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# Divine Hiddenness and the Challenge of Inculpable Nonbelief

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DIVINE HIDDENNESS AND THE CHALLENGE OF INCULPABLE NONBELIEF

DIVINE HIDDENNESS AND THE CHALLENGE OF INCULPABLE NONBELIEF

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

By

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## Abstract

Divine hiddenness is the idea that God is in some sense hidden or obscure. This dissertation responds to J.L. Schellenberg's argument, based on divine hiddenness and human reason, against the existence of God. Schellenberg argues that if a perfectly loving God exists, we would not expect to find such widespread nonbelief in God's existence. Given the amount of reasonable nonbelief in the world, Schellenberg argues that an agnostic ought to conclude that God does not exist rather than conclude that God is hidden. Schellenberg's argument has three major premises: (1) If there is a God, he is perfectly loving; (2) If a perfectly loving God exists, reasonable nonbelief does not occur; (3) Reasonable nonbelief occurs. I provide a theistic response to the argument from divine hiddenness in an attempt to offer the agnostic a reasonable reply that prevents an atheistic conclusion. In order to defeat the *prima facie* evidence for Schellenberg's argument, I first question the amount of reasonable nonbelief in an effort to reduce the evidential force of Schellenberg's third premise. This is followed by a consideration of possible defenses to challenge the second premise that if a perfectly loving God exists, reasonable nonbelief does not occur. Free-will defenses are considered, but I conclude that they are not sufficient as a response to the challenge that Schellenberg has developed. Instead, I argue that skeptical theism is a defense which can be successful in preventing an agnostic from being necessarily led, epistemically, to conclude that God does not exist. Finally, I develop a second defense motivated by concepts from Paul K. Moser that I take to be the most promising response to Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness. By casting the evidence for God in a new context, I conclude that the challenge that Schellenberg has developed can be overcome by providing a defense which shows that God, motivated by divine love, may in some sense be hidden so as to allow reasonable nonbelief to occur at least for a time.

This dissertation is approved for recommendation  
to the Graduate Council.

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**Dedication**

For my wife, Aleshia, who is a blessing and an everyday reminder of God's love for me.

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## Introduction

### The Argument

Divine hiddenness is the idea that deity, or God, is in some sense hidden or obscured. J. L. Schellenberg's 1993 book, Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason, develops an argument against the existence of God by claiming that divine hiddenness is a problem for theistic belief. If God is perfectly loving and wants a personal relationship with humans, then we would expect more of humanity to believe in God. Operating from the assumption that belief is involuntary, God would need to offer evidence sufficient for belief. Schellenberg argues that nonbelief in the existence of God results from lack of evidence. The widespread nonbelief in God across the world suggests that there is a lack of evidence for the existence of God. Rather than conclude that God is hidden, Schellenberg concludes that we should instead question whether such a God exists at all. Schellenberg is motivated to make such an argument because he claims the concept of divine love entails that perfect divine love would not allow God to remain hidden, and therefore, if there is a God, there would be evidence sufficient to prevent reasonable nonbelief. The three premises of Schellenberg's argument are as follows:

- (1) If there is a God, he is perfectly loving.
- (2) If a perfectly loving God exists, reasonable nonbelief does not occur.
- (3) Reasonable nonbelief occurs.

Another version of the argument from divine hiddenness is in the form of an analogy. Consider the relationship between a loving mother and child. The loving mother will be present to the child in whatever ways she can to reassure the child of her love. If the child were lost in the woods the mother would come looking for the child if at all within her ability. If the child were calling out for his mother she would answer unless something beyond her power prevented her from being able to do so. Now apply this to a perfectly loving God, who would not be limited in any way or resources, and we can see

that nothing would prevent God from responding to the calls of humankind. However, there are many who may cry out to God but receive no answer.

### **Responses**

There are common theistic responses to attempt to explain the hiddenness of God. Robert McKim provides a helpful taxonomy: human defectiveness theories, divine transcendence theories, and appropriateness theories (1990, 145-46). Human **defectiveness** theories have a common characteristic in stressing that it is not so much a problem with God being hidden, but instead something at fault in ourselves which prevents us from properly deciphering the evidence for God. Divine **transcendence** theories are those which stress that God is a being so beyond our understanding that we are not in a position to understand much regarding divine hiddenness. **Appropriateness** theories argue that God's hiddenness is appropriate because it makes a choice to believe in Him possible, promotes freedom of choices, or allows some other such good which explains why God is hidden from us.

Given the interest that Schellenberg has generated in response to the argument from divine hiddenness, the topic has taken on new life and is relevant to both theists and non-theists. The main question I wish to address is this: What is the best way for the theist to respond to the argument from divine hiddenness? To answer the question we must: (1) clarify the argument, (2) examine the different solutions offered in the literature, (3) decide which approach is most viable in answering the argument from divine hiddenness, and (4) develop a defense to respond to Schellenberg's argument. Secondly, I wish to challenge Schellenberg's conclusion that an agnostic faced with the argument from divine hiddenness should actually be led towards atheism. Instead the agnostic, who is an agnostic because of the argument from divine hiddenness, still has a choice between agnosticism, theism, and atheism and is therefore not necessarily led, epistemically, to atheism because of the argument from divine hiddenness.

## A Look Ahead

Chapter 1 will examine in more detail the argument that Schellenberg has made from divine hiddenness. More will be said regarding the premises of the argument and the argument from analogy, including more recent developments in Schellenberg's argument. Chapter 1 will also establish the parameters of the responses as well as point out the connections between the argument from divine hiddenness and the argument from evil. The argument from evil and the argument from divine hiddenness parallel one another in that many of the responses to the argument from evil can be applied with the appropriate changes to the argument from divine hiddenness. Although these arguments can be held independently they are related in many ways. Chapter 1 will also introduce in more detail the responses made to the argument that will be explored in the course of this dissertation.

Chapter 2 will challenge premise (3) of Schellenberg's argument: *Reasonable nonbelief occurs*. Although this premise is often taken to be clearly true, I will challenge the quick acceptance of premise (3). This chapter will show that, rather than a problem with the evidence, there may be a problem with us perceiving the evidence. This is a defectiveness response to the argument from divine hiddenness because it claims that the problem lies with us rather than with God. Due to the lack of attention that this response receives it will be worthwhile to explore its viability and should help clarify Schellenberg's argument. Regardless of the outcome, I will ultimately grant Schellenberg the premise for the sake of argument.

Chapter 3 will challenge premise (2) of Schellenberg's argument: *If a perfectly loving God exists, reasonable nonbelief does not occur*. I will challenge premise (2) by examining a common approach to the argument from divine hiddenness found in the literature – defenses and theodicies. Defenses and theodicies offer explanations to defend God's existence with the existence of evil. Defenses and theodicies can be applied to the argument from divine hiddenness by offering reasons why a perfectly loving God would allow reasonable nonbelief to occur. Two of the most common defenses that will be explored are free-will defenses and John Hick's "soul-making" theodicy. A free-will defense argues that

God remains hidden to preserve human free will, while the soul-making theodicy argues that the hiddenness of God allows humans to develop their souls in a way that would not be possible if God were readily apparent.

Chapter 4 will explore the possibility of skeptical theism as a defense to Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness. Skeptical theism is a limited skepticism arguing that if God exists, we should be skeptical as to our ability to make all-things-considered claims about what God would or would not do given our limited cognitive abilities. Should we expect to understand the hiddenness of God fully? If we try very hard to explain the hiddenness of God and come up short does this mean that no explanation exists? This is an argument from a broader principle that if we search for something and cannot find it, then it must not exist. Or put more succinctly, an absence of evidence is evidence of absence. Is this principle correct? These and other related issues will be discussed. I will conclude that skeptical theism is a viable defense to Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness.

Despite my appeal to skeptical theism, chapter 5 will develop another defense which reinterprets the question in a different context than originally posed by Schellenberg. This defense questions the type of evidence we should expect from a perfectly loving God. This response is motivated by Paul K. Moser's books, The Elusive God and The Evidence for God. Moser wants to shift the focus from humans as spectators, which places the sole responsibility on God for our knowledge, to a focus on humans having responsibility to be in a position to receive "purposively available" evidence for God. Moser's response will be analyzed in more detail and I will use it to springboard into a development of a broader defense which can be used to address Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness.

The Appendix is a survey of Judeo-Christian scripture as it relates to the argument from divine hiddenness. This appendix will be informative for those who are interested in what Judeo-Christian scripture may be able to suggest in understanding divine hiddenness. In Judeo-Christian scripture there



are accounts of familiarity and relationships between God and humans, yet there are also themes of hiddenness that are found. For those inclined to accept or study Scripture, such themes will help inform expectations regarding divinity as it relates to the argument from divine hiddenness, and should further motivate a questioning and challenging of Schellenberg's argument.

## Chapter 1: The Argument from Divine Hiddenness

### Introduction

J. L. Schellenberg's 1993 book, Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason, has ignited a renewed interest in the topic of divine hiddenness. Schellenberg argues that divine hiddenness is a problem for theistic belief and has developed a challenge posed by such hiddenness. If God is all-loving and wants a personal relationship with humankind, then we would expect widespread belief in the existence of God. However, this is not the case given the amount of disbelief and nonbelief in the world. But if God is all-loving he would provide evidence sufficient for belief and thus we should expect God's existence to be more obvious. Instead of suggesting that God is hidden, Schellenberg argues that a lack of evidence for theism should lead us to question whether such a God actually exists.

In Schellenberg's introduction he clarifies that his intent is not to defend atheism but rather to show that there is an argument from hiddenness which deserves more attention. The argument which he develops is a challenge for the theist to find a solution to the argument from hiddenness since he has yet to encounter any available counter-arguments that are successful (12-13). It is the goal of this dissertation to understand the argument as developed by Schellenberg, and to examine possible replies to challenge Schellenberg's claim that the hiddenness of God should lead an agnostic towards an atheistic conclusion. To begin this process I will in this chapter draw on Schellenberg's work to examine the main issues involved in the argument from divine hiddenness and lay out the premises of the argument as well as the logical implications. In order to address the question we need to define the major terms and explore in what ways it is in conflict with theistic belief. The core thoughts that motivate Schellenberg's argument center on the notion of divine love and "reasonable nonbelief." I will then offers ways in which to challenge his argument and highlight the approaches that will be developed in the coming chapters.

### **Schellenberg's Three Premises**

It is worth noting several assumptions that Schellenberg makes explicit before forging into the three premises of his argument. First, Schellenberg assumes that belief is involuntary in that we cannot merely choose what we want to believe at a moment's notice. Second, humans have libertarian free will, that is, the ability to act intentionally without being fully determined and thus able to choose freely. Third, he assumes that the idea of God includes God being unsurpassably great which would include attributes such as omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence. To be unsurpassably great, as many theists affirm, includes these attributes as well as being an ultimate and personal being. Fourth, going along with this is the assumption that the claim "God exists" is coherent and therefore can be made sense of in some way. All these Schellenberg assumes given that most contemporary philosophers and theists would hold these assumptions as well. Furthermore, Schellenberg assumes that, based on the continual debates, deadlocks and unresolved matters in the writing of philosophy of religion, the relevant evidence does not clearly favor theism or the denial of theism. Sixth, he assumes that it is coherent to suppose humans survive their death. Although this may be controversial, Schellenberg again assumes it for the sake of argument since it is accepted by many of those that will be interested in the argument (9-12). With these assumptions now laid out let us proceed to the three premises of Schellenberg's argument.

### **If there is a God, he is perfectly loving**

The first premise of Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness is: *If there is a God, he is perfectly loving*. This again is part of the assumption that if God is unsurpassable, then God is perfectly loving. This premise will not be challenged since it is assumed by most theists to be part of the traditional concept of God. Also, throughout this dissertation I will be considering the concept of God found in Judeo-Christian tradition and scripture as this is the most common conception of God in Western thinking. This premise is also key to Schellenberg's argument since the argument is a conceptual argument motivated by the concept of divine love. Therefore, in agreement with

Schellenberg, I will assume that unsurpassability implies unsurpassable love. This is not to say that there are not other views which deny this claim. The Stoic view, for example, is one that denies that unsurpassable greatness implies unsurpassable love since “a divine sage,” free from potentially upsetting emotions, “would not possess the sort of attachment and passion characteristic of the love exhibited by parents for their children” (Howard-Snyder 2006, 2). But again, using the traditional concept of God found in Judeo-Christian tradition, we will assume that if God is unsurpassably great, then God’s *love* would be unsurpassably great. Given Schellenberg’s first premise, we can ask what the outcome would be of a God that is perfectly loving. Based on reflections of divine love, we can proceed to ask what kind of evidence God would provide for His existence, or “what hiddenness related facts would be absent from the world if such love were present in it” (Schellenberg 1993, viii). This leads us to Schellenberg’s second premise.

**If a perfectly loving God exists, reasonable nonbelief does not occur**

Schellenberg’s second premise is: *If a perfectly loving God exists, reasonable nonbelief does not occur*. What drives Schellenberg’s argument is his deeper claim “about the connection between love and openness to relationship” (1993, viii). Schellenberg argues that given the concept of divine love, such a love would ensure that God would provide evidence sufficient for belief so that no one who is searching for God would lack the evidence needed to have belief in God’s existence. The root of Schellenberg’s claim is that given a perfectly loving God, “we might expect God’s *existence* to be more obvious” (4). The reason for such a claim is that a perfectly loving God would seek an explicit and reciprocal relationship with humans – “involving not only such things as Divine guidance, support, and forgiveness, but also human trust, obedience, and worship” (18).

An analogy can be made with the best of human love – as humans we express our love by seeking out a reciprocal relationship that involves providing the best resources we have available and a giving of ourselves to caring for the other person. In the same way, and to a much greater extent,

wouldn't a perfectly loving God seek a relationship with humankind and provide the opportunities in order to develop that relationship? And given that belief is involuntary, wouldn't a perfectly loving God provide adequate evidence necessary for humans to develop such a belief in God? If God has created us with "the cognitive and affective equipment required to hold religious beliefs and exhibit such attitudes as trust, gratefulness, obedience, and worship," wouldn't God seek to be personally related to humankind and to help us actuate such a relationship (24)?

It is at this point that an important qualification needs to be made: a personal relationship requires the participation of two parties. For a personal relationship to be possible both parties must be involved in the relationship: "God may wish to be personally related to me, but if I choose not to respond to his overtures, personal relations will not exist between us" (27). God, in being perfectly loving, would also respect the freedom and autonomy of the beloved. This respect for freedom could go to the extent that God would allow humans to ignore and tune out such calls for a relationship and thus place themselves in a position of no longer being receptive to God's attempts at relationship building. Schellenberg writes, "Such resistance of God would, of course, be culpable, for it would involve shutting out one whom we had seen to be our creator, and perfectly good, as well as the culpable activity of self-deception," and this exercise of freedom which results in our turning away from such a relationship with God, would still be permitted by God out of God's respect for our freedom (27-28). Thus it is possible for humans to have culpable, or blameworthy, nonbelief in God by rejecting God's advances. But in the absence of such culpable actions of humans, God would bring it about that humans are in the position to have a personal relationship with God due to God's being perfectly loving. As a result, reasonable nonbelief would not occur.

The question then becomes whether humans can be in a position such that humans have evidence sufficient for belief in God. Schellenberg argues that it is possible for humans to be in a strong epistemic situation in relation to God. That is, there is a possible world in which there is no inculpable

nonbelief because the evidence for God is sufficient for all humans to believe in the existence of God. He thinks this is possible since humans do not need certainty in order to be beyond reasonable nonbelief. In the absence of any culpable resistance on the human side of the relationship there only needs to be some degree of belief in God (45). Schellenberg makes the case that religious experience could make the epistemic contribution needed in order for individuals to have evidence to prevent reasonable nonbelief. Religious experience would provide a personal experience in which God is *present to me* in experience and this kind of evidence would be available generally and at all times and is perhaps more likely to elicit a personal response to God (48). This kind of religious experience can be non-sensory, produce the belief that God is present, and can take particular forms such as a “*forgiving, comforting, or guiding presence of God*” – all accomplished in way that does not threaten to overwhelm human freedom (49). And so we arrive at Schellenberg’s second premise that if God is perfectly loving, reasonable nonbelief does not occur – with “reasonable” being another word for “inculpable.” Or put more precisely:

*P2'* If God exists and is perfectly loving, then for any human subject *S* and time *t*, if *S* is at *t* capable of relating personally to God, *S* at *t* believes that *G* [God exists] on the basis of evidence that renders *G* probable, except insofar as *S* is culpably in a contrary position at *t*. (38)

Schellenberg thinks it is a conceptual truth that the concept of divine love entails that there is no possibility for reasonable nonbelief.

### **Reasonable nonbelief occurs**

Now we arrive at Schellenberg’s third premise: *Reasonable nonbelief occurs*. Schellenberg suggests that there are those who have never entertained the proposition: “God exists.” Schellenberg has in mind individuals from non-Western cultures who have never considered the proposition, or those from both Western and non-Western backgrounds who may be familiar with the concept of God but

have never considered the proposition with any effort (58). Those who have given no serious consideration to such a proposition are classified as *unreflective nonbelievers*. On the other hand, there are many that have considered such a premise and have remained agnostic after examining evidence. These we may call *reflective nonbelievers*. And so, an empirical fact of the world is that nonbelief occurs. What then for reasonable? Schellenberg defines reasonable nonbelief as “exemplified by any instance of failure to believe in the existence of God that is not the result of culpable actions or omissions on the part of the subject” (59). To defend this claim Schellenberg will focus the argument by considering doubt – a type of nonbelief – and show that it can be inculpable (or reasonable). The reason he considers doubt is to show that someone who is considering the evidence for God can still end up in a state of inculpable nonbelief which would be in conflict with the concept of a perfectly loving God. It would seem that if a person were to search for God, then God would at least provide evidence sufficient for belief and thus prevent the possibility of reflective nonbelievers. If Schellenberg can establish a scenario in which a reflective nonbeliever ends in a state of doubt about the existence of God, then he has established the possibility of inculpable nonbelief.

In Schellenberg’s later book, *The Wisdom to Doubt*, he uses examples of other nonresistant nonbelief to further argue his case. Consider a former believer who wants to maintain his belief in God but because of awareness of reasons, arguments, or experiences, has his theistic belief undercut and ultimately gives up on his belief in God, even though the individual has a sense of loss and may still wish to believe. Other forms of nonbelief that Schellenberg lists are converts to nontheistic religion, isolated nontheists and lifelong seekers. Such forms of nonbelief certainly exist and Schellenberg argues that these types of nonbelief can all be inculpable, or reasonable, nonbelief. Given such forms of nonbelief, Schellenberg thinks the most challenging circumstance for theism to explain is the case of the lifelong seeker. A lifelong seeker does not start out in a relationship with God and may not specifically be in search of God, but is still seeking to find purpose and is open to a relationship with God but ultimately

does not find God. Schellenberg claims that the existence of a perfectly loving God is a sufficient condition for their not being any lifelong seekers who never find God: “Wouldn’t the twists and turns of their investigation somewhere, somehow, bring them into contact with God – a God whose search for them is as earnest as their own” (22)? Thus the theist must address how such nonbelief can exist in the world – particularly nonbelief that is inculpable.

### **Implications of Schellenberg’s three premises**

Now that Schellenberg’s premises have been introduced we can see how divine hiddenness has been developed into a challenge for theistic belief because of the implications of Schellenberg’s three premises:

A perfectly loving God would desire a reciprocal personal relationship always to obtain between himself and every human being capable of it. But a logically necessary condition of such Divine-human reciprocity is human belief in Divine existence. Hence a perfectly loving God would have reason to ensure that everyone capable of such belief (or at any rate, everyone capable who was not disposed to resist it) was in possession of evidence sufficient to bring it about that such belief was formed. But the evidence actually available is not of this sort. The most obvious indication that it is not is that inculpable – or, reasonable, nonbelief actually occurs. Hence we can argue from the weakness of theistic evidence, or more specifically, from the reasonableness of nonbelief, to the nonexistence of a perfectly loving God. But God, if he exists, is perfectly loving. Hence we can argue from the reasonableness of nonbelief to the nonexistence of God. (1993, 2-3)

More formally the argument, *A*, proceeds as follows:

- (1) If there is a God, he is perfectly loving.
- (2) If a perfectly loving God exists, reasonable nonbelief does not occur.
- (3) Reasonable nonbelief occurs.

Thus (2) and (3) result in:

- (4) No perfectly loving God exists;

And (1) and (4) result in:

- (5) There is no God.



Schellenberg shows that this argument has no error of logic. Further, he takes (1) and (3) to be clearly true. Thus it all depends on (2) – “if it is true, A is sound” (84). And Schellenberg claims that based on the concept of divine love, there is *prima facie* evidence that (2) is true. Therefore in order to overcome the argument from divine hiddenness as presented by Schellenberg, we need an argument showing the plausibility of the denial of (2). This is the conclusion of the first part of Schellenberg’s book, Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason. The second part is focused on analyzing possible rebuttals – arguments of Pascal, Joseph Butler, Kierkegaard, and John Hick – which would undermine the *prima facie* evidence for (2). His conclusion is that no available arguments overcome such evidence for (2), and therefore, we are left with the powerful consequence of the argument – that the argument from divine hiddenness supports grounds for atheism.

With this simple form of the argument before us, my general approach will be as follows: I argue that Schellenberg’s argument is valid but not sound. I agree with Schellenberg that (1) is clearly true. However, I do not as easily accept the truth of (3). I will challenge this premise by arguing that (3) is not as “clearly true” as Schellenberg makes it out to be. For the sake of argument I will ultimately accept (3) as true. This leaves me with the same common approach which is found in the literature of challenging (2). I will look at both defenses and skeptical theism as a response to (2) to argue that the premise does not have as much *prima facie* evidence for it as Schellenberg thinks, and therefore, the argument is yet to be shown as sound. Finally, I will reconsider the hiddenness of God from a different perspective as motivated by Paul K. Moser in his books, The Elusive God and The Evidence for God, to show that Schellenberg’s argument does not necessarily epistemically lead to atheism for the nonbeliever.

A more recent and robust formulation of the argument has been discussed by Imran Aijaz and Markus Weidler. With help from Schellenberg through personal correspondence they have put the argument in standard form with revisions since the original argument as presented in Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason:

P1. If there is a perfectly loving God, all creatures capable of explicit and positively meaningful relationship with God who have not freely shut themselves off from God are in a position to participate in such a relationship – i.e. able to do so just by trying.

P2. No one can be in a position to participate in such a relationship without believing that God exists.

C1. If there is a perfectly loving God, all creatures capable of explicit and positively meaningful relationship with God who have not freely shut themselves off from God believe that God exists (from P1 and P2).

P3. It is not the case that all creatures capable of explicit and positively meaningful relationship with God who have not freely shut themselves off from God believe that God exists: there is non-resistant nonbelief; 'God is hidden'.

C2. It is not the case that there is a perfectly loving God (from C1 and P3).

P4. If God exists, God is perfectly loving.

C3. It is not the case that God exists (from C2 and P4).

Aijaz and Weidler break the argument down into three sub-arguments: the '*expectations*' sub-argument (P1, P2, and C1), the '*hiddenness*' sub-argument (the consequent of C1 is denied in P3 resulting in C2), and the '*atheistic*' sub-argument (the conjunction of C2 and P4 gives us C3). What is helpful about this formulation of the argument is it highlights the important role that the '*expectations*' sub-argument plays in setting up the rest of the argument to follow. It is "a crucial preliminary in the hiddenness argument, for it describes a state of affairs that one would *expect* to obtain given the existence of a perfectly loving God" (5). Schellenberg is using the expectations of his concept of divine love to be the driving force of the hiddenness argument. These expectations have also been expressed through the use of analogies and it is to the analogy form of the hiddenness argument to which I will now turn.

### **The Hiddenness Argument from Analogy**

Schellenberg develops the hiddenness argument from analogy in 2004's, "Divine Hiddenness Justifies Atheism." He uses the analogy of a child alone in the woods who is calling for his loving mother, but there is no reply. There are a couple renditions of this analogy and one of the more extreme versions is this:

You're still a small child, and an amnesiac, but this time you're in the middle of a vast rain forest, dripping with dangers of various kinds. You've been stuck there for days, trying to figure out who you are and where you came from. You don't remember having a mother who accompanied you into this jungle, but in your moments of deepest pain and misery you call for her anyway: "MOOOOMMMMM!" Over and over again. For days and days... the last time when a jaguar comes at you out of nowhere...but with no response. What should you think in this situation? In your dying moments, what should cross your mind? Would the thought that you have a mother who cares about you and hears your cry and *could* come to you but chooses *not* to even make it onto the list? (31-32)

The first step in the argument from analogy is to show that a loving mother would not remain hidden from her child if she could help it because of reasons *x*, *y*, and *z*. The second step is to show that there are circumstances that are similar in the real world of divine hiddenness as those expressed in the analogy. The third step is then to argue that what was said about the mother's love for her child would apply to God's love for humankind: "In other words, the Analogy Argument in conjunction with what we know about divine resourcefulness gives us a powerful reason to say that, if God exists, this form of divine hiddenness does not occur. But it does occur. Therefore, we have a powerful reason to believe that God does not exist" (2004, 34).

Paul Moser replies that the analogy argument fails on two counts: first, there is no support for a future-referring assumption that says that a divine answer is never forthcoming to some seekers; and second, there is no support for an assumption that a loving God would "seek to provide a quick response" (2004, 57). The point that is commonly made by Moser and other writers is that there is nothing inconsistent with divine love and the possibility of inculpable nonbelief for a time. Specifically in reference to expectations of the divine in the analogy argument, Howard-Snyder and Moser point out in the introduction to Divine Hiddenness that "one's operative analogies can make a big difference in what one expects of a perfectly loving being" (8). Writers have drawn different lessons about divine love from analogies that have different emphases. There are those like Schellenberg who use the analogy of a parent and a child in distress to emphasize that God would do whatever it takes to prevent inculpable nonbelief. Others will use the analogy of adult love in which the lover wants the reciprocation of love to

be accompanied by certain attitudes, motivations, and behaviors. Various analogies that emphasize such aspects are often used in conjunction with other defenses to overcome the problem of inculpable nonbelief by arguing that God could have various reasons for allowing inculpable nonbelief so as to allow the relationship to develop in an appropriate way.

Aijaz and Weidler argue that there are challenges available to Schellenberg's jungle analogy argument which can be deduced from William Hubert Vanstone's book, Love's Endeavor, Love's Expense, which Schellenberg quotes in Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason:

As W. H. Vanstone puts it, "the authenticity of love must imply a totality of giving – that which we call the giving of self or self-giving. The self is the totality of what a man has and is: and it is no less than this that is offered or made available in love." Therefore, if I am to act toward you with perfect benevolence, I must, it seems, seek personal relations with you. (18)

Aijaz and Weidler argue that Vanstone's idea of 'total self-giving' is actually in conflict with Schellenberg's conclusion. Vanstone interprets self-giving as a total self-emptying. In God's total self-giving, God is vulnerable in waiting for a response from creation:

If God is love, and if the universe is His creation, then for the being of the universe God is totally expended in precarious endeavour, of which the issue, as triumph or as tragedy, has passed from His hands. For that issue, as triumphant or tragic, God waits upon the response of His creation. He waits as the artist or as the lover waits, having given all. (74)

This line of approach potentially undercuts God's attributes of omnipotence and omniscience and perhaps may fall out of the mainstream concept of God, but it is worth noting that such a conception does offer the possibility of God actually waiting for a response from creation. Regardless of agreement with Vanstone's concept of God it does allow us to see the possibility of another approach to recognition and relationship with God. Instead of Schellenberg's notion of recognition "which mainly relies on the idea of a basic, revelatory encounter with the personal divine," we may find another way of recognition through "indirect, temporally patterned experiences of God's love through His creative *works*" (Aijaz and Weidler 16). To this Schellenberg replies that the total self-giving of God would make

the argument from hiddenness all the greater, and that this different way of recognition of God is just a different form of revelation rather than the absence of revelation (2008, 138).

The argument from analogy may help develop our considerations of expectations of divine love, but it does not resolve the conflict since there is disagreement over what analogy best represents divine love. Analogies are helpful but ultimately are only analogies, and therefore, the argument from analogy is, generally, less convincing. For this reason, while addressing the argument from analogy, I plan to focus on the conceptual argument and the dominant answers given in response. Of course, the argument from analogy and the conceptual argument overlap and so one should not be surprised to see analogies continue to play a role in the conceptual argument to some extent.

### **Challenging the argument from divine hiddenness**

#### **Parameters of the responses**

It is important at the beginning to clarify two parameters of the responses that I will be considering. First, I am considering the argument from divine hiddenness as it relates to traditional Western theism. Therefore, any proposed solution to the argument from divine hiddenness that does not keep intact the traditional attributes of God – omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence – will not be considered in the course of this dissertation. This is the same conception that Schellenberg uses since this is the traditional view of God that many western theists accept.

The second parameter is that I will not be considering responses which argue that implicit belief in God is all that is required rather than explicit belief in God. While an argument can be made that despite the lack of explicit belief in God humans can still begin a relationship with God, I will argue, along with Schellenberg, that in order for an explicit and positively meaningful relationship to exist between a human and God, explicit belief that God exists, or an openness to God, must also be included.

Schellenberg writes in Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason:

[A] personal relationship with God entails belief in Divine existence, that is, entails a disposition to “feel it true” that God exists. This claim seems obviously true. For I

cannot love God, be grateful to God, or contemplate God's goodness unless I believe that there *is* a God. [...] It is important to note that my point here is a logical one. There is something logically amiss in the suggestion that I could display attitudes and perform actions of the sort in question without being disposed to feel it true that God exists. It is not as though someone who cannot be grateful to God or praise God because she does not believe there is a God could do so if only she *tried* a little harder. Such attitudes and actions are not just contingently difficult but *logically impossible* for one who does not believe that God exists. (30)

This is not to say that strong belief is necessary since Schellenberg clearly states that this is not needed for a relationship: "Even a weak belief that God exists is compatible with gratefulness, love toward God [...] for even a weak belief involves a disposition to feel it true that [God exists]" (32).

Even if there is a possibility of an explicit and reciprocal relationship with God without believing that there is a God, it would be difficult to claim that it is 'positively meaningful' if the person does not regard it to be true that there is a God. Aijaz and Weidler argue this is false: "all that is required is some sort of (positive) *attitude* towards the proposition 'God exists,'" and this attitude need not be doxastic (19). We can have *hope* or *accept* that God exists and this is enough for a commitment to God. Thus the reasonable non-believer can choose to accept the existence of God and therefore begin a relationship with God (21). However, Schellenberg makes it clear that the kind of relationship he has in mind "entails a *conscious* recognition of each party by the other" (2008, 138). Belief is necessary for a relationship with God because "even if *we* might be satisfied under certain circumstances with nonbelieving faith that God exists, nothing has been presented to show that a *perfectly loving God* would rest content with it" (139).

In the literature surrounding divine hiddenness there are a number of discussions which seek to develop the concept of relationship in light of concepts such as implicit belief or acceptance rather than belief. Doing so takes some of the bite out of the argument from divine hiddenness by extending the range of what is accepted as a relationship with God, and therefore, making the troubling problem cases smaller or disappear altogether. But for our purposes, I want to grant Schellenberg most of what he intends at face value – that relationship with divinity is explicit and explicitly meaningful. As

Schellenberg writes, “explicit relationship far outshines implicit” (2007b, 201). This is not to say that this results in highly confident beliefs at *all* times. There can be value in struggling with belief, and times of doubt, which can be accommodated for while still being in a relationship with God.

### **Relationship to the argument from evil**

Another important introductory understanding needed is the relationship between the argument from divine hiddenness and the argument from evil. The argument from divine hiddenness is related to the argument from evil and can even be construed as a special instance of the argument from evil. That is to say, given the concept of divine love, one could expect inculpable nonbelief to not occur. However, this kind of evil, inculpable nonbelief, does occur and is therefore evidence against the existence of a perfectly loving God. Because of the close relationship between the argument from evil and the argument from divine hiddenness, it is important to consider if there are any lessons that can be drawn from the literature on the argument from evil that may serve as guideposts on the direction we should take a rebuttal to the argument from divine hiddenness. However, it should also be mentioned that despite the fact that the argument from divine hiddenness can be considered a special instance of the problem of evil, it is possible for the problems to be held independent of one another. As Howard-Snyder points out, imagine a society similar to ours but in which there is no evil or suffering. While the problem of evil could not arise in such a scenario there could still be some who believe there is a God while others argue that there is not a God since there is inculpable nonbelief (2006, 1). This distinction can be held unless inculpable nonbelief is considered as a form of suffering or evil.

Regardless of the distinction, there are many intersections between the argument from evil and the argument from divine hiddenness. For example, the presence of evil in the world is one which makes the hiddenness of God all the more relevant. Why would a perfectly loving God, if there exists such a God, remain hidden in the face of such adversity? If God wants humans to have a relationship with him, why isn't he there when he is needed the most? Despite these kinds of questions,

Schellenberg notes that “it is not the trauma of a certain kind of anguished doubt or unrequited seeking for God that leads to the argument – indeed this has no role in [the] argument” (1993, 7). This would confound the hiddenness argument and the argument from evil. As already mentioned, Schellenberg wants to focus on his deeper claim regarding the concept of divine love and what that means for the openness of relationship. Nevertheless, inculpable nonbelief can be construed as a special instance of the problem of evil if inculpable nonbelief is in conflict, and as such a certain sort of evil or suffering, with what theists affirm about the nature of God.

