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Paul Moser and the Antecedent Belief Criticism

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Abstract: Paul Moser recently argued that one could have evidence for God even if one does not have a concept of God. This particular argument was discussed in *Philosophia Christi's* most recent symposium on Moser's religious epistemology. In particular, all the participants held a criticism – in one form or another – that I'll call the *antecedent belief criticism*. The crux of the criticism is the denial of the claim that one could have evidence for God if one did not have a prior concept of God. However, the criticism, I argue, misfires on the basis of not taking into account Moser's earlier epistemological work in *Knowledge and Evidence*. Specifically, the criticism does not take into account Moser's theory of evidence as it relates to what he dubs *attention-attraction awareness* and the contents of *subjective nonconceptual perceptual experience*. The essay seeks to clarify what it is that Moser is claiming through his foundationalism in *Knowledge and Evidence*, and demonstrates how each form of the *antecedent belief criticism* fails to have impact. The article ends with direction for future debate concerning Moser's religious epistemology. In particular, how strong is the analogy of the contents of experience in the transformative gift and the contents of subjective nonconceptual perceptual experience?

Paul Moser's reexamining of religious knowledge has amassed no small amount of chatter and argument. The threat his project poses for natural theology has – if you will forgive me – naturally called forth rejections from various corners of Christian Philosophy. As in all arguments, misunderstandings arise. For words “decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,” and this often holds true as well for philosophers.¹ A particular area of Moser's work that received a sustained amount of suspicion - and perhaps carried with it some misunderstandings - concerned exactly who could have evidence for God. In Moser's *The Evidence for God*, he considers a person Y, who experiences being

¹ Particularly so for some of our contemporary reformers of creedal orthodoxy.

authoritatively convicted in conscience and forgiven by *X* of sin and thereby being authoritatively called into volitional fellowship with *X* in perfect love and into rightful worship toward *X* as worthy of worship and, on that basis, transformed by *X* from default tendencies to selfishness and despair to a new volitional center with a default position of unselfish love, including forgiveness, toward all people and of hope in the triumph of good over evil by *X*.²

To illuminate the issue consider a few more developments in our person *Y*. She continues to experience moral transformation over the years via the conflict and submission of will in conscience. Further *Y* has never heard of God, and her worldview does not permit the existence of incorporeal agents, and therefore God's existence. In Paul Moser's religious epistemology, *Y* has evidence for God by virtue of *Y*'s reception of the transformative gift – and therefore a *de re* experience of God - without having any concept for God.³

I submit that this thesis in Moser's religious epistemology is widely misunderstood. In *Philosophia Christi's* (hereafter *PC*) symposium on Moser's work, three respondents were chosen to assess Moser's arguments in his religious epistemology. Each of the respondents aimed a criticism at Moser's account that I will call the *antecedent belief criticism*. The idea is that unless one has some prior conceptual construal/framework of/for the contents of experience - in particular, the experience of the transformative gift - then one does not have evidence for a proposition concerning that experience (namely, the proposition *that* God exists). In large part, how Moser rebuts this criticism will

² Paul K. Moser, *The Evidence for God: Religious Knowledge Reexamined* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 200. This is Moser's definition of what he calls the "transformative gift." In a personal conversation with Professor Moser he admits that one need not have the whole package of the transformative gift in order to have evidence for God. In particular, one could be convicted in conscience –being challenged in will by God's will – and submit to its directives thereby being morally transformed to unselfish love. If you struggle to see how the whole transformative gift could be received non-conceptually and count as evidence for God, then see my argument as only including *conviction in conscience, submission of will, and transformation of character*.

