

Two Solutions to the Problem of Divine Hiddenness

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J.L. Schellenberg's argument from hiddenness against the existence of God is simple. The primary argument is as follows.

The Main Argument from Hiddenness

- (1) If God exists, then no one would be epistemically rational for not believing in God.
- (2) Some people are epistemically rational for not believing in God.
- (3) Therefore, God does not exist.¹

However, much of the issue concerning this argument surrounds the support for premise (1). As many have noted, Schellenberg's first premise does not demand an undeniable, incontrovertible proof for God's existence. He merely claims that God would provide evidence sufficient for rational belief, and presumably this would entail that the only people who do not believe are culpable for their non-belief. Their non-belief would be their own fault.

Why does Schellenberg place so much emphasis on belief? Because he thinks that one of the greatest goods, if God exists, is a personal relationship with God and that God would do whatever is necessary to bring about such a relationship. He goes on to note that belief in God is required for this relationship to exist, and so God will do what ever is necessary to guarantee that people believe in Him. Here is Schellenberg's main argument in support of the first premise in the argument above.²

The Personal Relationship Argument (for premise 1 in The Main Argument)

- (P1) The greatest good (if God exists) is a personal relationship with God.
- (P2) If (P1), then if God exists, then there is a being who would do **what is necessary for all** human beings to enter into a personal relationship with God.
- (P3) Therefore, if God exists, then there is a being who would do **what is necessary for all** human beings to enter into a personal relationship with God.
- (P4) If there is a being who would do **what is necessary for all** human beings to enter into a relationship with God, then there is a being who makes sure that everyone has sufficient evidence to believe there is a God.
- (P5) If there is a being who makes sure that everyone has sufficient evidence to believe there is a God, then no one would be epistemically rational for not believing in God.
- (P6) Therefore, If God exists, then no one would be epistemically rational for not believing in God.

(P1) is an assumption that many theists would be inclined to endorse, but will be challenged later. On the plausible assumption that an all-loving, all-powerful, and all-knowing God would do whatever is necessary to bring about the greatest good, (P2) should be obvious. (P3) is a subconclusion that follows from (P1) and (P2). (P4) is supposed to be plausible because it seems that belief in a person is required in order to have a personal relationship with that person, and (P5) seems fairly obvious.³

Many of the responses to the Problem of Divine Hiddenness are a kind of Greater Good Defense; similar in structure to Greater good defenses one might see against the Problem of Evil⁴ These responses will not be discussed at length in this paper, nor a range of other potential responses that are not in the spirit of the greater good defense.⁵

This paper will offer two responses to the problem of divine hiddenness, and will only introduce other similar potential responses that have appeared in the literature in order to highlight some novel differences between those responses and the two responses offered here⁶ These two responses bear some resemblance to a few responses that have

appeared in the literature, but there are important differences that that make them stronger than the responses that have been offered. In particular, Schellenberg can resist the two responses that some might think these responses resembles. The way these responses are developed, it's not clear that Schellenberg can resist them as easily.

II. **Hiddenness and Love**

The first response begins by rejecting the thesis that you must believe in the existence of someone to have a loving personal relationship with them. If belief isn't required for a personal relationship, then we can resist (P4) in the argument designed to support that main argument from hiddenness.

We can proceed without offering a precise definition of *loving personal relationship* and simply identify certain features that one would expect to find present in such relationships. People in loving personal relationships should at times be nice to each other, do nice things for one another. They should be quick to forgive one another. Perhaps they should even have some sort of positive feelings directed toward one another. Let's proceed with the hope that we have some rough idea as to what sorts of things count as a loving personal relationship and what sorts of things don't count. Hopefully, with just our intuitive understanding of what it is for something to be a personal relationship, it can be seen that it is possible to have it without belief.⁷

Turing Chat-Rooms

Bob is lonely and begins a chat-room relationship with Julie. Bob and Julie are both grieving the loss of a loved one. Julie offers words of encouragement that no one has been able to offer Bob. Bob does the same for Julie. Then Bob's friend Steve provides Bob with an overwhelming amount of evidence that Chat Rooms have very sophisticated Turing Machine Like programs that can perfectly replicate close, personal conversation with other humans. Bob is nervous. It is highly likely that Julie is a fake. He stops believing that Julie exists. He even tells Julie that he doesn't believe she exists. However, he holds out strong hope that Julie exists. He says, you may not be real, but there is some very slim possibility

that you are – that’s enough for me to think this is worth continuing. Eventually, they meet. They marry. Someone asks them “When did your personal relationship begin?” Bob says, “Back when I didn’t even believe Julie existed.”

What Bob says seems true. He had a personal relationship without believing that the person existed.

There are two ways to resist. One is to claim that this is *not a loving personal relationship*, however, it certainly seems that this should count as one. There are many features of a loving personal relationship that can be present in chat-room relationships. Bob can go on-line and send nice things to Julie. Bob and Julie can forgive each other. Bob and Julie can comfort and console one another when the other is stressed or grieving.