The arguments further intersect in that the arguments from evil can be applied to the argument from divine hiddenness. Many of the arguments for divine hiddenness parallel those already made in regards to the argument from evil. The arguments from evil are commonly distinguished as either logical/deductive arguments from evil or evidential/inductive arguments from evil. Arguments from inculpable nonbelief can be formulated along the same lines. The way one responds to the argument from inculpable nonbelief can also parallel responses to the argument from evil. There are responses on one end of the spectrum that argue that the concept of perfect love used to get the argument off the ground needs revision – similar to revising what is to count as evil. And on the other end of the spectrum responses may be made which deny the “troubling phenomenon in question” – in the case of divine hiddenness, inculpable nonbelief, similar to the way that Augustine denied the real existence of evil (Howard-Snyder and Moser 5-6). The relationship between the argument from evil and the argument from divine hiddenness will be discussed further, particularly in chapter 3 as it relates to defenses and theodicies, and in chapter 4 when considering skeptical theism as a reply to the argument from divine hiddenness.

### **Common Approaches**

Now that the argument from divine hiddenness has been introduced, the general parameters of responses set, and the relationship to the argument from evil established, we are in a position to



describe some of the common approaches in challenging the argument from divine hiddenness. As mentioned in the introduction, I will follow the same general taxonomy used by McKim in classifying the common approaches into three groups: human defectiveness theories, divine transcendence theories, and appropriateness theories (1990, 145-46). Each chapter in this dissertation could be broadly classified under each type. Chapter 2 will examine a *defectiveness* theory with the possibility that it is humans which are flawed, and that any nonbelief in the existence of God is the fault of humans rather than God. Chapter 3 explores a type of *appropriateness* theory since it will respond with defenses and theodicies which claim the hiddenness in the world is appropriate so that humans can freely enter into a relationship with God. Chapter 4 will consider skeptical theism as a defense to the hiddenness argument, and therefore, while not formally a transcendence theory, could be loosely considered a *transcendence* theory since it argues that God is beyond our understanding to some extent, and thus we should remain skeptical of our ability to understand the reasons of God. The last chapter will be my attempt to respond to the hiddenness argument with a blend of all three kinds of theories that incorporates lessons learned from all the preceding approaches.

### **Questioning Premise (3)**

With the common approaches established, I will now introduce each of the chapters as a response to the argument from divine hiddenness. The second chapter will question Schellenberg's third premise: *Reasonable nonbelief occurs* (or as I prefer for clarification, inculpable nonbelief). To set up the chapter, and to further clarify Schellenberg's argument, it is important to understand what Schellenberg means by inculpable, or reasonable, nonbelief. Schellenberg argues that a belief is inculpable if there are no voluntary actions on the part of the believer which would make the belief culpable. In establishing this point Schellenberg looks to Richard Swinburne's account of epistemic rationality in which he breaks rationality into 5 subtypes. I will explain Swinburne's breakdown in the next chapter, but for introductory purposes I will say that Schellenberg accepts Swinburne's account of

epistemic culpability that a belief is culpable if it is irrational based on a particular subcategory of rationality. This irrationality is the result of negligence on the part of an individual that is a voluntary failure. Unrecognized neglect is thus inculpable. Schellenberg argues that there are many cases of nonbelief that are inculpable because there are many individuals who do not believe in the existence of God, through no fault of their own, since they are ignorant of any neglect on their own part.

Even though Schellenberg considers there to be many forms of inculpable nonbelief, he focuses on doubt in order to show that there are *reflective* individuals who still end up with nonbelief in regards to the existence of God. If he can establish such a case, this would show that such individuals are not making any voluntary failures and are doing their best to reflect on the existence of God, and yet they still end up in doubt, or more specifically, inculpable nonbelief. Schellenberg defines doubt as the following: “for all *S*, if *S* inculpably believes that epistemic parity obtains between *G* and not-*G*, then *S* is inculpably in doubt about *G*” (*G* being the premise ‘God exists’) (1993, 60). When given the evidence for or against a proposition, in this case the existence of God, Schellenberg considers epistemic parity to be when *S* “is not justified in holding either proposition to be more probably than its denial – that neither is [...] *epistemically preferable* to its denial” (65). Taking all this into account, Schellenberg offers the following:

*S* is inculpably in doubt about the truth of *G* if (1) *S* believes that epistemic parity obtains between *G* and not-*G*, and (2) *S* has not knowingly (self-deceptively or non-self-deceptively) neglected to submit this belief to adequate investigation. (64)

Schellenberg argues that such inculpable doubt is indeed possible. First, there are agnostics, those who hold parity of belief in regards to the existence of God. This does not necessarily mean that an agnostic believes that the evidence for the affirmation or negation of the premise is equally probable, but rather it could be that an agnostic holds that the probabilities of the evidence cannot be determined (65). In regards to deception of the adequacy of investigation, there are those who have thoroughly

investigated the issue, and further, wish to believe in the existence of God, and yet still hold epistemic parity. Given such a desire, Schellenberg thinks it is more likely that S would find a way of avoiding parity rather than of acquiring it. This, suggests Schellenberg, indicates a more general point that “if S desires a well-justified belief that *G*, or that not-*G*, he will arrive at a parity belief only *reluctantly* and, therefore, only if careful attention to the matter seems to him to leave him with no other option” (66).

In further support of inculpable nonbelief, Schellenberg points out that some contemporary theological and philosophical views affirm the existence of inculpable nonbelief, even inculpable *disbelief*. Many Christian thinkers allow for reasonable parity of belief, and some seem to hold parity of belief themselves (71). But how is this possible? Schellenberg believes there is a needed distinction between public and private evidence. Thus comments describing the world as “religiously ambiguous,” as John Hick does, are more an indication of the public evidence for the probability of *G*. In many cases there are personal experiences or religious experiences which ground one’s faith; this would be private evidence which renders *G* probable for *S*. Schellenberg suggests: “Although they consider epistemic parity to obtain at the public level, the private evidence available to them [...], perhaps in conjunction with the public evidence, seems to them to render *G* more probable than not-*G*, and thus, *all things considered*, they do *not* consider epistemic parity to obtain” (71-72). Thus one can believe *G*, while still holding that the public evidence for *G* or not-*G* is indeterminable.

However, there are Christian thinkers who, despite all this, argue that there *is* private evidence that is available to *all* humankind, and therefore, if there is nonbelief or disbelief in God’s existence, it is due to the sin of the nonbeliever. This is a Calvinist response in which doubt is never inculpable because it is the result of sin. John Calvin would hold that there is a *sensus divinitatus* – an innate, natural tendency in us that is inclined to believe in God. It is the result of human sin which suppresses such an innate awareness. This depends on an argument that there is sufficient evidence for belief in the existence of God (which is what Schellenberg is denying). This evidence can be through creation,

history, or one's natural inclination to believe. Nonbelief is the result of the sinfulness of nonbelievers which means it is not inculpable. Falling into this category would be someone like Jonathan Edwards, who argues that while the evidence is sufficient, there are those who lack, what he calls, true benevolence, and are therefore not blameless.

Schellenberg's third premise is often taken for granted, but I would like to give it further consideration and challenge Schellenberg's claim that premise (3) is clearly true. Our experience with seemingly sincere nonbelievers inclines us to accept that inculpable nonbelief does occur but more attention should be given to the possibility that it does not occur. Perhaps there is something culpably at fault with the nonbeliever in perceiving evidence for God, or maybe the nonbeliever has omitted something in their reasoning or search for God that results in being culpable. This brings up another discussion that will occur in the next chapter of questioning Schellenberg's definition of reasonable nonbelief. Schellenberg prefers "reasonable" to "inculpable" but I will argue that this provides the possibility of ambiguity to arise in the discussion of inculpable nonbelief since it is possible that there is reasonable belief which could at the same time be culpable belief. I will consider different distinctions of culpability to argue that reasonable nonbelief and inculpable nonbelief are not identical, and therefore to equate the two terms is mistaken. It is for this reason that I will be using the word "inculpable" to qualify nonbelief, rather than the word "reasonable" as used by Schellenberg, to account for this distinction.

McKim has some comments regarding human defectiveness theories that are helpful. He writes that "at first the appeal to human defectiveness for divine hiddenness is unappealing." This is because it insults the non-theist and it has an unfalsifiable air about it in the sense that if you lack an awareness of God that just shows that you are in a defective state (and thus insulting to anyone who does not believe in the existence of God). "But," he continues, "on closer inspection, it is more plausible: it contains no inconsistencies, is not clearly at odds with generally recognized and agreed upon facts, and indeed has

something reasonable about it. Perhaps part of the explanation of the hiddenness of God is to be found in this area” (1990, 156). These thoughts motivate a deeper consideration of inculpable nonbelief rather than a passing acceptance of the occurrence of inculpable nonbelief as obviously true. What is the purported nature of inculpable nonbelief, and is it reasonable to deny that it does exist? How are we to distinguish inculpable nonbelief from culpable nonbelief? These kinds of questions will motivate chapter 2 as I consider the viability of a defectiveness theory as an answer to the argument from divine hiddenness. If it is reasonable to deny inculpable nonbelief, then it may be the best response to Schellenberg’s argument from divine hiddenness.

There are of course difficulties on both sides regarding inculpable nonbelief. Those who argue against the occurrence of inculpable nonbelief must explain why so many lack belief in God, why they are responsible for it, and suggest why our intuition that inclines us to accept the possibility of inculpable nonbelief is wrong. On the other hand, those who argue for the occurrence of inculpable nonbelief have the challenge of showing why explanations for culpable nonbelief fail collectively as well as individually. Howard-Snyder and Moser write: “Here a distinctively epistemic problem for the proponent of the argument from hiddenness arises. Human beings are enormously complicated, and it is no easy task to tell whether any particular candidate for inculpable nonbelief possesses or fails to possess those motivations, attitudes, and dispositions that putatively explain their inculpable nonbelief” (10-11). While I am sympathetic to a defectiveness theory, I want to ultimately grant Schellenberg the premise that inculpable nonbelief does occur to further engage the problem. Regardless of the outcome of defectiveness theories, it is worthwhile to consider such an approach to see if there are any fruitful outcomes that will help alleviate, clarify, or contribute to the argument from divine hiddenness.

### **Questioning Premise (2)**

Chapter 3 will challenge and question premise (2): *If a perfectly loving God exists, reasonable nonbelief does not occur.* As Schellenberg points out, the soundness of the argument appears to rest on

premise (2), and therefore, I will focus on possible rebuttals to show that the denial of premise (2) is plausible. But what are the conditions to do so? Schellenberg argues: “(2) is false if and only if there is a state of affairs in the actual world which it would be logically impossible for God to bring about without permitting the occurrence of at least one instance of reasonable nonbelief, for the sake of which God would be willing to sacrifice the good of belief and all it entails” (1993, 85-86). In other words, Schellenberg thinks (2) is a conceptual truth. Therefore, to question premise (2) is to attempt to find a possible case in which God brought about a state of affairs in which he could not have avoided having at least one case of inculpable nonbelief, and this state of affairs was preferable to a state of affairs in which inculpable nonbelief is not instantiated. Chapter 3 will explore the possibility of questioning premise (2) by examining several prominent defenses and theodicies which claim that God would indeed allow, or perhaps must allow, inculpable nonbelief – even if just for a time. Those who deny premise (2) are faced with the challenge of denying Schellenberg’s conceptual analysis of divine love and providing reasons why a personal, unsurpassably loving God would keep himself hidden from humans and thus lovingly allow inculpable nonbelief.

Chapter 3 will begin by questioning Schellenberg’s concept of divine love, and will consider possible reasons why God would allow, even if just for a time, inculpable nonbelief. Howard-Snyder highlights some of the reasons that have been given in the literature:

God may prefer temporary nonbelief to belief accompanied by a negative response.  
 God might have different reasons for different individuals depending on factors.  
 God may have a combination of reasons which together explain inculpable nonbelief.  
 Everyone will eventually have evidence sufficient for belief, even if not in this life.  
 Evidence need not to include great wonders and signs, experiential awareness of God is enough. (2006, 5-6)

These, and other reasons, motivate the formulation of defenses and theodicies which try to show that Schellenberg’s concept of divine love, and thus premise (2), are mistaken. Defenses attempt to show that it is not inconsistent for a perfectly loving God to exist *and* for inculpable nonbelief to be instantiated. Defenses claim that, for all we know, it could be the case; theodicies go a step further to

provide probable or likely reasons, or explanations, as to why God would allow inculpable nonbelief to occur despite God's all-loving nature. The following is a list and descriptions of different types of theodicies that Howard-Snyder provides. *Presumption theodicies* argue that God's hiddenness avoids the possibility of individuals responding presumptuously and arrogantly rather than humbly. *Stimulus theodicies* suggest that God's hiddenness provides the stimulus needed for individuals to realize what a desperate state they are in without God. *Deception theodicies* claim that God's hiddenness prevents individuals from deceiving themselves into thinking that they know all religious truth and therefore would become complacent in their relationship to God. *Intellectual virtue theodicies* argue that God's hiddenness allows individuals to respond to God in ways that develop virtues by allowing humans to struggle with belief in God that brings about those virtues. *Diversity theodicies* suggest that God's hiddenness allows for religious diversity and variety which is its own sort of good. *Investigation theodicies* claim that God's hiddenness promotes the good of searching for knowledge which would not be possible if God were clearly evident (2006, 7). These are just some of the theodicies that have been offered in response to the argument from divine hiddenness. There are many arguments in the literature, with varying degrees of success, which can be applied to the argument from divine hiddenness to provide a case for why God would remain hidden from an inculpable nonbeliever.

Instead of surveying the possibilities, I will focus on the more prominent approaches found in the literature, which are, in my opinion, most seemingly to succeed as a response to the argument from divine hiddenness. These approaches are motivated by *free-will* and *soul-making* defenses and theodicies. First, I will consider Michael J. Murray's argument that if God were not hidden to the extent that he is, then humans would be coerced into believing in God. Since God wants a relationship that is freely entered into, God must allow humans to discover God in an appropriate way that still respects the free will of humans. Similarly, Peter van Inwagen argues that God should not remove all hiddenness as it would get in the way of God's plan of atonement or of bringing humans into a redemptive relationship

with God. If this is the case we should not expect signs and wonders confirming God's existence because, as van Inwagen argues, God not only wants humans to believe in his existence but also wants humans to come to have belief in an appropriate way which furthers God's goal of atonement.

Another kind of prominent response to the argument from divine hiddenness is motivated by John Hick's "soul-making" theodicy. Soul-making is the concept that we are in need of spiritual development and thus God created an environment in which we would have the opportunity for development or "soul-making." These opportunities for growth and development come about because of trials and difficulties. This need for humans to develop justifies the existence of divine hiddenness in the world. The main objection to these free-will and soul-making responses will be that it seems logically possible that God could still respect the free will of humans, as well as provide opportunities for soul-making and character development, all while being *less* hidden from human kind. In order to evaluate the success of these responses, and the challenge of the criticisms, I will also clarify what I take the relationship to be between evidence and belief, the concept of coercion, and the roles that miracles and religious experience play in belief.

### **Skeptical Theism**

But what if our attempts at denying (3), and denying (2), via free-will defenses and theodicies, both fail? Are we necessarily led to accept the conclusion that Schellenberg's argument stands and we should therefore be led to atheism? Chapter 4 will challenge Schellenberg's argument via skeptical theism. That is, given an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving God, we should be skeptical of our ability to be able to discover an answer to the argument from divine hiddenness given our limited cognitive abilities and position in relation to God. This criticism of the hiddenness argument will focus on the distinction between absence of evidence, and evidence of absence. Just because we cannot answer the question as to why God would choose to remain hidden, or provide the reasons justifying inculpable nonbelief, does not mean that we should conclude that there are no such reasons. Thus we are able to



challenge premise (2) from another angle by invoking skepticism of our ability to determine the reasons God would have in allowing inculpable nonbelief.

Skeptical theism has been developed as a response to the argument from evil but applies in similar ways to the argument from divine hiddenness. Both the argument from evil and the argument from divine hiddenness can, in many ways, be generalized to an argument that claims that if God exists, some feature of the world,  $x$ , would not occur. However  $x$  does occur, and therefore God does not exist. In the case of divine hiddenness, Schellenberg is claiming that if God exists, inculpable nonbelief would not occur. But inculpable nonbelief does occur, and therefore, God does not exist. Skeptical theism questions our ability to make all-things-considered claims such as, "If God exists, inculpable nonbelief would not occur." I will consider the possibility of skeptical theism as an objection against the *prima facie* evidence for Schellenberg's second premise that, if God is perfectly loving, inculpable nonbelief would not occur. That is to say, we ought to be skeptical of the claim that God would always make himself known, at all times, to all those capable of belief in God, since it is an all-things-considered claim about what God would do. In considering the actions of an unsurpassably great God, our ability to make a determination on that matter is too limited.

In the course of chapter 4, I will discuss several kinds of arguments that are made for skeptical theism. Common approaches found in the literature include the following: arguments from analogy, arguments from complexity, arguments from alternatives, and arguments from enabling premises. *Analogy arguments* try to highlight similar circumstances in which there are cases of extreme differences in ability to understand reasons for actions, i.e. an infant or small child not understanding why a loving parent is allowing something to happen (such as causing the child pain because of needed immunizations). *Arguments from complexity* highlight the many variables and factors that are involved in trying to determine what God would or would not do to show that we are not capable of making such involved and complex all-things-considered evaluations of the actions of God. *Arguments from*

*alternatives* similarly stress that we cannot rule out every live possibility of reasons that God may have for allowing nonbelief, and therefore we should be skeptical of the conclusion that no such reason exists. This brings us to *arguments from enabling premises* which promote skepticism regarding our ability to make the inference from, "As far as we can tell, there are no reasons for God to allow inculpable nonbelief," to the claim, "Therefore, there are no reasons for God to allow inculpable nonbelief." This kind of argument claims that we are not in a position to make such an inference given our limited perspective in relation to God.

A central challenge to skeptical theism is to determine if it is possible to limit our skepticism regarding God in respect to divine hiddenness and/or the argument from evil without spilling into other areas of knowledge – particularly theological knowledge in which the theist will want to make positive claims about God. That is, can the skeptical theist use skeptical theism to dodge the argument from divine hiddenness, while at the same time, make claims to theological knowledge? Critics argue that there is more at stake than just theological knowledge. The claim is that skeptical theism also throws moral knowledge, and even common knowledge, into doubt. Our common knowledge may be limited since skepticism could extend into other all-things-considered inferences which we make in general knowledge claims. Similarly with moral knowledge and deliberation, how can we determine the best course of action since we cannot make all-things-considered judgments? How can I know, all-things-considered, whether or not I should share my belief in God with a nonbeliever since God may intend for that case of nonbelief to accomplish some greater good? And in regards to theological knowledge, skeptical theism will not allow us to make claims about what God would or would not do. Even if the theist is to appeal to revelation, skeptical theism implies that for all we know God's revelation to humanity could be misleading or false, because, all-things-considered, there may be a reason for God to give humans misleading or false revelation of which we are not aware. These are the kinds of objections that I will consider in chapter 4 and attempt to provide a response which allows us to use skeptical

theism to challenge the *prima facie* evidence of Schellenberg's second premise, while at the same time limiting the skepticism so that it does not throw other kinds of knowledge into doubt.

### Reinterpreting the Question

Even though I will argue that skeptical theism is a viable response to Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness, such a defense still leaves us without a positive account of why God would allow inculpable nonbelief. Skeptical theism also creates the difficulty of showing how the limited skepticism is not a threat to other theological knowledge claims. Therefore, I will make an attempt at another defense which incorporates conclusions from the previous chapters and multiple kinds of theories, in order to show that Schellenberg's framing of the argument from divine hiddenness is flawed, and thus, should not lead to atheism. This is the point at which Moser's books, The Elusive God and The Evidence for God, are of particular interest since they reinterpret the context of the argument from divine hiddenness and questions the type of evidence we should expect from a perfectly loving God. The main thesis of The Elusive God is that:

We should expect evidence of divine reality to be *purposively available* to humans, that is, available in a manner, and only in a manner, suitable to divine purposes in self-revelation. The latter purposes [...] would mirror God's morally perfect character, and aim noncoercively [...] but authoritatively to transform human purpose to agree with divine purposes. We thus should expect a distinctive kind of *authoritative* evidence rather than spectator evidence that fails to challenge humans to yield their wills to a perfectly authoritative agent. (x)

Moser provides a rough visual analogy found in the famous duck-rabbit – the example of an ambiguous illustration in which you can see either a duck or a rabbit depending on how you choose to look at the figure. This example highlights that just as “a volitional commitment to redirect visual focus can bring a new perspective [...] on an ambiguous visual figure,” the “redirection of one's will can contribute to one's receiving otherwise overlooked but nonetheless purposively available evidence regarding divine reality” (5-6). Moser advocates for a shift to move knowledge of God from a solely intellectual domain to the domain of a human's will since we are not only thinkers, but also agents,

which both involve intentional activity (11). I will use this idea to not just examine the possibility of evidence for God, but also to examine the role that volitional openness plays in examining the evidence for God.

Moser argues that divine hiddenness does not justify atheism because God does supply sufficient evidence. But this sufficient decisive evidence is different from what we would expect. Instead of *spectator* evidence which could only produce mere belief, Moser argues it will be *authoritative* evidence which challenges and makes demands of our will. Instead of *propositional* knowledge that God exists, it will be *reconciling, filial* knowledge that reconciles humans to God through volitional submission which transforms the individual rather than merely produces a belief. Central to Moser's account is his argument that the authoritative evidence for God is a divine call from God in our conscience and that God's choice to reveal himself or remain hidden will be in line with God's intentions and morally perfect character.

It is helpful here to introduce some thoughts that motivate Moser's response to the argument from divine hiddenness. First, Moser focuses, as I do, on the Hebraic God. From Judeo-Christian scripture, God is portrayed as hiding as a response to human disobedience or for a constructive purpose (a blend of both human defectiveness and appropriateness theories). But this is in the context of God's desire that people have a filial or loving knowledge of God by which they become loving themselves. Second, mere belief is not enough to satisfy the desire of a divine-human relationship. It is not just assenting to information, he writes, but instead primarily involves one's will and not just one's intellect. Proper knowledge of God "requires one's humbly, faithfully, and lovingly standing in a child-parent, or filial, relationship to God as one's righteously gracious father" (2004, 45). Third, Moser uses the term cognitive idolatry to describe obstructions that get in the way of what he takes to be evidence of God's reality, and he explores the concept of becoming "attuned" to God's reality. Moser's answer to the argument from divine hiddenness is that we can "reconcile divine hiddenness and a perfectly loving God

at a personal evidential level.” However, this does not provide a theodicy for divine hiddenness because it is not an explanation of God’s hiddenness. Having evidence of God is one thing, “explaining God’s intentions in hiding is quite another” (53). The emphasis, Moser will argue, is not so much why isn’t God more obvious, but why do we fail to apprehend God’s reality and presence (53-54)? While Moser’s argument does not specifically address *inculpable* nonbelief, I want to incorporate Moser’s concepts to challenge the *prima facie* evidence for Schellenberg’s argument and develop a defense inspired by Moser’s concepts.

Both skeptical theism and Moser’s reinterpretation of the question of divine hiddenness will motivate my concluding response to Schellenberg. I will conclude that the lesson to be taken from skeptical theism is that just because one does not know of a reason for God’s hiddenness, does not mean that one is necessarily led to conclude that God does not exist. However, I will attempt to incorporate modified thoughts from Moser’s approach into a defense which an agnostic could consider if they are volitionally open to the possibility of theism. An individual who is an agnostic *because of* Schellenberg’s argument from divine hiddenness has the possibility of (1) remaining an agnostic for other reasons, (2) deciding whether to trust in one’s own cognitive abilities in regards to making claims about divinity, or (3) accepting the reasonable possibility that reality may go well beyond our understanding and/or that a defense is capable of providing possible reasons for a perfectly loving God to allow inculpable nonbelief to occur. If the agnostic chooses to accept one’s own cognitive abilities then it is a step which will lead to continued agnosticism, or an atheistic conclusion, because of Schellenberg’s argument. In regards to whether or not the continued agnosticism or atheism is culpable, it would depend on the volitional openness of an individual to a relationship with God. However, this is not the only viable option available to the agnostic. If the agnostic is volitionally open to a relationship with God and accepts the possibility of cognitive limitations then it is a potential step towards a theistic conclusion. Likewise, if the agnostic is volitionally open to a relationship with God and

finds a defense to the argument from divine hiddenness reasonable, then this is also a potential step towards theism.

### **Understanding the God in question**

For those interested in what Judeo-Christian scriptures may have to offer regarding the hiddenness of God, the appendix will further explore understanding the God in question from a perspective found in Judeo-Christian scripture. In Genesis there are passages about how God was intimately involved in the lives of human beings. However, over the course of the Old Testament there is a theme of withdrawal of God from human beings. This is one of the topics that Richard Elliott Friedman writes about in The Hidden Face of God. Friedman points out that the Bible begins with God actively and visibly involved in the world, but through the Old Testament “the deity appears less and less to humans, speaks less and less. Miracles, angels, and all other signs of divine presence become rarer and finally cease.” Friedman highlights that in some of the last words to Moses, God says, “I shall hide my face from them. I shall see what their end will be” (Deut. 32:20). And, Friedman says, “by the end of the story God does just that” (7). For those inclined to accept Judeo-Christian scripture, or interested in Scripture, such a survey can clarify the issue of divine hiddenness and provide a background context for the argument from divine hiddenness.

## Chapter 2: Inculpable Nonbelief

### Motivations for questioning (3)

Now that the argument from divine hiddenness has been introduced, as well as the challenges that will follow in each chapter, I will in this chapter focus on premise (3) of Schellenberg's argument: *Reasonable nonbelief occurs*. I start with this premise because, as already stated, it is commonly accepted by many as clearly true and is not challenged as often in the divine hiddenness literature. There are two kinds of motivation for questioning the third premise. First, is a philosophical motivation of clarifying what culpability entails, and how this is manifested in human reasoning regarding the existence of God. I will argue that Schellenberg's definition of culpability is flawed and his claim to widespread inculpable nonbelief is mistaken. I will compare Schellenberg's definition of culpability with other conceptions of culpability to show that we ought to reject Schellenberg's concept of inculpable nonbelief. Second is a theological motivation from a traditional religious view that nonbelief is the result of culpable sin rather than a lack of evidence.

Since Schellenberg's argument is an evidential argument against the existence of God, by reducing the number of troubling cases of inculpable nonbelief the strength of the argument in general is also reduced. By showing that inculpable nonbelief is not nearly as common or widespread as Schellenberg would have us believe, the evidential strength of Schellenberg's argument is reduced. Therefore, the goal of this chapter is to show Schellenberg's standard of inculpability to be flawed, thus reducing the extent of inculpable nonbelief that is left to challenge the existence of God. I will argue that a human defectiveness theory is promising as an approach to significantly reducing the evidential weight of inculpable nonbelief in the argument from divine hiddenness. Despite this weakening of Schellenberg's argument, I will grant that the possibility of inculpable nonbelief cannot be entirely ruled out, and therefore, we should grant Schellenberg's third premise for the sake of argument and pursue other possible replies to the argument from divine hiddenness. By doing so, we will be led to consider, in the next chapter, challenges to Schellenberg's second premise through defenses and theodicies that

attempt to show that despite the existence of a perfectly loving God, inculpable nonbelief may still occur.

The second motivation for questioning Schellenberg's third premise is theological. Divine hiddenness can be, from a theological perspective, considered as a result of human fault in not recognizing or accepting the evidence for God rather than a lack of evidence for God. This common theme is found in works of influential religious thinkers such as John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards. It is sin – sin for which we are culpable – that blinds us to evidence for God and prevents a relationship with God. Since we are considering a theistic response to the argument from divine hiddenness, I will develop a view of the noetic effects of sin – the effects of sin on one's thinking – that can be used to challenge the occurrence of inculpable nonbelief. The following are a couple examples from Judeo-Christian scripture which motivate the theist to question the premise that inculpable nonbelief occurs:

Romans 1:20 "Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."

Proverbs 8:17 "I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me."

Jeremiah 29:13 "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

Acts 17:27 Paul in speaking to the Greeks claimed that God made human beings "that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us."

These examples illustrate why a theist will be motivated from a theological perspective to challenge the occurrence of inculpable nonbelief since such statements indicate that, from a Judeo-Christian theistic perspective, God responds to those who truly seek him. This implies that nonbelief is culpable since anyone who truly seeks after God will come to believe in the existence of God. This being said, I will attempt to keep theistic assumptions to a minimum since the fewer theistic assumptions there are, the more inclined an agnostic would be to consider a human defectiveness theory as a response to the argument from divine hiddenness.



It is important to remember that Schellenberg isn't requiring the evidence for God to be in the form of grand displays, but rather a general awareness that is available to all who are capable and open to such a presence. This chapter will attempt to show that perhaps this *is* available, and therefore, any nonbelief is culpable. However, since denying inculpable nonbelief means that God can be sufficiently known through some generally available evidence, we need an explanation of why individuals fail to believe in the existence of God. Since we are assuming that belief is not voluntary, we must explain how evidence that is available to all humanity, and is also sufficient to support belief in the existence of God, is being misunderstood or overlooked by individuals. As mentioned, a defectiveness theory ultimately cannot explain all nonbelief, but this chapter will show that the extent of inculpable nonbelief can be significantly reduced by philosophical considerations which are also in line with theological considerations.

One common argument that will not be considered is that humans in fact believe in God implicitly if they are pursuing goodness in general. By pursuing a moral life they are pursuing God, whose chief attribute is goodness. This is another way to argue that cases of inculpable nonbelief are less common than initially one might think. As mentioned in the first chapter, I have purposely decided not to pursue the possibility of implicit belief because it does not address Schellenberg's argument that a relationship with God would be explicit and meaningful. I think it is a fair judgment that explicit belief would be better than implicit belief, and therefore, if God is all powerful and perfectly loving, God would seek a relationship based on explicit belief rather than implicit belief.

## **Culpability**

### **Schellenberg's definition of culpability**

The place to start considering Schellenberg's definition of culpability is with his discussion of Richard Swinburne's distinctions of epistemic rationality (Schellenberg 1993, 60-64). In Swinburne's book, Faith and Reason, Swinburne gives the following basic distinctions of epistemic rationality:

**Rationality<sub>1</sub>** is “[S’s] belief that *p* is probable, given his inductive standards and given his evidence.” In other words, *S*’s belief is internally coherent. If *S* violates rationality<sub>1</sub>, it is “a failure of which the subject is unaware.” But perhaps the individual is not “responding to the world in a justifiable way.” This results in **Rationality<sub>2</sub>** which is *S*’s belief that *p* is *properly* grounded in experience and involves *correct* inductive standards, or a “conformity to objective standards which the believer may not recognize and may indeed explicitly deny” (46). There are three more distinctions that Swinburne makes, and I will now highlight the same passage that Schellenberg quotes:

The rationality of both rational<sub>1</sub> and rational<sub>2</sub> beliefs is a matter of the believer’s response to present sensations and memories of the past and to apparently self-justifying truths of reason at the time in question [...] However, we often feel that although a man is justified in holding a certain belief at some time, he ought to have looked for more evidence or checked his standards more thoroughly at earlier times. Had he done so, he might have beliefs which were better justified, more probable. And so, according to whether the failure at an earlier stage was a failure by the subject’s own standards of which he was aware, a failure by the subject’s own standards of which he was not aware, or a failure by correct standards, we have three further kinds of irrationality of belief. In so far as these possible failures have been avoided, we have three further kinds of rationality. (1981, 49)

With these distinctions the rest of the breakdown of rationality is like the following: **Rationality<sub>3</sub>** is *S*’s belief that *p* is probable on the evidence which has been adequately investigated from *S*’s own perspective. **Rationality<sub>4</sub>** is *S*’s belief that *p* is probable on the evidence which has been adequately investigated by *S*’s normal standards. **Rationality<sub>5</sub>** is *S*’s belief that *p* is probable on the evidence which has been adequately investigated by correct standards (Swinburne 49-54; Schellenberg, 1993 60-64).

Swinburne says that belief is culpable if it is irrational<sub>3</sub>. I again highlight another quote from Swinburne that Schellenberg heavily relies on:

It is only irrationality in sense (3) which is culpable irrationality, for it results from the subject neglecting investigative procedures which he recognizes that he ought to pursue. Irrationality in sense (4) and (5) are a matter of objective discrepancy between the subject’s actual investigative procedures and either those which he normally recognizes or really adequate investigative procedures; but in so far as the subject does not recognize these discrepancies, no blame attaches to his conduct. Irrationality in senses (1) and (2) arises from a failure to recognize certain things at the time in question – discrepancies within the class of the subject’s beliefs in the case of irrationality (1),

and unjustified evidence and incorrect standards in the case of irrationality (2). But either you recognize the things in question at the time or you do not. Recognizing is coming to believe; and if, as I have argued, belief is a passive matter, so too is recognition. No blame is attachable to you for things that happen to you, only for things that you do. (1981, 54)

Schellenberg agrees with Swinburne that belief is culpable only if it is irrational<sub>3</sub>, and this is the foundation of his distinction between culpable and inculpable nonbelief: “It seems correct to say that only for voluntary actions could we ever legitimately be blamed. If *S* is to blame for something, *S* must have made some intentional contribution to it. Hence no one can justifiably be blamed for involuntary epistemic failures or for the very fact of belief” (Schellenberg 1993, 63).