³ Technically, *Y*, would have evidence for God by virtue of receiving "part" of the *transformative gift*. I think the principal parts are *convicted in conscience* and *moral transformation*. In a personal conversation with Professor Moser, he commented that one need not receive the whole transformative gift in order to have evidence for God. Particularly for the situation at hand, if one needed to receive the *whole* gift it would be hard to understand how forgiveness could be operative between two agents, which includes one who does not know the other exists – and therefore cannot recognize any wrong done to the other.

depend on his prior philosophical work, particularly, in *Knowledge and Evidence* (hereafter *KE*).⁴

It is the purpose of this essay to show that the *antecedent belief* criticism to Moser's proposal hinges on a failure to take into account Moser's own theory of evidence concerning the role of defeaters in evidence and foundational evidence. In addition I will offer two suggestions for a possible way forward. First, the apparent misunderstanding across the reviewers indicates that Moser's notion of evidence in his religious epistemology up to *The Evidence for God* (hereafter *EG*) is not sufficiently clear, and he should have incorporated a space to connect his *KE* with his religious epistemology.⁵ Second, in order for the dialogue to proceed constructively respondents would be well advised to address Moser's foundationalism in relation to his religious epistemology. In particular, how are the experiences of conscience roughly similar to perceptual experience to serve as the *subjective nonconceptual perceptual content* needed for epistemic justifiability?

Before we embark on the exegetical task - presenting the criticisms and Moser's position - we will briefly look at the overall structure of Moser's religious epistemology. After providing the rough framework, we will ascertain the key point within his argument that the respondents all criticized his account for.

PART I: The General Framework

Moser's account begins with an analogue from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, "we should let our understanding of evidence, and thus of knowledge, regarding a subject matter (in particular, God) be guided by the nature of the subject matter and the actual corresponding features of our evidence regarding that subject matter."⁶ Moser's account then emerges with the idea (not the reality) of a God worthy of worship. "God" is to be understood as a title, and not a name. "Worthy of worship," is the criterion by which one adjudicates between one being from the next. It requires the titleholder to be self-sufficiently morally perfect. A "morally perfect God, by title, would have to seek what is morally and spiritually best for humans, and this would include seeking the (noncoerced) deliverance of humans from their morally and

⁴ Paul Moser, *Knowledge and Evidence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁵ "Should" understood here as "a very good thing to do" or "an advisable course of action." I clarify here simply to make clear that I am not using a normative notion.

⁶ Moser, *The Evidence for God*. 37-38.

spiritually defective ways in alienation from God.”⁷ Humans are free to reject evidence for God. In this way, evidence for God does not depend on humans recognizing it or not. Along these lines he sees the Judeo-Christian God as the most obvious and qualified candidate, particularly as construed by Jesus.⁸

God, being morally perfect, would seek for redemptive avenues to draw humans into redeeming relationships with Godself. Further, God would only *offer* evidence that is volitionally significant and relevant. Meaning, that in the reception of evidence for God, one’s will is challenged. God, on this construal, would encounter humans at a *de re* personal intervention level. Here he means, that the subject would be confronted in some sense with God’s communicative activity. Moser notes, “The redemption of humans calls for God’s role as an intentional guide who meets, instructs, leads, and empowers humans, even when arguments fall short.”⁹ Central to this epistemological framework is Moser’s insistence on *de re* evidence, which is the personal intervention of God’s will with the subjects will in the experiences of conscience for the purpose of moral transformation and friendship with God. In reference to this *de re* evidence, Moser holds that one’s “*having* conclusive evidence of God does not entail one’s having a propositional answer to a question about God or any alternative.”¹⁰ This seems to allow for possibility of *having* evidence for God by virtue of submitting one’s will to the directives of conscience and leading a morally transformed life.¹¹ And not by, in any way, conceptually recognizing God in the experience.

Part II: The Criticism(s)

This aspect of Moser’s religious epistemology leads us right into the *antecedent belief criticism*. The criticism comes in roughly two different forms: wide

⁷ Paul Moser, “Natural Theology and the Evidence for God: Reply to Harold Netland, Charles Taliaferro, and Katharyn D. Waidler,” *Philosophia Christi* 14 no. 2 (2012): 306.

⁸ See: Paul Moser, “Beyond Spectator Evidence to Pneumatic Evidence: Reply To Charles Taliaferro” for the “Christ Shaped Philosophy Project” (2013): 3 (<http://www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=171>). Here, Moser states “The God and Father of Jesus Christ is arguably the best candidate for this title... the job of sifting from the candidates is not, after all, terribly difficult.”

⁹ Moser, “Natural Theology and the Evidence for God,” 306.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 308.