Another response is to argue that Bob *really does believe* in some sense that Julie exists. Some might hold that the mere fact that Bob is *acting as if Julie exists*, is sufficient for it to be true that Bob *believes that Julie exists*. But even if we thought some kind of behaviorist thesis was true and that beliefs are merely dispositions to act in certain ways or behaviors of some kind, it wouldn't follow that Bob believes that Julie exists. Even a strong behaviorist should acknowledge that we would expect to see *different behavior* from someone who really did believe the other person existed. For example, Bob typing "I don't believe you exist" would count as a behavior that counts against the claim that Bob believes that Julies exists.

Bob really hopes that Julie exists, and he might be acting in certain ways because he hopes that Julie is real, but a hope is different from a belief. For example, suppose a mother goes out and buys her son's favorite food to keep in the cupboard and makes sure his room is pulled together *in hopes* that her son will come home from The War soon. She is acting in certain ways that she thinks would be good for her son, were he to come

home soon. That does not mean she believes that he will come home soon. Bob is similar to a mother who makes preparations like this. Bob *in his hope* that Julie exists, acts in certain ways. A hope that P is true is not a belief that P is true.

Another reason to think that hopes are not beliefs is that different norms of rationality govern hopes and beliefs. All of one's evidence might point to the conclusion that his friend committed some horrible crime, so much so that it would be irrational for him to believe that his friend did not the crime. It would make sense to claim that the belief would be irrational. However, it does not make sense to claim that his hope that his friend is innocent is irrational.⁸

Let's look at another thought experiment that some might find better supports the idea that you can have a loving personal relationship without belief.

The Hallucination Scenario

Suppose Bob recently discovers that he has been (for several years) hallucinating people and from his perspective developing very sophisticated, complex relationships. After several months in the hospital the doctors have determined that Bob has been cured. They are confident that he will no longer hallucinate. Julie is one of the doctors. Bob is skeptical that Julie is real. He even says on several occasions, I really don't believe you exist. However, Bob thinks to himself. Julie (if real) would be the most amazing person I have ever met, and I am confident that we could have a long lasting relationship. I could never forgive myself if I didn't give her exactly the kindness she deserves (if I discovered she were real), so I'll continue this *relationship*.

Some are inclined in the Turing Machine scenario to say that Bob believes that *something exists*, either a computer program or a person. But the hallucination scenario has no such something that Bob believes in. The Hallucination Scenario *also* has more elements that one might find necessary in a personal relationship. The Hallucination Scenario makes the thesis that you can have personal relationships with someone when you don't believe they exist much more compelling.

If loving personal relationships don't require belief, then we have another way to undermine the argument from divine hiddenness. Rejecting the thesis that personal relationships require belief would undermine Schellenberg's motivation for (P4). Other philosophers have attempted similar strategies. It is worth noting how this way of framing the response is importantly different from similar responses that have appeared in the literature.

Williams Wainwright suggests that the sort of explicit belief that Schellenberg has in mind is not the sort of belief required for entering into a personal relationship with God. God might be synonymous with *the Good*. People can believe in The Good, respond to The Good in certain ways, and that might be sufficient for the personal relationship.⁹

Trent Dougherty and Ted Poston offer a similar strategy. The sort of belief that Schellenberg maintains is required for a personal relationship with God is a kind of *de dicto* belief in some sort of sentence like "God exists", but it is absurd to think that *this* is the sort of belief required. Some *de re* belief that was not on the face of it explicitly about God could be good enough.¹⁰

Howard-Snyder notes that one could make a distinction between *accepting* and *believing*. One could go on to claim that believing that God exists is not required for a personal relationship with God, and that the only thing that was required was *accepting* that God exists.¹¹

One novel aspect of this response is that it involves some good examples that seems to establish what the above authors seem to think is true. There are now some very clear examples that offer some positive reason to think that personal relationships do not require belief in any strong sense. More importantly, the above strategies attempt to

accommodate the intuition that some kind of belief or *belief-like* state is required.

However, if the above counterexamples are successful, they show that no belief or belief-like state is required.

This way of framing the response has, at least, one virtue over previous attempts to respond to the problem of hiddenness. A potential problem with saying that *some sort of belief* may be required, or that *some sort of belief-like* state is required is that it is open to Schellenberg to run another argument from hiddenness against these more moderate positions. Assuming that these beliefs and acceptance states are governed by some sort of norms of rationality, then he can plausibly maintain that there are people who are rational in withholding from the candidate belief-like state. If he can plausibly maintain that there are people who are rational in withholding belief in *The Good*, or withholding belief in the relevant *de re* proposition, or withholding in accepting that God exists, then he can still run the argument.

If there is any doxastic state that one might plausibly maintain is required if the counter-examples are successful it would be something like *hoping that God exists*. And as was noted above *hoping* is not the sort of thing that is governed by the evidential norms that govern belief and acceptance.¹²

There are some plausible objections to the idea that you can have loving personal relationships without belief. Fictional characters help illustrate this point. Consider the following.