This clarifies why Schellenberg upholds the following principle regarding culpability: “*S* is culpable in respect of some failure of hers if and only if her failure is voluntary” (1993, 62). Since belief is passive, no blame can be attached to things that happen to you, and therefore, “we are only culpable for *voluntary* epistemic failures *leading up to* belief” (64). I will now argue that Schellenberg is mistaken in using this standard of culpability in his argument for inculpable nonbelief. Instead of equating rational and irrational with inculpable and culpable, the standards of culpability are stricter than standards of rationality, thus providing room for more divergent theories of culpability and belief. Because of these differences it is possible to say that *S* can have a rational belief that is culpable. That is, despite the fact that *S* does not recognize the fault at the time, does not mean that *S* is inculpable for being in a position that fails to recognize the fault.

This is similar to some disputes between internalist and externalist regarding the justification of belief: is it something internal to the agent that justifies the agent or something external to the agent, such as reliable processes, which justifies the belief? I will argue in a similar way that culpability isn’t necessarily tied to internal recognition of the agent. Voluntary epistemic failure leading up to belief is a sufficient condition for culpability but not a necessary condition. To make such a claim, I want to consider two other standards of culpability from which to challenge Schellenberg’s standard of

culpability. These other standards are based on guidelines from the American Law Institutes Model Penal Code, as well as Robert Adams' article, "Involuntary Sins," which show how we can be culpable for involuntary failures.

### Model Penal Code

I argue that the standards of culpability found in the Model Penal Code can be used to challenge Schellenberg's concept of culpability. The Model Penal Code was developed by experts in law to clarify, interpret, and standardize penal law in the United States. Within the Model Penal Code are four modes of culpability which are distinguished in an attempt to better differentiate the mental state, or the *mens rea*, of an individual to determine if she is guilty of a crime. I suggest we look to these distinctions of culpability to see if we can apply them to develop other standards of culpable and inculpable nonbelief besides Schellenberg's conception. The four distinctions are: purpose, knowledge, recklessness, and negligence. These correspond with a breakdown of offense elements: conduct, circumstance, and result. The chart for these distinctions looks like the following:

#### Modes of Culpability

	Purpose	Knowledge	Recklessness	Negligence
<b>Conduct</b>				
(attitude)	conscious object	awareness	(not defined)	(not defined)
<b>Circumstance</b>				
(attitude)	awareness, belief, hope	awareness	conscious disregard	(no awareness)*
(probability)			substantial and unjustifiable risk**	substantial and unjustifiable risk***
<b>Result</b>				
(attitude)	conscious object	awareness	conscious disregard	(no awareness)*
(probability)		practical certainty	substantial and unjustifiable risk**	substantial and unjustifiable risk***

\*absence of awareness gives rise to liability

\*\*disregard is a gross deviation from the standard of conduct of a law abiding citizen

\*\*\*disregard is a gross deviation from the standard of conduct of a reasonable person

(<http://wings.buffalo.edu/law/bclc/web/modescheme.pdf>)

We may define the forms of culpable action as follows: (1) If *S* acts **purposively**, *S* acts intentionally. (2) If *S* acts **knowingly**, *S* acts while aware of the likely result. (3) If *S* acts **recklessly**, *S* consciously disregards the risk involved. (4) If *S* acts **negligently**, *S* has no awareness of the substantial risk but still may be held liable or responsible for the lack of awareness. Applying this to culpable nonbelief we can see further distinctions between awareness and lack of awareness regarding belief forming standards. Schellenberg would be in agreement that nonbelief is culpable if *S* *purposively* or *knowingly* has faulty belief forming processes or investigation. I think Schellenberg would even accept nonbelief as the result of *recklessness* as culpable since it would involve conscious disregard of adequate standards of evidence investigation or belief formation. However, I want to go one step further to say that *negligent* nonbelief is culpable even though *S* may not be aware of any faults in his investigation of evidence or belief forming processes.

Just as the penal code considers negligence, which entails a lack of awareness, to be culpable, nonbelief can be culpable even if there are epistemic failures of which the agent is unaware. This model shows greater degrees of culpability and shows that such negligent nonbelief can be culpable since the agent is held liable for the lack of awareness. Instead of saying “we are culpable for *voluntary* epistemic failures *leading up to* belief,” as Schellenberg does (1993, 64), I argue that if we are negligent of standards regarding evidence investigation and belief formation, we are culpable even if we do not recognize epistemic failures leading up to belief. That is, even though belief is not under our direct control, *S* may be culpable for holding or not holding certain beliefs. This model shows that belief which is negligent is culpable, and therefore, the standards of culpable nonbelief are lower than Schellenberg claims. Granted, negligent nonbelief may be less blameworthy than intentional nonbelief, but such negligent nonbelief is still culpable to some degree. Even if *S* is not aware of any epistemic failures or shortcomings, *S* can still be culpable because *S* *should* have been aware of those failings or omissions. I now turn to consider this possibility via Adams’ article, “Involuntary Sins.”

### **Involuntary Sins**

Adams argues that the thesis that “we are ethically accountable only for voluntary actions and omissions must be rejected” (3). Instead, there are involuntary sins that are found in morally objectionable states of mind which include corrupt beliefs and wrong desires. Adams lists things like “jealousy, hatred, and other sorts of malice; contempt for other people, and the lack of a hearty concern for their welfare” (4). Such an account is quickly dismissed by Schellenberg (1993, 63-64), but Douglas Henry thinks this is because Schellenberg limits Adams’ concerns to “morally repugnant beliefs,” when in actuality Adams “addresses a gamut of blameworthy states from barely noticeable peccadilloes to the morally reprehensible.” Even if nonbelief about the existence of God is not morally reprehensible, that doesn’t mean it is not still culpable (2008, 280). If God does exist, then it is reasonable to claim that nonbelief in God would be, in Adams’ terms, “a bad state of mind.” Adams’ argument can be used to challenge Schellenberg’s claim of the inculpability of nonbelief. At issue is “how fully one’s responsibility for a bad state of mind must be accounted for by wrong voluntary actions and omissions in the past by which one has caused it, or failed to prevent it, in oneself” (Adams 12).

Adams addresses a variety of states, from anger, to self-righteousness, to ungratefulness, and considers how we lay responsibility and blame on individuals even when it is not voluntary. To introduce his argument I begin with the following quote from Adams:

Our desires and emotions, though not voluntary, are responses of ours, and affect the moral significance of our lives, not only by influencing our voluntary actions, but also just by being what they are, and by manifesting themselves involuntarily. Who we are morally depends on a complex and incompletely integrated fabric that includes desires and feelings as well as deliberations and choices. (11)

With this in mind, I will use Adams’ example of ungratefulness to try and develop the general points that Adams has to offer in support of holding others culpable for things that are not under voluntary control.

Adams asks us to consider a scenario in which “you have just realized that you are ungrateful to someone who has done a lot for you” (12). Instead of responding to the kindness of the other person you made light of it and are in fact resentful of being dependent on others. Adams argues that such an

attitude is blameworthy. But if you are blameworthy, must we assume that you caused it by some voluntary action? You acted ungrateful because you already were ungrateful. Adams asks: "What have you left undone that you ought to have done?" You could have begun to struggle with your ingratitude sooner but this implies you would have voluntarily had the bad attitude and known of your ungratefulness at an earlier state: "For voluntary consent, as ordinarily understood, implies knowledge; and you did not realize that you had a problem in this area." Adams thinks that "the search for voluntary actions and omissions by which you may have caused your ingratitude keeps leading to other *involuntary sins that lie behind your past voluntary behavior*" (13).

There are several ways that Adams shows the reasonableness of involuntary sins being blameworthy. First, he thinks a closer look at our struggle against bad states of minds, such as ingratitude, supports the proposition that we are accountable for those states of mind that we have. Adams suggests that the struggle against such bad states of mind is normally a form of *repentance*, which involves self-reproach and the taking of responsibility for that state of mind. In regards to your ingratitude: "You see it as an opposition that you yourself are making, not voluntarily but none the less really, to the generosity of the other person and to your own position as a recipient of love and assistance. In repentance you repudiate this opposition, not as an evil existing outside the inner circle of your selfhood, but as your own; and you reproach yourself for it" (15-16).

Another reason that Adams thinks involuntary states can be blameworthy is our intuition that even if you have never noticed your ingratitude it is still no excuse. Granted, if *S* is aware of his bad attitude, then *S* may not be assigned the same blame as if *S* did not know it, but this is not a function of knowledge or ignorance; rather "our evaluation is affected by what he does with his knowledge." Similar to our distinctions of culpability from the penal code, we would blame someone more if he was knowingly ungrateful, less if he does nothing voluntary to prevent his ungratefulness, even less if the thought of his ungratefulness never crossed his mind, and less still if he is aware of the attitude and is

struggling to get rid of his ungratefulness. Of course, Adams sees this all as “additional proof that the blameworthiness of states of mind is not dependent on voluntariness” (17).

How then can ignorance be culpable? Adams argues that ignorance of one’s faults is not the only thing that is blameworthy, and there are many other cognitive failures that we think of as morally reprehensible that are not generally voluntary. Examples Adams offers are: “believing that certain people do not have rights that they do in fact have; perceiving members of some social group as less capable than they actually are; failing to notice indications of other people’s feelings; and holding too high an opinion of one’s own attainments” (18). Suppose *S* was brought up in an environment such as Nazi Germany or a segregated South, and therefore, has morally reprehensible beliefs in regards to race and human equality even though he was not directly responsible for such beliefs since *S* could not have helped being in that environment. Regardless of how these beliefs came about the beliefs still make *S* an object of reproach. If *S* was unable to help those beliefs given his situation, then *S* may be treated with mercy but not exempted from blame (19).

In regards to blame, Adams does not think that responses should be the same to both involuntary and voluntary sins. For example, punishment is appropriate for voluntary actions, but punishment is only one kind of response. While punishment is properly imposed by someone with authority, there are “less specialized responses to wrong,” particularly *reproach*, which requires no need for authority: “Reproach is at home in a much wider variety of relationships in which one is affected by, or appropriately cares about, another person’s behavior or attitudes” (21-22). Adams’ two claims about reproach are: (1) it is a form of blaming which is appropriate in many cases in which punishment may not be appropriate; and (2) people can be reproached for involuntary faults (22). If blaming individuals for involuntary failures seems too oppressive, Adams offers that reproach and judgments of blame are meant “to lead us to repentance, and to acknowledge moral realities.” Furthermore, “it would be catering to self-righteousness to try to solve it [the problem of oppressiveness] by leaving the burden of



blame on the shoulders of the shoplifter and the car thief while lifting it from the self-seeking motive and the contemptuous attitude that may involuntarily poison the conscientious deed" (24).

With these arguments in mind, Adams works to begin to develop principles towards a theory of responsibility which can also be used to challenge some of Schellenberg's assumptions. In order to understand what the limits of our responsibility are for our own condition, and thus to understand what keeps us from being blamed for every undesirable state we may find ourselves in, Adams offers the following four principles that can contribute to a theory. (1) The involuntary sins he has considered are all states of mind or psychological states. Thus desires, emotions, attitudes, and belief are different from things that are not blameworthy in themselves such as blindness, sickness, or lack of athletic ability (25). (2) The states of mind that he is considering are all directed toward an object, or have an intentional object: "we are angry *at* someone, glad *of* something, sorry *about* an event" (26). (3) The intuition that "we cannot be morally responsible for anything unless some of its springs or causes lie within us in an appropriate way," can still be retained in that states of mind are something that arise within us. Adams suggestion is: "Among states of mind that have intentional objects, the ones for which we are directly responsible are those in which we are responding, consciously or unconsciously, to data that are rich enough to permit a fairly adequate ethical appreciation of the state's intentional object and of the object's place in the fabric of personal relationships." And so, feelings like hunger or thirst are states for which we are not accountable (26). (4) Unlike traditional theories, Adams does not require conscious recognition, but instead "only that the data to which we are responding be rich enough to *permit* recognition of relevant values" (26-27). And so again, considering an individual that is raised in Nazi Germany or the segregated South, he would not have to be exposed to enlightened ethical systems as part of his data since he would have enough data in the evidence of humanity, even if he was told some individuals do not have certain rights (27).

A discussion of Adams is directly relevant to the matter of inculpable nonbelief because it provides additional principles which can be used to determine if nonbelief is culpable or inculpable. Schellenberg has tied culpability to voluntary factors, but, as Adams' argument demonstrates, this is too narrow a focus. By broadening an understanding of ways in which we may be responsible for our belief, or nonbelief, it becomes clear that culpability is a broader notion than Schellenberg permits. If God does exist, then nonbelief would be an undesirable state. Applying Adams principles for a theory of responsibility demonstrates why an individual can be responsible for the undesirable state of nonbelief: (1) nonbelief is a state of mind, or psychological state; (2) God, or, if this concept is not available, spiritual concerns, are the potential intentional objects; and (3) the states of mind regarding these objects arise from within us. This leaves Adams' fourth principle to be applied to inculpable nonbelief – even if an individual does not believe that God exists, is there data which is rich enough to permit the recognition of relevant values which are important regarding spiritual concerns or the belief that God exists? This could involve a variety of important values and traits that are considered to play a role in belief that God exists. A non-exhaustive list could include traits like valuing truth, seeking understanding, loving, and humility. Is it reasonable to expect that individuals *could* recognize the importance of these values from everyday experience? It seems uncontroversial to say that these values are ones that individuals can generally develop through experience. Therefore, we would typically hold someone responsible, to some degree, if the individual does not value truth, does not seek understanding, is uncaring, and arrogant.

Let's apply this to a case of nonbelief. Consider an unreflective nonbeliever who hasn't put any effort into considering the existence of God. Let's say that she is familiar with the concept of God, and is generally, what we would call, a "good person," but has little concern regarding spiritual questions or the existence of God. She has not formed any beliefs regarding the existence of God, and she has not done anything to voluntarily avoid forming such beliefs, or been involved in any form of self-deception.

Schellenberg would consider this a case of inculpable nonbelief since she has not made any *voluntary* epistemic failures in her nonbelief. However, such a case of nonbelief could be culpable because she has not cultivated in herself those values or traits which would encourage her to pursue spiritual concerns or the existence of God as important topics. Although she has not made any explicit voluntary failures in not having the belief that God exists, her experience has provided her opportunities to develop these values, and yet she has ignored them over time to a point where she is now considered to be culpable for having failed to develop these traits, despite the fact that it may be involuntarily. This is just a rough example but there are likely a variety of scenarios that could be offered to show that even though there were no voluntary failures involved, a person can be held responsible for being in a psychological state which does not encourage the pursuit of beliefs regarding spiritual concerns or the existence of God.

Schellenberg briefly mentions Adams' article "Involuntary Sins" in a couple of sentences but quickly dismisses it by relying on Richard Swinburne's account that in laying blame we are responding to the situation as objectively bad or laying blame for "past omissions to act which allowed such attitudes to develop" (Swinburne 1989, 34; qtd. in Schellenberg 1993, 63). In a footnote, Schellenberg again dismisses Adams' argument by suggesting that even if Adams is right, holding parity nonbelief is not morally repugnant (63). Epistemic parity being when *S* "is not justified in holding either proposition to be more probable than its denial – that neither is [...] *epistemically preferable* to its denial" (65). However, as has already been shown, Adams is not just concerned about morally repugnant beliefs but more common involuntary sins such as ingratitude or other bad states of mind. William J. Wainwright writes that "neither Swinburne nor Schellenberg have an *argument* for the claim that we aren't culpable for 'involuntary sins,' merely an appeal to intuition" (118). Even if Swinburne were right, it is still possible that a person is culpable if they made omissions which placed them in their current state. Wainwright correctly points out that "a person's nonbelief can be reasonable in the defined sense in

circumstance C and not in circumstance C', where the person in question is *culpable for being in C rather than in C'*" (110). Therefore, even if someone is inculpable at one level there could be a deeper level in which the person is still ultimately culpable. Perhaps there is a needed distinction between epistemic culpability and moral culpability which can be added to Wainwright's point: S may be epistemically inculpable in circumstance C, but is morally culpable for being in circumstance C, rather than morally inculpable in circumstance C'. With considerations of culpability from (1) the Model Penal Code, which shows that S may be culpable for negligent beliefs; and (2) Adams' argument, that even involuntary states and beliefs are potentially culpable, Schellenberg's standard of culpability is not clearly established. I will now return to Schellenberg's distinctions of nonbelief to apply these considerations of culpability and to determine if there are any candidates of nonbelief that are inculpably instantiated.

### **Nonbelief**

Schellenberg distinguishes between *unreflective* nonbelievers – those who may have never even considered the proposition 'God exists' or given the proposition much thought – and *reflective* nonbelievers – those who disbelieve or are in doubt after considering the proposition. As mentioned in the last chapter, even though Schellenberg considers there to be many forms of inculpable nonbelief he focuses on doubt in order to show that there are *reflective* individuals who still end up with nonbelief in regards to the existence of God. As already mentioned, if he can establish such a case this would show that such individuals are not making any voluntary failures and are doing their best to reflect on the existence of God, and yet they still end up in doubt, or more specifically, inculpable nonbelief. With doubt defined as the following: "for all S, if S inculpably believes that epistemic parity obtains between G and not-G, then S is inculpably in doubt about G" (60), we now have a definition of inculpable doubt:

S is inculpably in doubt about the truth of G if (1) S believes that epistemic parity obtains between G and not-G, and (2) S has not knowingly (self-deceptively or non-self-deceptively) neglected to submit this belief to adequate investigation. (64)

With these distinctions and definitions in place, I will first consider reflective nonbelief in the form of doubt, and second, unreflective nonbelief, to determine if inculpable forms of each are likely.

### **Reflective Inculpable Nonbelief**

The lack of attention to the premise that inculpable nonbelief occurs is understandable given our own experiences with others who are intelligent non-theists who by all accounts appear to be honest seekers of truth. While I will consider theological considerations concerning inculpable nonbelief later in this chapter, Douglas Henry offers a reasonable sentiment when he writes, “Appeals to doctrines regarding the Fall or to the noetic effects of sin seem to miss the point. If nonbelievers are to be faulted for their nonbelief, their failure to believe must be the result of factors for which they are somehow personally and immediately responsible.” Thus the theist is left with the challenge of “understanding whether and in what ways nonbelievers may be culpable in their nonbelief” (2001, 78). However, all Schellenberg needs to do is establish the possibility of inculpable nonbelief to show that nonbelief is not always culpable.

Schellenberg and Henry both think the best case to convince the theist of the possibility of inculpable nonbelief to be nonbelievers that have two traits: *reflective* individuals who put forth the effort to think about the evidence for God, and second, individuals with *nonbelief* rather than *disbelief* since it is more convincing that someone is willing to evaluate evidence evenly by being open to arguments both for and against the existence of God. This is the “paradigmatic instance of reasonable nonbelief” – a reflective *nonbeliever* (rather than *disbeliever*) “neither acknowledging nor denying God’s existence” (Henry 2001, 78-79). Henry challenges the evidential weight of Schellenberg’s claim of inculpable nonbelief by focusing on reflective nonbelievers since it is the subclass that Schellenberg thinks most clearly supports the premise. Henry’s criticism is that the class of reflective nonbelievers is very small, and therefore, given the small numbers of this subgroup, it is questionable if any meet the further qualifications that satisfy Schellenberg’s condition to count as an inculpable nonbeliever.

The paradigm reasonable nonbeliever will be one who “will arrive at a parity belief only *reluctantly* and, therefore, only if careful attention to the matter seems to him to leave him with no other option” (Schellenberg 66). Henry argues that given (1) Schellenberg’s endorsement of Swinburne’s standards of epistemic responsibility; and (2) the high bar that Schellenberg sets in order to show inculpable nonbelief, Schellenberg “appears to have reduced to miniscule numbers the already small class of persons who appear to investigate adequately the issue of God’s existence” (80). Therefore, there are several difficulties that a defender of inculpable nonbelief would need to address. I will now turn to a discussion of criticisms from both Henry and Lehe, and responses from Schellenberg. These criticisms involve: adequacy of investigation, possibility of deception, parity belief, and broader culpability.

The first difficulty is regarding the *adequacy of investigation* into the evidence for God. In order to determine if someone satisfies the conditions of adequate investigation, there must be an understanding of what adequate investigation entails and how to judge if it has taken place (Henry 2001, 79). Also, there is the distinction between objectively adequate investigation and investigation that is subjectively adequate to the individual. Swinburne says subjectively adequate investigation relies on four beliefs of the individual: “(a) about the importance of the issue, (b) about the closeness to 0 or 1 of the probability of his belief about the issue, (c) about the probability that investigation will achieve something, and (d) about whether he has other more important actions to do.” Objectively adequate investigation will depend on what is objectively true with respect to (a)-(d) (1981, 53).

The ability to determine if adequate investigation took place, based on the internal standards of the agent, is not possible based on any simple empirical methods of observation. We can take individuals at their word that such investigation took place, but even so, there is still the possibility of deception (Henry 2001, 80). Even if subjectively adequate investigation has taken place, Robert Lehe argues that Schellenberg’s requirement that one knowingly fails to submit a belief to adequate investigation is too strong. The reason being that if someone is self-deceived, then it is possible that

they are not aware that such a deception has occurred. Schellenberg is emphasizing voluntariness being present for culpability, but there is tension by putting “knowingly neglect” and “self-deceptively” together (Lehe 171). If *S* is self-deceived, *S* may not have knowing neglect even though *S* is culpable for the self-deception.

In response to this difficulty Schellenberg claims that it results from confusing “the *absence of knowing neglect* of adequate investigation with *objectively adequate* investigation,” and Schellenberg’s criterion for inculpable nonbelief only refers to the former while Henry uses the latter. Schellenberg argues that “even if Henry is right that claims of objectively adequate investigation cannot be confirmed here, it does not follow that claims of *inculpable* investigation cannot be confirmed” (2005, 333). Schellenberg makes this claim because his argument is that if *S* is unaware of any failures of objectively adequate investigation, then *S* is not culpable since *S* did not commit any voluntary epistemic failures. However, even if *S* is negligent of failures of adequate investigation *S* may still be culpable.

The difficulty of determining adequate investigation leads to another difficulty of the *possibility of deception* – either to others or to oneself. How are we to know that an individual is not deceiving us in the adequacy of their investigation? Even more difficult, how are we to know that a person has not succumbed to self-deception? Schellenberg accommodates for this possibility already in his definition of inculpable doubt by requiring parity belief, and that *S* not knowingly neglect anything through deception or self-deception. Schellenberg goes on to say that in addition to the weight that self-reported adequate investigation carries we can also base our judgment on our familiarity with the person’s investigation – i.e., the amount of time and energy someone invested, their honesty in other areas, and that the individual seeks the truth. Furthermore, arriving at a parity belief is not a desirable state and therefore a person would arrive at it *reluctantly*. Schellenberg argues that parity belief can be an indication that self-deception has not taken place. In the desire to avoid a parity belief, it would be “much more likely to find ways of avoiding a parity belief than to find ways of acquiring one” (2003, 66).

But this does not satisfy Henry because it does not leave judgments about the adequacy of investigation “straightforward and uncontroversial.” The characteristics of adequate and exemplary investigation “can be both deceptively and self-deceptively instantiated, i.e. not really instantiated at all” (2001, 81). A more substantial criticism is that parity belief is not a sufficient indication that self-deception has not taken place since someone could find parity belief preferable to holding or not holding a certain belief because of other implications of the belief. For example, someone may prefer to have a parity belief regarding the existence of God because if she believes in the existence of God, she feels that she will have to live her life differently; if she does not believe in the existence of God, she feels like the world will lack ultimate meaning. Because of these implications, she self-deceptively comes to a parity belief in the existence of God since she is not ready to face the implications of belief.

While I agree with Schellenberg that we can, for the most part, take someone at their word regarding their perception of their investigation – even more so if we have previous experience with the individual or have any of our doubts addressed through further questioning of the individual – parity of belief is not an indication of a lack of self-deception. Therefore, Henry’s concern over the possibility of self-deception is legitimate. If we were purely rational beings or logic machines then we could be confident about not being self-deceived about many things. But humans are much more complicated, intentional, and emotional beings, often shading the perception of evidence while considering the evidence for things – especially the consideration of significant questions with wide extending ramifications such as the existence of God. Even exemplary investigation is susceptible to self-deception. Lehe raises a similar concern that Schellenberg does not give enough credit to the complexity and psychology of religious belief. Given the complexity involved it becomes difficult for the individual to determine any self-deception. Lehe uses Augustine as an example of someone who believed that God exists but did not come to believe *in* God until later. Augustine says it was pride and lust that prevented him from committing himself to God. This leads Lehe to ask, how can we know if



someone “is not subconsciously resisting belief in God because of a culpable unwillingness to submit completely to God’s will” (170)?

The Augustine example does not help Lehe’s case against Schellenberg. A reply can be made that it is precisely because of the gap between “belief that” and “belief in” that one can believe *that* God exists without having belief *in* God, and therefore, there should be enough evidence for God to at least provide belief *that* God exists. Even with Augustine’s moral flaws and unwillingness to believe *in* God he still had a belief *that* God exists. Lehe’s example would be more relevant if there was a necessary relation between belief *that* and belief *in*, however there are individuals who believe *that* God exists without having any sort of belief *in* God. At issue here is enough evidence for “belief that” and not the stronger claim for “belief in.”

Even if such self-deceptive motives were in place, Schellenberg doesn’t see why someone would take steps to prevent theistic belief if there is evidence causally sufficient for it, instead of rationalizing away the undesirable implications of such a belief. Schellenberg rightly suggests that theists, and even professing Christians, can “rationalize away the need for certain actions in *response* to one’s belief,” and yet still remain believers. Schellenberg claims that it is more reasonable to accept the possibility of inculpable nonbelief based on evidence of there being good motives in individuals that would prevent deception, actions that confirm it, and also reasons that the nonbeliever can cite and develop (2005, 338). Still I think Lehe is correct that there are many subjective factors involved that Schellenberg may not be willing to give enough credit to and is in effect underestimating human potential for self-deception. As Henry writes, self-deception can be complex: “Complex self-deception arises when one has mixed motives, or a divided will, and thereby can in one way claim fair judgment, but in another way can be faulted for less than a fair judgment. One can want and not want to possess the truth; one can desire and not desire to be honest” (2008, 284).

Despite all this the theist must strike a balance between the ability to determine self-deception and the complexity of humans. The greater the complexity of humans, the more likely that humans may be self-deceived, but the less likely it is that the self-deception is culpable. Therefore, Henry and Lehe must find a balance in which the claim is that the complexity of humans can make self-deception likely, while at the same time simple enough that a person is culpable for the self-deception that takes place. To make such a claim would require further specialized development regarding human psychology and belief formation, but for my purposes here it is enough to show that combining the possibility of being culpable for things other than *voluntary* failures, with the possibility of culpable self-deception, provides a possible challenge to Schellenberg's premise.

Schellenberg argues that parity belief is a safeguard to self-deception because parity belief is undesirable to someone who is honestly pursuing the truth on a matter. Schellenberg suggests that self-deception is more likely to occur in order to avoid a parity belief. Therefore, if *S* arrives at a parity belief, then this is an indication that *S* has overcome the desire for any self-deception and has instead remained true to the results of the investigation. I have already shown why parity belief is not a sure indication of a lack of self-deception. This brings us to a third difficulty that involves *parity belief*. Henry argues that if someone is seeking after truth, then that person will not be satisfied with a parity belief. As Schellenberg himself suggests, parity belief would be arrived at reluctantly "after all alternatives have been exhausted" (1993, 68). But the traits that make for good investigation would also lend themselves to a person not being content with evidential parity.

Henry argues that Schellenberg faces a dilemma: to show that inculpable nonbelief is instantiated there must be individuals with the high standards of investigation so as to avoid the possibility of deception or self-deception. However, the more those standards and traits are exemplified the less likely that an individual will arrive at or be satisfied with a parity belief. If these standards are weakened, then parity belief is more likely, but at the same time, so is the possibility of

deception and self-deception. And so, Henry concludes: (1) “adequate investigation is the exception rather than the rule,” (2) “claims of adequate investigation cannot be confirmed through the presence of the factors identified by Schellenberg,” and (3) “these factors, when genuinely present, would not result in the satisfaction with evidential parity characteristic of nonbelief.” This, Henry thinks, undermines Schellenberg’s third premise because the standards invoked to ensure adequate investigation also make the parity position of the third premise unlikely, “and since the argument as a whole constitutes an inductive-style version of the problem of evil,” the empirical improbability of inculpable nonbelief renders concluding on these grounds that God does not exist “empirically improbable as well” (2001, 82).

However, Schellenberg does not take parity belief to mean that further consideration will cease to take place. Instead, what Schellenberg means by arriving at parity belief, after all alternatives are exhausted, is that the individual’s evidence cannot support one alternative over the other. It is only an indication of the individual’s present evidence, not of future inquiry or the end of evidence (2005, 334). If this is the case, Henry doesn’t have a problem with the weaker reading because that just means that a person will continue to examine the evidence and may be able to come to a conclusion. For that reason, Henry assumed that Schellenberg must take the stronger reading. Henry writes: “If this is what reasonable nonbelief means, it becomes less than clear that it constitutes an evil preclusive of God’s existence” (2001, 82).

A fourth difficulty is the possibility of *broader culpability*. Lehe argues that even though nonbelief that results from parity belief and adequate investigation may be inculpable based on cognitive standards of adequacy, there is the possibility that such belief may be culpable in a broader sense based on other spiritual or moral deficiencies. Lehe is suggesting that someone can pursue honest investigation while still insulating themselves from religious commitments that the individual deems undesirable. This relates somewhat to the difference between belief *that* God exists and belief *in*

God. To illustrate, Lehe considers that a person could be open to the possibility of a loving God that gives blessings and eternal life, while at the same time resistant to a demanding God that wants total commitment and to put God's desires before personal desires. What Lehe is getting at is that God may withhold evidence of himself from someone for a time in order to overcome other spiritual or moral roadblocks, and yet that nonbelief is still culpable precisely because of those roadblocks (169).

Schellenberg rejects the claim that he has not taken other moral or spiritual concerns into consideration. Given Schellenberg's sufficient criteria for inculpable nonbelief (non-neglectfully held parity belief and adequate investigation), the considerations taken into account are not purely intellectual because it also involves someone not being resistant to the possibility of God, which would seem to include such moral and spiritual concerns (2005, 337). Schellenberg responds that Lehe's argument is, at most, an argument that a person with nonbelief is not justified in accepting their own inculpability. But, Schellenberg argues, a person with nonbelief could still accept that the premise of inculpable nonbelief is supported by the inculpable nonbelief of others (337). However, if we are not justified in accepting our own inculpability, then all the more reason not to accept the inculpability of others. One could be surer of his own inculpability, rather than other's inculpability, since each person has access to his own thoughts and processes in a way that no one else does.

To sum up, the most likely scenario of nonbelief that is inculpable is also the least likely to be instantiated. It is not clearly obvious that inculpable nonbelief occurs given the difficulties of determining if: (1) *S* has nonbelief that is the result of objectively adequate investigation, (2) *S* has avoided any deception, (3) *S* is satisfied with parity belief, and (4) *S* is not culpable in a broader sense.

Henry summarizes the overall problem with Schellenberg's argument as follows:

If the standards for reasonable nonbelief are stringent, it becomes plausible to hold that they are never met, while if they are more relaxed, it is dubious that God would of necessity prevent such nonbelief from occurring. This is why the nonbelief needed for his argument to persuade is hard to come by. The kind of reasonable nonbelief most readily identified is least likely to throw a wrench into the work of divine love. The kind

of reasonable nonbelief “left over” is most likely to be deficient in one way or another. (2008, 277)

Schellenberg responds by saying that his criteria for inculpable investigation are only sufficient conditions, not necessary conditions. Henry has argued that probably no one satisfies these conditions, and therefore, no one has inculpable nonbelief. Schellenberg argues that this has not shown that inculpable nonbelief does not occur since these were only sufficient conditions to begin with. Schellenberg’s purpose was to try to convince those strongly disposed to think of parity belief as culpable (2005, 335-36).

This leads to the more general complaint Schellenberg has against Henry and Lehe: both assume that reasonable nonbelief is reasonable doubt. But Schellenberg claims that inculpable nonbelief comes in many forms – reflective doubt, reflective disbelief, unreflective doubt, and unreflective disbelief (2005, 330). Because of these other forms of nonbelief, Schellenberg argues that “even if our authors [Henry and Lehe] are right in all they say, nothing follows for nonbelief in general, since plenty of instances of nonbelief do not presuppose reflection or involve doubt.” Schellenberg claims that there are many who have never even been in a position to be able to consider theism and therefore cannot respond culpably or inculpably, or if they have they are not in a position to see its importance. According to Schellenberg inculpable nonbelief is widespread, common, and easy to come by. This, thinks Schellenberg, is enough to show Henry’s and Lehe’s arguments are unsound (331). I have tried to show that Henry and Lehe’s arguments are challenging for Schellenberg’s premise, and therefore, to further show this to be the case, I must consider the possibility of unreflective inculpable nonbelief. If unreflective nonbelief is likely to be culpable, then Schellenberg cannot retreat to it to avoid Henry and Lehe’s arguments.

