

modern ‘irrationalism’ (often themselves devised by philosophers) are able to provide,” although “the relation between reason and revelation must be ‘determined,’” as Maimonides believed, “by the priority of the political even in philosophical debate” (158–59).

In G.’s account, Strauss himself, after boldly challenging the traditional or conventionally pious understanding of Maimonides’s views in his pathbreaking 1936 essay “Some Remarks on the Political Science of Maimonides and Farabi,” chose henceforth to imitate the Rambam’s politic tact by presenting his thought “in a less imprudent and more responsible way” (*Leo Strauss on Maimonides* 38). G.’s own interpretation of Strauss’s thought does not make for easy reading, perhaps because he imitates his subject’s tact. But in these two volumes, he has provided the patient and philosophic reader with an invaluable compendium of writings by a thinker who deserves to be recognized as a latter-day Maimonides, together with an admirably thoughtful *entrée* into the study of those writings.

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The Severity of God: Religion and Philosophy Reconceived. By Paul K. Moser. New York: Cambridge University, 2013. Pp. xi + 218. \$29.99.

An alternative title for this book could be “The Notion of a God Worthy of Worship.” This is the central idea from which all the main arguments flow, including some arguments that present severity as an important though widely neglected attribute of such a God. Moser’s purpose in foregrounding this aspect is to resist the popularized image of a warm and cuddly “celestial Santa Claus figure” (38). As a better candidate for the title of “God,” he proposes a morally perfect agent who seeks to share this moral perfection with human beings through a gracious process of redemption that demands (but does not coerce) their volitional cooperation even in the midst of suffering (6). M. appeals to Jesus’ Gethsemane experience (“not what I will, but what you will”) as exemplary (30, 88; see Mk 14:36). He adds to this Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s famous description of the costly nature of discipleship (38), and St. Paul’s many references to soteriology and ethics. In fact, if one were to ask whose God M. deems most worthy of worship, it would undoubtedly be Paul’s. And the primary reason would not be severity per se but a perfect exercise of *agapē* that transcends but necessarily includes a strict righteousness (17).

That the arguments of this text proceed from a “notion” (52) of God seems to support the philosophical nature of the work. What we have, by and large, is the exposition of an idea (the idea of a God worthy of worship), which would remain intelligible even if it lacked an actual, existing referent (12). M.’s frequent use of the subjunctive mood reminds the reader of the hypothetical frame of the discussion. A typical sentence reads, “For the sake of redemption, *this God would* bring serious conflict” (16, emphasis added), instead of the more direct, “*God brings* serious conflict,” which one might expect from a work of unfettered theology.

At the same time, this is by no means a confessionally hesitant text. M. holds fast to the position he advanced in previous works (such as *The Evidence for God: Religious Knowledge Reexamined* [2010]) that the spiritual experience of Christians provides some reliable evidence for the existence of such a worship-worthy God (120). Moreover, he contends that this is a kind of evidence that God may choose to withhold from certain thinkers who are skeptical of theistic truth claims, particularly “positive evidential atheists” who deny God’s existence on evidentiary grounds and believe that this nonexistence is a good thing (200). M.’s attempt to count such withholding as part of God’s soteriological and purposive severity seems somewhat forced. Would not God’s desire to save typically favor God’s offering at least some accessible and epistemically reassuring forms of revelation, especially to those who need it most? M.’s related suggestion that a negative disposition toward God could be an impediment to receiving decisive experiential evidence for God’s existence is more persuasive.

The confessional nature of the book also appears in the challenge that M. addresses to his fellow Christian philosophers. He makes an impassioned plea that they should not rest content with methods of natural theology that seek to prove the existence of an abstract first principle but instead do their philosophizing (i.e., wisdom-seeking) from within the intellectual and volitional context of Gethsemane and the Pauline experience of transformative grace (121, 205). Only this context can authenticate the Christian character of their thought. In this discussion, I would have liked to see some consideration of the type of relationship between Christian philosophy and Christian theology that M. believes should result from his recommendations. Have the two become synonymous? If not, where does the distinction lie and what is its significance?

I could imagine this book being used profitably in a philosophy or theology course that treats questions of God and suffering. Many readers will be happy to find that M. does not seek to offer any final answer to the theodicy problem. However, he does work out an interesting position that holds the mystery of evil in tension with an affirmation of God’s loving but demanding presence, from which the faithful can never be separated (85; see Rom 8:35). M.’s severe God does not cause or condone evil acts against any human beings, including Jesus, whom M. contends is not punished by the Father but simply victimized by human sin (25). Nevertheless, M. emphasizes God’s ability to employ situations of suffering in morally corrective or educative ways (35,164). Some consideration of what Emmanuel Lévinas calls “useless suffering” would helpfully balance M.’s account. This part of the argument, and the book as a whole, would also be enhanced by a more extensive retrieval of biblical traditions outside the Pauline corpus and the agony in the garden (particularly Jesus’ ministry of healing). In the end, the idea that in seeking God we should expect to find ourselves deeply challenged and not merely comforted is a valuable contribution of this book.

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