Can you be in love with Anna Karenina while believing that she is merely a character in Tolstoy's novel? Can you believe that be afraid of King Kong as he strides menacingly towards the camera, while realizing that there is no danger because it is just a movie? Arguably not. People can have fantasies of love and of fear. But if you were really afraid of King Kong, why would you stay in your seat rather than rush from the cinema? The emotions are counterfeit.¹³

It seems that these are cases where you have something like the emotion of love for a thing or fear of a thing, but you don't really love something or fear something in these cases. A good candidate explanation for what makes the emotions counterfeit is precisely *because* belief in the existence of the object is absent. If lack of belief is what *makes* the emotion counterfeit, then we have a problem for the view that you can have a personal relationship without belief. Assuming emotional states are part of a loving personal relationship, you couldn't have a personal relationship without belief.

There are a few responses available. One is to concede that these emotions are counterfeit, but maintain that personal relationships can be had with counterfeit emotions, or at a minimum that *counterfeit* personal relationships can be had with real people and are valuable.

Another possible response would be to resist the idea that the emotions are counterfeit. Fictional characters are relevantly different from an existing entity in a way that may introduce some confusion. One relevant disanalogy between these fictional characters and the persons in the above examples is that that above examples involve someone having a personal relationship with a person *that existed* while not believing that the person exists. It seems that a plausible explanation for the objector's intuition that these are counterfeit emotions is simply that they misfire by not having an object.

The counterfeit emotions in the King Kong case and the Anna Karenina case are counterfeit because one argument in the relation is missing. You don't really fear King Kong because King Kong isn't real. However, you are in a similar emotional state. We need not explain the failure to fear King Kong by positing that the emotional state is in

some sense counterfeit. All we need to posit is that one necessary condition for instantiating a two-place relation is absent. The feelings are real, they fail to have an object - but were the object real we could truthfully say that the person loves Anna and fears King Kong.

There is another relevant disanalogy between King Kong and Anna Karenina on the one hand and Julie on the other. A large part of the motivation for thinking that the emotions involved with respect to King Kong and Anna Karenina are counterfeit is that the person does not behave in the ways they would if they *really* feared King Kong or really loved Anna Karenina. Notice, however, that in both of the cases involving Bob and Julie, Bob *is* behaving the way one would if they really loved the other person (e.g., doing nice things for them etc...) - So even if we concede that the emotions are counterfeit in the King Kong and Anna Karenina case, there is yet another difference between those cases and the cases involving Bob and Julie. The objection involving King Kong cites the behavior as evidence that the fear-like emotion is not really fear. But this appeal to behavior actually *supports* the idea that the emotions involved in the Bob and Julie case are real - since Bob *is* behaving the way a person in love behaves.

There is a more specific objection to the use of the above counterexamples that is also worth mentioning. It has been noted that one reason to think that there is an actual loving relationship in cases like Turing-Chat Room is that it seemed possible for both parties to succeed in forgiving one another. But one might think that forgiveness or seeking forgiveness isn't possible unless you believe in the existence of the offending party because forgiveness requires believing that they have wronged you. Here's a quick formalization of the argument.

The main motivation behind this objection is the intuition that an essential component to forgiving someone is that you believe that they have wronged you. Forgiveness seems to involve actively not holding a wrong against a person, or seeking to restore a relationship in spite of some wrong they have committed. So, there is some prima facie plausibility to the idea that in order to forgive someone, you must believe that they have wronged you.

There are, at least, two responses available. First, it seems that there is possible to forgive someone without believing that they have wronged you. Consider the following cases.

Moral Skepticism

Suppose someone is a moral skeptic and they actually don't believe that actions are morally right or wrong. It would be odd to say that it is metaphysically impossible for them to forgive someone. Surely a moral skeptic is capable of forgiving someone.

Permissible Harm

Suppose someone revealed information about you that hurt you in some way, but you thought that they were well within their rights to reveal that information (suppose lives were at stake). You might be hurt or damaged by that revelation, fail to believe that the revelation was wrong, but it still seems possible for you to forgive the person for that revelation.¹⁴ By making a conscious effort to not hold this action against them, it seems that you are forgiving them.

Moral Uncertainty

Set aside global moral skepticism. Suppose you're simply unsure whether or not a particular action against you (that harmed you) was wrong or right. This seems like a perfectly intelligible thing to say "You hurt me. I'm not really sure whether it was permissible or not, but whatever the case - I forgive you" (and then proceed to act in whatever ways one should act if they have actually forgiven someone)

The above cases all seem like cases that involve forgiveness without actual belief that a wrong has been committed.

It may be resisted that the above cases are not *genuine* forgiveness, but rather pseudo-forgiveness or conditional forgiveness.¹⁵ However, if someone were to resist in this way we'd have another response available which would be to add to the earlier claim that not only is forgiveness of one another evidence that they are in a personal relationship, but that this relation of pseudo-forgiveness is also evidence of such a relationship too. The ability to conditionally forgive someone would be part of a loving relationship. So the mere fact that Bob and Julie are capable of this conditional forgiveness would be enough to count as some reason to think they are in a personal relationship.

Schellenberg might argue that this response simply pushes the problem back. You don't need believe that God exists in order to have a personal relationship with God, but you need to engage in certain actions. One might think that a necessary condition for engaging in these actions is that persons believe that it's in their best interests to engage in these kinds of actions. People won't act as if God is there unless they think it is in their best interests. So, one might think that if God exists no one would be epistemically rational for not believing that it's in their best interests to act as if God exists. Surely there are people who are epistemically rational in not believing that acting as if God exists is in their best interests. So, we still have a problem.