¹¹ For an illustration of this position, see pp. 245-246 in *EG*, where Moser seems to imply that a girl stranded on an island ignorant of belief in the God of Christianity could still be in a redemptive relationship with God, *albeit* unknowingly. On this account the girl would have evidence for God - although she would not know that she did - nor that this God existed.

and narrow. The wide form says that for one to believe that God exists, one must first have a “worldview” that allows for such a belief. It suggests that one’s reception of the transformative gift happens against a large backdrop of philosophical assumptions. And further that the nature of this worldview makes the reception possible or impossible. This charge comes to expression both in Katharyn D. Waidler’s and Charles Taliaferro’s comments in *PC*’s symposium on Moser’s *EG*. Waidler suggests that some form of antecedent knowledge of God is required for a willingness to receive the transformative gift.¹² Consider, “But it seems that some sort of knowledge of God *as a morally perfect being*, that is, one whose aim is to bring about the best for a human being, *precedes* one’s willingness to accept God’s authoritative call or even to recognize it as such.”¹³ And later “The question remains, then, whether such a person could be in a position to judge the titleholder or even to recognize God in the context of the divine encounter.”¹⁴ Waidler seems to think that one could not *receive* the transformative gift apart from a worldview that permitted God’s existence, but even if one could, could it serve as evidence for God?

Taliaferro, similar to Waidler, questions whether or not Moser’s account can really be applicable to the person who has no room for God in their “worldview,” saying “If your worldview rules out the existence of God, as well as incorporeal spirits and parapsychical phenomenon, no amount of appearances... of God will change your mind.”¹⁵ The idea is that no matter how God may encounter one in *conscience* that is not enough to change the person’s mind about the existence of God. Perhaps Taliaferro means that it would not count as sufficient evidence given their worldview, and something else would be needed. Taliaferro hopes that this need will carve out a space for the discipline of natural theology.

Now, concerning both Waidler and Taliaferro, it is not clear what conclusion they want to draw from their respective statements. As I see it, there are roughly three interpretations. Interpretation one holds that unless *Y* has a view that allows for God at time, *t*, then no encounter with God via conscience at *t*, can count as evidence for God. Interpretation two holds that *Y*’s experience in conscience can only count as evidence for God, once *Y* has a worldview that permits God’s existence.¹⁶ Interpretation three holds that unless

¹² I take Waidler as meaning “belief” not “knowledge.”

¹³ Katharyn Waidler, “Volitional Evidence for God,” *Philosophia Christi* 14, no. 2 (2012): 278.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 279.

¹⁵ Charles Taliaferro, “The Evidence for Paul Moser,” *Philosophia Christi* 14, no. 2 (2012): 288.

¹⁶ How this is relevantly different from the first interpretation is that it allows for the first encounter, call it *E*, to count as evidence, *V*, for the proposition *P*, once the subject, *X*,

Y has a worldview that permits God, *Y* will not be persuaded that God is encountering her in conscience. For the purposes of the essay I will interpret them – along with Moser – as meaning either interpretation one or two.¹⁷

These considerations take us into the *narrowed* form of the *antecedent belief criticism*. Harold Netland in the same symposium offers this critique of Moser’s project, “We noted earlier that experience of the transformative gift could be evidence for God only if the subject were aware that God is the giver of the gift.”¹⁸ And earlier Netland wondered, “But in such cases (where the subject is not *aware that*) how can this serve as evidence for God?”¹⁹ Recall our *Y* – at the beginning of the essay. On Netland’s account unless *Y* is aware *that* it is a divine agent directing her through conscience, her experience and moral transformation cannot count as evidence for the proposition that God exists. Some kind of conceptualism, seems to lie behind this charge.²⁰ Namely, the notion that unless we have concepts of a particular content of our subjective experience, then we cannot have evidence for a particular proposition concerning that content. Netland’s charge, then, is clear: no awareness *that* God is the giver of the gift, no evidence for the proposition *that* God exists.

