

THE GOD RELATIONSHIP

In this book, Paul K. Moser proposes a new approach to inquiry about God, including a new discipline of the ethics for inquiry about God. It is an ethics for human attitudes and relationships as well as actions in inquiry, and it includes human responsibility for seeking evidence that involves a moral priority for humans. Such ethics includes an ongoing test, a trial, for human receptivity to goodness, including morally good relationships, as a priority in human inquiry and life. Moser also defends an approach to the evidence for God that makes sense of the elusiveness and occasional absence of God in human experience. His book will be of interest to those interested in inquiry about God, with special relevance to scholars and advanced students in religious studies, philosophy, theology, and Biblical studies.

Paul K. Moser is Professor of Philosophy at Loyola University Chicago. He is the author of *The Elusive God* (winner of a national book award from the Jesuit Honor Society); *The Evidence for God*; *The Severity of God*; *Knowledge and Evidence* (all Cambridge University Press), and *Philosophy after Objectivity*, co-author of *Theory of Knowledge*, editor of *Jesus and Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press) and *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology* (Oxford University Press); co-editor of *The Cambridge Companion to the Problem of Evil*, and *The Wisdom of the Christian Faith* (both from Cambridge University Press). He is the co-editor of the book series, *Cambridge Studies in Religion, Philosophy, and Society*.

The God Relationship

The Ethics for Inquiry about the Divine

PAUL K. MOSER
Loyola University Chicago



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The God relationship of the individual human being is the main point.
– Søren Kierkegaard as Johannes Climacus (1846)

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Preface

Many religious people talk about their *relationship* with God, but few people have explored the consequences of such talk for human inquiry about God. (Søren Kierkegaard is a rare and an important exception.) This book explores those consequences by introducing and developing a topic almost universally neglected by inquirers about God: *the ethics for inquiry* about God for humans. It combines this topic with an equally neglected position: the view that humans can choose either to empower or to block God with regard to the option of God's self-manifesting in their salient, or definite, evidence. This human capability would arise not from a divine inadequacy, but from God's valuing what is good in a human relationship with God, including one's freedom either to approve or to disapprove of having salient evidence of God in one's experience. Humans thus would be in a position to give God approval to intervene in their salient evidence, even if some ambiguous or indefinite evidence of God can come to them without their approval.

A perfectly good God would not stalk humans coercively with salient divine evidence, but would seek to have humans, in self-avowed need, *freely make themselves* available and receptive to any salient evidence of God. In addition, this God would not want to be trivialized by becoming just an object of experience, feeling, or thought for humans. Instead, this God would seek a good *cooperative relationship*

with humans, rather than just humans having experiences, thoughts, feelings, or actions regarding God. The corresponding salient evidence of God's reality would follow suit, as would faith, knowledge, wisdom, and meaning stemming from God. That is, they would be suitably appropriated by humans in, and only in, a cooperative relationship with God. Without such an interpersonal relationship, various goods easily become prideful idols for a person, complete with harmful self-righteousness.

The role of a cooperative relationship is important, because it does not require one to have a *constant* experience, feeling, or thought of God for well-founded commitment to God. However elusive or subtle, experience of God is crucial, but it need not be constant or available on demand. In focusing on experiences, thoughts, feelings, and actions regarding God, philosophers and theologians have neglected the importance of a cooperative relationship with God, to the detriment of a case for theism. This book corrects for this neglect in connection with the following topics: basics of the God relationship (Chapter 1), faith's trial with God (Chapter 2), seeking hidden evidence of God (Chapter 3), wisdom and meaning from God for human life (Chapter 4), *koinonia* and defending faith in God (Chapter 5).

Inquiry is an active, intentional pursuit, and the ethics for inquiry about God is an ethics for responsibly pursuing what would be true, well-grounded, and morally good in a divine-human relationship. Such ethics requires inquirers actively to pursue evidence for God's reality and to be open to assessment by a standard of intending (or not intending) to care morally as God cares, including for others in inquiry. Inquirers' intending (or not intending) in this regard would make them available (or unavailable) for uncoerced personal transformation toward the moral character of the God who would value freedom in human commitment to God. Such intending would make them personally available to God's own moral domain. As perfectly good, God

would not relinquish the moral domain for something less good, just as God would not relinquish truth in inquiry.

The relevant ethics for inquiry about God has *standards* for putting oneself in a responsible position to receive what is good as a priority in inquiry. It does not entail, however, one's earning or meriting what is good. It is an ethics for human attitudes and relationships as well as actions in inquiry, and it includes human responsibility for seeking evidence that involves a moral priority for humans. It will be ethics in relation to a perfectly good moral character, if it is actually directed toward a God worthy of worship. Such ethics will include an ongoing test, a trial, for human receptivity to goodness, including morally good relationships, as a priority in human inquiry and life. The trial can take humans to their own limits for being good, thus indicating a need for outside help in the trial. Bearing on inquiry in general regarding God, the ethics in question, we shall see, exceeds what some philosophers call "the ethics of belief."

The book does not simply assume that the claim that God exists is true or even justified. It thus speaks at times of what God *would be* or *would do* (if God exists). It identifies what expectations of God we should have *if* the claim that God exists is true or justified. Each person, however, will need to discern if the expectations in question are satisfied in his or her own experience. This is part of the irreducibly existential, person-oriented nature of faith in God. The outstanding question is whether we humans are willing to engage in the existential challenge on offer, at the cost of who we are, how we live, and how we relate to others, including our enemies. A key issue is whether we are willing to empower, rather than to obstruct, God in the option of God's self-manifesting in our experience. The book explores the importance of this issue, and asks whether a distinctive kind of personal transformation, including a reordering of one's priorities, in cooperative relationship with God is a clue to the veracity of the story on offer.

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P.K.M. Chicago, Illinois