However, it's not clear that a necessary condition on A-ing is that that one believes that it's in one's best interests to A. Surely, weakness of will is metaphysically possible. To think that God can't construct a world where people are free to act contrary to what they themselves believe is in their best interests.

Another strategy Schellenberg could pursue would be to offer a different argument for the first premise in the main argument. Schellenberg relies on the following the strong claim to support (P4) which in turn supports 1 in the Main Argument.

- (N) For any X and any Y, If X has a personal relationship with Y, then X believes that Y exists.

He might have instead attempted to run the argument using the following principle.

- (P) For any X and any Y, the probability that X will have a personal relationship with Y is higher if X believes in Y, than the probability that X will have a personal relationship with Y if X does not believe in Y.

While belief may not be required for a personal relationship, it may be that belief significantly increases the chances that a personal relationship will form. Imagine two chat-room scenarios. In one scenario A the persons have great evidence that the other person exists. In the other scenario one of the persons has great evidence that there is no person on the other end. That they are merely talking to a computer. Which scenario seems more likely to develop a personal relationship. The obvious answer is A. Belief increases the chances that a personal relationship will form.

The Personal Relationship Argument (for premise 1 in The Main Argument)

- (P1*) The greatest good (if God exists) is a personal relationship with God.
(P2*) If (1a), then if God exists, then there is a being who would **maximize the probability that all** human beings to enter into a personal relationship with God.
(P3*) Therefore, if God exists, then there is a being who would **maximize the probability that all** human beings to enter into a personal relationship with God.
(P4*) If there is a being who would **maximize the probability that all** human beings to enter into a relationship with God, then there is a being who makes sure that everyone has sufficient evidence to believe there is a God.
(P5*) If there is a being who makes sure that everyone has sufficient evidence to believe there is a God, then no one would be epistemically rational for not believing in God.

(P6*) Therefore, If God exists, then no one would be epistemically rational for not believing in God.

This is a stronger argument for the first premise in the main argument. However, there are problems. First, once you've accepted that (N) is false. It's not clear why you would accept (P). Any intuitions one might that (P) is true can be explained by the fact that we find (N) intuitive. Once you've given up on (N) and accept the counter-examples to (N) we can construct counter-examples to (P).

The Emotionally Vulnerable

Suppose John is emotionally vulnerable and very afraid of rejection. Suppose he gets into a chat room scenario that he *thinks* is a Turing Program. In situations where he can suspend judgment about the existence of the thing, he finds that it is *even easier* to interact in ways that would result in the formation of a personal relationship.

The above scenario seems to provide us with a counter-example to (P). Here you have someone where it is not more likely that they will form a personal relationship with someone in a situation where they believe they exist. In fact, it's *less likely*. So it seems that this revised argument still leaves (P4*) unsupported.

Even if you don't accept that the above thought experiment undermines (P), it may be that there is no upper bound on the probability that people form a loving personal relationship with God. For any world where the probability that people will form personal relationships with God is n , there may be some world where the probability is just a little bit higher than n . There could be an infinite number of options open to God with greater and greater probability that people will form personal relationships with him. So if we grant that God won't guarantee that everyone believes he exists, which even Schellenberg grants, then God will not maximize the probability that everyone will believe in him

simply because that probability cannot be maximized. If this is true, then we should also reject (P3*) in this argument.

There may be, however, a third way for Schellenberg to revise the argument. Schellenberg could claim that there is something better about personal relationships *with explicit belief in the person* - that these relationships are even better than the kinds of relationships where one of the persons suspends judgment.

Consider the following two variants of the Hallucination Scenario.

HS-BELIEF

In this variant Bob **believes** Julie, the doctor exists. Suppose his evidence now supports that she exists and he believes it. He makes several sorts of sacrifices for her. She loves him. He loves her.

HS-SUSPENSION

In this variant Bob **suspends judgement and does not believe** Julie, the doctor exists. Suppose his evidence now supports that she exists and he believes it. He makes several sorts of sacrifices for her. She loves him. He's not sure what to call it, but he experiences feelings as if in love.

Some will find it intuitively plausible to suppose that HS-BELIEF is *all things considered* – better. The relationship that Bob and Julie have in HS-Belief is more meaningful, or valuable, or worthwhile. Something is there in HS-BELIEF that you don't get in HS-SUSPENSION.

What is it that might make HS-BELIEF better. For starters, presumably many people would *rather* be in a situation where the person would not doubt their existence. Mostly, because in many cases this would be a pathetic sort of existence for them. That might lead us to conclude that HS-BELIEF is somehow better. However, there are also some considerations that might move one to think that there are good things about HS-SUSPENSION that are not present in HS-BELIEF.

One might claim that it is rather remarkable for someone like Bob to risk so much on a person that he is not even certain is real. That is, some could argue, rather self-less. After all, in HS-SUSPENSION Bob doesn't have the sorts of *apparent* guarantees that his love will be reciprocated. Bob has the opportunity to demonstrate a kind of self-less love for Julie that he does not have in HS-BELIEF.