Interestingly, both the wide and narrow form of the *antecedent belief criticism* assume that some kind of *awareness that* God stands behind the experience in conscience is necessary to have significant evidence for God’s existence. On the wide understanding, it requires that there be a worldview that could allow the *possibility* for such an awareness. On the narrow understanding it requires that there be an *actual* awareness. In order to get clear on these arguments, and Moser’s own claims, we will take a moment to see how Moser responds.

has the conceptual framework to understand it as such. On the first interpretation, the experience can never count as evidence because the subject had no conceptual framework at the time of the event.

¹⁷ It’s possible that both Waidler and Taliaferro mean that *Y* could have evidence for God, but then their claims seem trivial. On Waidler’s account, of course it’s true that if I don’t have a concept for God and I have an encounter of God then I couldn’t use a concept I don’t have to describe that experience. On Taliaferro, of course it’s at least probable that someone who doesn’t believe in incorporeal agents is unlikely to believe they’re experiencing God in conscience. Since these obviously miss the mark of Moser’s argument I try to provide a different way of understanding them.

¹⁸ Harold Netland, “If ‘Personifying Evidence’ Is the Answer, What is the Question? A Response to Paul Moser,” *Philosophia Christi* 14, no. 2 (2012): 303.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 298-299.

²⁰ Concerning this, see Moser’s *KE* p. 44, “can there be justifying truth indicators for a person that are not conceptual states of that person, i.e., that are not states essentially involving conceptualization or predication ... The first issue can be called *conceptualism*.” For a detailed rejection of the *conceptualism thesis* see pp. 186-194.

In responding to Taliaferro and Waidler, Moser states “I submit that *de re* experience and evidence of God can undermine worldviews in virtue of supplying defeaters, particularly undefeated defeaters.”²¹ In this response, Moser is interpreting Taliaferro and Waidler along the lines of either interpretation one or two. And regarding the way he subsequently responds to Netland, it is clear that “*de re* experience and evidence of God” does not need to be comprehended by the subject *as* from God in order for it to be *evidence* for God. In relation to Netland’s query he simply states, “This requirement, I submit, is false.”²² Moser elaborates on this claim stating, “Awareness *that* God is the giver is *de dicto*, that is, propositional, whereas *de re* awareness *of* God is not; nor does the latter awareness require the former.”²³ In relation to the former quote, Moser states in a footnote, “My book, *Knowledge and Evidence* ... labored this kind of distinction and its crucial role in epistemology.”²⁴ The idea for Moser, is that evidence for a proposition, is always at bottom,²⁵ *nonconceptual*. And further, that to have evidence is not the same as having an argument or an answer to a question. Otherwise one’s epistemology will be subject to the “infamous epistemic regress problem.”²⁶ “Answers to questions are propositional; evidence need not be, and foundational evidence is not (on which see *Knowledge and Evidence*).”²⁷

At this point, it’s not clear if the criticisms of Netland, Taliaferro and Waidler serve as possible defeaters, underminers, or at least challenges to Moser’s project. However, what is clear is that Moser believes that they are wide of the mark. In each instance of their misunderstanding he appeals back

²¹ Moser, “Natural Theology and the Evidence for God,” 308.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Here I speak a little loosely. It’s not that all evidence (e.g. evidential probability maker, truth-indicator, etc.) is nonconceptual, but that at some point the evidential probability of any proposition terminates in the evidential probability maker of some subjective nonconceptual content. See Moser on pp. 151-158 in *KE*. As should be obvious Moser is a foundationalist, but his account varies from classical foundationalism in two key ways. First his foundationalism does not commit him to there only being indubitable, incorrigible beliefs in the foundation of the noetic structure; and second, he is not committed to endorsing that the justification for physical-object beliefs are based on the justification for beliefs about what one seems to perceive. (145) It seems to me that Moser’s account—at least on a prima facie reading—escapes the criticisms of classical foundationalism in Plantinga and Wolterstorff, etc., and provides a possible alternative route for the *Internalist*.

²⁶ Ibid. 309.

²⁷ Ibid.

to his work in *KE*. In the next section we will consider each criticism against the backdrop of Moser's theory of evidence in *KE*.