### **Unreflective Inculpable Nonbelief**

The move to unreflective nonbelief is troubling because Schellenberg doesn’t support the claim much beyond the fact that it is accepted: “It seems clear enough that each type [reflective and

unreflective nonbelief] is inculpably exemplified” (Schellenberg 1993, 59). Henry argues that Schellenberg’s claims that many have never had the theistic idea before their minds, or have never been in a position to respond, are based on factual and normative assumptions that are arguable (2008, 278). Several reasons are given of why these assumptions should be questioned. First, Henry considers Tertullian’s *anima naturaliter Christiana* (the soul that is by nature Christian). This is the idea that humans by nature have something internal to them that predisposes or inclines them to God. Henry goes on to cite anthropologists and ethnographers that suggest something similar. For example, he cites Andrew Lang: “the idea of God, as he is conceived of by our inquiring plain man, occurs rudely, but recognizably, in the lowest-known grades of savagery” (qtd. in Henry 2008, 278). Even if the soul is not ‘Christian by nature,’ an argument can be made that many cultures have the idea of supernatural beings, even a supreme being. This is far from a well formed conception of the Judeo-Christian God, but this shows the presumptuousness of the claim that Schellenberg makes that many cannot get God “squarely before their minds” and should cause us to question that such unreflective nonbelief is common (Henry 279).

Second, Henry thinks it reasonable to question Schellenberg’s normative assumption that if someone fails to form the theistic idea or consider the possibility, then it is inculpable. A long Christian tradition can be found that considers any nonbelief as culpable. Such thinking can be found in Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Calvin, and Edwards. Furthermore, similar thinking can be found in others such as “Socrates, Seneca, Petrarch, and others who urge attention to the care and improvement of the soul alongside life’s commonplace concerns.” Henry thinks it reasonable to hold that humans ought to consider such matters and they can be faulted when they do not consider such matters (2008, 279). If any claim seems to have implications for investigation, the existence of a supreme being would be one of the top candidates. If the concept occurs to *S* then perhaps *S* is culpable if *S* does not pursue considering the implications of such a claim and *S*’s relationship to such a being.

Third, Schellenberg has taken such pains to establish standards for reflective nonbelief that Henry finds it surprising that there would not be some sort of standards set for unreflective nonbelief. Given that reflective nonbelievers may be deceived or self-deceived, shouldn't it seem all the more likely that unreflective nonbelievers would be as well? While I understand what Henry is saying, Schellenberg's goal was to be persuasive to those less inclined to accept inculpable nonbelief. Schellenberg however thinks that nonbelief is inculpable even with much less stringent requirements. I do think Henry is correct in saying that "in the few words Schellenberg offers about unreflective nonbelief, he assumes rather than argues that it is widely instantiated, and without making a case for it, he supposes that it is always inculpable" (2008, 280). Also, Schellenberg said he had accounted for moral and spiritual concerns in his standards for reflective inculpable nonbelief, but such concerns are not addressed in the context of unreflective nonbelief.

Schellenberg thinks inculpable nonbelief is easily instantiated and common since a person is only culpable for *voluntary* epistemic failures leading up to belief. I have argued that the standards of culpability are less stringent in that negligence, of which an individual is unaware of, is enough to make nonbelief culpable. I further supported this argument with arguments from Adams' account of involuntary sins. I have also used Henry and Lehe's arguments to show that the most likely candidate for inculpable nonbelief – reflective nonbelief – is difficult to show inculpable. Given everything that has been discussed so far, it seems less likely that unreflective nonbelief is so easily found to be inculpable. A concept of God, or a supreme being, is more common than Schellenberg has claimed. Furthermore, both Christian and non-Christian traditions have held individuals accountable, or culpable, for not pursuing considerations about the improvements of one's soul or relationship to a possible supreme being.

Since Schellenberg does not offer any further criteria for the inculpability of unreflective nonbelief (besides that there not be any *voluntary* failures), I will further consider the culpability of

unreflective nonbelief, and nonbelief in general, from a theological perspective. Given that divine hiddenness is being considered in the context of how a theist from a Judeo-Christian tradition can respond to the problem, it is reasonable to consider a common answer given from such a tradition. Even though, as Henry admitted, the appeal to sin or the Fall is not considered an attractive option by many, it is to this specific topic that I will turn to in considering inculpable nonbelief. While my goal is to argue against any Calvinist conception of original sin as an answer to the problem, perhaps there are some promising approaches through which a theist can explain the culpability of nonbelievers and thus reduce the evidential force of Schellenberg's premise that inculpable nonbelief occurs.

### **The Noetic Effects of Sin**

In considering the role sin plays in nonbelief, a significant resource can be found in Stephen K. Moroney's book, The Noetic Effects of Sin. Moroney provides a comprehensive study of the writings of several theologians and how they conceive of sin impacting and affecting human reasoning. First, I will give a summary of what Moroney has to say about the noetic effects of sin found in the writings of John Calvin (1509-1564) in order to establish a starting point from which to consider the possibility of sin as an explanation of nonbelief. Second, I will add in other views from theologians Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) (as discussed by William J. Wainwright), and Heinrich Emil Brunner (1889-1966) (as discussed by Moroney), to develop a broader picture of the noetic effects of sin from the Christian tradition. Third, I argue that Moroney has the best model, so far, for the effects that sin can have on our reasoning. Finally, I will attempt to modify Moroney's account and remove as many religious assumptions as possible in order to provide the best explanation for nonbelief from a theological perspective that is most appealing to an agnostic considering the culpability of nonbelief. When this is paired with the previous philosophical considerations regarding the culpability of reflective and unreflective nonbelief it forms the best response possible to challenge the evidential weight for Schellenberg's third premise that inculpable nonbelief occurs.



In this discussion I will use the same definition of sin as Moroney, as defined by Cornelius Plantinga Jr.: “Let us say that *a* sin is any thought, desire, emotion, word, or deed – or its particular absence – that displeases God and deserves blame. Let us add that *sin* is the disposition to commit sins. And let us use the word *sin* for instances of either” (qtd. in Moroney 36). I also make no assumptions in this discussion as to the historicity regarding the doctrine of the Fall, and therefore, it only need to be considered as a mythic interpretation at minimum. As Jonathan Kvanvig writes, “Whether historical or not, the doctrine of the Fall points to a need, both cognitive and conative [how one acts on those things], that can be addressed only by the intervention of the divine” (151). Consider the following examples given by Kvanvig: (1) the “logical and empirical gap between recognized sufficient warrant and actual belief formation very much like the fallenness of humanity displayed in cases of weakness of the will;” (2) the possibility of self-deception; and (3) “the Jamesian possibility of such paranoia over the prospect of false belief that one sets the standards for warranted belief too high.” Kvanvig suggests a doctrine of the Fall is a theological interpretation of such fallenness, “a doctrine according to which all aspects of fallenness [...] are somehow fleeting and regrettable aspects of our earthly existence which God is in the process of removing” (151).

### **John Calvin and the Fall**

For all the studies of John Calvin’s writing there is very little, and in fact no major studies, on Calvin’s account of the noetic effects of sin (Moroney 1). Moroney attempts to give a “historically responsible exposition” of Calvin’s understanding of reason and the noetic effects of sin primarily using Calvin’s Institutes of the Christian Religion and commentaries. Instead of going into the details of Calvin’s writing, I will highlight some of the key concepts that play a role in Calvin’s thinking regarding the effects of sin on human reason. Calvin understood human reason to be the faculty by which humankind “distinguishes between good and evil, and by which [it] understands and judges” (Institutes

I.15.7; qtd. in Moroney 3). The three main points I mention in relation to Calvin and human reason are Calvin's view of the Fall, the distinction of earthly and heavenly matters, and the role of the Holy Spirit.

Central to the writings of Calvin is the teaching of the Fall of Man, or the Fall, for short. Previous to the Fall humankind was in harmony with God, but due to sin humankind fell into a state of corruption and separation from God. Calvin thinks this corruption resulted in a state of depravity that has also affected human reason. The first original sin, as well as our own sin, impairs our ability to reason. Calvin further believed that Satan plays a role in deceiving human reason, and further, even God may blind humans that are sinful. All three of these may contribute in preventing the proper functioning of human reason. However, "Calvin stressed that fallen humanity is without excuse because its failure to attain a true and saving knowledge of God is self-caused" (Moroney 4).

Second, despite the fallen nature of humanity, Calvin thought that human reason was still capable of understanding great things. These things, however, were earthly things, and these were to be distinguished from heavenly things. Earthly things are those things that "have their significance and relationship with regard to the present life and are, in a sense, confined within its bounds." Heavenly things are "the pure knowledge of God, the nature of true righteousness, and the mysteries of the heavenly kingdom" (Calvin II.2.13; qtd. in Moroney 5-6). Although humanity may reason and excel in areas such as government, sciences, and the arts, "heavenly things," those things pertaining to God, and his will for humanity, are not in the realm of fallen human reason.

In this fallen state human reason cannot obtain knowledge of God and it is only through the Word of God, or Scripture, that knowledge of God can be found. But in order for Scripture to be understood, human reason must be regenerated through the work of the Holy Spirit: "flesh is not capable of such lofty wisdom as to conceive God and what is God's, unless it be illumined by the Spirit of God" (Calvin, II.2.19; qtd. in Moroney 9). Moroney emphasizes that for Calvin, "the Word of God is ineffective revelation apart from the Spirit of God regenerating the fallen human mind" (10). Faith and

renewal of reason are needed in order to properly understand God and to reverse the noetic effects of sin. However, even when these are in place, there are limits to our ability to understand God. When it comes to topics of God's providence, predestination, essence, and hidden will, we ought to recognize the limits of our human reason (Moroney 12). Therefore, central to Calvin's view is that the Fall, and human sin, has affected our ability to reason, and the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit is needed to understand what we can about God.

### **Jonathan Edwards and true benevolence**

Jonathan Edwards is another example of someone who believed that sin and human failure was responsible for the hiddenness of God. What follows is Wainwright's consideration of Edwards' writings as a response to the argument from divine hiddenness. In short, Edwards believed that God would reveal himself, and did reveal himself, through objective, adequate evidence. The ability to reason was given to humanity so that humankind could discern such evidence. God further revealed "divine things" to humanity through revelation. Edwards believed this was evidenced by ideas stemming from Judaism that were among other nations – such as the need for atonement or sacrifice for sin (Wainwright 99).

Edwards believed that individuals cannot understand God's benevolence unless those persons are benevolent themselves. Wainwright interprets true benevolence as loving being in general, rather than any private system, i.e. one's self: "If the sense in which the truly benevolent love truth more is analogous to that in which they love being more, we can infer that they wish to know more important truths about being in general, and that their love of these truths is more disinterested – freer from self-interest and the pressure of natural instinct" (101). Because of a lack of true benevolence, the insensibility of humans is shown through humanity's "proneness to idolatry" and its "disregard of eternal things" (Edwards I.VII.I.I.VI; qtd. in Wainwright 102). This can be seen in that even God's chosen people, the Israelites, repeatedly turned to idolatry. The disregard of eternal things is shown by the way prudence is applied towards worldly affairs but is often not applied to eternal things, which are far more

important (Wainwright 102-03). Thus blindness to God's existence is our own fault. Take, for example, the possibility of someone having a "strong reason" without having a "good reason." Edwards argues that this is not a defect of reason but rather a fault of the disposition; and faulty dispositions affect our ability to reason correctly (Wainwright 103). Edwards' writings therefore claim that sin is at the core of the existence of nonbelief, and because of sin, human nonbelief is culpable.

### **Heinrich Emil Brunner and the law of the closeness of relation**

According to Moroney, Heinrich Emil Brunner is one of the best known theologians of the twentieth century in regards to the noetic effects of sin. Brunner has similarities with Calvin but also has a continued development of the noetic effects of sin:

Brunner maintained that "reason is never neutral," but rather "in all that reason does it is making a response – whether in sin or in faith." Like Calvin, Brunner recognized that "our reason, apart from its restoration through the Word of grace, is always sinfully self-sufficient, a reason infected with rationalism and unbelief." Also like his predecessors, [...] Brunner argued that sin has noetic effects which are not constant, but variable. (Moroney 31)

Brunner's model is characterized by concentric circles in which the innermost circles are most affected by sin, while the outer circles become less and less influenced, or disadvantaged, by the effects of sin. The innermost circle is theology, and the outmost circle is mathematics and natural sciences. The areas of knowledge move from theology, to ethics, to humanities, and then mathematics and natural sciences. Brunner referred to this model as "the law of the closeness of relation" because the effects of sin on human reason are increased as the subject becomes more personal. In mathematics and natural sciences, such as physics, chemistry and anatomy, Brunner considered the effects of sin to be at minimum or not even present – Christian and non-Christian can both learn the same math with the same outcome. However, as areas of knowledge become more personal – things which affect personal and social life – the effects of sin become greater. Brunner argues that the humanities, sociology, and law, are examples of things that can be affected to small degrees by sin. Even more pronounced are the effects of sin upon the field of ethics in which divergent views are found on what constitutes the good

life. And finally, theology is the field most affected by sin because it is concerned with the study of God and humanity's relationship to God (Moroney 31-33). Brunner writes: "The nearer we come to the sphere of that which is connected with the personal being of God and man, which can no longer be perceived by reason but only by faith, the more we shall see that the self-sufficient reason is a source of error" (qtd. in Moroney 33). Therefore, according to Brunner, the noetic effects of sin will be greater when considering the existence of God, and therefore, all the more likely that nonbelief is culpable.

### **Shortcomings of Calvin, Edwards, and Brunner**

With these general points from Calvin, Edwards, and Brunner we are in a position to see that the view of nonbelief as culpable is common in theistic thought. However, there are shortcomings in each of these accounts that Moroney is able to improve upon, thus giving a more sophisticated account of the noetic effects of sin. One flaw that Moroney points out, in regards to Calvin's account, is that Calvin's distinction between earthly and heavenly things is too simplistic and inadequate to categorize the different kinds of human knowledge. Moroney asks how different kinds of human knowledge such as philosophy, history, anthropology, and psychology fit into these two categories, particularly when many "earthly things" can be blended with "heavenly things" further complicating the matter (14-15). In regards to Edwards's account, it is also too simplistic in claiming that it is a lack of true benevolence which leads to nonbelief. Just as Schellenberg underestimates the complexity of self-deception, Edwards overestimates the ability of humans to separate themselves from subjective influences and self-interest. There are self-interested theists who don't seem to exemplify true benevolence and yet still believe that God exists. Therefore, the lack of true benevolence, if true, is only a part of the answer for nonbelief.

Brunner's account of the noetic effects of sin is more sophisticated and is better than Calvin's account since he avoids the dichotomy of earthly and heavenly things. However, as Moroney writes, "he [Brunner] focuses so much on the object of study as to virtually ignore the knowing subject, outside

of the one question of whether the knower is a Christian” (34). Another major flaw is that Brunner equates the amount of the effects of sin in an area of knowledge based on whether or not there is disagreement between Christians and non-Christians in the particular field. The more distinct the Christian view is from the non-Christian is the gauge by which Brunner judges the effects of sin but this does not take into account the noetic effects of sin on Christian thinking. Moroney writes: “The great danger for Christians here is that of a Pharisaic finger-pointing at the way sin may distort unbelievers’ thought without attending to how sin distorts their own thought” (35).

The “law of the closeness of relation,” while better at explaining the variable effects that sin has on different areas of knowledge, is still inadequate as an account of the noetic effects of sin. What I find interesting about Brunner’s account is that instead of the “law of the closeness of relation” being about the effects of sin, Brunner seems to be focused on the role that faith plays in someone’s reasoning on a given field of knowledge. Faith is not needed in the calculations of a mathematical problem, but faith can play a significant role in the study of theology. In light of Brunner’s claim that the closer we get to the investigation of God and humanity’s relation to God the more we must perceive by faith instead of reason, he appears to be focused more on the role of faith in fields of knowledge rather than the noetic effects of sin. Perhaps a case can be made that there is an inverse relation between faith and sin, and therefore, it still reflects the noetic effects of sin, but ultimately, Brunner’s model suffers from a lack of clarity on how exactly sin has such an effect.

Moroney offers a compelling criticism of both Calvin and Brunner that can also be applied to Edwards. Moroney argues that both Calvin’s and Brunner’s view of sin are not comprehensive enough because they are too individualistic – neither accounts for the “corporate aspects of sin” (29). In none of these accounts does there seem to be an explanation for the role of social groups and communities. Moroney’s account of the noetic effects of sin is the best available, in part, because he wants to include the social aspects of humanity and how these factors play into a theory of the noetic effects of sin. I

now want to consider Moroney's model of the noetic effects of sin and apply it as an explanation for the culpability of nonbelief.

### **Stephen Moroney and a new model**

Moroney has taken the lessons learned from theologians before him to develop a model of the noetic effects of sin that takes into account the multifaceted and complex nature of sin and its effects on human reasoning. Moroney does not attempt to predict how the noetic effects of sin are manifested in particular situations given the "complex interplay of many factors," but rather gives possible broad generalizations (36). Moroney's model includes "objects of knowledge" and "knowing subjects." Incorporating the idea that sin affects different fields of knowledge to different degrees, Moroney has three different objects of knowledge: **(O1) God, (O2) Human Beings, and (O3) Impersonal Creation** (36). At each level the effects of sin become less evident. Such a distinction is an improvement on Calvin because it does not rely on a simple dichotomy, and an improvement on Brunner, because it doesn't generalize broad fields of studies, but instead incorporates that the different fields of study can each have a different focus.

Given this model, the effects of sin are at a minimum when dealing with objects that are of impersonal creation – for example, "sin is expected to have little impact on psychologists' investigation into the communicative action of neurons or the learning patterns of pigeons." However, when moving to human beings the effects of sin become more likely – "sin likely interferes to a greater degree in psychologists' investigation of the nature of human motivation or the definition of optimal mental health for humans." Sin can be expected to have an even greater impact when the object of knowledge is God – "sin is expected to interfere the most in psychologists' investigation of the function of worshipping God or the significance of believing in God" (37). These, however, are only generalizations. The second part of the model takes into account the knowing subject.

Other factors that Moroney thinks are important when considering the noetic effects of sin are characteristics of the knowing subject: **(S1) Regeneration and Sanctification**, **(S2) Influence of Communities**, and **(S3) Individual Differences** (36). Moroney, as well as many others, argue that human reasoning cannot be separated from other parts of human nature – psychological, social, cultural and religious. This amounts to acknowledging “that there is a moral dimension to human knowledge, especially knowledge of certain objects,” and so, Moroney argues, “people’s thinking is influenced by their relationship with God, specifically (1) whether or not they have been regenerated by the work of the Holy Spirit, and (2) to what degree they are sanctified” (38). By including **(S1) Regeneration and Sanctification**, Moroney can continue in the tradition of Calvin and Brunner of accounting for the importance of regeneration while also allowing for the further variables of the maturity and development of the regenerate through sanctification.

In Moroney’s critique of Calvin and Brunner, he continues to see a shortcoming of their accounts in that the models do not account for sin at the corporate level, that is, “how people are influenced by the communities in which they participate” (38). And so, Moroney includes **(S2) Influence of Communities** to acknowledge the context in which individuals find themselves. Prominent thought at different times has dictated standards of human rationality, and likewise, Moroney adds that “sinful elements in human traditions have distorting noetic effects on the thinking of people within those traditions” (39). However, the influence of communities can also have redemptive effects as well and thus Moroney’s model attempts to take these possibilities into account.

The final knowing subject in Moroney’s model is **(S3) Individual Differences**. This takes into account the specific circumstances and differences of individuals, and the ways that the noetic effects of sin may be individualized. Moroney uses the example of several biblical scholars involved in extramarital affairs:

One may distort the biblical teaching in such a way that it does not condemn his adulterous behavior. Another may admit that the Bible condemns adultery, but may



simply dismiss the Bible as an authoritative guide for her life. Still another may simply avoid any serious study or reflection on what the Bible teaches about adultery. (40)

Moroney writes that “sin has volitional as well as noetic effects, and it is no easy matter to predict how people’s wills and minds may influence on another” (40). (S3), Individual Differences, enables the model to take such individual considerations into account.

The final point of Moroney’s model is that all these factors, both objects of knowledge and the knowing subject, interact and make it difficult to determine how the noetic effects of sin will be instantiated. However, the model is the most comprehensive in including factors that should be considered when thinking about the noetic effects of sin on human reason. While the model does make generalizations, it can also accommodate the individualism that is needed given the individuality found in humanity (40-41). Despite all this, Moroney stresses that while the noetic effects of sin are the focus of this model, not all error of reasoning is due to sin. Other things, like human finitude, play a role in errors of human reasoning, and thus, “the proposed model does not claim that all cognitive failures are *caused* by moral faults or sins” (41-42).

A general objection that Moroney has to counter is what may be called “the objection of impracticality” (79). This objection has two assertions: (1) “humans are much more inclined to apply the concept to others than to themselves;” and (2) since no humans exist that do not suffer from the effects of sin in some form or fashion, there is no way to identify the noetic effects of sin which are not themselves free of the noetic effects of sin (80). To these objections Moroney’s basic reply is that “it is possible to identify, at least partially, the distortions in our thinking caused by sin – a possibility which may in large measure be realized through being self-critical and open to correction from others” (81). Just as intersubjectivity is helpful in other studies, such as the scientific method, intersubjectivity can be used to correct our understanding. Of course having a proper humility and appreciation for our finitude is also in order (82-83). While understanding the noetic effects of sin may be difficult, Moroney says that the objection of impracticality “reminds us to guard against the tendency to exaggerate the noetic

effects of sin on others' thinking and to minimize the noetic effects on our own thinking. [...] The noetic effects of sin should be explored further not in order to judge others but to facilitate our own repentance" (83). Of course using this quote in the context of the discussion here is in tension with the goal of trying to argue that nonbelief is culpable and therefore all humans are blameworthy if they exhibit nonbelief. Nevertheless, it is a reminder of the humility that should be in place when considering culpable nonbelief.

### **The Noetic Effects of Sin as an Explanation of Culpable Nonbelief**

Now that a brief description of the development of the noetic effects of sin from the Christian tradition has been given, as well as a discussion of Moroney's contemporary view, I would now like to apply the noetic effects of sin as an explanation of how nonbelief is culpable. In doing so it is important to note that just as assumptions of a historical fall are not necessary, there are also other assumptions that are not necessary for a view of the noetic effects of sin to work as a partial explanation for culpable nonbelief. An account of the noetic effects of sin as a challenge to Schellenberg's third premise can still work even without assumptions that have been mentioned in the discussion so far. These assumptions include: a deceiver such as Satan; the need for regeneration from the Holy Spirit to understand Scripture; predestination; and a *sensus divinitatus* or an innate idea of God. Instead God can be assumed to be freely discovered to some extent through human reason alone.

Applying the noetic effects of sin as an explanation for nonbelief implies that God has provided enough evidence for humans to come to believe in his existence. Such an explanation will include the claim that there is enough evidence for all humans, even if only indirect and mediate, to support belief in the existence of God. The reasons that individuals do not believe in God are broad and diverse but are ultimately grounded in the idea that sin has affected our human reasoning to such an extent that it can easily interfere with belief in the existence of God. But if we all have a natural disposition to sin, then even if sin interferes with belief, how are humans culpable? My previous application of Adams'

article, "Involuntary Sins," to Schellenberg's standard of culpability is again relevant. The culpability comes from the neglect of possibilities to foster characteristics within ourselves to overcome the disadvantages that we may inculpably find ourselves in. If we do not, over time, develop good-seeking, or truth-seeking, characteristics, then we are culpable for those omissions which led to our current state.

To help illustrate this concept, consider the development of a child. A child is not held responsible for all her actions and beliefs when she is young, but as she ages and develops there is a growing sense of responsibility and accountability. I will not hold a selfish three-year-old accountable in the same way that I would a selfish eighteen-year-old accountable. The three-year-old is at a disadvantage because she does not have the cognitive or emotional development in place to be able to manage and control herself in the same way that the eighteen-year-old should be able to control himself. We expect the eighteen-year-old to have matured and developed those characteristics which make him a responsible adult. If the eighteen-year-old has failed to develop those characteristics we would consider him culpable for his present state since he neglected the opportunities for development that would have resulted in a better current state. If I am by nature selfish, then this is something I am not initially culpable for. However, if I do not, over time, improve upon my original selfishness to develop characteristics of being caring, mindful of others, and less selfish, then I am at some point no longer inculpable, but culpable. In the same way, the noetic effects of sin are a disadvantage that humans inculpably find themselves in, but as individuals develop, there are opportunities to overcome those disadvantages. Those who fail to take advantage of opportunities to overcome the disadvantages of the noetic effects of sin can then be said to be culpable for the noetic effects of sin.

With Moroney's account of the noetic effects of sin, stripped of as many religious assumptions as possible, the theist can provide an explanation for nonbelief being culpable from a theological perspective that the agnostic may find worthy of consideration and can reduce the evidential support of

premise three of Schellenberg's argument. Inquiry into matters such as the existence of God will have more demanding and personal implications than other more mundane claims of human knowledge. This being the case, it is challenging to show clear cases of objective, adequately investigated, non-deceived, inculpable nonbelief since the question itself will involve various subjective factors and considerations in addition to the objective factors. Moroney's model includes a complex interplay of factors in allowing for the effects of sin that make it applicable to address many different kinds, forms, and instances of nonbelief. Not only does he divide the kinds of objects of knowledge (God, Human Beings, and Impersonal Creation), but his inclusion of diverse factors of the knowing subjects (Influence of Communities, and Individual Differences) allows us to offer a variety of replies and potential explanations for cases of nonbelief. This is why Moroney's model is the best available to challenge Schellenberg's third premise and to engage the agnostic.

#### **A Challenge from the Demographics of Theism**

To show the ability of Moroney's model to help explain cases of culpable nonbelief, I will now turn to one of the more powerful challenges to the argument that all nonbelief is culpable. This challenge is provided by Stephen Maitzen's argument from the demographics of theism. Maitzen argues that, given the uneven distribution of theistic belief, naturalistic explanations are more reasonable than any other account for the amount of theistic belief in the world (177). Given the assumption that non-belief is the result of epistemic or moral defectiveness that is common to all of humanity, Maitzen asks an appropriate question: "Why does that defectiveness vary dramatically with cultural and national boundaries" (180)? For example, consider that 95 percent of the population of Saudi Arabia is theistic while 95 percent of the population of Thailand is Buddhist and therefore only 5 percent theistic (179). If humans share the noetic effects of sin in common, then we should expect nonbelief to be evenly distributed as well. However, in the actual world, nonbelief in the existence of God is widely uneven in different populations.

One of the advantages to Moroney's model that was not found in previous models is that it takes into consideration the possibility of corporate sin – that is, that humans live in communities and are, for better or worse, influenced by societal factors. Because of this, Moroney's model can be used to begin a response to Maitzen's challenge from the demographics of theism. The reason that there is uneven distribution of theistic belief is because different societies and cultures all throughout the world have influences upon those that are born into them. Whatever culture or community an individual is born into, that community will, for better or worse, have an impact on that individual. If someone is born into a non-theistic community, then the sin of that community will have an influence on her thinking and place her at a disadvantage in relation to belief in the existence of God. However, the flip side of Maitzen's question is: Why does theistic belief continue to persist in cultural or national boundaries that are hostile or ignorant of theistic belief? Moroney's model can again account for this because it also takes into consideration the individual differences of the knowing subject. Although there is not one general answer to Maitzen's challenge, one that could be offered is that, despite the disadvantage of one born into a non-theist community, individual differences may make one more open to the evidence for God. Although individuals cannot control the environment they were born into, individuals can be responsible for the characteristics they want to develop that result in one being disposed to evidence for God. Thus, Moroney's model can provide an explanation for how individuals can come to believe in God despite unfavorable circumstances. While such kinds of responses would need to be developed to continue to reply to different iterations of the challenge from the demographics of theism, the point is that, contrary to what Maitzen thinks, a response is possible via a model of the noetic effects of sin that is comprehensive in its consideration of multiple factors that have an interplay of the effects of sin, i.e. the influence of communities and individual differences.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued, from both philosophical and theological perspectives, that the evidential weight of Schellenberg's third premise can be significantly reduced by considering other standards of culpability which show that Schellenberg is mistaken in his standard of culpability. Furthermore, given the difficulties of determining adequate investigation, the possibility of deception, and the challenges of parity belief, it becomes even more difficult to identify cases of *reflective* inculpable nonbelief. While Schellenberg claims this is not a problem, because *unreflective* inculpable nonbelief is widespread, I challenged the claim that unreflective inculpable nonbelief is so easily instantiated. The assumptions that Schellenberg makes are quick and do not give the possible rebuttals much attention. The possibility of involuntary sins for which we are culpable, as well as an account of the noetic effects of sin on human reasoning, while not popular replies to the argument from divine hiddenness, should be weighed nonetheless. When combining these possibilities and the complexity of human reasoning, it becomes reasonable to question, and perhaps reject, Schellenberg's third premise. A case can be made, from a theistic view, that God does provide enough evidence, even if indirect, for humankind to come to have belief in his existence. Since the focus is on the possibility of enough evidence for God so that a person can begin to enter into some form of relationship with deity, then perhaps there is enough of such general evidence for God. Any failure to recognize such evidence is potentially culpable for a variety of reasons and shortcomings, both voluntary and involuntary, and the noetic effects of sin. Therefore, any nonbelief in the existence of God is in some way culpable, and therefore, inculpable nonbelief does not occur.

Despite all of this, there is still a possible reply available to anyone critical of a denial of inculpable nonbelief. That is, that while such arguments may limit the amount of inculpable nonbelief in the world, to say that such arguments rid the possibility completely is too bold a claim. It would in effect be saying that given the amount of people in the world today, as well as all those who have come before, and any who will come after, it is unlikely that there has ever been a case of inculpable

nonbelief. Because of this, the theist should not stop with a simple denial of inculpable nonbelief. While such inculpable nonbelief may be much less common than supposed, it is still a reasonable possibility. Therefore, the theist should be open to granting Schellenberg's third premise and should turn to other possible rebuttals of Schellenberg's argument. Following this advice, I will in the next chapter consider possible challenges to Schellenberg's second premise: *If a perfectly loving God exists, reasonable nonbelief will not occur.*

### Chapter 3: Theodicies and Defenses

#### Relationship of Divine Hiddenness to the Argument from Evil

##### The “logical” and “evidential” distinction

I consider the argument from divine hiddenness as a special instance of the argument from evil even though it is not necessarily the case. Schellenberg wants to focus on the deeper claim of the concept of divine love and openness of relationship rather than divine hiddenness as a problem of evil, but it is helpful to consider the general structure of the argument from evil in order to understand the argument from divine hiddenness. Given this relationship and the way that responses to both arguments can parallel, I will make a few introductory remarks regarding the argument from evil. First, a common distinction is made between the logical argument from evil and the evidential argument from evil. J. L. Mackie is an example of someone who promoted the ‘logical argument from evil’ because, on his view, it is impossible for the statements, “*God is omnipotent and God is wholly, good,*” and “*evil exists,*” both to be true given the moral principle that “*a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can,*” and the proposition, “*there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do.*” Mackie argues that not only are religious beliefs lacking in rational support, they are actually irrational beliefs since the claims of classical theism and the existence of evil are inconsistent with one another resulting in the theist having to “be prepared to believe, not merely what cannot be proved, but what can be *disproved* from other beliefs that he also holds” (200). Howard-Snyder sums up the distinctions of the argument from evil as follows: “Allowing that Mackie’s argument is a guide, we can think of a ‘logical argument from evil’ as one which has a premise that says God and some *known* fact about evil are *incompatible*, and we can think of an ‘evidential argument from evil’ as one that *lacks* such a premise” (1996b, xiv). What is unique about Schellenberg’s argument is that it can appear ambiguous as to whether or not it is meant to be a logical argument or an evidential argument from divine hiddenness. Although the argument may appear at first to be a logical argument, Schellenberg considers his argument to be an evidential argument from divine hiddenness (1993, 9). I will discuss some of the confusion that this



ambiguity can create in the next chapter, but for now I will consider Schellenberg's argument only as an evidential argument from divine hiddenness.

In more recent years the focus of the argument from evil has shifted to the 'evidential argument from evil' since, as William P. Alston points out, "it is now acknowledged on (almost) all sides that the logical argument is bankrupt, but the inductive argument is still very much alive and kicking" (1996, 97). This is due to arguments which offer logical possibilities for the belief in the traditional concept of God (all-knowing, all-loving, all-powerful) while at the same time allowing for the possibility of evil. Human free will is commonly used in arguments to show that there is the logical possibility of evil because of God's respect for human free will. With this shift in focus on the argument from evil, the atheist argues that, given the amount of evil, it is unlikely that God exists because evil constitutes empirical evidence against the existence of God (97). The theist attempts to counter this claim to show that the evidential force of the existence of evil does not weigh as heavily against the possibility of God's existence as it may first seem, or against the total evidence for theism.