It need not be claimed that HS-SUSPENSION is *better* than HS-BELIEF, but it is worth noting that we should not be so quick to think that one is better. In fact, we should perhaps suspend judgment about which is better. At best, the comparative value between HS-SUSPENSION and HS-BELIEF may be inscrutable. They might both have certain good features, and God could very well have reasons to have instances of both.¹⁶

Ultimately, there are good reasons to resist the problem of divine hiddenness when we think about what really is necessary to form personal loving relationships. Let's turn our attention to a second potential response.

II. Hiddenness and Sacrifice

In order to offer the next response, it is worth briefly summarizing a debate that, at first glance, will seem unrelated to the present debate. Erik Wielenberg has recently argued that some of the greatest possible goods are only attainable in a naturalistic universe. Thinking about Wielenberg's position will put us in a position to offer a solution to the problem of divine hiddenness.

Wielenberg reaches the conclusion that some of the greatest goods are only possible in a naturalistic universe by defending naturalism from a variety of arguments for the conclusion that naturalism has implausible ethical (or other normative) implications.

Among the charges he addresses is the charge that some of the greatest goods are only possible under theism.

For example, Wielenberg considers charges by William Lane Craig and Kant that God is the only way we can guarantee that some really great goods obtain.¹⁷ God's guarantee of perfect justice is (allegedly) necessary for certain goods to obtain. We need not get into the details of Craig and Kant's charge, nor need we get into the details of Wielenberg's response. Wielenberg's discussion of this debate is relevant only to introduce some naturalistic intuitions about value that Wielenberg appeals to in his overall response. We need only consider these claims for our present purposes.

In his response to Craig and Kant, Wielenberg cleverly argues that contrary to their claims that only God can guarantee great goods, it may be that some of the greatest goods would only be possible in the absence of God.

In fact, if God does exist, then the second component of Kant's highest good (perfect justice) at least is not only possible but *certain*. This follows from the feature of theism that played a role in Craig's argument discussed earlier in this chapter -- the divine guarantee of perfect justice. This guarantee surely takes at least some of the urgency out of human action; if we know that God will make the universe perfectly just in the end, we lose one reason for trying to promote justice -- namely, that if we do not, no one will (though we still have a self--interested reason to promote justice, since presumably God rewards the just).⁵⁹ Without God in the picture, the universe is only as just as we make it, and consequently there is a much greater urgency to pursue justice here on earth. In fact, the notion that there is a divine guarantee of perfect justice can lead not only to complacency but to outright atrocity. Such a guarantee also renders one of the most admirable kinds of human action impossible.¹⁸

One such good is a kind of self-sacrifice. Wielenberg offers us the following case.

The Self-Sacrificing Mother

Imagine, for example, a mother who sacrifices her own life so that her child can live. If there is a divine guarantee of perfect justice, then the child who lives has not been saved from a fate worse than she deserves, nor has the mother who dies accepted a fate worse than she deserves. But if there is no God -- and hence no divine guarantee of perfect justice -- the situation is different. In a naturalistic

universe, death marks the permanent end of conscious experience. A person's death deprives her of any future goods she would have obtained had she not died.⁶⁶ Without God, the woman who sacrifices her life to save her child may well have accepted a fate worse than the one she deserves, and in so doing she may have spared her child a fate worse than the one it deserves. It follows, therefore, that only in a Godless universe is this kind of self-sacrificing action possible. Only in a Godless universe can one forego the ultimate fate one deserves in order to help others.¹⁹

There is something very right about what Wielenberg says here. It does seem quite plausible to suppose that there some kind of really great and noble good that cannot happen when one knows that God is there to guarantee that all will work out for the best.

As Wielenberg goes on to note,

Fear in the face of death is a natural human reaction, and there is something to admire in the actions of someone who overcomes this fear -- even if she is certain that the fear is unfounded. But there is even more to admire in the actions of someone who knows that death is the end and accepts it anyway for the sake of the greater good. Only without God is this highest form of self--sacrifice, one of the most admirable kinds of human action, an available option. Only without God can a human being, knowing that death is the end, that there is no hope of eternal salvation or divine justice, no chance that he will get the further goods he deserves, nevertheless accept death for himself so that others may live.²⁰

So there is something really good that can only be achieved if someone knows that naturalism is true. Wielenberg goes on to allege that that there are a wide range of kinds of goods that naturalism makes possible.

I propose that the naturalist ought to view herself as a hero. She is a hero struggling to satisfy the demands of morality and simultaneously secure an internally meaningful life for herself and her loved ones in a universe which is at best utterly indifferent and at worst downright hostile to both projects. She is a hero who must pursue her projects with the understanding that "they are vulnerable to evil no matter how hard and well [she tries] to succeed at them".⁸³ She can hope for at best a temporary victory, but it is a victory worth struggling for. As Russell observes, "[h]appiness is nonetheless true happiness because it must come to an end, nor do thought and love lose their value because they are not everlasting."⁸⁴ And, as Kekes suggests, she must keep these fundamental facts about the universe before her mind as much as she can.²¹

There is a kind of courage in confronting death that the naturalist can have that the *psychologically certain* theist cannot. There is a kind of really pure morality that only naturalist can have. The *firmly committed* theist will always have the promise of reward dangling in front of him.