Part III: Knowledge and Evidence

Recall the general form of the *antecedent belief criticism*, “unless one has some prior conceptual construal/framework of/for the contents of experience - in particular, the agent of the experience of the transformative gift - then one does not have evidence for a proposition concerning that agent (namely, the proposition *that* God exists).” Further recall, how Moser responds. He states both that *X* – in receiving the transformative gift - could have *de re* evidence of God, and *awareness of God* without either having *de dicto* evidence of God or *awareness that God*.

Part of the rationale behind this is that Moser's epistemology is founded on what he calls “subjective *nonconceptual* perceptual experience.”²⁸ He holds that the content of these experiences can serve as evidence, or epistemic reasons. Where an “epistemic reason is simply an indicator for a person that a proposition is true.”²⁹ And these experiences are constituted by “an event or state of awareness that essentially has as an object, a sensory item or feature... essentially related only to a nonconceptual sensory item or feature, such as shape, color, sound, *etc.*”³⁰ This awareness he dubs as *attention-attraction awareness*.³¹

a. *The role of contravening*

What role does “subjective *nonconceptual* perceptual experience” play in relation to our believing a proposition that does not *fit* in our worldview?

²⁸ Moser provides this definition in *KE*, “is also an event or state of awareness that essentially has as an object a sensory item or feature. But it does not essentially have a conceptual item as an object. Such a nonconceptual experience is a psychological event or state of attention attraction essentially related only to a nonconceptual sensory item or feature, such as a shape, color, sound, odor, taste, or some combination or merely ostensible analogue thereof.” (84) And by a “concept,” he means, “a classificatory item, such as a class term (perhaps only in a language of thought), that can be a constituent of a proposition.” (80)

²⁹ Moser, *Knowledge and Evidence*, 47.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 84.

³¹ This sort of awareness involves one's attention being directly engaged by the more or less determinate feature of presented contents. In *KE* Moser comments, “And such attention is different from sensory stimulation, since it essentially involves direct awareness, albeit nonconceptual awareness, of what is presented in experience.” (81) Finally, his notion is different from Russell's notion of *acquaintance*. His account differs on two accounts. First, Russell, according to Moser, seems to allow for *acquaintance* even when the subject is not aware of the contents; and secondly, Russell account seems to rely on a notion of selective attention.

Consider *Y* again, she has received the transformative gift, but does not have a concept for God, and her worldview is not God-permissible. How does Moser's appeal to "*de re* experience and evidence of God" adequately respond to the *wide* form of the *antecedent belief criticism*? Recall that Moser said that the above experience and evidence could undermine a worldview by supplying defeaters. Presumably then, Moser is suggesting that *Y*'s "*de re* experience and evidence of God" is presented in *Y*'s experience in the form of subjective nonconceptual content. Further, that this *content* of *Y*'s experience serves as a possible defeater of a worldview that is not God-permissible.³² How could it thus serve as a possible defeater?

At base in Moser's epistemology is the notion of fallibilism in relation to evidence; namely, that evidential probability-makers are defeasible.³³ Evidential probability-makers can fail to be such when there is some contravening feature in one's experience. And in order for a proposition (or worldview) to be justifiable for one is for that proposition to serve as a best explanation of the relevant set of experiences without any uncontravened contravening.³⁴ There are two types of contravening, *direct* and *indirect*.

In relation to *indirect contravening*, one has a contravening feature in one's experience – for a particular proposition – if that feature is *negatively relevant* to features that the proposition was originally accounting for.³⁵ In this case, perhaps Moser means to suggest that God's *de re* presentation of Godself via conscience, and the empowerment for moral transformation serves as a feature within *X*'s overall subjective nonconceptual content that is *negatively related* to the set of subjective nonconceptual content that *X*'s statement (or worldview) is related to.

³² On this point, it is odd that Moser speaks of evidence undermining a worldview. In an indirect fashion evidence can play this sort of role, but evidence if it is ever a defeater, it is always a defeater for a particular proposition. Though, propositional relations are not easily segregated, such that if proposition *P* is undermined by evidence set *E*, then certain propositions that are entailed by *P*, could also be undermined.

³³ "Evidential probability makers" include one's subjective nonconceptual content.

³⁴ Moser's notion of direct and indirect defeaters parallels what he calls in *KE* "direct and indirect contravening." See pp. 126-131.