### **From the Argument from Evil to Divine Hiddenness**

The clearest formulation of showing how the argument from divine hiddenness can be responded to in similar ways as the argument from evil can be found in Peter van Inwagen's chapter, "*The Hiddenness of God*" of his book, The Problem of Evil. Van Inwagen says that the hiddenness argument is very similar to the argument from evil:

It [the hiddenness argument] contends that if there were a God, the world would, owing to his moral perfection, his knowledge, and his power, have certain observable features; it contends, moreover, that the world can be seen not to have these features; it concludes that God does not exist. In a way, it *is* an argument from evil, for, if God *does* exist, then a rational creature's being ignorant of his existence is an evil. (135)

Van Inwagen proposes that the theistic response to hiddenness should "strictly parallel" the theistic response to the argument from evil. That parallel is to tell a story that has the following logical consequences:

The world was created and is sustained by a necessary, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, morally perfect being – that is, by God. There are rational beings in this world, and God wants these beings, or some of them at some times, to believe in his existence. The world is devoid of signs and wonders – of “special effects”. Or if the world contains any such events, they are so rare that very few people have actually observed one or even encountered anyone who claims to have observed one. (In the latter case, among those people whom God wants to believe in his existence are many of the people who are distant in space and time from any of the very rare signs and wonders.) (144)

Such stories are a defense, and just like the defenses given in the argument from evil, reasons are needed to justify why God permits the existence of the thing in question, which in our case is the hiddenness of God. In the argument from evil, defenses provide reasons or explanations for evil which are, for all we know, possible. Theodicies must satisfy stricter standards by providing reasons or explanations for evil which are more likely to be true rather than *just* merely possible. A defense to the argument from divine hiddenness demonstrates the logical possibility of God allowing inculpable nonbelief to occur by offering possible reasons, but does not have to argue for the truth of the reasons provided. Defenses can incorporate theodicies by demonstrating that the reasons offered to explain divine hiddenness are likely to be true.

Taking van Inwagen’s advice on how to respond to the argument from evil and applying it to the argument from divine hiddenness, two ways to respond to the argument from hiddenness are to either (1) construct a defense which shows that inculpable nonbelief is less surprising, given the existence of God, than one might suppose, or (2) argue that there are reasons for preferring theism to atheism that outweigh the *prima facie* reason for preferring atheism to theism that is provided by the argument from divine hiddenness (168). While hiddenness is a difficulty for the theist, difficulties do not render beliefs irrational – even if theists are unable to construct a theodicy. Van Inwagen writes:

They can acknowledge the difficulties. They can admit that the difficulties exist and that they’re not sure what to say about them. They might go on to offer some speculations about the causes of the phenomena that raise the difficulties [...]. Such speculations [...] need not be probable on anything that is known to be true, although they should not be improbable on anything that is known to be true. They are to be offered as

explanations of the difficult phenomena that are, *for all anyone knows*, the correct ones. In sum, the way to deal with such difficulties is to construct defenses. (169)

More precisely, “A difficulty with a theory does not necessarily constitute evidence against it, it suffices to construct a defense that accounts for the facts that raise the difficulty” (170). And so in similar fashion, as is done in the argument from evil, I will explore possible defenses and theodicies that have been offered to account for the hiddenness of God. The most popular defenses and theodicies in the literature have at their core the feature of free will as an explanation for divine hiddenness.

### **The possibility of inculpable nonbelief**

Before moving to a closer examination of prominent theodicies and defenses I first challenge Schellenberg’s claim that inculpable nonbelief would *never* occur in those capable of a relationship with God. Schellenberg emphasizes that his argument is motivated from the concept of divine love, but it is relatively easy to show how divine love is still consistent with the possibility of inculpable nonbelief. Again, Schellenberg’s second premise is: *If a perfectly loving God exists, reasonable nonbelief does not occur*. Schellenberg repeatedly responds to criticisms of his argument that critics are not taking into account the motivating factor behind his argument, that is, the concept of divine love. Schellenberg’s argument is based on a concept of divine love ‘from above’ rather than ‘from below.’ If God is all-powerful and all-loving then individuals who are capable, and are nonresistant, will at all times have a relationship available to them. Schellenberg writes: “I myself start, as it were, ‘from above’, *with those general considerations*, which, I have argued, suggest that, contrary to what might otherwise seem plausible, a loving God would not permit inculpable nonbelief of any kind or for any duration” (2005, 334). This claim is challenged by offering accounts in which God may allow, and perhaps must allow, inculpable nonbelief for a time *because* of divine love, or in order to bring about some other good. Perhaps, because of divine love, God desires an individual to experience a time of nonbelief in order to come to a realization of a need for a relationship with God. Perhaps inculpable nonbelief is needed for a time in an individual so that she will later respond to God in an appropriate way. The end result that she

ends up in relationship with God outweighs the inculpable nonbelief that may have persisted for a time, and further, may have been needed to bring about the resulting relationship. Thus it is reasonable to challenge Schellenberg's concept of divine love as the *only* possible conception given a perfectly loving God. Douglas Henry writes:

However much we might try to identify with God – embracing God's nature, reflecting in light of God's omniscient wisdom, and loving in the profundity of divine charity – we cannot succeed in really seeing things from above. We must allow, then, that accounts of divine love are subject to the limits and frailties of our view from below. Honestly appraising the humble position we occupy reminds us that divine love could be different from what we imagine. (2008, 281)

Robert McKim argues that even if a relationship with God is a great good – even a good that is central to the purpose of our existence – as well as the fact that we are capable of such a relationship, it does not follow that it is right we achieve it *now*. Particularly if we are not *ready* for it now: “If we are not now ready for such a relationship even if we are capable of it, this would provide excellent reason for a loving God not to seek such a relationship with us now” (1995, 276). Howard-Snyder likewise would not find it surprising if there are reasons that God has to permit inculpable nonbelief that we are not aware of: “even though we rightly believed that God had a desire to relate personally to us, our total evidence would not be sufficient to conclude that God would prevent inculpable nonbelief” (1995, 432). This highlights the need to distinguish between *a* desire, from *an all-things-considered* desire that God may have to relate personally to us (1996, 434).

Howard-Snyder offers a couple examples to explain why God might want to refrain from entering into a personal relationship and thereby possible reasons why God would allow inculpable nonbelief. If someone is disposed to reject God, say for example, someone who through no fault of his own because of “an abusively strict religious upbringing,” then God's failing to provide reasonable grounds for the individual, for the time, could be an act of mercy in order to prevent the individual being in an actual state of rejecting God. Similarly for those inculpable nonbelievers who would respond

indifferently, God could have similar reasons to delay the offer of a relationship until the indifferent individual was in a better position to respond (1996, 441-42).

What Howard-Snyder has attempted to do is show that “there is *prima facie* reason for God to permit inculpable nonbelief *for a time*.” Furthermore he argues that even if he is wrong, and we cannot think of any reasons God would allow inculpable nonbelief, the argument from divine hiddenness still doesn’t stand because “the inference from ‘We can’t think of a reason for God to permit inculpable nonbelief’ to ‘There is no reason for God to permit inculpable nonbelief’ is reasonable *only if* we have no good reason to be suspicious about whether we would likely discern God’s reason if He had one” (1996, 453). I will consider this line of argument in the next chapter.

The kind of claim that Schellenberg is making is styled after the claim made in the logical argument from evil: If an all-loving God exists, then pain and suffering would *never* occur. This is despite the fact that Schellenberg’s argument from divine hiddenness is considered to be an evidential argument. Just as the claim of pain and suffering never occurring has been generally rejected in the logical argument from evil, Schellenberg’s claim that inculpable nonbelief never occurs should be rejected. The logical argument from evil has been generally rejected given the possibility of other goods that pain and suffering could bring about. One such kind of suffering is referred to as redemptive suffering – suffering which brings about the possibility of some greater good. With the shift to the evidential argument from evil, the distinction is made that if a loving God exists, *gratuitous* pain and suffering would not occur. In a similar way Schellenberg’s second premise should instead be read as: If a perfectly loving God exists, then *gratuitous* inculpable nonbelief does not occur. This reading is more in line with an evidential argument and avoids the faulty claim that Schellenberg is making while still demonstrating the challenge of the argument from divine hiddenness. Schellenberg should retreat from his initial version of the premise to the latter version I have offered. Doubtless, the response from Schellenberg will be that inculpable nonbelief will not occur because it is a necessary condition of divine

love. However, given the variety of defenses available to the argument from divine hiddenness, it has been demonstrated that God could have reasons for inculpable nonbelief to occur. Therefore, it is reasonable to hold that inculpable nonbelief is possible even if a perfectly loving God exists.

### **Defenses and Theodicies**

There are many different kinds of defenses and theodicies which have been offered as an answer to the argument from evil but those motivated by free-will and soul-making are the defenses and theodicies that have been most developed as a response to the more specific argument from divine hiddenness. Free-will theodicies center on the value of human free will. Thus, God permits suffering because by doing so he respects the free will of humankind to choose between good and evil. Hick's soul-making, or Irenaean theodicy (influenced by Irenaeus 130-202), centers on the idea that God could not create a perfect and free human, in relation to God, and so there needed to be a "divine distance" in which humankind could develop the proper virtues through the exercise of free will. Thus, the world is an environment in which human "soul-making" can take place so that humans can develop into the kind of individuals we need to be and our response to evil and suffering can facilitate this process.

It should be mentioned that behind some versions of these theodicies may be other theistic assumptions that can be found in Biblical theodicies which incorporate some of the following: (1) the fall of humankind so that evil is a punishment for humans or a means to being tested or disciplined; (2) possibility of redemptive suffering; (3) evil due to powers from the likes of Satan and his fallen angels; (4) "faith solutions" which may be supported from texts like the Book of Job and other New Testament texts, which encourage "a trusting faith that all goods and evils which occur in human life are part of God's incomprehensible plan," and therefore have meaning and purpose, even if that meaning and purpose is only known to God (Whitney 257). Of course these are further religious assumptions which are not necessarily required, and may be denied, in the variety of free-will and soul-making theodicies.

I will now consider three different defenses and theodicies for divine hiddenness. The first begins with a discussion of coercion to make the claim that if God is not hidden we would be coerced in to believing that God exists. The second argues that God would not reveal himself through signs and wonders because it would interfere with God's plan of atonement. The third theodicy claims that God's hiddenness allows us to be cognitively free and believe in God's existence so that we are also free to enter into a relationship with God. These defenses and theodicies all fall under appropriateness theories because each will explain why God's hiddenness is appropriate for the benefit of some other good. In most cases this is the good that humans can freely enter into a relationship with God. I will criticize each of the defenses and theodicies offered and show that free-will defenses are not sufficient to respond to the challenge posed by Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness.

#### **Michael J. Murray and Coercion**

A free-will theodicy can be applied to divine hiddenness by arguing that God, by ensuring a free response from humans, must remain hidden in some regard. Michael J. Murray utilizes such a theodicy in his 1993 and 2002 articles to argue that if God were not hidden, a response to God would be coerced rather than motivated out of free will. Murray argues that "fully robust and morally significant free-will cannot be exercised by someone who is compelled by another in the context of a threat." He goes on to say that if God did not remain hidden to some extent, then at least some free creatures "would be in the condition of being compelled in the context of a threat and, as a result, such creatures could not exercise their freedom in this robust, morally significant manner" (1993, 29). Consider the example Murray gives of Barney and Fred. Barney was sent by his friend Fred to deposit money into a bank account. Along the way Barney is confronted by a robber and hands over the money at gun point. It is understandable that we would not consider Barney morally culpable in a way that he would be if he had given the money away or not followed through with Fred's request. In cases of compulsion "it would appear that although freedom *simpliciter* is not eliminated, the moral significance of the action

performed is" (30). The relationship between threats and freedom is not as simple as laid out here and there is much more that would need to be said to fully examine disagreement surrounding further possibilities, but Murray is not concerned with defending any of these positions. Rather, for his purposes it is enough to see that such instances put the threatened "in an unsavory position, one which in some way interferes with their exercising morally-significant freedom in a fully robust manner" (31).

Given the ambiguity of what is a "significant threat," Murray attempts to clarify the concept by providing factors which jointly determine "threat significance." These three important factors are *threat strength*, *threat imminence*, and *wantonness of the threatened* (31). Threat strength is the degree to which someone would feel the consequences are harmful to himself. Threat imminence is the degree to which someone would feel the consequences will follow. Wantonness of the threatened is the disregard someone has for his own personal well-being. Murray claims that the degree of compulsion is directly proportional to threat strength and threat imminence, and is inversely proportional to wantonness of the threatened.

Regarding threat imminence, Murray offers three distinct senses: *probabilistic*, *temporal*, and *epistemic*. *Probabilistic* threat imminence is the degree to which someone feels the likelihood of the threat being carried out. The examples given by Murray to highlight two different degrees of probability would be the standard robber case with a gun to your back in contrast to a prisoner who is told he will be shot by the prison guards if he attempts to escape. In the robber scenario you would feel it highly probable you would be shot if you do not comply with the threat. However, in the prison example, the prisoner may feel that even though there is a threat of being shot it is a lower probability due to factors such as the distance between the guard tower and the prisoner or the guard seeing the prisoner trying to escape given all the other prisoners he is watching as well (31).

Regarding *temporal* threat imminence, the compulsion is greater when the consequence is perceived as proceeding more immediately if the conditions of the threat are not met. Thus the



compulsion is greater in the robber case when you are told you will be shot on the spot rather than shot with darts containing a poison with no antidote that will kill you in fifty years (32). *Epistemic* threat imminence is the idea that the more epistemically forceful something is the greater the compulsion. To help clarify this idea, Murray says this is the reason why massive advertising campaigns are made for things like smoking or drinking and driving. Those who engage in such behaviors don't typically believe that it is not bad for them and are usually aware of possible consequences. The goal of such campaigns may not be primarily to inform but rather to reinforce epistemically the threat of how dangerous these behaviors can be. Thus, "the more epistemically forceful the danger is, the more likely we are to not act in such a way." Similarly, in regards to compulsion, "the more epistemically imminent a threat, the more compelled the threatened individual will feel" (32).

Murray argues that the two factors of strength and imminence are still not sufficient to explain compulsion. This can be seen again in the prison example. Assuming that all the prisoners do not want to remain in prison, why do some attempt to escape and others do not, even though the threat strength and imminence are the same for all the prisoners? The third factor needed is the wantonness of the threatened. Different individuals under the same threat strength and imminence "can feel compelled to different degrees depending on a certain internal character trait which can be described as incorrigibility or threat indifference." This is an indifference for one's well-being in the face of consequences should he refuse to submit to some threat. Therefore, Murray concludes, it is these three factors that need to be considered "when we consider the degree to which a threat prevents the exercise of robust morally significant freedom" (32). Now let's apply these three factors to the hiddenness of God. Murray argues that divine hiddenness preserves human free will because it is the only way that God can decrease the possibility of coercion. In Western theistic tradition, specifically Christian tradition, there are both temporal and eternal threats for disobedience to divine will. Given the context of individuals under divine threat, how then are we to avoid compulsion from threats found in Christian tradition? Murray

argues that one of the three factors of compulsion must be mitigated in some way to avoid compromising human free will.

Given traditional Christian doctrine, Murray grants the existence of hell and considers the threat of hell to be “equal to the strongest imaginable threat.” Therefore, by granting the existence of hell, “we also preclude the possibility of mitigating compulsion by attenuating threat strength.” Next we turn to wantonness. But Murray quickly dismisses this as the place to mitigate compulsion because “it seems likely that the development and functioning of traits such as wantonness is something which falls within the domain of the freedom of the individual” (33). To make such a case would require more by way of psychological questions of how personality traits develop in general (i.e. nature or nurture) and how traits are developed in relation to wantonness, but he cites the Aristotelian view on development of virtues (“by willful cultivation of habits of right-acting”) to support his brief claim that wantonness cannot be manipulated by God if free will is to be preserved (33).

We are now left with the factor of threat imminence. How can threat imminence be manipulated to soften the threat so as not to lead to coercion and thus a loss of morally significant freedom? Probabilistic threat imminence does not seem a viable option since in the Christian tradition the threat of hell will be carried out. Temporal threat imminence is a little more viable in that the consequences are not carried out immediately. However, even if the temporal imminence were lessened, this does not guarantee that it would be sufficient to avoid compulsion. Murray writes that if God appeared in the sky and gave a temporal and eternal threat, “it seems that the actions of such free creatures clearly *would be* compelled if they were to be confronted by such obvious threats” (34).

This brings Murray to consider epistemic threat imminence. Murray argues that it is only epistemic threat imminence that can be manipulated so as to prevent coercion in free agents. Murray’s claim is that “the hiddenness of God is required in order for free beings to be able to exercise their freedom in a morally significant manner given the strength of the threat implied by knowledge of the

threat implicit in the traditional Christian story” (34). If God were to reveal himself to be more apparent in this world, then that would put us in the robber scenario where, because of the strength and imminence of the threat, which would overcome any wantonness of most, individuals would be compelled to act in accordance with the demand. To avoid such a scenario, Murray concludes that God must reduce the threat imminence through remaining hidden and thus allow robust, morally significant freedom for humans: “it is this epistemic ambiguity that we call the problem of the hiddenness of God” (34).

### **Criticisms**

While I find Murray’s breakdown of coercion helpful and informative I offer three criticisms which show that this free-will defense from coercion is insufficient as an explanation for the hiddenness of God. First, in line with my attempt to remove as many theistic assumptions as possible, in order to remain appealing to an agnostic, once more specific and robust theistic assumptions are removed from Murray’s account the case from coercion quickly becomes less plausible. When possible, I want to focus on the existence of God rather than further religious claims. Murray grants the existence of hell in order to show that the threat strength cannot be reduced in any way as it is “equal to the strongest imaginable threat,” and there is no lack of probability that such a threat will be carried out (33). However, the doctrine of hell is a further religious assumption that, for the purpose of discussion here, I do not want to assume. If the traditional doctrine of hell is not assumed, then there are many more ways in which the possibility of coercion can be reduced.

Since either the threat strength or probabilistic threat imminence could be reduced, this allows for an increase in epistemic imminence, or further revealing of God, without the consequence of compromising human free will. Temporal threat eminence alone can be manipulated more than Murray seems to give credit. As Schellenberg argues, any punishment that is in the future is less immediate and concrete which also reduces the strength of the desire to avoid punishment: “It always requires an act

of will to give up short-term goods in favor of longer-term interests. If punishment is seen as something in the future, its deterrent effect must be greatly reduced.” Consider the following possible reasoning: “It is not if I give in to *this* desire that God will punish me, perhaps even annihilate me, but only if I persistently, to my life’s end, give in to such desires. But of course, I do not intend to give in tomorrow, or the next day...; only today. So I may perform this action without fear of being punished” (1993, 124).

Second, considering the involuntary nature of belief, how is more evidence of God seen as coercive? If God provides further evidence for his existence and my reasoning follows that evidence to the conclusion that God exists, where has the coercion taken place? This seems to be the same process that happens in my belief formation of any other issue that I investigate and follow the evidence in order to come to a belief. If my siblings tell me I am adopted I may not believe them at first. However, if I am shown my birth certificate with my birth mother’s name and receive a letter from my birth mother further confirming her existence and the adoption, then I come to believe that I am adopted. I am not coerced into that belief but rather form the belief based on my conclusion from the evidence. If this is coercion, then it is not a kind of coercion that would cause concern for divine hiddenness. For Murray’s account to work, some form of direct doxastic voluntarism must be true so that an agent can be coerced into having a belief since the agent must perform an action, or not perform an action, so as to avoid a significant threat. But if belief formation is involuntary, as Schellenberg has assumed from the beginning, then how can we be coerced in a process through which we have limited control in the first case? The most that I grant here is an indirect doxastic voluntarism in which we have some control in directing our beliefs, i.e. evaluating evidence so as to have a belief.

Murray may respond that coercion comes into play because of the threats that are implied in the evidence given by God. Even still, given that we are talking about beliefs rather than actions, Murray’s account ultimately fails for a third reason: Murray does not take into account the distinction between belief *that* God exists, and belief *in* God. This distinction is very important and it will continue

to come into play when evaluating defenses and theodicies. At issue here is the belief *that* God exists, and it is possible to have the belief *that* God exists without having belief *in* God which includes things like trust, hope, and love. With this distinction in place, even if the doctrine of hell is granted as a threat, there is less possibility for coercion that would compromise human free will or prevent God from revealing his existence to a greater extent. There are several reasons for this claim. First, belief *that* God exists is a necessary condition but not sufficient condition for belief *in* God. If I trust and love God, then it is necessary that I believe God exists, but if I believe that God exists, it is not necessary that I love and trust God. Second, belief *that* God exists is involuntary, or at most indirectly voluntary, and is thus based on evidence that a person has, whether public or private evidence. In contrast, belief *in* God is volitional and thus a matter of the will. Since belief *that* God exists does not entail belief *in* God, any further revelation of God does not infringe upon the autonomy of the individual and therefore there is no possibility of coercion even in the face of threats such as hell. Even if I am convinced that God exists, this does not infringe upon my right to be indifferent. Given that the context of Schellenberg's argument is that, at minimum, evidence should be given for belief *that* God exists to be possible for everyone, God could be more apparent without the possibility of coercion.

But let us further consider the possibility of coercion from a significant threat for belief *in* God. I argue that even coercion of belief *in* God is unlikely. Let us assume that God expresses the following basic threat: "You will go to hell unless you obey me!" If obeying God is a set of rules for our actions to follow, then perhaps I can be coerced into following those rules if the threat is significant in all the ways that Murray has laid out. However, and here I bring in at least some theistic assumptions, obedience is more than mere rule following. A common religious account of obedience is a robust concept which involves volitional love. In the Christian tradition, when Jesus is asked which is the greatest commandment of the Law he responds that it is to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. The second is to love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus says that on these two commandments all the rest of

the Law hangs. Thus to obey God in the Christian tradition includes loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and therefore, involves all aspects of the agent rather than just following certain rules or laws.

With this idea in mind, perhaps the threat could be equivalent to: “You will go to hell unless you love me!” This clarifies why belief *in* God cannot be coerced: love cannot be coerced because it can only be freely offered. I would think this claim is generally accepted. Consider some generic movie plot line in which a greedy king takes a maiden from a poor pauper and says that she must love him. No matter what the king does to force or threaten her to be with him he cannot force her to love him. This may be expressed in a scene where she slaps him and says, “My heart will never belong to you.” Perhaps she marries the king in order to keep the pauper she loves alive, but her marriage will be a loveless marriage since her heart does not belong to the king. The king may coerce her actions (i.e. she marries him) but he cannot coerce her love. Obviously this analogy does break down since we are considering God as perfectly loving, but nevertheless this illustrates the intuition that love is not coerced.

But just to further examine the possibility of coercion, let’s say that love can be coerced. Consider another generic movie plot. In this movie there is a guy madly in love with the girl next door. However, the girl has no interest in the guy and is instead dating the neighborhood bully. Over the course of the movie the guy proceeds to do things to make his love apparent to the girl and ‘makes her fall in love’ with him. Let’s say that she is so overwhelmed by his displays of love that she can’t help but fall in love with the boy next door. If there was any possible way of saying the girl was coerced into loving the guy, would coercion be a bad thing in this context? The girl is much better off and happier with the boy next door rather than with the bully who really doesn’t treat her right even if she was initially *coerced* into loving the boy next door! But this analogy seems flawed from the start because instead of the guy coercing the girl in the context of a threat, it seems to be the guy wooing the girl in

context of an offer. This shows why love cannot be coerced since love is a showing of care for another and is thus an offer rather than a threat.

Let me offer one other analogy to try to make the point that even if God were to coerce humans into loving him, it would not necessarily be a bad thing. I enjoy all sorts of ethnic foods. I don't have children but my hope is that when I do, my children will be adventurous eaters so that my wife and I can continue to eat our favorite ethnic foods as a family. I would hope that my children would come to enjoy these foods on their own. I would also hope that I would not use coercion in my child rearing. However, if other parenting is any indication, it would seem that some coercion in the context of threats is unavoidable when raising a child. Consider the example: "Eat your vegetables!" The child does not like vegetables and refuses to eat them. Thus, coercion in context of a threat may be, "Eat your vegetables or you will go to your room!" or, "Eat your vegetables or I will spank you!" Assume that the child is coerced into eating his vegetables. Furthermore, to the surprise of the child, the child actually really enjoys vegetables. If the child is brought to the state of enjoying vegetables and eating them on his own, then it seems that even though coercion was initially used it has brought about a positive state of affairs which is beneficial to the child. If the child is eloquent, he may even share that he is thankful that his parents forced him to eat the vegetables because now it is something that he enjoys at every meal. Thus coercing my future child into eating a variety of ethnic foods can bring about a positive result that outweighs the initial negativity of coercion. Applying this to God, I question whether it is necessarily a bad thing if God were to coerce us to believe that he exists. Even though I may initially be coerced into believing that God exists, I may come to see myself in a much better state of affairs and therefore be glad that God forced me to recognize his existence.

Because of these considerations, I conclude that Murray's argument from coercion is insufficient to explain the hiddenness of God. First, Murray's case relies on robust theistic claims that once removed would allow many other ways in which God could mitigate coercion without reducing

epistemic threat imminence. Second, given the involuntary nature of belief, it is not clear how more evidence is coercive to a passive belief forming process. Third, even if belief *that* God exists is coerced, one can remain indifferent to belief *in* God, and it is only a belief *in* God, that if coerced could possibly be an infringement on human free will. But even in such a scenario, where evidence for God is more apparent, such coercion is not likely possible. For my rejection of Murray to stand I do not have to maintain the stronger claim that God, in principle, can never reveal himself to an extent that would overwhelm or coerce humans and compromise free will. Instead, only the weaker claim is needed that God could at least reveal himself to a greater extent without compromising human free will.

### **Van Inwagen and “Ubiquitous Signs and Wonders”**

In van Inwagen’s chapter, “*The Hiddenness of God*,” in *The Problem of Evil*, van Inwagen presents an expanded free-will defense that has the core idea that the removal of all hiddenness by “ubiquitous signs and wonders would [...] frustrate God’s plan of atonement.” Van Inwagen begins such a defense by making the observation that the proposition, “God wants people to believe in his existence,” does not entail, “God wants people to believe in his existence – *and* he does not care why anyone who believes in him has this belief” (145). Van Inwagen thinks it reasonable that God could regard the following three states of affairs in order of decreasing value:

- (1) Patricia believes, for reason A, that God exists.
- (2) Patricia believes that God does not exist.
- (3) Patricia believes, for reason B, that God exists.

Van Inwagen writes: “It is certainly conceivable that someone’s believing in him for a certain reason (because, say, that person has witnessed signs and wonders) might make it difficult or even impossible for that person to acquire other features God wanted him or her to have” (145-46). To give a biblical example there is the story in Luke 16 of the rich man. The rich man is in torments for the life that he lived and he asks that someone be sent back to his brothers who are still living so that they may avoid the fate that he is now suffering. The reply he receives is, “If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets,



neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.” Van Inwagen asks the following: “Can it be true that witnessing a miracle, even a very personal and pointed miracle, would have no effect on the character of values of someone who witnessed it, no effect on the type of person he or she is” (146)?

Van Inwagen goes on to introduce a modern parable of his own making in which there is a Russian strategist who places bombs in Afghanistan that are disguised as bright shiny toys. This man dies and ends up in hell and begs to appear to his brother (who is the General who carried out the placement of the bombs) so as to warn him. In this story, the strategist is allowed to do so. What then would be the result? Van Inwagen offers a couple possible results: one could be that the General reasons as follows – “What I have to do is to figure out how to obey these damned rules in a way that will require a minimum modification of my goals in life;” or another possibility would be rebellion (148). But any resolution to modify his behavior may not be expected to last very long. Van Inwagen suggests that we shouldn’t be surprised if after too long the General finds a way to convince himself that the vision of his brother was some sort of illusion (148). Regardless of whether the General continues to think the miracle is real or not, van Inwagen argues that any change in behavior that it would produce is not something God would be interested in: “It’s not going to make of him a man who believes that the world is a horrible place *because* human beings are separated from God, and that the world can be healed only if humanity is reunited with God.” And so, van Inwagen claims that this can be applied generally to show that God’s use of ubiquitous miracles to convince us of his existence would not contribute to his plan of atonement (148).

For van Inwagen, part of the reason that God hasn’t provided us with more evidence is that there is enough evidence already to be convinced. Furthermore, if there were overwhelming miracles and signs, the best it could produce “would be a sort of sullen compliance with someone else’s opinion,” even if that someone else is God. Instead, “what is needed is natural conviction that proceeds from our normal cognitive apparatus operating on the normal data of the senses” (150). If there is enough

evidence and it is the result of some sort of epistemic defectiveness on an individual's part, van Inwagen argues that such miraculous evidence may only raise those barriers of the self-deceived (150-51). Van Inwagen concludes his discussion of hiddenness with the following:

If there is, as St Paul has said, a natural tendency in us to see the existence and power and deity of the maker of the world in the things around us (Rom. 2:20), and if many people do not see this because they do not want to see it, is it not possible that grains of sand bearing the legend 'Made by God' (or articulate thunder or a rearrangement of the stars bearing a similar message) would simply raise such emotional barriers, such waves of sullen resentment among the self-deceived, that there would be no hope of their eventually coming to perceive the power and deity of God in the ordinary, everyday operations of the things he has made? (151)

And so the hiddenness of God is necessary to respect the free will of humans. By remaining hidden, God prevents a coerced response and allows humans to freely have a personal relationship with Him.

### **Criticisms**

While I agree with some of what van Inwagen has to say, I disagree with his central claim. I want to make the claim that even ubiquitous signs and wonders would not interfere with atonement. Also, van Inwagen is blending both appropriateness and human defectiveness theories, but in this chapter I am focused on reasons why God would allow inculpable nonbelief, and therefore, I am not currently considering any explanation that incorporates defectiveness claims. My claim that ubiquitous signs and wonders would not interfere with atonement is based on the traditional religious assumption that God has used miracles in the past to convey his existence. In fact, a passing glance at Judeo-Christian scripture would show quite the opposite of van Inwagen's claim given the amount of miraculous signs that were provided to confirm the existence of God or the authority of God's communication.

If God used miracles today, it would have the same result that it did in biblical times: some will respond to the miracles and believe in God, while others will rationalize it away or choose to ignore the power of the miracle. I do think van Inwagen is correct in his estimation that signs and wonders would raise the barriers of the self-deceived or that a case like the ruthless General would play out as

described. But since I am in the context of talking about inculpable nonbelievers, someone open to the possibility of God's existence, or open to the possibility once presented with the proposition, could in fact come to believe that God exists via signs and wonders. If this did occur it would not be an infringement upon human freedom – just as people coming to believe in the existence of God based on miracles in biblical literature do not seem to have their free will compromised. This is the case because the signs and wonders only reveal the kind of believer someone already is: a believer, a culpable nonbeliever, or an inculpable nonbeliever. The miracle does not frustrate the plan of atonement but it does have an effect on the person. To use religious language, it reveals whether the person is hard-hearted or not. To use another religious analogy: just as the effects of the sun melt butter and harden concrete, so can the effects of God convict or harden someone's heart. I agree with van Inwagen that the culpable nonbeliever may not be affected by the miracle. However, I disagree with van Inwagen because signs and wonders would be an effective way to bring about belief in an inculpable nonbeliever without compromising that person's free will since the person has not done anything to shut out belief that God exists, and therefore would be open to more conclusive evidence.

The distinction between belief *that* and belief *in* again comes into play. Consider the following example van Inwagen gives: I want my wife to believe in my existence, yes, but what I really want "is for my wife and me to stand in a certain complex set of relations that, as a matter of fact, have her believing in my existence as an essential component or logical consequence." In the same way God does not want belief in his existence, *simpliciter*, but instead a complex set of relations of which belief in his existence is a logical consequence (149). I agree with van Inwagen on this point, but this just shows the importance of my distinction. Of course one could argue that God wants humans to believe *in* him, but this is not the type of belief that Schellenberg is claiming is needed at minimum. I am here concerned with belief *that* God exists, and this must come prior to belief *in* God's existence. Even clear evidence of God through ubiquitous signs and wonders would not frustrate God's plan of atonement. Instead, it

would at least bring individuals one step closer to a relationship with God because it would lay the foundation of the necessary belief that God does exist.

### **John Hick's Soul-Making Theodicy**

I now want to consider John Hick's soul-making theodicy, not only because it has been so influential in the argument from evil, but also because the claim he makes with his theodicy is that if God is not hidden, our belief *that* God exists would be forced, which would also cause our belief *in* God to be forced as well. In general, Hick's soul-making theodicy is an attempt to show that God allows evil because it makes possible the greater good of humans being able to develop valuable characteristics of the soul. Hick argues that God is at an epistemic distance so that the world is a "vale of soul-making" – that is, an environment in which humans can cultivate these important characteristics. Evil then actually creates the opportunity for humans to respond in a way that allows them to grow and mature into the individuals that God wants us to be. While soul-making is often given as a justification for the existence of evil, it has been applied in a similar manner to justify divine hiddenness. Thus God must be at a distance, or hidden, to ensure the opportunity to cultivate those things within ourselves so as to want to enter into a relationship with God.

Consider the following from Hick:

Let us suppose that the infinite God creates finite persons to share the life which He imparts to them. If He creates them in His immediate presence, so that they cannot fail to be conscious from the first of the infinite divine being and glory, goodness and love, wisdom, power and knowledge in whose presence they are, they will have no creaturely independence in relation to their Maker. They will not be able to *choose* to worship God, or to turn to Him freely as valuing spirits responding to infinite Value. In order, then, to give them the freedom to come to Him, God creates them at a distance – not a spatial but an epistemic distance. (1973, 523)

Thus, according to Hick, God must be *deus absconditus*, or at an epistemic distance, to allow humans the possibility to recognize or fail to recognize God's dealings with us (1996, 135). Hick indicates that the freedom that is allowed by this epistemic distance is an ability to have a free response to God – whether or not to enter into a relationship with Him, or, as I have been expressing it, belief *in* God. And so the

world must be religiously ambiguous to be interpreted theistically or naturalistically: “Thus the world, as the environment of man’s life, will be religiously ambiguous, both veiling God and revealing Him – veiling Him to ensure man’s freedom and revealing Him to men as they rightly exercise that freedom” (1963, 318).