Overall the lesson to be learned is that.

It turns out that the absence of God from the universe makes possible one of the most worthy kinds of actions a human being can undertake.²²

In the self-sacrifice case Wielenberg notes that the martyr's knowledge that naturalism is true makes the really great good possible. The sacrifice is more noble than it would be in a world where the person knew that Christian theism was true.

But what is it about the knowledge that makes this sacrifice more noble? What makes the naturalist a hero? It seems that it is the belief that naturalism is true that does the work in making the sacrifice more noble. It isn't *actual absence* of God that make these great noble actions possible as Wielenberg suggests. If anything it is *apparent absence* of God.²³

But if that is what makes the great good possible, then we have an easy solution to our original problem of hiddenness. God has a very good reason to hide. The kind of uncertainty that a believer faces in a world where the God hides is the only way to bring about some really great goods.²⁴

It's tricky how to flesh this out, and it's yet clear how we use these considerations to motivate a rejection of a premise in the original argument. It's best to compare two worlds.

(W1) Everyone has a personal relationship with God, but a really great good is impossible – because the certainty of God’s existence makes it not possible for people to genuinely sacrifice.

(W2) A lot of people have personal relationships with God, but a really great good is possible, because there is sufficient likelihood that God doesn’t exist to make genuine sacrifice possible.

It might be that a personal relationship with God is a really great good, but not so great a good that God would \W1 in lieu of W2. It may be true that for each individual person the greatest good they can achieve is a personal relationship with God, so Schellenberg might be right about premise (1) in the Personal relationship argument. But it may be that, on the whole, everyone achieving their greatest good does not outweigh the goods that come from having a world where people can make real, genuine sacrifices for one another. We can reject the second premise of the Personal Relationship Argument.

It may seem that what has been presented here is not entirely novel. Michael Murray²⁵, Richard Swinburne²⁶, and Robert McKim²⁷ have all offered greater good style defenses that seem to have the following form.

(V) Certain kinds of virtuous actions would not be possible if God were not hidden.

There are some important differences between what is offered here and what Swinburne, Murray, and McKim offer. They focus on the fact that we would not be *free* to perform any kind of good actions. That we must be given the opportunity to *freely* choose the good. The primary claim in the above response is that a certain kind of virtuous action *requires* that people be in a certain kind of cognitive state. We can see that this response is slightly different by examining, one of Schellenberg’s major criticism of the Swinburne, Murray, and McKim style of response. Schellenberg tries to strengthen the

Swinburne, Murray, and McKim style of response and claim that it is still vulnerable to criticism.

To see the main point here, notice that while it may seem that, in order to engage in the sort of difficult-soul-making-resulting-in-good-character for which one is responsible so emphasized in contemporary philosophy of religion, one must choose what is good for the sake of the good in the face of serious temptation to choose the bad, a more accurate indication of what is needed would be given by something more general: choosing the good for its own sake in the face of an inclination or propensity not to choose the good for its own sake. Now one way of not choosing the good for its own sake involves not choosing it at all, and instead giving in to temptation to do the bad. The opportunity to do this, we are supposing with Swinburne and Murray, would, in the absence of objectionable changes to the strength of human desires for good and for evil, be lost if God were not hidden. But another way of not choosing the good for its own sake involves choosing it for some other reason, under the influence of a contrary motive. And the opportunity to do this would not be lost if Swinburne and Murray are right. For if they are right, then evidence sufficient for belief would remove our ability to do serious wrong by giving us strong prudential desires. Individuals, they say, would inevitably do what is right because they would see that it was obviously in their interest to do so. But in that case individuals would face a new challenge, and new choices: they would have the opportunity to grow beyond the purely self-interested motives, and to cultivate a love of the good for its own sake.²⁸

The kinds of virtue that Swinburne, Murray, and McKim seem to focus on according to Schellenberg are the virtues of doing good, for its own sake, without the logically secured guarantee of reward that an ever-present God would bring. He argues that it is still possible to achieve these virtues even in a world where God is ever present.

However, the virtue suggested by the main response offered above is not vulnerable to the same sort of criticism. It is possible to help someone in need for some ulterior motive *even if God is obviously present*. But to lay down one's life for a friend and have that count as a *genuine sacrifice* seems like a kind of virtue that *cannot* be had in a world where God is obviously present.

Another virtue of this proposed solution is that it draws on *non-theistic* intuitions about what counts as heroic, virtuous character. Wielenberg is right to suggest that there

is something much more noble about virtuous actions done with the belief that naturalism is true than the same action done with the belief that theism is true. But if he is right, then there is something much more noble about virtuous actions done in the apparent absence of God, in the face of a hiding God, than in the presence of a clearly present (not hidden) God.

The best way for God to have us develop this really great and noble characteristic, short of making himself not exist (which is impossible) would be to hide.

It has been suggested to me that this response to the problem of divine hiddenness only works for a version of theism that includes the following three theses. i) God plans all that occurs, or at least all value-relevant events, and brings it about that his plans are fulfilled

- (ii) God both maximizes overall good, and guarantees perfect justice
- (iii) God maximizes the good for each individual.

