Diller (2013), 222.

⁷Schellenberg (forthcoming), 4.

⁸I will be using the all-caps 'ULTIMISM' and 'IETSISM' to refer specifically to the propositions at hand.

When discussing assent to the object that ULTIMISM or IETSISM depicts, lower-case lettering will be used.

I.e., 'Ultimism' means religiously assenting to ULTIMISM. The specifics of ULTIMISM and IETSISM will be covered in a later section. See Schellenberg (2009), 1; (2013a), 99; and (forthcoming) for Schellenberg's rendering of ULTIMISM.

⁹See, for example, Chignell (2013), Diller (2013), Dole (2013), Howard-Snyder (2013), MacIntosh (2011), Morrision (2013), and Wykstra (2011).

¹⁰'Ietsism' isn't a new term, but it is nearly non-existent in the analytic philosophy of religion literature. Those familiar with it may note that this rendering is not quite the same as its traditional understanding, which would assert agnosticism regarding soteriological transcendence. My choice of rendering IETSISM as affirming soteriological transcendence will be made clear later on. Roughly, I think IETSISM requires soteriological transcendence in order to warrant a distinctively religious form of assent.

¹¹Indeed, the broadness of ULTIMISM is something that has been heavily criticized. See, e.g. MacIntosh (2011), who argues that Schellenberg is nothing more than a *bona fide* sceptic, whose reasons to doubt any religious assent overcome any impetus to assent to ULTIMISM. Note also Schellenberg's reply (2011b).

¹²In fact, being so exceptionally broad, IETSISM has a relatively high prior probability of being true. Nearly any religious or quasi-religious position – including those associated with Islam, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Scientology, and new-age mysticism (for example) – falls under the scope of IETSISM. Pretty much the only positions that don't fall under the scope of IETSISM are views such as scientific naturalism and nihilism.

¹³Diller (2013), 224. She uses 'UUU' in the place of my 'ULTIMISM'.

¹⁴Schellenberg (2013a), 98.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁶See, e.g. Dole (2013) and Morrision (2013). For a broader discussion of the topic, see Fraser (2005).

¹⁷Schellenberg (2013a) and (2013c). Diller's (2013) argument is quite similar to mine; however, my argument is pertinently distinct: I am arguing for a stronger thesis, and picking up where Diller left off. Diller suggests that a triply-ultimate reality is fine for ER, but that a merely transcendent reality should be the concern for the Philosophy of Religion at large; I suggest that something similar to the latter should be the object for ER.

¹⁸This argument is far from uncontroversial. Paul Draper, for example, has raised concern with this understanding of 'total evidence', because Schellenberg's formulation of the Total Evidence Argument is unclear on the role of *p*'s truth-maker.

¹⁹Schellenberg's definition of 'epistemic possibility' is as follows: a proposition *p* is epistemically possible iff the belief that $\sim p$ is unjustified.

²⁰ This argument deserves careful consideration which would take us too far afield. Readers may be inclined to raise a dubious eyebrow at the argument at first blush, as it seems to entail global scepticism. It does no such thing: the key detail is that we are working with characteristically religious propositions – viz. those which are precise, detailed, ambitious, profound, controversial, and attractive. See Ward (2013), Schellenberg (2011a; 2013d; 2014), and Wykstra (2011). I am also thankful to Paul Draper for his insightful comments in discussions on Schellenberg’s total evidence argument.

²¹ This, perhaps even more so than the Total Evidence Argument, deserves (and has garnered) much more discussion than can be touched upon here. See Howard-Snyder (2013) and Schellenberg’s reply (2013c) for an excellent exchange on this subject.

²² Schellenberg (2013a), 80–81.

²³ Recall, also, his two main criteria for something’s being assent-worthy: (i) it does justice to the history of religious experience, and (ii) it is existentially challenging and able to stretch our imaginations.

²⁴ As many are keen to note, this vagueness does indeed make ULTIMISM less psychologically appealing in some ways when compared to traditional, detailed religious propositions. But this is an issue to be explored elsewhere. See Morrision (2013), Fraser (2005), Chignell (2013), and Penelhum (2013) for further discussion on this point.