Hick is not merely talking about belief *that* God exists but rather belief *in* God – a response to God that involves love and trust. Hick considers there to be a tight link between belief *that* and belief *in*. The claim seems to be something like: If God is too evident then we cannot help but believe *that* God exists, and this makes us less free in our choosing to believe *in* God. This distinction is pointed out in Schellenberg’s discussion of Hick as Schellenberg highlights the difference between *cognitive freedom* (i.e., ‘belief *that*’) and *moral freedom* (i.e., ‘belief *in*’). Epistemic distance is needed for cognitive freedom because such freedom entails the possibility to seek out God or to shut God out. The reason why such freedom is necessary is because it allows for moral freedom – the ability to believe *in* God – which is Hick’s main concern (1993, 104-05). In Faith and Knowledge, Hick writes, “The reality of the divine Being is assumed throughout as a manifest fact. [...] The biblical writers are not conscious of their belief in the reality of God as being itself an exercise of faith, but only of their confidence in his promises and providence” (3-4). Hick later writes: “The reason why God reveals himself indirectly – meeting us in and through the world as mediating a significance which requires an appropriate response on our part [...] – is that only thus can the conditions exist for a *personal* relationship between God and man” (140). Thus, according to Hick, cognitive freedom is a necessary condition of moral freedom because if we were forced to believe *that* God exists (lack of cognitive freedom), then we would not be free to respond with our belief *in* God (lack of moral freedom). Schellenberg describes Hick’s argument as having “a *backward* movement from the importance of moral freedom to the necessity of cognitive freedom.” Schellenberg constructs it as follows:

(1) If we were deprived of moral freedom in relation to God – forced to obey God, to commit ourselves to him – personal relationships between ourselves and God could not exist.

(2) God wishes us to enter into personal relationship with himself.

(3) So God will not deprive us of our moral freedom in relation to himself. (From (1) and (2))

(4) Anyone forced to experience (and to believe in the existence of) God is ipso facto forced to *obey* God, and so is deprived of moral freedom in relation to God.

(5) Hence God will *not* force us to experience and to believe in the existence of God, but will leave us with a measure of freedom in this respect, that is, cognitive freedom. (From (3) and (4))

And so cognitive freedom is necessary because “cognitive freedom is theologically necessary because only if it is in place can those who experience the presence of God and commit themselves to him be said to be morally free in relation to God” (107). Schellenberg goes on to expand the argument that he believes Hick would accept:

(6) Cognitive freedom requires that the world be religiously ambiguous.

(7) God will therefore create a religiously ambiguous world. (From (5) and (6))

(8) If God’s existence is beyond reasonable nonbelief, the world is not religiously ambiguous in the required sense.

(9) Therefore, if God exists, his existence is *not* beyond reasonable nonbelief. (From (7) and (8)) (108)

Hick’s concept of faith is faith as interpretation or “experiencing as” (1966, 142). C. Robert Mesle expands further on Hick’s view that all human experience is interpretive. For example, in larger contexts, some will claim we cannot prove that a material world exists since it is possible to rationally explain the world around us through solipsism – the idea that only my own mind can be known to exist. However, it is rare to find a true solipsist, and many find it rational and compelling to interpret the world as if there really is an external world beyond our own mind. In a similar way, Hick is claiming that although we cannot prove the existence of God, we can interpret the world theistically (or

naturalistically) and to do so is not irrational. Mesle writes, “As believers immerse themselves in this interpretation of the world they move toward being rationally justified in feeling that they ‘know’ that their experience of the world is mediated confrontation with the living God” (98). But why then has God created an ambiguous world?

This returns us back to the purpose of ‘epistemic distance’ as ‘soul-making’: “Hick argues that while God could create us as persons who both believe in and love God, God would realize that this was not a free choice on our part” (Mesle 98). If we were in immediate divine presence, we would be overwhelmed by God, and thus not able to freely choose to enter into a personal relationship with God. Thus, “this apparent evil of our ignorance of God is justified on the grounds that it is necessary to God’s purposes for us – that we should, in the midst of our worldly struggle, freely choose to believe in and love God” (99). Epistemic distance ensures our freedom because it assures that our decision to love God is not coerced since one freely enters into interpreting the world theistically, and thereby creating the possibility of developing a personal relationship with God. Mesle thinks the following is an accurate summary of Hick’s view in this regard:

Through the evolutionary process our freedom to choose to love God is guaranteed by creating us in a situation of suffering and struggle, a situation which means that we emerge into personhood in an already fallen state, but which assures that our decision to love God will not be coerced. Similarly, our freedom to make the voluntary cognitive choice to believe that God exists is assured by the fact that given the evolutionary process everything can be accounted for naturalistically, without reference to God. God has made the world to look “as if there were no God.” Yet, God is not entirely hidden. So the world is finally ambiguous, both revealing and veiling God. On this interpretation, the revealing/veiling paradox applies to both dimensions of faith. Can we learn to love in the midst of our suffering and struggle? Will we decide to believe in God in the face of uncertain evidence? (99)

However, Mesle also highlights the potential problem that Hick’s position implies there are no rationally compelling arguments for the existence of God. If there were, his whole position of epistemic distance and soul-making collapses. In later writings Hick distances himself from the position by saying that such arguments, if they were to exist, would still not be coercive in the relevant sense:

The assent that a valid theistic proof could compel would be (in Newman's terminology) a merely notional assent. Such a demonstrative proof might ensure assent to the proposition 'God exists' but could not bring about a distinctively religious and worshipping response to the thought of God as an existing being. A purely non-religious response – 'there is a God, so what?' – would still be possible. (1967, 273)

And in Arguments for the Existence of God:

In Newman's terminology, when a notional assent to the proposition that God exists becomes a real assent, equivalent to an actual living belief and faith in God, there has been a free human response to an idea which could instead have been rejected by being held at the notional level. In other words, a verbal proof of God's existence cannot by itself break down our human freedom; it can only lead to a notional assent which has little or no positive religious value or substance. (107)

Notice that once the world is being interpreted by someone theistically it may at some point become coercive to her, but this has not compromised her free will since a free choice was made to interpret the world in such a way and believe *that* God exists. But, as Mesle points out, this justified sense of 'knowing' is not proof for others: "Hick admits that those who lack this evidence, while seeing that others have it, are fully justified in their agnosticism" (100). In fact, contrary interpretations such as Islamic, Jewish, Buddhists, and naturalistic interpretations "can all provide these people with a properly justified sense of 'knowing' that their own position is true. This after all, is part of the ambiguity of the world" (100-101). Thus, according to Hick, despite the theist's evidence, the agnostic position is a proper one if she does not have the same reason and evidence as the theist (1971, 115).

### **Criticisms**

Given the popularity of Hick's soul-making theodicy, there are many criticisms that have been offered. I will use Mesle's criticisms and Schellenberg's criticisms to bring out what I also consider to be shortcomings of the theodicy in regards to divine hiddenness. Ultimately I argue, as Mesle and Schellenberg do, that a soul-making theodicy does not provide an adequate response to the argument from divine hiddenness. Mesle offers criticisms that I find to be convincing as a challenge to Hick's theodicy. First, rather than affirm the existence of God, Hick's soul-making theodicy seems better suited to lead to agnosticism. In an ambiguous world differing views among individuals can all be held to be



true by those individuals. How then are we to decide between such conflicting views? Mesle instead claims that “if someone really affirms that all of these different positions can be equally compelling to an intelligent and honest seeker, it seems that none of them is really warranted” (101).

A second criticism is that Hick’s soul-making theodicy appears to value mere belief without evidence. Consider Mesle’s complaint:

It is obvious throughout Hick’s work that belief in God is essential for the soul-making process leading to salvation, but that, in this world at least, God has intentionally arranged things so that we can come to belief only by willing to believe something for which, at the time of the decision, we necessarily have insufficient evidence. [...] How can we avoid charging Hick with affirming a theodicy in which that worst of all forms of faith – mere belief without evidence – is seen by God as a virtue required for salvation? (101-102)

Mesle thinks the freedom that Hick is attempting to save is a poor freedom if God has created a world so that we can enter into a personal relationship with Him via blind belief because of the ambiguity and insufficient evidence that the world provides: “A genuinely free choice about faith must presuppose that we know what we are choosing for or against” (103).

A third criticism from Mesle is that a shortcoming of Hick’s theodicy can be shown by comparing Hick’s concept of faith as interpretation with a biblical concept of faith. A major difference is that in biblical writings faith presupposes knowledge of God. Writers assumed that God set out to make his existence clear. Passages such as, “That which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them” (Rom. 1:19), illustrate this idea. It was in the face of clear knowledge of God that the possibility of faith arose by trusting and loving God or by being rebellious, and despite human knowledge of God, being held morally accountable for the choice to have a relationship with God (103-04). Mesle is not appealing to the Bible as authority and ultimately disagrees with the biblical authors’ perspective on faith in favor of a process theology view. That being said he thinks that the biblical view of faith is superior to Hick’s view (108-11).

Mesle's analogy of faith and freedom on the human level shows the unattractiveness of the soul-making view: Consider a married couple who model their upbringing of the child based on Hick's view of faith and freedom. Let's say they arrange for the embryo to be implanted in another woman and for her to raise the child as her own, and then they expect the child to eventually believe that she is not the parent but the biological parents instead. Or, they raise the child and cause it to suffer on alternate days so there will be ambiguous evidence as to whether or not they are loving parents. Mesle sees little difference between this human analogy and Hick's view. This analogy is of course limited by the difference between God and humans, but Mesle argues that "surely God could make the divine presence and love at least as obvious as a very good human parent" (104). I offer Mesle's criticisms to show significant challenges that Hick's soul-making theodicy must face. Between Hick's potential for agnosticism, apparent endorsement of belief without evidence, and a poor concept of faith, soul-making does not appear to be a promising theodicy to apply to the argument from divine hiddenness.

I now want to highlight Schellenberg's main line of criticism to Hick's soul-making theodicy. A central claim that Schellenberg raises as a challenge to soul-making is that religious experience is not necessarily coercive. I want to consider this line of thought because I have previously considered the coercive possibilities of (1) more apparent evidence for God via Murray, and (2) more miraculous signs and wonders via van Inwagen; and so it is natural to next consider another form of revelation in the form of religious experience. Schellenberg offers initial support for the claim that religious experience is not coercive from the possibility that there are people who may have some sort of religious experience and yet the experience remains ambiguous or they persist in doubt as to God's existence. Nevertheless, Schellenberg writes:

Let us, however, grant for the sake of argument that here too Hick's view can be successfully defended – that a willingness to know God leads inevitably both to religious experience *and* the acquisition of belief. The most fundamental objection to Hick is that his claims with regard to the *need* for such a prior willingness if our experience of God is to be compatible with our moral freedom (premises (4) and (5) of his argument) are

false, and that he has therefore provided us with no reason to suppose that religious experience must be withheld by God until it is shown. (1993, 109)

Schellenberg is rejecting, and I would say rightly so, (4): “Anyone forced to experience (and to believe in the existence of) God is ipso facto forced to *obey* God, and so is deprived of moral freedom in relation to God” (1993, 107). In support of rejecting this premise consider that there are indirect ways to resist an acquired belief. Schellenberg thinks that someone can “avoid acting upon it (moral freedom) by taking steps to remove one’s active awareness of it or to lose it altogether (cognitive freedom)” (110). Hick, while acknowledging the possibility of self-deception, seems to think that, in the case of belief in God, self-deception can only happen prior to belief acquisition. Schellenberg argues that we should not think our ability of self-deception is limited to such an extent. Instead, beliefs can be shut out or even avoided in the first place. One can avoid acquiring a belief by “looking at the evidence for and against again but selectively, and then taking steps to forget having done so,” and in cases where certainty is lacking, “any small margin of negative probability can be blown all out of proportion if one has the requisite motives” (110). But even if the belief *that* God exists is acquired and held, this does not imply there would have to be a moral commitment to follow.

Schellenberg is rejecting, like I have, that such a strong connection between belief and obedience is necessary. This rejection of (4) would also be supported by biblical examples as well. There are many supposed scenarios in which people experienced God in some way and yet were still able to freely rebel against God. Consider also the following quotes from Terence Penelhum: “I *can* ‘know that such a Being exists and be at the same time indifferent to him’ – if I lull myself with sufficient persistence” (1983, 111-12; qtd. in Schellenberg 1993, 111). For example, “[one] way would be to adjust his understanding of the moral demands to which he saw he was subject so that they did not interfere much with his worldly preferences” (1983, 110). A further reason of Penelhum that Schellenberg seizes on is when Penelhum writes, “Perhaps, what makes faith voluntary is not that its grounds are inconclusive, but that even if they are conclusive, men are free to deceive themselves and refuse to

admit that they are. Faith would be the outcome of a willingness to admit this, and faith and knowledge need not then be exclusive at all" (1989, 132; qtd. in Schellenberg 111). And so, Schellenberg claims, it can be argued that "given that it is possible to deceive ourselves with respect to both theistic belief and its moral implications, we are (meritoriously) exercising both cognitive and moral freedom if, *instead of* giving in to the temptation to deceive ourselves, we respond in the *right way* to our beliefs" (111).

Schellenberg is arguing, correctly, that there is a wider range of moral choices that are open to an individual in the face of good evidence for God than Hick is willing to acknowledge. This is similar to what my criticisms of the previous defenses and theodicies were implying with the distinction between belief *that* and belief *in* God. Individuals have the freedom to deceive themselves about the moral implications of a belief that God exists *or* have the freedom to avoid self-deception and instead act upon the implications in appropriate ways.

What then would be Hick's rebuttal? Schellenberg thinks it would involve a reply that this could only be the case if the belief is arrived at inferentially, through argument, since Hick considers it impossible to ignore and to remain unaffected by religious experience (1993, 112). In the context of a soul-making theodicy the question, as Nick Trakakis writes, becomes the following: can we "freely decide to enter into a loving relationship with a being whose presence is impressed upon our immediate consciousness" (220)? Schellenberg criticizes the question by saying it is a false dichotomy: that God's presence is either overwhelming or it is not. Instead, Schellenberg argues, and cites Hick's An Interpretation of Religion as well, that such experience need not be "sharply focused," but could continue as "a general background awareness" (Hick 154; Schellenberg 112). Self-deception would still be possible and thus belief *that* God exists via religious experience would also be avoidable. For Hick's point to stand, it would require religious experience to be unmistakable and continuous so as to overwhelm us and remove our moral freedom (Schellenberg 113). Instead, consider the following possibility given by Schellenberg:

Suppose ... that the world is one in which all human beings who evince a capacity for personal relationship with God have an experience as of God presenting himself to them, which they take to be caused by God and which actually *is* caused by God presenting himself to their experience. This experience, let us say, is non-sensory – an intense apparent awareness of reality at once ultimate and loving which (1) produces the belief that God is lovingly present (and ipso facto, that God exists), (2) continues indefinitely in stronger or weaker forms and minimally as a ‘background awareness’ in those who do not resist it, and (3) takes more particular forms in the lives of those who respond to the beliefs to which it gives rise in religiously appropriate ways. (48-49)

Schellenberg’s argument is that God could bring about a state of affairs that people’s awareness of God is greater than what is found in the actual world and yet still allows for human freedom in relation to God. The evidence need only be enough to remove the possibility of inculpable nonbelief. There would be background evidence available to an individual, but also not so overwhelming that it couldn’t be ignored or cast aside through self-deception. Furthermore, the belief that God exists would not compel a relationship with God given the difference between belief *that* and belief *in*.

These comments of Schellenberg actually motivate my consideration of the occurrence of inculpable nonbelief. I tend to think the scenario that Schellenberg has offered is likely and may not be so different than our current world. A general availability of religious experience need not be very strong, and thus the possibility of self-deception is easier to come by, and so more likely to be widespread. Also, each of these defenses and theodicies considered, in their more robust form, include a defectiveness explanation as well. Both Murray and van Inwagen clearly suggest that sufficient evidence for belief that God exists is likely to already be provided. However, in this chapter I have granted Schellenberg the occurrence of inculpable nonbelief and therefore have attempted to find a defense or theodicy that accounts for such nonbelief. But, as I argued in the previous chapter, inculpable nonbelief is less common than Schellenberg claims, and is therefore less evidential weight against the claim that God exists than may be initially thought. The types of inculpable nonbelief that I find most difficult to explain would be the honest reflective nonbeliever and the isolated nonreflective

nontheist. Therefore, my standard of success for a defense or theodicy in this context would be its ability to explain such instances of inculpable nonbelief.

Each of the defenses and theodicies I have considered appear to be incapable of explaining the honest reflective nonbeliever and the isolated nonreflective nontheist. The central objection that becomes evident is that in each of these defenses and theodicies it is possible to make an argument that experience of God, via stronger evidence, more miracles, or general religious experience, can be accommodated so that it does not violate the free will of humans. If that is the case, then it is possible that God could be more evident than he is in the world, and thus these theodicies do not offer a satisfying answer in justifying the hiddenness of God in the face of inculpable nonbelief. In the context of Schellenberg's argument, he is not asking for "ubiquitous signs and wonders" but rather a possible scenario in which awareness of God is a background awareness available to all, and yet can still be ignored by all. Therefore, both Murray's and van Inwagen's free-will theodicies, and Hick's soul-making theodicy, do not answer the challenge that Schellenberg has set forth. If God can be revealed to a much greater extent without compromising human free will, then God can at least be revealed to a smaller extent via religious experience. Schellenberg's challenge to free-will defenses and theodicies has been to show that God could be less hidden while still allowing for human free will, and therefore, these defenses and theodicies do not answer why God is hidden to the extent that he is in this world.

Central to my criticisms of the defenses and theodicies in this chapter is the distinction between belief *that* God exists and belief *in* God. Because of this distinction, it becomes apparent that God could be less hidden than is the case in the actual world because more evidence for God would not jeopardize human free will. In this chapter, I have shown possible responses to challenge the second premise of Schellenberg's argument: *if a perfectly loving God exists, inculpable nonbelief does not occur*. To do this, I commented on the relationship between the argument from evil and the argument from divine hiddenness to show how responses to the argument from evil can be adapted to respond to the

argument from divine hiddenness. This is most commonly done via defenses and theodicies. I introduced versions of the most prominent defenses motivated by free will or soul-making which make the claim that such goods would be compromised unless God is hidden. I then provided criticisms which showed that God being less hidden would not compromise human free will or potential for soul-making. However, even if this kind of defense is not likely, or fails to hold up altogether, does not mean that Schellenberg's argument cannot be challenged in other ways. Just because we do not have a reason for the occurrence of inculpable nonbelief or the amount of divine hiddenness does not mean that we should conclude that there is not a reason at all. This approach is referred to as skeptical theism. In the next chapter I consider the possibility of skeptical theism as a response to the argument from divine hiddenness.

## Chapter 4: Skeptical Theism

### Skeptical Theism

So far, I have challenged Schellenberg's third premise that inculpable nonbelief occurs by offering philosophical and theological arguments which show that inculpable nonbelief is less common than Schellenberg would have us think. However, I granted the occurrence of inculpable nonbelief and challenged Schellenberg's second premise that if a perfectly loving God exists, inculpable nonbelief will not occur. First, I offered reasons why it is possible for inculpable nonbelief to occur, at least for a time, rather than accept Schellenberg's stronger claim that given the concept of divine love, inculpable nonbelief should never occur. I proceeded to offer defenses and theodicies motivated by free will that are prominent in the literature. I argued that these defenses and theodicies, which are based on arguments from coercion, signs and wonders, and soul-making, are not sufficient to respond to Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness. Even if this is the case, there is still another defense available. Although this defense may not be satisfying, it does show the possibility of God's existence despite the claims of Schellenberg's argument. This defense, based on skeptical theism, is motivated by the thought that our not being able to determine a reason for inculpable nonbelief does not imply that there is no such reason.

A simple way to explain skeptical theism is to generalize the kind of argument that is taking place in the argument from divine hiddenness. Justin P. McBrayer lays out the basic form that many arguments against the existence of God take:

- (1) If God exists, the world would not be like *this* (where 'this picks out some feature of the world like the existence of evil, etc.)
- (2) But the world is like *this*.
- (3) Therefore, God does not exist. (2010, 611)

Skeptical theists are theists who are skeptical about our ability to make judgments like that of premise (1). McBrayer continues: "According to skeptical theism, if there were a God, it is likely that he



would have reasons for acting that are beyond our ken, and thus we are not justified in making all-things-considered judgments about what the world would be like if there were a God” (611). If this is the case, then it calls into question ‘noseeum’ inferences, that is, the inference from, “As far as we can tell, there are no X’s” to “Therefore, there are no X’s.” Or put another way, it is the *absence of evidence* which leads to a claim of the *evidence of absence* (Kraay 203). I will argue that such an inference is mistaken in the context of divine hiddenness.

The ‘noseeum’ inference gets its name from Stephen John Wykstra’s example based on the “seeability” of something. Consider a garage: “looking around my garage and seeing no dog entitles me to conclude that none is present, but seeing no flea does not; and this is because fleas, unlike dogs, have low seeability: even if they were present, we cannot reasonably expect to see them in this way” (1996, 126). Thus Wykstra is suggesting that we may not have anything to say regarding God-purposed goods when considering God’s knowledge as compared to our knowledge of such goods. In terms of Schellenberg’s argument, just because we cannot think of a reason for inculpable nonbelief does not mean that there is no reason. Therefore, I am offering skeptical theism as a defense to the second premise: if a perfectly loving God exists, reasonable nonbelief does not occur.

Skeptical theism is primarily used against the evidential argument from evil to deny the inference from there being some sort of evil in the world to the denial of the existence of God. William L. Rowe, for example, argues that there are gratuitous evils in the world and that if God is all-good and all-loving, such evils would not occur. One of the most well known arguments of Rowe involves a suffering fawn: “Suppose in some distant forest lightning strikes a dead tree, resulting in a forest fire. In the fire a fawn is trapped, horribly burned, and lies in terrible agony for several days before death relieves its suffering. So far as we can see, the fawn’s intense suffering is pointless” (1979, 4). Such instances of human and animal suffering are clear instances of evil that occur in the world. Thus the argument from evil is stated as follows:

1. There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
2. An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
3. There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being. (Rowe 1979, 2)

Many theists try to show the first premise of Rowe's argument false. There is the possibility to argue against the second premise, as van Inwagen does, but I am currently putting that approach aside to focus on the first premise. Rowe recognizes that we may not be able to prove premise (1) as true, but he thinks it is enough to show that we have rational grounds to believe (1) to be true (1979, 4).

Skeptical theists will challenge the inference by arguing that even if there are evils that we cannot explain or justify does not mean that there is no God-justifying reasons regarding the existence of such evils.

Skeptical theism is applied in a similar fashion to the argument from divine hiddenness. The skeptical theist will argue that we should be skeptical of the claim that God, if he exists, would at all times make himself known to all humans capable of entering into a relationship with him. The reason for the skepticism is that such a statement is an all-things-considered claim about what God would do. However, God could have reasons for not making himself known, and therefore, our ability to not detect such reasons does not mean that such reasons do not exist (McBrayer 2010, 613). William Alston challenges Rowe's argument, and thus the argument from divine hiddenness, in the same manner claiming that our limited human cognitive capacities are not equipped to make judgments in such a context (1996, 97). In the context of Rowe's argument, Alston "attacks the claim that we are rationally justified in accepting 1," and "does so on the grounds that our epistemic situation is such that we are unable to make a sufficiently well grounded determination that 1 is the case" (98). In the same way, just because we cannot determine a reason that God would not make himself known to all capable humans,

does not mean that there is no reason. Our ability to make a determination on that matter is too limited. To further examine the plausibility of the skeptical theist's response it will be helpful to examine the common kinds of arguments that are given for such a position. I will follow McBrayer's helpful classification of defense types: "arguments from analogy, arguments from complexity, arguments from alternatives, and arguments from enabling premises" (2010, 613).

### **Arguments from Analogy**

Wykstra uses an analogy to express the idea that if there is a creator and sustainer of the universe, then given our cognitive limitations, we should not expect to be able to discern in the same way as God or to the same extent as God. Wykstra argues that the "vision and wisdom" of God would be much greater than ours: "A modest proposal might be that his wisdom is to ours, roughly as an adult human's is to a one month old infant's." This "Parent Analogy" supposes that although we may be able to discern some of the goods that God intends, "that we should discern most of them [goods] seems about as likely as that a one-month old should discern most of his parents' purposes for those pains they allow him to suffer – which is to say, it is not likely at all" (1984, 88). The lack of ability for a small child to be able to discern the reasons for the pain caused by immunization shots that a parents allows to happen does not justify believing that there are no such reasons.

Rowe thinks that this analogy actually illustrates a flaw to Wykstra's criticism against Rowe's argument. While there are disanalogies to be made between a loving parent and God, the main weakness is that when a loving parent allows for his or her child to suffer for a distant good, the parent tends to the child to comfort, express their love, and assure the child throughout the suffering: "In short, during these periods of intentionally permitted intense suffering, the child is *consciously aware* of the direct presence, love, and concern of the parent, and receives *special assurances* from the parent that, if not why, the suffering (or the parent's permission of it) is necessary for some distant good" (1996, 276). Thus the application of the Parent Analogy would lead us to conclude that if there is suffering that has a

good “beyond our ken,” then God would make himself present to us in our suffering so as to comfort us and assure us of his love through our suffering. However, there is much suffering in the world that is endured without any conscious indication of divine presence or concern and so we are led to the conclusion that if there is a God, “the goods for the sake of which he permits horrendous human suffering are more often than not goods we know of” (276). In a similar way this is the claim that Schellenberg is making. If God is perfectly loving, then why would he remain hidden from individuals that are inculpable nonbelievers? Schellenberg has tried to show that the goods that many theists have offered as reasons why God would remain hidden are still possible even if God were less hidden. Since we cannot come up with an explanation for God’s hiddenness, Schellenberg would have us conclude that there is no God since there is no reason God would not be able to provide better evidence to humans.

Alston, while generally agreeing with Wykstra, steers clear of the parent analogy because of the weaknesses in the analogy that are taken advantage of by Rowe. Instead, he offers several analogies that all involve something along the lines of being confronted with something in which he does not have the capacity to understand: “Suppose I am confronted with the activity or the productions of a master in a field in which I have no expertise. This may involve a scientific theory or experiment, a painting, a musical composition, an architectural design, or a chess move” (1996, 317). In each situation there may be decisions, conclusions, and actions that are made on behalf of the expert that we do not understand. And because of our lack of understanding, we are not entitled to determine that there are no reasons for the decisions, conclusions and actions of those experts. As Alston writes, by making the inference from, “‘I can’t see any sufficient reason for God to permit this evil,’ [or in our case reasonable nonbelief], to ‘There is no sufficient reason for God to permit this evil,’ we are taking the insights attainable by finite, fallible human beings as an adequate indication of what is available in the way of reasons to an omniscient, omnipotent being” (317). This is in line with Douglas Henry’s criticism of Schellenberg’s

hiddenness argument: “Schellenberg’s failure is his neglect of what we are. Essential to human nature are the constraints of embodied, dependent, rational creatures” (2008, 282-83).

If there is an argument from analogy that is to be successful, Alston’s analogy is a much better candidate than Wykstra’s parent analogy. Given the difference in cognitive abilities between God and humans, it is not unreasonable to conclude that God may remain hidden from inculpable nonbelievers for reasons that we are not aware of or may not even be able to be aware of given the human perspective. But this kind of analogy will not satisfy Schellenberg since his claim is motivated from general considerations about divine love that he thinks are apparent to humans even within the limits of our human reasoning. The next kind of argument for skeptical theism will claim that our human reasoning *cannot* handle such considerations because they are essentially too complex.

### **Arguments from Complexity**

Another argument that is made for skeptical theism is based on the complexity of variables and factors involved in making a decision on what counts as gratuitous evil, or in our case, gratuitous hiddenness. Alston makes two points along these lines. First, when considering divine hiddenness and what God could do, we are “by no means clear what possibilities are open to God” (1991, 55). We can conceive of a world in which God presents himself to every individual to say “I exist” (as Schellenberg has considered as a possibility), but is this conceptual possibility a metaphysical possibility? Alston argues that conceptual possibility is not sufficient for metaphysical possibility. Consider for example the composition of water as hydrogen and oxygen atoms. We can think of water as made of carbon and chlorine, a conceptual possibility, but that takes away from what water is metaphysically. Put simply by Alston, “what is conceptually or logically (in a narrow sense of ‘logical’) possible depends on the composition of the concepts, or the meanings of the terms, we use to cognize reality, while metaphysical possibility depends on what things are like in themselves, their essential natures, regardless of how they are represented in our thought and language.” Determining what is

metaphysically possible can be more difficult to determine since it depends on more than just thinking about the concepts that are involved (55).

In considering other possible amounts of divine hiddenness in other possible worlds it becomes difficult to determine which are actual possibilities since we are less than clear on the essential nature of God, and therefore even more uncertain of what possibilities could be manifested. In the argument from evil it is unknown what all the metaphysical possibilities and outcomes would be in calling for changes to the natural order of the way the world functions. In the same way, how are we to determine all the changes that would take place or result from a different amount of divine hiddenness in the world? If God is hidden to the extent that he is for reasons we are not aware of, we do not know all the outcomes from manipulating the amount of hiddenness.

The weakness of such an argument is that it is not clear that it would be metaphysically impossible for God to make his existence known to each individual. This particularly seems possible given the distinction I have been using between belief *that* God exists and belief *in* God. Also, we may ask, how could God's being less hidden put the world in a worse situation? The more apparent God is in the world, there is the potential for the world to be that much better a place. But this is where skeptical theism comes into play because no matter what is said to argue for Schellenberg's second premise, the skeptical theist will say we simply are not in a position to make such all-thing-considered judgments and are therefore not in a position to say. All-things-considered, God may not be as concerned about humanity's brief existence on the earth in comparison with humanity or the rest of creation in terms of eternal existence. But again, we are not in a position to make such a claim because we are simply not in a position to know.

Another approach to such complexity is presented by Kirk Durston who argues primarily from the complexity of history:

To use a simile, history is like a collection of billions of equations (causal chains) that are all dependent upon each other. Each equation contains thousands or millions of

variables (discrete events). If we change just one of the variables, innumerable variables in all the other dependent equations are changed as well. Although it is easy to suggest exchanging one variable for another, more positive variable, if we wish to see if history is actually improved by the substitution we must simultaneously solve billions of equations containing millions of variables to see if the overall, ultimate outcome has been improved. This is a task that is so far beyond human ability that we simply are not in a position to engage in such an exercise. (67)

Durston's challenge is that our ability to determine something as a gratuitous evil means not only determining "the negative intrinsic value of the evil itself, but also with the intrinsic values of all the consequences of that evil that will be actualized to the end of history" (68). Likewise, when considering divine hiddenness, we not only have to consider the negative impact that the hiddenness may have, but also all the outcomes of future evils and goods that are a result of that hiddenness. So for example, even though it seems an apparent evil that *S* is an inculpable nonbeliever, maybe it is a good so that *S* is later in a better position to not only believe that God exists but to believe in God and begin a relationship. Let's say that *S* later becomes a strong believer because of that period of nonbelief, and then impacts other inculpable nonbelievers in a way that they also come to believe that God exists. If we are assuming that humans are free agents, then to know all the possible outcomes would be to know how free agents would respond to such hiddenness. Such a determination would also require something that we do not possess: middle knowledge – "the knowledge of what every possible free creature would freely do in every situation in which that creature could possibly find himself" (69).

Because of the complexity of history, even changing what we may consider an insignificant variable has consequences that we are unable to determine. Such an idea has motivated many time travel novels and movies in which small changes can result in drastic effects that were unlikely to be foreseen. To see this, consider the example that Durston begins his paper with, and which has been highlighted by others:

On the night that Sir Winston Churchill was conceived, had Lady Randolph Churchill fallen asleep in a slightly different position, the precise pathway that each of the millions of spermatozoa took would have been slightly altered. As a result [...] Sir Winston

Churchill, as we knew him, would not have existed, with the likely result that the evolution of World War II would have been substantially different. (66)

Durston argues that even minor changes that have no apparent moral significance can have significant outcomes that result in events of great moral significance. If such minor changes result in outcomes that we cannot predict, then how much more for significant alterations? Again, Schellenberg may say that it *prima facie* seems that God's being less hidden is necessarily a better possible scenario. But again, the claim of skeptical theism is that we are not in a position to make such a claim. I think Schellenberg would argue that, despite complexities, we can in general rule out all other possibilities to show that there is not a case in which God is perfectly loving and inculpable nonbelief occurs because of the concept of divine love. This brings us to a third argument for skeptical theism which is the claim that, because of our cognitive limitations, we are not in a position to rule out all other possibilities of how a perfectly loving God would let inculpable nonbelief occur.

### **Arguments from Alternatives**

In Alston's 1991 article on the inductive argument from evil, the bulk of the paper explores various defenses that account for evil in the world. These different possibilities include theodicies such as: punishment for sin, soul making, redemptive suffering, justice, and free will. His point in discussing all of the defenses that have been given to account for evil is to argue that to be justified in the claim that God would not permit instances of evil we must also be justified in ruling out all other live possibilities that are denied by such a claim (36). Given our cognitive limitations, Alston argues that we cannot rule out every live possibility of reasons that God may have for allowing certain evils (57-58). Similarly, it can be applied to the argument from divine hiddenness. To accept Schellenberg's claim that divine hiddenness would not occur if there is a perfectly loving God requires ruling out all alternative possibilities that may account for such hiddenness. Schellenberg thinks he has done just that given his conceptual argument from divine love, and so this implies that other accounts that have yet to be



offered will likely fail as well. I think Alston would claim that it is preemptive to conclude that all alternative possibilities have been exhausted as to explanations or justification for divine hiddenness.