However, not all theists think that (i)-(iii) is true. so Wielenberg's claims do not show that the hiddenness of God is required to make the nobility of sacrifice possible.

Wielenberg's claims would, at best, show that the apparent absence of God is required to make the virtues of self-sacrifice possible by people who believe that if God exists then (i)-(iii) are all true.²⁹

However, it's not clear that we would need something as strong as (i)-(iii) in order to secure the goods of self-sacrifice.. This response would go through even if weaker theses followed from theism. Consider (iv) as an example.

- (iv) Death is not the end of conscious existence for some people.

Most firmly committed theists who believe that there is an omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent being (hereafter a OOO-being) think that something like (iv) is true, and

the obvious existence of a OOO-being would significantly increase the evidential probability for many that (iv) was true, and thus the value of self-sacrifice would be lost.

Even if (iv) is not entailed by theism, the truth and obviousness of theism would significantly raise the probability for someone that (iv) is true, and that would be enough to undermine or dampen the value of sacrificing one's life. So, (iv) doesn't need to follow from OOO-being theism to get the response to work, all we need is that the obviousness of a OOO-being entails that the evidential probability of (iv) would be very high for most people.

Ultimately, it seems that if a OOO-being thought that there was something good about situations where persons choose to lay down their life for another person, then a OOO-being would have good reason to hide. Since the obvious existence of a OOO-being would make it sufficiently likely that death is not the end of conscious existence.

III. Hiddenness, Love, and The Ultimate Sacrifice

There is a final virtue that this latter response to the problem of divine hiddenness has that should be of special interest to resolving some puzzles in philosophical theology. There is a passage in the Christian Bible that should puzzle Christians. Just before Jesus dies he cries out “My God, My God. Why Have You Forsaken Me?” This is a puzzling passage, and many interpret the passage as an indication that God the Father was hidden from Jesus. But these interpretations of God being hidden from Jesus are especially puzzling when we consider other components of traditional Christian doctrine (e.g., that Jesus was the Son of God and even according to many Christians in some sense identical with God). Christian theists have had a difficult time making sense of these passages.

Schellenberg argues that a loving mother would never abandon her child while the child was in pain, but here we have an instance where Christians seem forced to admit that this is an instance where God the Father *abandons* his only Son. What is going on here? What reason could God have for doing something like this?

The above solution to the problem of Divine Hiddenness also yields a solution to this puzzle.³⁰ If Christians take seriously the claim that Jesus was sacrificing his life for all of humankind and accept that *genuine sacrifice of a life* is only possible in circumstances where there is a significant epistemic possibility that death is the real end of it all, then it makes perfect sense to suppose that if God is going to become incarnate and do something really heroic and noble and actually make this ultimate sacrifice, then God is going to have to ensure that his incarnate form experiences the same sort of hiddenness that we do.

There is of course a worry that this threatens the omniscience of an incarnate God. If God were incarnate, then God incarnate would have to be omniscient. If God hides from Jesus, then one might think that there are some propositions that Jesus did not know. However, the proposed solution here doesn't introduce this puzzle. Christians theists who think that Jesus was in some sense God already have other passages of their Bible that suggest a non-omniscient Jesus. And there are already many candidate explanations offered for why Jesus apparently lacks omniscience in those cases that would explain why he appears to lack omniscience in these cases.³¹

So, if what has been said about sacrifice is correct, then it seems that it is almost necessary for Christian Theology that Jesus be ignorant *in some sense* of the guaranteed reward for his actions to count as *genuine sacrifice*.³²

IV. Conclusion

This paper presented two responses to the problem of divine hiddenness. The first is that certain kinds of valuable actions are only possible when it is far from certain that God exists – namely real genuine sacrifice. The other response is that certain kinds of personal relationship don't require belief, they don't require a doxastic state that is subject to the norms of rationality, and there is some reason to think that personal relationships formed in these situations are better.

This discussion also revealed a way to make sense of the one of the more puzzling events in the Christian tradition. Why would Jesus, who is supposed to be divine, utter those puzzling words? If real sacrifice requires a kind of blindness to future reward, and some loving relationships are better under such conditions of blindness, then Christians can appeal to both of those facts to explain that puzzling event.³³

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¹We see versions of this argument in much of Schellenberg's work. See Schellenberg (1993); (2004); (2005a); (2005b)

²This is a more formal version extracted from from Schellenberg (2004) p.40-41

³Concerns about evidentialism aside (of course). Strictly speaking P5 is not incompatible with reliabilism or proper functionalism. There are many reliabilists and proper functionalists who might be willing to grant that (P5) is, at least, contingently true because it just so happens that beliefs based on evidence are as a matter of contingent fact correlated with beliefs that are formed by reliable/properly functioning faculties.

⁴Howard-Snyder and Moser (2002) have a nice list of potential greater good-type responses listed in the introduction to the volume. Hiddenness could (a) allow for people to freely love God without coercion, (b) prevent human responses based on improper motives, (c) allow people to recognize our need for God, (d) allow for the sense of risk required for Passionate Faith, or (e) give us a share in bringing people to God.