³⁵ For the more detailed account of this see *Ibid.* 100-107. Moser uses the example of having a proposition as an explanation for the subjective nonconceptual contents of a blue book being presented to one. Further, that as a part of one's overall subjective nonconceptual contents there is an apparent light source generating a hologram of a blue book before one. Call this content *C**. "In such a case *P* is indirectly contravened as an explanation of *C* for me if *P* does not itself explain *C** and does not play an essential role in an explanation of *C* and *C** for me (in the sense that for every such explanation for me that entails *P*, the proposition that *P* answers no why-questions about *C* and *C** beyond those answered when *P* is omitted.)" (101)

Direct contravening, on the other hand, involves what Moser calls *gratuitous items*. An explanatory proposition, *P*, for a set of *subjective nonconceptual content*, *C*, is directly contravened if and only if *P* posits an item that *C* has no corresponding feature for. For example, one has *C* consisting of an apparent blue book, “and that those contents are explained for one by the well-known Cartesian hypothesis that an evil demon is causing one’s subjective contents.”³⁶ In this example, the explanatory proposition posits a feature that does not have a corresponding element in *C*, namely a Cartesian demon. In this case, then, the Cartesian hypothesis is directly contravened relative to *C*. The crucial idea here, as well as with *indirect contravening*, is “the role of contravening introduces a certain total evidence requirement on evidential probability, since it provides for the potential relevance of any feature of one’s subjective nonconceptual contents.”³⁷ If this is the type of contravening (defeater) that Moser had in mind when he responded to Waidler and Taliaferro, then certainty eludes me as to what would count as a direct defeater to a worldview that did not permit God’s existence.

Regarding the two types of contravening, I take Moser as meaning that God’s *de re* presentation of himself to *Y* can serve as an *indirect contravener* to *Y*’s non God-permissible worldview. And on this, Moser seems to be correct. If *Y* has received the transformative gift, then that set of her experience, serves as an *indirect contravener* of her overall worldview. And further, unless she can present an explanation that plays an essential role in explaining the transformative gift, then she has uncontravened contravener relative to her total subjective nonconceptual content and her worldview.

b. **Conceptualism**

Now that we understand Moser’s rejection of the wide form of the *antecedent belief criticism*, let’s consider the *narrow* form. Recall that the *narrow* form holds that unless *X* has awareness *that* God is the giver of the transformative gift, then there is no evidence for the proposition *that* God exists for *X*. Further recall that Moser holds that experience of the transformative gift for *X* could be evidence for God, even if she is not *aware that* God is the giver of the gift. Along with Netland we shall ask Moser, “But in such cases how can this serve as evidence for God?”³⁸

Moser’s argument is that to have evidence is not the same as being able to present evidence in answer to a question or challenge. And further, this

³⁶ Ibid. 104.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Netland, “If ‘Personifying Evidence’ Is the Answer, What is the Question?” 298-299.

confusion invites “the infamous epistemic regress.”³⁹ This seems obvious, and I think the narrow proponent would agree that the conditions for *having* evidence and *presenting* evidence are importantly different. But then how are we to understand the *narrow* claim? I suggest one way is to consider the *radical conceptualism thesis* in response to Moser’s account of nonconceptual contents as a given element in experiences.⁴⁰

Moser holds that the commitment to “nonconceptual perceptual contents is a commitment to a *given* element in experience, i.e., an element that is not essentially something *taken* to be of a certain sort.”⁴¹ He provides this definition of the given, “*X* is given to a person, *S* = *df.* *S* is immediately aware of *X*, and *X* can play a prominent evidential role in the noninferential, immediate justification of a foundational belief.”⁴² Recall our discussion of *attention-attraction*, as this is the type of awareness he is referring to above. Now, what is given in experience – in relation to our physical reality – are *apparent* physical objects and properties.