This is the weakest kind of argument for skeptical theism because according to skeptical theism we are not even in a position to lay any claim to what those possible alternatives may be because we are in no position to know what alternatives there are in relation to a perfectly loving God. While I think there is a reasonable argument from analogy that can be made for skeptical theism, it is not one that Schellenberg is likely to accept. The argument from complexity is ineffective since Schellenberg could argue that it doesn't matter how complex the variables are since his concept of divine love entails that inculpable nonbelief would not occur regardless of the complexity. Even from a skeptical theist perspective I think each of the arguments discussed is weak. According to the skeptical theist we would not be in a position to even know a relevant analogy, begin to make claims about complexity in regards to God, or offer other possibilities if we are not in a position to make all-things-considered judgments. The most successful argument for skeptical theism is motivated by Wykstra's claims about epistemic access, sensitivity, and enabling premises.

### **Arguments from Enabling Premises**

Arguments for skeptical theism that have received the most attention in the literature are those that claim that one must be justified in believing an enabling premise which allows for the noseem inference to be successful. The first is a sensitivity claim, made by Wykstra, which has become known as CORNEA, or "the Condition of Reasonable Epistemic Access" (1984, 74). The following is a formal statement of CORNEA: "On the basis of cognized situation *s*, human *H* is entitled to claim 'It appears that *p*' only if it is reasonable for *H* to believe that, given her cognitive faculties and the use she has made of them, if *p* were not the case, *s* would likely be different than it is in some way discernible by her" (85). This is a formal statement of what was already mentioned in the introduction of the chapter which calls

into question the inference from, “As far as we can tell, there are no X’s,” to “Therefore, there are no X’s.”

Wykstra’s appeal to CORNEA is an attempt to show that if God’s reasons for allowing what appear to us to be gratuitous evil, or in our case hiddenness, are “beyond our ken,” then the noseum inference cannot be made (89). Theism often includes the belief that such a supreme being would allow suffering, or hiddenness, if there were an outweighing good. Claims regarding good and outweighing goods are common in the argument from evil literature. The idea is that God may allow instances of evil if there is a greater good or outweighing good, which could not be obtained another way, that justifies the occurrence of that evil and in effect justifies God in allowing it to happen. For example, a natural disaster may occur that causes tremendous amounts of suffering, but the outweighing good offered is that natural laws provide a stable environment in which humans can interact and express free will. This is an example of a natural law theodicy which attempts to explain why such evil and suffering occurs even if God exists. The challenge that instances of gratuitous evil provide is that there seem to be no outweighing goods which offset the horrendousness of the evil or suffering. The theist may then appeal to goods beyond our understanding, or inscrutable goods, to say that just because we cannot point out the justifying good does not mean there is no such good. Given our cognitive limitations in comparison with a supreme being, the question is: If we expect there to be inscrutable goods, why would our inability to determine goods, which justify inculpable nonbelief, be evidence against theism? Wykstra writes:

The observed sufferings in the world do require us to say that there are outweighing goods connected to them that are entirely outside our ken, but this is not an *additional* postulate: it was implicit in theism (taken with a little realism about our cognitive powers) all along. If we have realized the magnitude of the theistic proposal, cognizance of suffering thus should not in the least reduce our confidence that it is true. When cognizance of suffering does have this effect, it is perhaps because we had not understood the sort of being theism proposes for belief in the first place. (91)

CORNEA has led to a large discussion in the literature that goes beyond our ability to reconsider here. There are many criticisms that have been made (from both theists and atheists) and many attempted improvements. One general charge against CORNEA is the claim that such a condition limits our ability to do inductive reasoning since “we lack evidence for many of our inductive beliefs as CORNEA places too strong a restriction on what counts as evidence,” and “oftentimes our evidence is not suitably sensitive to the facts (where some fact A is sensitive to fact B just in case were B not the case, A would not be the case)” (McBrayer 2009, 78). McBrayer’s criticism is that if CORNEA is true, we must be skeptics about inductive justification in general (84).

Howard-Snyder also criticizes CORNEA with the simple criticism that the appeal that Wykstra makes to omniscience “is little more than a rhetorical device masquerading as an important insight” (1992, 38). Howard-Snyder’s argument is that even if God is omniscient and knows more than we do, it doesn’t follow that it would be improbable that we would not know the reason for God allowing some horrific suffering. In order for that to be the case, we need to also know that the reason “would probably fall outside the scope of what we would be able to discern.” But, Howard-Snyder asks, why should we suppose this to be true? God’s ways may be beyond our comprehension, but in order for CORNEA to be used in response to evil it would also need to give an account of why our ability to discern the reasons for gratuitous evil would be outside the scope of our ability to discern. Appealing to God’s omniscience and our ignorance is not enough to warrant the conclusion that such goods would fall out of our scope of understanding (39). This is why cases like Rowe’s suffering fawn are so effective. Appealing to God’s omniscience is not a satisfying response since we would need other reasons to suspect that we would not be able to discern some sort of other good which justifies that situation. These criticisms, regarding inductive justification and the scope of our ability to discern reasons, resurface in response to a second strategy for skeptical theism. I will argue that there are ways to overcome these criticisms that would prevent us from denying the noseem inference.

A second similar strategy for skeptical theism, that denies the noseem inference, is that the noseem inference is only warranted if it is “reasonable for me to believe that my inductive sample of Xs is representative of the whole” (McBrayer 2010, 615). But Rowe argues that we *are* justified in making the noseem inference:

My answer is that we are justified in making this inference in the same way we are justified in making the many inferences we constantly make from the known to the unknown. All of us are constantly inferring from the A’s we know of to the A’s we don’t know of. If we observe many A’s and all of them are B’s we are justified in believing that the A’s we haven’t observed are also B’s. (1988, 123-24)

Similarly, Bruce Russell has responded with the blue crow example:

[The view that] there are reasons beyond our ken that would justify God, if he exists, in allowing all the suffering we see are like the view that there are blue crows beyond our powers of observation. Once we have conducted the relevant search for crows (looking all over the world in different seasons and at crows at different stages of maturity), we are justified in virtue of that search in believing there are no crows beyond our powers of observation which are relevantly different from the crows we’ve seen. If after the relevant search we weren’t justified in believing that, then we would have to remain skeptical about all generalizations about crows. What else could we do that would justify us in believing there are no crows beyond our powers of observation that are relevantly different from the crows we’ve seen? (1996, 197)

From the blue crow example we can, in a similar way, argue that once we have exhausted our resources in looking for God-justifying reasons in allowing suffering and we do not find any, we are then justified in concluding there are no reasons that justify such suffering in the same way that we are justified in concluding there are no blue crows.

Alston responds to this criticism by making the case that we are in no position to map out the “territory” of possible reasons God has. He does this with the use of various analogies of our inability to make determinations and predictions in other areas of what possibilities and future developments may bring (1996, 318-19). Alston writes:

The point is that the critic is engaged in attempting to support a particularly difficult claim, a claim that there isn’t something in a certain territory, while having a very sketchy idea of what is in that territory, and having no sufficient basis for an estimate of how much of the territory falls outside his knowledge. This is very different from our more usual situation in which we are forming judgments and drawing conclusions about

matters concerning which we antecedently know quite a lot, and the boundaries and parameters of which we have pretty well settled. (1991, 60)

Alston has responded that these kinds of inferences that Rowe and Russell offer are not the same kind of inference from known goods to all goods. When we are warranted in making generalizations from observed instances we know a lot about the sample from which we are drawing. The blue crow example actually helps show the distinction between these two different kinds of inferences:

The crow search is crucially different from the divine reasons search [...]. The territory of the search is well mapped. Furthermore, we know that, by the nature of the beast, a crow is open to sensory observation, given suitable conditions. Hence, given a careful enough search, we can be amply justified in supposing that there are no blue crows. But the search for divine reasons differs in just these respects. We have no idea how to map the relevant territory – what its boundaries are and what variety it contains. Nor can we be assured that the cognitive powers we possess are sufficient for detecting the quarry if it exists. (1996, 319)

The root of the disagreement is over whether or not we are justified in believing that our sample of goods and evils, the connections between them, and our suggestions of possible reasons, are representative of what is actually the case (McBrayer 2010, 615). For those like Russell, they believe our sample is representative so as to be justified in the conclusion that there is no God-justifying reason to permit the evil and hiddenness that exists in the world. For those like Alston, they believe that our sample is *not* representative because it is based on finite and fallible humans, and such a scenario will not be a true indication of what is available by way of reasons for a supreme being (1996, 317).

The skeptical theist is advocating a limited skepticism directed at certain claims regarding our understanding of God-justifying reasons for suffering, hiddenness, or any other thing that someone supposes would not be the case if God exists. To clarify the kinds of claims that skeptical theism makes we can state them in terms of the tri-fold distinction offered by Michael Bergmann:

ST1: We have no good reason for thinking that the possible goods we know of are representative of the possible goods there are.

ST2: We have no good reason for thinking that the possible evils we know of are representative of the possible evils there are.

ST3: We have no good reason for thinking that the entailment relations we know of between possible goods and the permission of possible evils are representative of the entailment relations there are between possible goods and the permission of possible evils. (2001, 279)

Thus skeptical theism suggests that we remain agnostic regarding our ability to determine, in relation to God, all the possible goods, possible evils, and all the possible relations and entailments between goods and evils. Such statements are plausible given an awareness of our cognitive limitations and the complexity of reality. Given the difference between inferences regarding things we are familiar with, like crows, versus inferences regarding things for which we find ourselves limited in understanding, like divine reasons, this shows that it is probable that there are God-purposed goods which fall outside of our scope of understanding and are therefore beyond our ken or are inscrutable.

### **Skeptical Theism and Schellenberg's Argument from Divine Hiddenness**

Now I want to apply skeptical theism specifically to divine hiddenness and Schellenberg's argument. Schellenberg addresses Wykstra's style of objection and agrees that if the skeptical theist's claim about the inscrutability of God-purposed goods is justified, then the inductive inference of premise (2) of Schellenberg's argument is blocked. Of course, Schellenberg argues that such a claim is *not* justified. First, he writes, it is important to make the distinction between "the claim that there are possible goods that we cannot grasp," and "the claim that the permission of evil is logically *necessary* for the existence of such goods" (1993, 89). Schellenberg says that the skeptical theist is saying the second claim will be true but, Schellenberg thinks, this second claim is much less likely than the former claim. Schellenberg grants that there may be goods beyond our understanding, but he does not think this supports the second claim that evils like inculpable nonbelief in fact serve such goods. I would clarify here that Schellenberg misconstrues the skeptical theist because the skeptical theist isn't saying that the second claim is true, but rather that we are not in a position to know or to determine if such is the case because the probabilities are inscrutable.

Schellenberg also thinks that we can infer that the goods that evil serves will be human goods, and if human goods, it would be unlikely that they are beyond our grasp. However, he infers this by claiming that “if there is a perfectly good and loving God, he has, in creating, sacrificed his own interests and taken on ours” (90). But this claim is not obviously clear to me and he gives no further support of the claim. Schellenberg would need to develop why he thinks that God, in creating humans, sacrifices his own interests. It would seem that God would still have his own purposes and interests that go beyond human purposes and interests, and thus, human goods are not the only goods. What Schellenberg does find unlikely is the specificity of the claim that inculpable nonbelief serves an inscrutable good if God exists: “The claim that there are *some* evils (we don’t know which) that will appear pointless if there is a God may not be clearly false, but when it is made on behalf of the occurrence of reasonable nonbelief *in particular*, we should be much less sanguine” (90). Schellenberg therefore thinks that the probability of inculpable nonbelief being a member of the class of evils that have inscrutable goods would be at most half that of the proposition that some evils will have inscrutable goods. And since the probability of inscrutable goods is at most half, the probability of inculpable nonbelief as having an inscrutable good is half of half, and therefore, “too low for rational acceptance” (91). But again, the claim of skeptical theism is that we are simply not in a position to make such determinations since the probabilities are inscrutable, and therefore Schellenberg’s criticisms do not seem to overcome Wykstra’s objection.

However, Schellenberg claims that even if Wykstra’s objection is shown to be correct, this does not prevent the *prima facie* case for Schellenberg’s argument. Schellenberg argues that we may still infer that there is no reason to deny his second premise (if a perfectly loving God exists, inculpable nonbelief will not occur), and therefore conclude that it is true. Schellenberg thinks that the premise is more probable true than not since he thinks he has offered considerable reason to affirm the second premise. Furthermore, Wykstra’s argument is limited because it only shows that our lack of ability to

identify inscrutable goods is not evidence that they do *not* exist, rather than provide reason to believe that the relevant goods *do* exist. Schellenberg thinks that the denial of the former claim is not required for his argument to go through (91). But this is in tension with his earlier claim that if the objection is successful the inductive inference in premise (2) is blocked. If we are not in a position to determine the noseem inference then this *does* challenge the *prima facie* case for Schellenberg's premise. If the claim is that we are not in a position to make the inference, then we should not assume the premise and therefore the *prima facie* evidence for his premise is brought into question.

Another reason to consider skeptical theism as a response to Schellenberg's divine hiddenness argument is that Schellenberg himself uses the same kind of argument when convenient for his purposes. McBrayer and Swenson point this out by citing Schellenberg's argument that if God exists, all that would be needed is for inculpable believers to have weak belief that God exists rather than strong belief that God exists (weak and strong referring to the amount of confidence with which the belief is held). Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness could be made *mutatis mutandis* to argue that if a perfectly loving God exists, then all people will have a strong belief that God exists. This is because strong belief is better than weak belief that God exists. Strong belief would also result in the greater likelihood of believers entering into a relationship with God rather than weak belief. What is Schellenberg's reply to such a possibility? Schellenberg writes: "God might have reasons for leaving me for a time in a state of weak belief and, given that firm belief is not required for a personal relationship with God, [God] might very well do so" (33). McBrayer and Swenson say, "this is the skeptical strategy *par excellence*" (22). Granted, Schellenberg will claim that at least weak belief is in place and thus the possibility of relationship with God, whereas an absence of belief in the existence of God restricts the possibility of personal relationship. But nevertheless, Schellenberg uses the same kind of skepticism in his argument that can be used against Schellenberg's second premise.



The most common approach to Schellenberg's argument is to challenge the second premise by offering theodicies and defenses which justify God in allowing inculpable nonbelief to occur. However, as I demonstrated in chapter three, it can be challenging to show how these theodicies and defenses overcome Schellenberg's criticism that all the cited goods of these defenses can be maintained even if God were a little less hidden. Therefore, I have offered skeptical theism as a way to respond to Schellenberg's argument because the central claim of this skepticism is that even if we cannot identify what those goods are for which God allows inculpable nonbelief does not mean that there is no such good for which God *actually* allows inculpable nonbelief to occur. I have offered the common arguments for such skepticism, and I find the argument from enabling premises the most adept at challenging Schellenberg's second premise. Now that I have shown how I think this to be the case, I will now turn to common general objections that are made against skeptical theism to show that despite the initial plausibility of skeptical theism, such a position may have unwanted consequences. I will conclude that the objections to skeptical theism are ones that can be overcome and therefore should not hinder an acceptance of skeptical theism as a response to the argument from divine hiddenness.

### **Objections to Skeptical Theism**

The common criticism of skeptical theism is that if we remain skeptical about the inference regarding justifying goods, then this will lead to broader skepticism. Alston does try to assuage this concern by commenting that his argument is not based on, nor does it lead to, a general skepticism or general theological skepticism. "It is compatible," he writes, "with our knowing quite a bit about the divine nature, activities, purposes, and relations with humanity. The conclusion of the argument is only that we are unable to form sound judgments on whether there are justifying reasons for God's permitting certain evils" (1996, 321-22). Similarly, Michael Bergmann writes, skeptical theism "is just the honest recognition of the fact that it wouldn't be the least bit surprising if reality far outstripped our understanding of it." And this he thinks is not bold, dogmatic, nor excessively skeptical (2001, 284).

While Bergmann's suggestion is reasonable, what ground does Alston have to make such claims if we aren't in a position to know what God would do all-things-considered? If skeptical theism is invoked, then it does seem *prima facie* to block many potential claims that we can make about deity and divine ways. Plenty of critics have disagreed with the central claim of skeptical theism, and therefore, I will examine three types of objections made against skeptical theism. These will include possible threats of skeptical theism to: common knowledge, moral knowledge, and theological knowledge.

### **Common Knowledge**

Some critics have claimed that any skepticism regarding our ability to make all-things-considered inferences in reference to God will lead to skepticism regarding much of our common knowledge. For example, Russell argues that the skeptical theist is in no position to know whether or not the world is more than 100 years old. For all we know, if God exists, he could have created a seemingly old earth only 100 years ago for some inscrutable good that we don't know. Russell asks: "Is the view that there is a God who, for reasons beyond our ken, allows the suffering which appears pointless to us any different epistemically from the view that there is a God who created the universe 100 years ago and, for reasons beyond our ken, has deceived us into thinking it is older?" Russell doesn't think so. If a theist is going to reject the 100-year theory because it is not reasonable to believe that God would deceive us, then it is not reasonable to believe that there is some good beyond our ken that justifies God in allowing the evil that we see in the world (1996, 196-97).

Bergmann replies that the reason we do not have doubts regarding the possibility of a 100 year old earth, is that we rationally hold beliefs with such high confidence that it is difficult to take such concerns seriously. This is different from the possibility that given our cognitive limitations we may not be able to discover all the possible goods that there are (2001, 290). However, the better answer to why Russell's objection fails is that the skeptical theist need not rely on a noseum inference, which the skeptical theist has denied, in rejecting the 100-year theory. The noseum inference has been

compared to Rowe's argument from the problem of evil and therefore the kind of inference has been referred to as a "Rowean inference" – that is the inference from, 'I can't see what would justify God's actualizing x' to, 'probably there is no reason.' While the skeptical theist cannot rely on this Rowean inference without being inconsistent with skeptical theism, there are plenty of "Rowean-inference-independent" reasons that would still be available to the skeptical theist, just as they would be available to the atheist or non-skeptical theist (Beaudoin 2005, 44).

Beaudoin offers the following analogy. Suppose I know nothing about Smith's honesty. I claim that I believe something (P) that Smith told me. But I believe P not based on Smith telling me but rather because it is something that I have confirmed myself. Beaudoin writes: "Clearly in this case it wouldn't do for someone to challenge the rationality of my belief by pointing out that for all I know Smith is a liar; my belief that P isn't based on Smith's testimony." In the same way the skeptical theist may believe in an old earth independent of arguments based on God's omnibenevolence. Instead there are theologically neutral arguments which reject skepticism about the past without relying on Rowean-inferences about the morality of God (2005, 45).

All of this does raise another concern that if skeptical theism rejects the Rowean inference, it seems to also reject a principle of rationality, which Swinburne has called, the Principle of Credulity. The Principle of Credulity is the principle that other things being equal, it is rational to believe things to be as they appear. This is the idea that, "in the absence of special considerations," if something seems to me to be the case, then it probably is the case. To use Swinburne's example, if you are having the experience that there seems (epistemically) to you to be a table in front of you, it is good evidence for you to suppose that there is a table there (1979, 303). Likewise, Schellenberg would claim, if there doesn't seem to be any outweighing good for God to allow inculpable nonbelief, then it is good evidence to suppose that there isn't any outweighing good. But the skeptical theist is denying this inference and therefore seeming to deny the Principle of Credulity as well. If the skeptical theist position requires a

rejection of the Principle of Credulity, then it does seem that many common sense inferences and much common sense reasoning will not be possible from a skeptical theist position.

Bergmann addresses this concern by clarifying that the skeptical theist is not arguing that it appears that there is no God-justifying reason for permitting evil or hiddenness, but rather, “we just don’t know how likely it is that there is a God-justifying reason for permitting evils” (2009, 387). The claim that skeptical theism requires a rejection of the Principle of Credulity is hasty. The principle is simply a rationality claim that it is reasonable to assume things are often as they seem to be *prima facie*. But *prima facie* considerations are different than all-things-considered judgments. As McBrayer and Swenson point out, “While it might be true that justification is easy to get, everyone grants that even on the most commonsense epistemology, it can be easily lost. And once we reflect on the differences between God and ourselves, this provides a defeater for whatever *prima facie* justification our beliefs about what God would do initially had” (26). It is not inconsistent to say that a skeptical theist can still accept the Principle of Credulity, while also accepting that upon closer examination things that were *prima facie* justified may be challenged by all-things-considered considerations. Therefore, there is nothing in skeptical theism that requires a complete disregard or rejection of common sense epistemology.

Returning again to the noseem garage analogy (that I would be sensitive to knowing if there is a dog in the garage, but not sensitive to knowing whether or not there are fleas in the garage), I can conclude rationally that when looking into a garage and not seeing a car that “it doesn’t appear that there is a car in the garage,” and, “it appears that there is no car in the garage.” However, now consider the possibility of seeing fleas in the garage: I am reasonable in saying, “there doesn’t appear to me to be fleas in the garage,” but I cannot reasonably conclude that “it appears that there are no fleas in the garage.” Likewise, the skeptical theist is saying that the most we can say is that “it doesn’t appear that there is a God-justifying reason,” and this is still consistent with the Principle of Credulity and other

common sense epistemology claims. Bergmann thinks Swinburne has misconstrued the argument: “He [Swinburne] thinks the skeptical theist’s aim is to show that the likelihood of some evil or other on theism might for all we know be higher than it initially appears.” But instead the skeptical theist is trying to respond to Rowe’s inference by showing that it is an inscrutable probability since we are not in a position to place a particular value or range on the probability in question (2009, 387-88).

Given these considerations we should not be as concerned about skeptical theism throwing our common knowledge into a skeptical abyss. Skeptical theism is a more modest claim addressing the possibility that we are not in a position to make all-things-considered judgments regarding justifying reasons for God. Furthermore, the skeptical theist still has the same reasons as atheists and non-skeptical theists for rationally believing much of our common knowledge based on reasoning that is independent of certain beliefs on God-justifying reasons. Skeptical theism is also not directly opposed to the Principle of Credulity, or other common sense epistemology principles, since the skeptical theist can still claim that all things being equal, things are often as they appear. The point at which skeptical theism diverges is that it claims we are not in a position, because of our cognitive limitations, to determine how things appear in regards to all-things-considered judgments regarding God-justifying reasons.

### **Moral Knowledge**

Another area of criticism that has received a significant amount of attention is in regards to the effect that skeptical theism has on the possibility of moral knowledge and moral deliberation. If, as the skeptical theist claims, we cannot make all-things-considered judgments regarding justificatory reasons for God since we cannot comprehend all the possible goods, then it seems that we are not in a position to make decisions regarding what is the best choice of action in moral deliberations. If we come across someone suffering, who are we to step in to prevent such suffering if it happens to serve some greater inscrutable good? Russell has argued that “moral skepticism about God’s omissions entails moral

skepticism about our own omissions” (1996, 198). Similarly, if there is some greater good that is being served by someone being a nonbeliever in the existence of God, how are we to know whether or not it would be the right thing for us to try to share with someone the possibility of God? These are the kinds of criticisms that are raised against skeptical theism on the moral front.

Although Beaudoin is not an advocate for skeptical theism, the clarity he brings to the position is helpful. Beaudoin highlights an important distinction that should be made when considering skeptical theism and moral knowledge. He asks: What, according to the skeptical theist, is the reason for the failure to understand the morally sufficient reason for evils? “Do we fail to find it because our grasp of the very concepts of good and evil are [...] defective, or because, though we can recognize good and evil when we see it, we simply don’t have sufficient access to relevant non-moral facts (such as what metaphysical restrictions there might be on possible worlds), or both?” Skeptical theists typically stress that, rather than supposing we are “moral idiots,” it is our ignorance of relevant non-moral facts (1998, 416-17). If we are not ‘moral-idiots,’ then we must examine what role the ignorance of relevant non-moral facts plays in our moral deliberations.

Let’s return to the challenge presented by Russell but cast it in terms of divine hiddenness. This example will also parallel Bergmann’s discussion of this challenge from Russell in the context of evil (2001, 291-92). Russell’s challenge in its modified version is that given our moral skepticism about God’s inaction in preventing some inculpable nonbelief, we likewise must be skeptical about the morality of our own inaction in not doing anything to prevent inculpable nonbelief when it occurs. Consider the following: I have an opportunity to share with an isolated nontheist, who is an inculpable nonbeliever, the concept of God and the possibility of relationship with God. However, I refrain from intervening and trying to put an end to the isolated nontheist’s nonbelief. Furthermore, let’s say that I could have easily intervened with no harm or disadvantages to myself. The reasonable reaction to such a scenario is that my inaction is wrong since I should have intervened to try to put an end to a case of nonbelief (and thus

a form of evil or disadvantage of some kind) and to bring about a good (belief that God exists). Russell argues that if we accept skeptical theism, we should remain agnostic as to whether or not my inaction is wrong. For all we know there could be some greater outweighing good which justifies the inculpable nonbelief taking place. There may be a good that is achieved only if I do *not* intervene in preventing the inculpable nonbelief from happening.

Now I present a modified version of how Bergmann formulates Russell's argument and provides a response. Consider whether or not:

A: There is some good G such that (a) it outweighs the [nonbelief] permitted by [my] inaction, (b) the permission of that [nonbelief] is necessary for the obtaining of G and (c) were G appropriately to motivate [my] inaction, [my] inaction would be justified (2001, 292).

Russell thinks that if we are not justified in believing that there is no such G, then it follows that we are not justified in believing that I did something wrong in failing to intervene (1996, 197). And so this suggests that agnosticism about A leads to agnosticism about:

B: My inaction is wrong.

But skepticism about B, Russell would argue, is unreasonable since it seems pretty obvious that my inaction is wrong. And so Russell would have us conclude that skeptical theism is likewise unreasonable because it does not allow us to claim that inaction is wrong in what appear to be obvious moral cases. Alston weighs in on the discussion and thinks this "badly misconstrues moral justification." Alston writes: "Whether I am morally justified in doing something is not a function of whether there are objective facts that could be used by *someone* as a morally good reason for doing it. It is rather a function of whether *I* have such a morally good reason for doing it. And it is quite possible [...] that God should have such a reason that no human being could have" (1996, 321). Therefore, Bergmann argues, if I am not appropriately motivated – not aware of (a) or (b) from A – and could have easily intervened then my inaction is wrong even if we are agnostic about A (2001, 292).

Bergmann, for the sake of argument, takes the response to Russell's challenge one step further and argues that if A is true, then there is a justifying reason for my inaction since the inaction results in better consequences than my intervention. Since I don't know what the justifying reason is, I can still be judged as acting immorally while at the same time have a positive overall judgment for my inaction since it results in better overall consequences. And so, Bergmann offers, Russell could restate his case to be that agnosticism about A leads to agnosticism about:

C: There exists no (known or unknown) justifying reason for my inaction.

Instead of Russell moving from agnosticism about A to agnosticism about B, he can move from agnosticism about A to agnosticism about C. But by doing so "he thereby loses his punchline" since agnosticism about C is reasonable: "Given our ignorance about what possible goods there are and about which goods require [my] inaction we simply have no idea whether or not C is true" (2001, 292-93). This reply softens the blow of Russell's challenge because it offers a way in which we can judge my inaction to be immoral while at the same time remaining skeptical of their being an inscrutable good.

Although skeptical theists have been accused of not being able to make significant moral deliberations or have moral knowledge, it can be argued that such deliberation and knowledge is indeed still possible. Bergmann offers the following proposals as ways that skeptical theists make moral decisions. First, while it is important to consider consequences of actions, we may also have other duties that dictate our decisions independently of the consequences, and so skeptical theists are not necessarily committed to a consequentialist moral theory. Second, in cases that do involve consideration of consequences, we are not morally bound to do what is *in fact* the best overall course of action, but instead act based on the information of what we can know at the time of action. Third, God's moral decision making can be analogous to ours in the following way: "God too will seek to bring about the best consequences except in cases where what morality requires is not dependent on consequences. And, in those cases where consequences of an action matter, God too will put the right



amount of effort and time into determining what the best consequences are.” Bergmann adds that in God’s case this may require no time, and little effort, and that what he *thinks* is best *is* the best action (2009, 392).

Finally, when considering whether or not to permit someone’s suffering or someone’s nonbelief, “it matters tremendously what one’s relationship is to the one permitted to suffer.” Bergmann offers the example that it may be morally appropriate to allow certain suffering for one’s child for their own good, whereas doing the same to a stranger’s child would be morally inappropriate (2009, 392). This gives further support to the argument that even if there is some inscrutable good that occurs from God allowing inculpable nonbelief to occur, this does not excuse human inaction in trying to prevent cases of inculpable nonbelief. Our relationship to other individuals is not the same as the relationship between God and those same individuals. Therefore, the skeptical theist has possible replies to objections like Russell’s, as well as possible positive considerations that can be made in moral deliberation, like those made by Bergmann. Even if skeptical theists are skeptical of all-things-considered Rowean-inferences or noseum inferences in relation to God, there is still the possibility of moral knowledge and significant moral deliberation since all-things-considered judgments are not necessary for moral deliberation or action. These examples show that skeptical theism does not throw all moral considerations into uncertainty and skepticism.

### **Theological Knowledge**

The third kind of criticism against skeptical theism to consider is the claim that skeptical theism will result in a more general theological skepticism. Since skeptical theists are agnostic about the possibility of knowing if there are reasons for God to allow certain evils or hiddenness, then this seems to jeopardize many things that the theist will want to say about God. This is because the more general claim of skeptical theism is that we cannot make all-things-considered judgments about what God would or would not do. If this is the case, then how can the skeptical theist make claims about God? Beaudoin

summarizes it this way: In the argument from evil, the atheist has argued that given the likelihood of gratuitous evil, the likelihood of God's existence is inversely related so that the likelihood of God's existence is very small. In a similar fashion, many theists have made similar arguments using inverse-probability that given, for example, the design found in the world, that the probability of their not being a God is low. But if skeptical theism claims that we cannot make all-things-considered judgments on what God would or would not do, then we are in no position to make the likely probability determinations for many of the arguments *for* the existence of God. Beaudoin thinks this leaves us with the following dilemma: "Either there is still room for an atheist to use an inverse-probability argument from evil that significantly reduces theism's epistemic probability, or the theist can avoid this sort of argument, but at the cost of relinquishing inverse-probability arguments *for* God's existence" (1998, 404). If this is the case, then skeptical theism threatens to limit theological knowledge.

Skeptical theists may respond to this dilemma differently, but I do think that what Beaudoin has to say is generally right. If we are going to be skeptical of God's reasons for all-things-considered judgments, then this will also limit our judgments that are made in arguments regarding what God would or would not do in a given situation. However, rather than skeptical theism bankrupting theological knowledge, it shows the need for special revelation from God in which the divine can communicate divine things and desires for humanity. Skeptical theism doesn't lead to a lack of ability to make *any* claims about God or theological knowledge, but rather implies that human experience and reason alone is not sufficient for robust theological knowledge. This does not seem to be a particularly controversial claim for a theist, or for that matter, an agnostic or atheist. If finite humans are to understand things about infinite divinity, it seems reasonable to conclude that God would need to communicate something to humanity. This is not to say that human reasoning has no role in divine matters, rather it is the tool we use in which to understand the communication from the divine.

Obviously, once special revelation is brought into consideration there is a whole new set of considerations and arguments that need to be made. In what ways would God communicate such a revelation? How are we to determine if a supposed revelation is a legitimate special revelation from God? Is such special revelation communicated directly, via scripture, indirectly in experience, or through other methods? Perhaps the most challenging problem is that since we cannot make all-things-considered claims to what God would do, for all we know God's revelation to us could be false or misleading and likewise all our beliefs about God's plans and intentions for humanity could be false or mistaken. Let's call this problem the problem, or possibility of, divine lies. Consider the following argument made by Beaudoin:

- (1) God exists.
- (2) God has the power to actualize *r* [the state of affairs in which God provides us, through some mode of special revelation, with *false* information about his eschatological plans for humanity].
- (3) For all we know, there is an MSR [morally sufficient reason] for God's actualizing *r*.
- (4) We have no good RI [Rowean Inference]-independent reasons for believing that God does not actualize *r*.
- (5) So for all we know God actualizes *r*; for all we know God's revelation is false and (hence) so are our beliefs about his eschatological plans for humanity. (2005, 46)

This argument concludes that for all we know, God may be telling us divine lies. This is a similar criticism that Rowe also offers of skeptical theism. While Rowe admits that the skeptical theist's reasoning is difficult to refute, he does think that skeptical theism leads to unwanted theistic consequences such as leaving us in the dark as to God's faithfulness: "And for all we know there is some good far greater than the good of eternal life for the faithful on earth, a good the realization of which precludes God's granting eternal life to the faithful on earth" (2006, 91). How then should the skeptical theist respond to Beaudoin's argument and criticisms such as Rowe's which present the challenge of the possibility of divine lies?