²⁵ Schellenberg (2013a). Cf. Schellenberg (forthcoming). I will use ‘MT’, ‘AT’, and ‘ST’ as shorthand for representing each respective type of transcendence throughout the rest of the article – i.e., ‘a reality’s being MT’ = ‘a reality’s being metaphysically transcendent’.

²⁶ It might be noted here that it seems that the triple-transcendence thesis and the ultimacy thesis are at odds with one another. This is not the case: the ultimacy thesis is a more specific form of the tripletranscendence thesis.

²⁷ Cf. Schellenberg (2013a), 86.

²⁸ A ‘believable’ proposition is, in this sense, one that has an honest chance of actually being true. Since a modest proposition has a higher chance of *actually being true* than a less modest one (*ceteris paribus*), the modest proposition is, in this sense, more *believable* (or, better yet, ‘believe-able’).

²⁹ See Schellenberg (2005), 19–25; (2013a), 99; (2013c), 277–278; and (forthcoming) for his explanation of these points.

³⁰ Since Schellenberg defines MT, AT, and ST in terms of non-naturalness, it may be odd to assert that something can be ST without being MT as well. Likewise, it may seem odd that something ST may not be AT. This is a fair suggestion, and of no consequence for my argument. My main interest is in rejecting the triple-transcendence thesis, which simply denies that MT, AT, and ST are conjunctively required for garnering a religious zeal.

³¹ This seems to be logically possible, to me – in the least, an argument would need to be made that something must be AT and MT if it is to be ST.

³² Schellenberg (2013c), 277–278.

³³ Schellenberg relies more on the nature of the historical arguments of Natural Theology to buttress his case that the Ultimate is indicative of MT, and more on the testimony of those who have had mystical experiences to buttress the case that the Ultimate is indicative of AT.

³⁴ I don’t think it is necessary here to give an explicit argument that mystical experiences give equal evidence for both ST alone and for triple transcendence, but one could be made. For example: it seems intuitive that mystical experiences give us good evidence that – whatever the existential reality is – it is utterly splendid, surpassing any sort of natural value. That doesn’t mean, however, that this value is *ipso facto* manifested as metaphysically significant (MT), intrinsically significant (AT), or extrinsically significant (ST). The probability that such experiences support the conjunction of MT, AT, and ST is therefore equal to the probability that it supports one conjunct over the others. (This is hardly an airtight argument, but you get the point.) It’s important to remember that Schellenberg is defending the ultimacy thesis, and not the triple-transcendence thesis.

³⁵ See Diller (2013).

³⁶ I suppose a further response might be that mystical experiences do in fact suggest a triply-ultimate reality as opposed to IETSISM. It’s tough to see how one could argue that mystical experiences support the ultimacy thesis over IETSISM, but one might be able to argue that mystical experiences support the tripletranscendence thesis over IETSISM. Perhaps a case could be made that, if you do affirm ST, you must thereby also affirm MT and AT. This doesn’t seem like a hopeless argument, and it may very well be promising. However, my concern in this article is primarily to argue that IETSISM is preferable over ULTIMISM, not that IETSISM is preferable over the triple-transcendence thesis. My point is, even if such an argument were successful, ULTIMISM is still not the right way to go.

³⁷ Schellenberg (2013c), 277.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 276.

³⁹ Although Diller doesn't defend a thesis such as IETSISM at length, what she does lay out is compatible with ULTIMISM. That is, she doesn't explicitly say that (her form of) IETSISM bars the idea of ULTIMISM as Schellenberg accuses her of doing.

⁴⁰ Schellenberg (2013c), 278. The parenthetical is Schellenberg's.

⁴¹ Schellenberg nicely fleshes out his idea for 'temporalism' in his forthcoming paper, 'God for all time: from theism to ultimism'.

⁴² See also, e.g. pp. 19–24 of *PPR*.

⁴³ Many have raised concerns similar to O with respect to ULTIMISM. See e.g. Chignell (2013), Crisp (2013), Dole (2013), Howard-Snyder (2013), and Penelhum (2013).

⁴⁴ Schellenberg (2005), 17 (n. 17)

⁴⁵ I am exceptionally grateful for the aid of Paul Draper, whose comments and discussions helped these ideas develop into their current form. I am also very grateful for the excellent and generous help of John Schellenberg, whose comments clarified my ideas and prose.