Moser lists several objections to the given, but for our interest we will only list the objection that seems most likely to provide the rationale behind the narrow claim. This objection to the given goes as follows: “(1) perceptual experience essentially involves the discrimination of a discrete thing *X*. (2) But to discriminate *X* is to discriminate *X* as something. (3) Thus to perceive *X* is to perceive *X* as something. (4) But to perceive *X* as something is to conceptualize *X*. (5) Hence perceptual experience essentially involves conceptualization.”⁴³ The major problem with the view above is that it invites an “imminent endless regress of required conceptual events.”⁴⁴ Under the above view, “if a person, *S*, is to have a visual perceptual experience of an object, *X*, *S* must discriminate *X* as something, and thus categorize *X* under some term, *F*. But it seems that if *S* is to categorize *X* under *F*, *S* must have some logically prior event of awareness of *X*; otherwise *S* may have in his psychological possession nothing whatsoever to categorize under *F*.”⁴⁵ Now given this type of objection *S* would have to have some prior event of *conceptual awareness* in order to categorize *X* under *F*. But since this prior event itself

³⁹ Moser, “Natural Theology and the Evidence for God,” 309.

⁴⁰ It is not the view of this paper that Professor Netland holds to the *radical conceptualism thesis*. The point of the linkage between Netland’s narrow claim and the *thesis* is to provide a possible rationale for the claim beyond the simple misunderstanding that one can have evidence for a proposition without knowing that one does.

⁴¹ Moser, *Knowledge and Evidence*, 186.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.* 188.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 189.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

would have to be conceptual, the regress begins, because it would presuppose a logically prior event of awareness, *ad infinitum*. If this can serve as the rationale behind the *narrow* claim, then we can understand how it misunderstands Moser's own theory of evidence, and how it fails on its own account.⁴⁶

Part IV: CONCLUSION

To conclude, the *antecedent belief criticism* fails on both accounts, in the wide and narrow. On the wide end we saw that it did not take into account the role of *indirect contravening* that is central to any epistemology that takes evidence as basic. Second, we saw how the *narrow* form either fails to realize, on the simple end, that the conditions for *having* evidence are much different than the conditions for *presenting* evidence. And on the more difficult end, fails to understand how the subjective nonconceptual contents of one's experience plays a "prominent role in the noninferential, immediate justification of a foundational belief."⁴⁷ Particularly in its support of a *radical conceptualization thesis* that ultimately ends up in a "endless regress of required conceptual events."⁴⁸

However, since each of the respondents did not demonstrate an understanding of the role of evidence in Moser's religious epistemology; in particular, how it was related to his earlier philosophical work it would have been wise for Moser to have included a section on the similarities between his *Knowledge and Evidence* and his religious epistemology. Lastly, I noted and hinted at various points throughout the essay that there seems to be a disanalogy – of some degree – at work between perceptual experience detailed in *KE* as concerning "shape, color, sound, odor, taste," and the experience of conscience

⁴⁶ It is possible that *narrow proponent* does not hold to this *radical conceptualization thesis*, but it was the most plausible rationale I could supply given his rejection of the claim that the reception of the transformative gift could serve as evidence for X. He assumes in his argument that X has experienced the divine agent by virtue of experiencing the transformative gift, but does not concede that this could serve as evidence. It seems though, that just because one does not *take* something as evidence for something, doesn't mean that one does not *have* evidence for that something. Further, I take it that Netland would agree with this; therefore, I try to seek out a rationale that would explain how an awareness experience of something could not count as evidence for that something. And the result I come up with is under the *radical conceptualization thesis*, that there actually is no such experience, and therefore, no evidence for that something. Obviously, in *KE* there is a disanalogy between visual perception of a physical object, and conscience perception of an incorporeal agent, but that is not the concern of my essay. Areas which call for further investigation include, "how does the experience of conscience *count as* an experience of God? In what way can we move from the familiar perceptual experiences to this one? What are the disanalogies, etc.?"

⁴⁷ Ibid. 186.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 189.

in his religious epistemology. For further research I recommend that respondents and Moser seek to find ways of either demonstrating that the disanalogy is not great enough to break the plausibility conferring relationship, or that the disanalogy is great enough for us to not consider it as a plausible source for evidence, let alone justifying evidence.⁴⁹

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⁴⁹ I would like to thank Keith Yandell, Harold Netland, Paul Moser and Joel Chopp for their helpful feedback on an earlier version of this paper.