⁵For example, Paul Moser (2004) argues that even raising the divine hiddenness problem displays a kind of cognitive idolatry. Hiddenness only seems to be a problem to us because of some flaw in us that has a negative epistemic impact on us. Note that this response is different from greater good type responses because it does not seek to explain the presence of hiddenness in terms of some greater good that might necessitate the hiddenness. See Moser's articles in Peterson and VanArragon (2004) pp. 42-54, 56-58.

⁶There is a response to premise 2 available. Some might argue that there are clear indications of God's presence. We just need to be open to it. God reveals himself everyday in the rising of the sun, the coming of the rain, the birth of new children, the majesty of the night sky. The signs are there, if only we are open.

But this is not what is meant by 'clear indication'. There are clear indications that there is a cup in front of me right now. There are clear indications that my wife is sitting on the couch next to me right now reading. And there are not clear indications of God's presence in that sense.

⁷Proponents of the arguments that will be addressed later in the paper don't really specify what they mean by *loving personal relationship*. It will come out later that this actually matters. There maybe a strong and a weak sense of a loving personal relationship. If they maintain the strong sense throughout their arguments, then a different premise of the argument is should be rejected.

⁸This distinction will be important when it is later explained how this solution to the Problem of Divine Hiddenness is importantly different than one that has appeared in the literature.

⁹Wainwright (2002) p. 18

¹⁰Poston and Dougherty (2007)

¹¹ Howard-Snyder and Moser (2002)

¹² It may be too quick to claim that *acceptance* states are governed by evidential norms. Some maintain the belief/acceptance distinction in order to plausibly maintain that while it might be irrational to believe a proposition, it could *on the same evidence*, be rational to accept that same proposition. But still it seems that acceptance states are governed by some norm or other – perhaps norms of practical reasoning if acceptance states are construed as belief-like doxastic states that are under our direct voluntary control. Nevertheless, many who accept the belief/acceptance distinction hold that there are some norms governing acceptance, so that they might be criticizable. Also, it may be that what Bob does in the above cases *is* what some people mean by the belief/acceptance distinction. If what people mean by acceptance who respond to the problem of divine hiddenness is something like what Bob does in my examples, then this solution is not much different from theirs. However, it's not clear if that is what people mean by *acceptance*, and I have yet to see examples like these counterexamples in the literature.

¹³ Thanks to an anonymous referee for bringing up these examples.

¹⁴ Thanks to Sarah Gerkenmeyer for this example.

¹⁵ I am grateful to Richard Chappell for pressing me on this point.

¹⁶ And even if we grant that HS-BELIEF is better than HS-SUSPENSION it may be that the enough of the value of a personal relationship is present in HS-SUSPENSION cases that God might allow for the possibility of some of them, if allowing for their possibility, enabled some other goods to result.

¹⁷ Wielenberg. 2005. p.116

¹⁸ Wielenberg. 2005. 116.

¹⁹ Wielenberg. (2005). 119.

²⁰ Wielenberg. (2005). 120.

²¹ Wielenberg. P.164

²² Wielenberg. P.120

²³ It should be noted that the point of Wielenberg's criticized here is not essential to Wielenberg's project. His point is but a small aside in a thorough and successful defense of naturalism from ethical objections.

²⁴ This even comports well with what might be thought to be part of the Christian World view.

This comports well with Christian thought. Suppose God actually wants us to each confront the real possibility of our own eternal non-existence. Every time we make a sacrifice for God there will always be that nagging possibility that all is for naught. God wants there to be a real, salient, epistemic possibility that naturalism is true.

Divine hiddenness makes it possible for Christian theists to become something like Wielenberg's naturalistic hero, and it seems like being that kind of hero, is only possible if naturalism is a real, salient possibility. Christians can only get what their heart desires by in some sense not directly seeking it. We must lose our life before we gain it.

²⁵Murray (1993)

²⁶Swinburne (1998)

²⁷McKim (1990)

²⁸ Schellenberg pp.294

²⁹Thanks to an anonymous referee for making this point.

³⁰ Going into the many ways that Christians have attempted to resolve this is well beyond the scope of this paper. It is mentioned here simply to illustrate a potential response.

³¹See David Hunt (1995) See also Tom Morris and Ronald Feenstra's essays in Feenstra (1990) and Cullison (2006)

³² Also, notice that if what was said about the hallucination cases is plausible, and that there is something better about love in the absence of guarantees of the existence of the beloved, then something like the incarnation where Jesus is temporarily ignorant may be required for God the father and Jesus to exemplify that love. Furthermore, if you thought there was something better about the loving relationship *with belief* and something better about the relationship *without belief* then you get an indirect argument for a Triune God. Assuming it is good for God to be in a loving personal relationship with a deity, then both kinds of relationships would be valuable. To have both kinds of relationships with a deity, God the Father would need two other deities, one who went through a kind of cognitive ignorance and one that did not. At a minimum two divine persons, one of which temporarily goes through that kind of cognitive ignorance. That would be a less orthodox version of Christianity, but something close to the Christian picture about God seems to have some weak degree of support here.

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