My initial response is to reject (2): God has the power to actualize a state of affairs in which he provides us with false information. One of the things that many theists hold is that God cannot lie and yet this is not considered a limit on God's power but rather it is in conflict with his nature. The appeal could be made that inherent in the idea of an omnibenevolent God is that God cannot lie and therefore cannot actualize r. However, this is just refuting the possibility of divine lies by making an all-things-considered judgment about God, which is not available to the skeptical theist. Even if God is omnibenevolent it doesn't rule out the possibility that there is some reason or inscrutable good for God to be misleading which is still in keeping with his omnibenevolence. Therefore, rejecting (2) is not a possibility open to the skeptical theist.

The skeptical theist is now left with rejecting either (3) or (4). However, it becomes quickly apparent that (3) is not able to be rejected for similar reasons. The skeptical theist cannot reject (3) because to do so is inconsistent with skeptical theism's central claim that we are not in a position to make such all-things-considered determinations. Rejecting (3) would undermine skeptical theism and prevent it from being used as a response to Schellenberg's second premise. This leaves premise (4) to be the only other premise open for the skeptical theist to reject. Thus the skeptical theist must make the claim that we have reasons for God not to actualize divine lies that are not dependent on all-things-considered claims about God. Beaudoin suggests that this could perhaps be argued by "*reasoning inductively from the truth of God's independently checkable revelations.*" The theist could potentially verify the special revelation under consideration with independently verifiable things, such as historical accuracy or empirical science like archaeology. Beaudoin writes, "If in these revelations God has a track-record of honesty, then we might reason inductively to the truth of what he tells us regarding matters not independently checkable. It is, after all, commonplace to reason thus in regard to other humans" (2005, 47).

However, Beaudoin goes on to say that there are two worries with this approach. The first worry concerns the feasibility to fact check God's revelations so as to be able to establish the track-record. The second worry is that this would imply that one's faith in revelation is tied to the results of empirical investigations. Furthermore, disagreements found in the investigations would lead to wavering between belief and unbelief (47-48). But these worries should not prevent a skeptical theist from rejecting premise (4) of Beaudoin's argument. While theists of an anti-evidentialist persuasion may disagree with the approach, there is a whole field of theistic apologetics that attempts to verify revelation through a variety of investigations and fact checking. This is done in an attempt to strengthen the beliefs of theists or to convince atheists and agnostics of God's existence by establishing a track-record of honesty regarding revelation. In regards to Beaudoin's second worry of tying ones faith to empirical tests, a theist would not have to be tossed back and forth between belief and unbelief. Empirical investigation of revelation may only be one aspect of the foundation on which a theist places faith in God. It is also possible for an individual to struggle with various doubts while still in the context of having a belief in God. Of course such an approach is likely not effective for an atheist or an agnostic that does not believe that God exists.

Beaudoin thinks the skeptical theist's best bet in overcoming the argument he has formulated is to *"give a circular justification for judging it improbable that God actualizes r."* Even though this circularity is *"using revelation's outputs to justify belief in its reliability,"* such circularity often seems unavoidable in many other areas of inquiry (2005, 48). Consider, for example, the circularity involved in establishing the reliability of our sense perception. Granted, given the difference between sense perception and divine revelation, more needs to be said, but such approaches have been developed by the likes of Alston and others (Alston 1992). Despite this approach, Beaudoin concludes that skeptical theism likely leads to theological skepticism, because the skeptical theist cannot rule out the possibility

of divine lies. However, I now want to argue that even if the skeptical theist cannot deny that there is a possibility of divine lies, this does not mean that theological skepticism is the necessary outcome.

McBrayer and Swenson argue that the possibility of divine lies is not as serious of an objection as it may first appear. First there is a distinction to be made between “all-things-considered” and “other things being equal,” or *ceteris paribus*. The skeptical theist cannot make the all-things-considered judgment regarding God, and therefore should accept the possibility of divine lies. Despite this, the skeptical theist can still claim that *ceteris paribus* a perfectly loving God would tell us the truth. This is similar to the previous discussion that skeptical theism does not rule out the Principle of Credulity and other common sense epistemological rationality claims. Even so, we are not in a position to “determine whether or not the *ceteris paribus* clause is met,” and therefore, “we should allow that it is possible that God is lying to us” (27-28). Second, McBrayer and Swenson argue that the possibility of divine lies does not make it irrational to accept revelation. Consider our rational acceptance of testimony. We generally accept the testimony of others even though there is a possibility of deception and instances where we have even been deceived in the past. In the same way, just as we find it epistemically appropriate to accept the testimony of others, it is still epistemically appropriate to accept the testimony of God via revelation despite the possibility of divine lies (28). Furthermore, this seems appropriate because it explains why faith, or belief *in* God, is an essential part of a relationship with God. The skeptical theist can still accept the possibility of divine lies, but it is the skeptical theist’s faith in God, which is a form of trust, that allows the skeptical theist to make further theological claims based on special revelation without violating common sense rationality claims.

It is reasonable to conclude that skeptical theism does not result in a general skepticism of theological knowledge. While it is true that skeptical theism’s claim that we cannot make all-things-considered judgments regarding what God would or would not do may limit our ability to make claims about God based on human reason and experience alone, this does not prevent the skeptical theist from

looking to special revelation to develop more robust claims of theological knowledge. However, the skeptical theist must admit the possibility of divine lies since the skeptical theist cannot make the all-things-considered judgment that God would not lie to humans. Although there are many other issues that would need to be addressed in considering what is to be a candidate for special revelation, the possibility of divine lies does not in principle rule out the rationality of a skeptical theist accepting and using special revelation in theological claims. Therefore, skeptical theism does not necessarily lead to theological skepticism.

### **Skeptical Theism and Divine Hiddenness**

What then can we conclude regarding skeptical theism and the argument from divine hiddenness? In the first half of this chapter, I offered a survey of the common arguments that are made for skeptical theism. These included arguments from analogy, arguments from complexity, arguments from alternatives, and arguments from enabling premises. I argued that arguments from enabling premises were the most promising in being applied to Schellenberg's argument. Schellenberg acknowledges the potential of Wykstra-style objections to block the inference that he makes in his second premise but ultimately concludes that such considerations do not challenge the *prima facie* case for his argument. Skeptical theism can be challenging to develop since it limits all-things-considered judgments about what God would or would not do. Nevertheless, skeptical theism can block Schellenberg's second premise because it shows the reasonability of our not being in a position to be able to make the determination of whether or not Schellenberg's second premise is the case or not and removes the *prima facie* evidence for the premise. Therefore, if attempts at defenses and theodicies fail there is a skeptical theism defense which is available to be used to block the conclusion of Schellenberg's argument. Even if we can't say what the good is in which God would allow inculpable nonbelief (theodicies), or what the good, for all we know, might be in which God would allow inculpable

nonbelief (defenses), this does not mean that there are no such goods since we are not in a position to make all-things-considered judgments about God (skeptical theism).

If skeptical theism is the most successful response to Schellenberg's argument, then it is important to consider the consequences and results of such skepticism. Therefore, I considered the most common objections to skeptical theism, about which all agree that, in their most general form, allow skeptical theism to bleed into other areas of knowledge and end up resulting in a more widespread skepticism. While it is true that there are challenges involving the implications of skeptical theism, they are not as threatening or as far-fetching as some would claim. Common sense knowledge claims, moral knowledge claims, and theological knowledge claims are still insulated from the skepticism of skeptical theism. The most challenging is in defending theological knowledge claims. Since the skeptical theist cannot make all-things-considered judgments about God, this limits the possible things we can say about God based on human reason and experience alone. Therefore, the skeptical theist must rely on special revelation in order to make more robust claims about God. But the general challenge to special revelation will be that the skeptical theist cannot rule out the possibility of divine lies. Even with this unattractive possibility, this does not in principle rule out the skeptical theist's acceptance of special revelation. And so the skeptical theist can still make claims to theological knowledge even though skeptical theism claims that we are not in a position to make all-things-considered judgments about God.

This defense, via skeptical theism, shows that Schellenberg's argument does not necessarily, epistemically, lead an agnostic (because of divine hiddenness) towards atheism as he has suggested. Instead the agnostic still has three viable options in front of him or her depending on the agnostic's acceptance of skeptical theism. If the agnostic finds skeptical theism reasonable then this can either result in continued agnosticism or a possible move towards theism. The agnostic may continue in being an agnostic because of other reasons he or she may have for questioning the possibility of God's



existence. If the agnostic is moved towards the possibility of theism this will involve not only accepting that God has reasons beyond our own understanding to justify the hiddenness that is found in the world, but also include being open to putting trust or faith in such a God despite the possibility of divine lies. If on the other hand, the agnostic finds such a step unappealing, or skeptical theism unattractive, then another option is to trust in human cognitive abilities and capabilities, and therefore conclude that the hiddenness of God is better explained by the absence of God. Such a step is one towards atheism. I conclude that this is enough to show that Schellenberg is mistaken in assuming that an agnostic is necessarily led to atheism because of the argument from divine hiddenness. I have shown how it is possible to remain skeptical of Schellenberg's second premise and argument all together. An agnostic can accept the reasonableness found in skeptical theism which argues that due to our cognitive limitations in regards to understanding all the ways of a supreme being, we are not in a position to make a judgment in the degree of hiddenness or the inculpable nonbelief that God has reasons to instantiate. Given this possibility, there are still viable options available to the agnostic: remaining agnostic, moving towards theism, or moving towards atheism.

In closing, there is a significant difference in the way that skeptical theism is applied to the argument from evil and the way it is applied to the argument from divine hiddenness. This difference is worth mentioning because it clarifies some ambiguity that is found in Schellenberg's argument. In the evidential argument from evil, the atheist is arguing that if God exists, cases of gratuitous evil will not occur. Gratuitous cases of evil exist in the world (cases like the suffering fawn), and therefore it is likely that God does not exist. Skeptical theism is used to challenge the claim that there is gratuitous evil by arguing that even if we do not have a reason for why the evil is not gratuitous, this does not mean we should conclude that it is gratuitous. In the argument from evil, skeptical theism is challenging the *evidential* claim regarding gratuitous evil. In the case of Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness, I am using skeptical theism to challenge Schellenberg's *conceptual* claim regarding divine

love not allowing inculpable nonbelief to occur. I have accepted Schellenberg's evidential premise that inculpable nonbelief occurs, and instead challenged the conceptual claim that this is in conflict with the concept of divine love. If I were using skeptical theism in the same way as the evidential argument from evil, I would be using skeptical theism to challenge the evidential claim that inculpable nonbelief occurs, but instead I am using skeptical theism to challenge Schellenberg's concept of divine love.

This brings into focus the ambiguity of Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness as to whether or not it should be considered a logical argument or an evidential argument. Schellenberg, and others, have all considered his argument to be an evidential-styled argument. However, Schellenberg repeatedly responds to his critics that, when they are considering his argument, they are forgetting his deeper claim that it is motivated out of divine love. Such a response indicates that Schellenberg considers his argument to be a logical argument from divine love, even though he says otherwise, since he continues to rely on his conceptual claim when challenged. If it is intended to be a logical argument, then it fails because of the various possibilities that have been offered and discussed in the previous chapters and in the divine hiddenness literature. Therefore, Schellenberg cannot rely on his conceptual claim as the only possibility of divine love. Even if we cannot provide a reason why divine love would allow inculpable nonbelief, does not mean that there is not such reason. This is my reason for showing how skeptical theism can be used to challenge and reject the conceptual claim that Schellenberg has made in his argument.

Schellenberg is left by default with an evidential argument from divine hiddenness. Since this is the case, my strategy has been to challenge each of the premises in order to reduce the evidential weight they may carry against the possibility of the existence of God. This is why the second chapter clarified the concept of inculpable nonbelief in order to show that the amount of inculpable nonbelief in the world is much less than Schellenberg assumes. While I am not denying the occurrence of inculpable nonbelief, Schellenberg's premise is not as alarming as initially thought. Since Schellenberg's argument

is not a logical argument, my granting the third premise is not a concession to the argument as a whole. Hence, my next effort has been to show that his conceptual premise regarding divine love should not be accepted. In chapter three, I examined free-will defenses to consider the possibility that human free will requires God to remain hidden to the extent that he is which creates the possibility of inculpable nonbelief. Finding such defenses lacking, I have now examined, and accepted, skeptical theism as a viable way to reject an acceptance of Schellenberg's conceptual claim.

Even if we agree with the skeptical theist that we have cognitive limitations which prevent us from determining the reasons for God's degree of hiddenness, this does not prevent us from further developing other defenses to attempt to give an answer to Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness. I conclude that skeptical theism is a sufficient response to Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness. However, even though it is sufficient, it may not be a satisfying defense to many theists who want to develop a defense that will make more positive claims of an explanation to inculpable nonbelief rather than the claim that we are not in a position to know. This is my motivation for making one more attempt in the next chapter to understand the hiddenness of God and inculpable nonbelief which incorporates aspects of the various approaches to the argument from divine hiddenness discussed so far, as well as a twist on the concept of evidence for God.

## Chapter 5

### Summary of Chapters 1 through 4

Before making a final response which incorporates components of each chapter it will be helpful to quickly recap where we've been so far. In Chapter 1, I laid out the argument from divine hiddenness as presented by Schellenberg and introduced the ways that I have addressed the argument. Again, the simplest form of the argument is:

- (1) If there is a God, he is perfectly loving.
- (2) If a perfectly loving God exists, reasonable nonbelief does not occur
- (3) Reasonable nonbelief occurs
- (4) No perfectly loving God exists (From (2) and (3))
- (5) There is no God (From (1) and (4))

This, as was noted, is a typical kind of argument against the existence of God which picks out some aspect of the world which is in apparent conflict with a traditional claim about God. Thus, the argument from divine hiddenness is similar in structure to the argument from evil. Schellenberg, motivated from the concept of divine love, argues that if God is perfectly loving, God will always, at all times, provide evidence sufficient for belief, so that all individuals capable of a relationship with God will have sufficient evidence to believe that God exists.

In Chapter 2, I questioned Schellenberg's third premise that inculpable nonbelief occurs (the first premise being granted given that I have in mind a traditional Judeo-Christian concept of God). I began with this premise because the literature on divine hiddenness typically accepts it to be true without much closer examination. There are two kinds of motivations for questioning the occurrence of inculpable nonbelief – philosophical and theological. From philosophical motivations, I examined different concepts of culpability in comparison with Schellenberg's concept. Based on examples from the Model Penal Code and from Robert Adams' arguments for involuntary culpability, I argued that individuals can be held culpable for involuntary states and actions, and therefore, Schellenberg's

standard of culpability for nonbelief ought to be rejected. With a stricter standard of inculpability, cases of inculpable reflective and unreflective nonbelief are less common than Schellenberg assumes.

From theological motivations, I considered the noetic effects of sin – something that is often referenced but rarely discussed. This is the idea that sin has effects on our reasoning, and therefore, nonbelief in the existence of God is culpable. Humans, while not initially culpable for the noetic effects of sin, at some point become culpable if they have not developed the characteristics needed to overcome the disadvantages of the noetic effects of sin. I concluded that Stephen Moroney’s model of the noetic effects of sin is the most comprehensive model and is also useful in responding to the challenge from the demographics of theism. Despite the possibility for culpable self-deception and the noetic effects of sin, I granted the premise that inculpable nonbelief occurs since to deny the premise is too bold a claim. Nevertheless, I did show that the evidential force of the premise is reduced since inculpable nonbelief is less common than Schellenberg claims.

In Chapter 3, I then questioned the second premise which receives the most attention in the divine hiddenness literature. I first briefly examined the argument from evil as it relates to the argument from divine hiddenness to show that many of the proposed solutions to the argument from evil can be applied to the argument from divine hiddenness because of the similar structure between the two arguments. Therefore, to challenge Schellenberg’s second premise I applied defenses and theodicies used in the argument from evil to the argument from divine hiddenness. Although there are numerous kinds of defenses and theodicies available, I focused on those motivated by the concept of free will. I considered defenses and theodicies that claim that God must be hidden in order to prevent coercive belief, prevent interference with atonement, and prevent interference with soul-making. I concluded that in each case God could still be *less* hidden while maintaining the stated good. Much of this depended on what I take to be an important distinction between belief *that* God exists, and belief *in* God.

In Chapter 4, I argued that even if a defense or theodicy is not offered that significantly challenges the argument from divine hiddenness, there is still a defense to be found in skeptical theism. Skeptical theism is the view that we are not in a position to make the inference required of Schellenberg's second premise. That is, given our cognitive limitations, we ought to be skeptical of our ability to determine the all-things-considered reasons God has for divine hiddenness. The common arguments for skeptical theism are made from: (1) analogies, (2) complexity, (3) alternatives, and (4) enabling premises. I concluded that the Wykstra-style objection of denying the enabling premise is the best argument to apply to Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness. This is the claim that we are not able to make the all-things-considered judgment about what God would or would not do in regards to inculpable nonbelief.

I then considered the common objections to skeptical theism which claim that skeptical theism leads to skepticism about common knowledge, moral knowledge, and theological knowledge. I concluded in each case that the threat of skepticism to these fields of knowledge is not as severe as they are sometimes made out to be. Instead, skeptical theism can be limited to skepticism about all-things-considered judgments about what God would or would not do, and this does not prevent further claims to common knowledge, moral knowledge, and even theological knowledge. However, the skeptical theist will need to rely on revelation if she wants to make more robust claims about God since the skeptical theist cannot make the all-things-considered judgment about what God would or would not do given limitations of human reasoning. That being the case, the skeptical theist must grant the possibility of divine lies since she cannot make the all-things-considered judgment that God would not have some inscrutable good for deceiving humanity through revelation. Despite this possibility, it is still rational to accept the possibility of revelation as a source for claims about the divine. However, in order to do so, it will entail that the theist place some amount of trust in God in accepting revelation as a source of knowledge claims about God. From skeptical theism I concluded that, just because we do not have a

reason for God's allowing inculpable nonbelief, does not mean that a person must epistemically conclude that God does not exist. This defense shows that Schellenberg's argument does not necessarily lead an agnostic epistemically towards atheism. Of course, it is also rational to deny the claims of skeptical theism.

Despite the possibility of the skeptical theist's defense to the argument from divine hiddenness, such a conclusion will no doubt leave many of us wanting of a more fulfilling defense. Even if someone accepts skeptical theism, there is still a desire to further understand why God would not make himself more evident so that the religious skeptic could be answered, or at least leave the theist in a better position to satisfy the religious skeptic. Because of our human inquiry, we want to know and understand, not just that there *is* hiddenness, but we want to understand *why* there is divine hiddenness. There is value to be found in continuing to try to tell the story of why, if God is perfectly loving, God would allow for such hiddenness to occur. Such a story will lead to a better understanding of ourselves, of God, and of the dynamics of relationship between God and humanity. Therefore, in this chapter, I will attempt to develop a defense to the argument from divine hiddenness which combines aspects of each of the previous chapters and will serve as a summary and conclusion of this dissertation.

I will develop this defense in the context of an answer to an agnostic who is an agnostic because of the argument from divine hiddenness. This defense is also inspired by Paul K. Moser's discussion of divine hiddenness in [The Elusive God](#) and [The Evidence for God](#). Both of Moser's books overlap in many ways and I will be incorporating concepts found in both books. While Moser does not specifically address inculpable nonbelief, he does offer a response to divine hiddenness which is essentially a defectiveness theory. The response that I will now offer is a culmination of the discussions in the previous chapters and is, at its foundation, the claim that most nonbelief is culpable because it is the result of culpable defectiveness on the part of humanity, which makes God's hiddenness appropriate. As a result, the smaller amount of inculpable nonbelief left to challenge the existence of God weakens the

evidential force of Schellenberg's argument. However, I will accept Schellenberg's premise that inculpable nonbelief occurs, although to a lesser extent, and therefore, develop a defense to Schellenberg's claim that if a perfectly loving God exists, inculpable nonbelief will not occur. The agnostic is therefore not necessarily, epistemically, led to atheism by the argument from divine hiddenness.

### **Questioning Schellenberg's Context**

The first step in developing a defense to Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness is to reconsider the context surrounding the argument. By context I mean that Schellenberg is primarily concerned with all individuals, at all times, having evidence sufficient for belief *that* God exists, so as to be able to begin a relationship with God. Instead, divine hiddenness should be considered in the context that a perfectly loving God may, in divine love, be primarily concerned with belief *in* God. Belief *that* God exists is necessary but not sufficient for belief *in* God, and therefore, there may be God-considerations to promote belief *in* God that require a delay in the belief *that* God exists. If someone's attitude is "so-what" to the proposition, "God exists," then it is reasonable to claim that God may delay evidence until such a person is in a better position to not only have belief *that* God exists, but also believe *in* God. This would be a reason, motivated from divine love, God may have to delay evidence for belief. It is at this point that I want to introduce a reinterpretation of the question regarding the evidence for God's existence, as offered by Moser, to show that the context of Schellenberg's argument is mistaken. To set the tone of the discussion to follow, I offer the following from Moser:

Contrary to a typical philosophical attitude, knowledge of God is not spectator entertainment, casual speculation, or an opportunity for self-credit, but is instead part of a process of God's thorough make-over of a person. It is, from our side of the process, an *active self-commitment* to a morally transforming personal relationship of volitional cooperation rather than to a mere subjective state or disposition. We come to know God only as God becomes *our* God, the Lord of our lives, rather than just an object of our entertainment, speculation, or manipulation. God refuses, for our own good, to become an idol of human proportions. Instead, God seeks to remove all of our idols, ideally by our cooperating in removing them. (2010, 264)



### The Spectator and Authoritative Evidence Distinction

Moser makes a distinction between spectator evidence and authoritative evidence to offer a different consideration of what kind of evidence is entailed by a perfectly loving God. The main thesis of The Elusive God is that we should expect “purposively available authoritative evidence” for God’s existence. *Purposively available* means that it is suited to God’s intentions and morally perfect character; *authoritative evidence* means that it is transformational, and thus, challenges all those who encounter it. The distinction between evidence that is *authoritative* evidence, rather than just *spectator* evidence, suggests that since a perfectly loving God will desire divine-human relationships, the evidence offered will be of the kind that promotes more than just mere belief. Spectator evidence is inadequate because it “fails to challenge humans to yield their wills to a perfectly authoritative agent,” in the way that purposively authoritative evidence will (2008, 2). It is this distinction which I believe is helpful in considering the context of Schellenberg’s argument.

Moser establishes the distinction between spectator and authoritative evidence in the early part of The Elusive God:

Purposively available evidence: is both *person-involving* and *life-involving* in its identifying and challenging both *who we are* and *how we live* as morally accountable personal agents under the authority of a perfectly loving personal God. Such purposively available evidence would seek whole-hearted transformation of humans toward God’s character via volitional fellowship with God, where such fellowship between God and a human requires sharing in each other’s concerns guided by love. The relevant evidence, then, wouldn’t assume that humans are just spectators in need of further information or intellectual enlightenment. It would thus contrast sharply with any kind of *spectator evidence* that fails to challenge humans to yield their wills to a perfectly authoritative agent. (2)

The distinction of evidence also plays a role in Moser’s The Evidence for God with the added terminology of “personifying evidence”:

The knowledge of God in question would require that we be willing to become personifying evidence of God’s reality, in virtue of our willingly receiving and reflecting God’s moral character for others. We thus should consider an important distinction between *spectator* knowledge of God’s reality (that does not challenge a human will to yield to God or to become evidence of God’s reality) and *authoritative*, invitational knowledge of God’s reality (that invites a person to cooperate with God’s will and

thereby to become personifying evidence of God's reality, including evidence of God as an intentional agent). The latter kind of knowledge, although widely neglected by philosophers and theologians, is critically important to our inquiry. (33)

Using the distinction of spectator and authoritative evidence, Schellenberg is, in Moser's terms, asking for spectator evidence sufficient for belief *that* God exists. However, God may be more concerned with authoritative evidence that promotes belief *in* God, since belief *in* God would be better than belief *that* God exists. Moser's continual emphasis is that we shouldn't be focused on evidence as spectators, but rather on the responsibility of humans to be able to receive purposively available evidence from God: "In contrast with *spectator evidence*, perfectly authoritative evidence of divine reality makes an authoritative call on a person's life, including a person's will, to yield wholeheartedly to divine perfect love, in fellowship with God" (2008, 10).

The question regarding the existence and evidence of God should not be isolated in the intellectual domain but should also include the human will. It is the volitional component of humans that Schellenberg has not considered in the argument from divine hiddenness. The analogy that Moser uses of the duck-rabbit shows that just as "a volitional commitment to redirect visual focus can bring a new perspective [...] on an ambiguous visual figure," the "redirection of one's will can contribute to one's receiving otherwise overlooked but nonetheless purposively available evidence regarding divine reality" (2008, 5-6). This is why inculpable nonbelief is less common than Schellenberg assumes. There is available evidence for God, but it may be culpably overlooked by many because such individuals are not willing to volitionally commit to believe *in* God by trusting God. Much of what Schellenberg considers unreflective reasonable nonbelief is actually culpable nonbelief. If someone is familiar with the concept of God but does not desire to believe *in* God, then the lack of belief *that* God exists does not count against the existence of God since it is the culpability of the individual in not being volitionally open to God.

A further development in Moser's, The Evidence for God, is the concept of "personifying evidence of God." This is the idea that as individuals grow in relationship with God, they will themselves be transformed, and reflect God to others. Moser writes:

The evidence for God is morally and existentially challenging to humans: *this evidence becomes salient to inquirers as they, themselves, responsively and willingly become evidence of God's reality*, in willingly receiving and reflecting God's powerful moral character – specifically divine, unselfish love for others, even one's enemies. We shall call this *personifying evidence of God*, because it requires the evidence to be personified in an intentional agent, such as a purposive human, and thereby to be evidence inherently of an intentional agent. (2)

Moser's approach reinterprets the problem of divine hiddenness by claiming that it is not a question of why God isn't more obvious but rather why do we fail to apprehend God's reality and presence (2004, 53-54). As mentioned at the beginning of this dissertation, the question for Moser is not so much: (a) "Do we humans know that God exists?" as it is (b) "Are we humans known by God in virtue of our freely and agreeably being willing (i) to be known by God and thereby (ii) to be transformed toward God's moral character of perfect love as we are willingly led by God in volitional fellowship with God, thereby obediently yielding our wills to God's authoritative will" (2008, 4)? If this is the case, we must not demand that the evidence be based on human preferred standards. Instead, we must be open to other possibilities through which God would provide evidence (38).

To be fair, Schellenberg is open to consider other possibilities, such as religious experience, but this is often in the context of *spectator* evidence. Schellenberg is also only asking for a minimum amount of evidence for the existence of God that would be sufficient for belief – such as general background awareness. However, this is actually a weakness of Schellenberg's argument since the lower the threshold for evidence sufficient for belief that God exists, the more likely that such evidence can be culpably overlooked and ignored. Therefore, Schellenberg is mistaken in his concept of divine love (that inculpable nonbelief would never occur); that the minimum amount of evidence he suggests would be sufficient for all humans to believe that God exists (a general background awareness); and in

his criteria for culpability (that we are responsible, and thus culpable, *only* for voluntary failures). The agnostic must ask himself if he is placing any demands on the kind of evidence that God must provide, and self-reflect to ask himself if he is truly open to the possibility of trusting in God, if such a being exists. If the agnostic is not open to such possibilities, Moser thinks spectator evidence would be like ‘casting pearls before swine’ (2008, 51).

Moser thinks our typical approaches to evidence for God are insufficient because they focus on spectator evidence rather than authoritative evidence. The evidence God provides, Moser says, will need to save us from our self-reliance and move us into obedient trust in God who is the only one who can save us from our “destructive selfishness and impending death” (2008, 48). Moser writes: “The relevant evidence would contrast with any kind of spectator evidence that makes no demand or call on the direction of a human will or life, such as either observational evidence from design or order in nature or theoretical evidence concerning the need for a first cause of experienced contingent events” (2010, 37). Because of the distinction between spectator and authoritative evidence, Moser is not impressed by natural theology because it is limited in its ability to challenge and bring about change in humans: “the alleged evidence from traditional natural theology falls short of conclusive evidence for the reality of a perfectly authoritative and loving God of redemption” (2008, 49). If someone is looking for spectator evidence, such a search will be misplaced and the evidence of God will seem elusive or hidden. Therefore, God’s hiddenness is not evidence against God’s existence but rather God providing authoritative evidence according to his purposes.

### **Modifying Moser**

While I agree that the distinction between spectator evidence and purposively available authoritative evidence is useful, and to some extent correct, I want to modify Moser’s distinction by proposing that different kinds of evidence do not fall rigidly into only one of the two categories. Moser repeatedly dismisses spectator evidence from areas like natural theology because it is not challenging in

the way authoritative evidence would be to the volitional center of someone. I disagree and instead argue that evidence from natural theology can be authoritative evidence. Moser criticizes skeptics and others who put their own limitations on evidence for God but Moser is doing the same by not placing value in what he considers to be spectator evidence. Why should we limit God in the types of evidence that he chooses to present to humankind? Moser is mistaken in assuming there is an objective distinction in the kind of evidence itself. Instead, the distinction should be considered in terms of how the evidence is received and interpreted by an individual.

Something that Moser considers to only be *spectator* evidence could serve as part of God's purposively available *authoritative* evidence for an individual. There are many theist apologists who focus on evidence that Moser considers spectator evidence, and accusing them of trivializing evidence for God seems presumptuous. If you were to ask those who believe in God why they do so, there would be as many different answers as there are individuals. It would not be surprising that some have come to believe in God via what Moser considers only spectator-styled evidence that has nevertheless resulted in conviction and a transformation in their volitional centers, and is therefore, authoritative evidence. Furthermore, spectator evidence could contribute to someone being 'cognitively founded' in her belief in the existence of God as part of her inference to the best explanation. Such a person could infer that her theistic world view is the best explanation given any evidence she may have (authoritative *or* spectator evidence).

Instead of so much focus on the distinction of the type of evidence, the focus should be on, to borrow religious terminology, the hardness or softness of hearts. What Moser considers spectator evidence could have the same effect on someone as authoritative evidence if that person is volitionally open to the possibility of God. Spectator evidence, while perhaps not as directly challenging on an individual as authoritative evidence, as Moser claims, could still lead one toward belief in divine reality and ultimately to 'robust theism' if one considers the consequences of an ultimate being and the

potential implications that belief could have on one's life. The reason I say that spectator evidence may not be as directly challenging is because there does seem to be a difference between someone coming to believe that God exists based on, for example, an intellectual appeal to some sort of probability argument for the existence of God, versus someone coming to believe that God exists based on, for example, religious experience. Or consider an individual who is moved by a moral argument for the existence of God: a person may believe that there are moral absolutes and come to believe that there must be a moral law giver. From there he may be moved to consider what moral responsibilities he may have in relation to such a moral law giver and begin to be volitionally transformed.

While I do agree with Moser that we should not expect God to provide evidence based on our whims or standards, I disagree with the strict distinction that Moser wants to keep in place between spectator evidence and authoritative evidence. Evidence may come in different forms and be volitionally challenging in different degrees in different individuals, and we should not dismiss the value of any particular kind of evidence for divine reality. Moser references a variety of Judeo-Christian scriptures to illustrate his case for purposively available authoritative evidence. It is therefore relevant to point out that when looking to Judeo-Christian scriptures there are plenty of instances in which God is apparently willing to give spectator evidence to get the attention of humans. There are many instances in the Old Testament in which God performs some action or creates some outcome for the purpose of other nations recognizing the existence of God. I conclude that there is not an objective distinction between spectator and authoritative evidence, but instead a subjective distinction between spectator and authoritative evidence based on the way such evidence is received by an individual.

I agree with Moser most strongly about his desire to shift from the intellectual domain to the entire person, including the intellectual, emotional and volitional aspects, when considering the evidence and existence of God. Even though I disagree with the rigidity of Moser's distinction between spectator and authoritative evidence, the discussion regarding how an individual is willing to

receive evidence for God is the appropriate direction to take the discussion of divine hiddenness. It is an important question to ask how open an individual is to potentially trusting and believing in God, or if not familiar with the concept of God, pursuing things like unselfishness and love, rather than supposing standards of what evidence God ought to provide. In the context of Schellenberg's argument, it will also be important to ask if someone is culpable for not being volitionally open, and to consider the potential there is for culpable self-deception to play a role in someone's ability to be volitionally open to God.

My modified account of Moser's distinction between spectator and authoritative evidence is helpful in showing why the context of Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness is mistaken. Schellenberg is concerned with standards of spectator evidence for the belief *that* God exists without focusing on the primary kind of authoritative evidence which brings about volitional commitment to God and belief *in* God. Schellenberg is too narrowly focused on his conception of divine love to consider other possibilities of what kind of evidence divine love could entail. Not only is my account still motivated by divine love, but it also suggests why God may not be able to accomplish his goal of fellowship with humans if limited by Schellenberg's concept of divine love. Schellenberg's focus and demand for evidence from God neglects giving attention to the factors that are involved in the reception of individuals for the evidence for God.

Knowledge of God will require more than just a rationalistic or empirical approach. Moser writes: "Pure rationalism about knowledge of God's reality, characterized broadly, implies that human reason is *the* source of knowledge of God's reality. Pure empiricism about knowledge of God's reality, also stated generally, implies that human (sensory or perceptual) experience is *the* source of knowledge of God's reality." Instead, Moser calls for a third alternative, volitionalism, which implies that the human will is a central source or avenue for "conclusive evidence and knowledge of God's reality." Moser thinks this is more appropriate for the evidence for God because it prevents the dominance of demand for spectator evidence and instead allows "a cognitive role for divine *authority* that makes a

demand on human wills” (2008, 59-60). It is in the context of Moser’s third alternative, volitionalism, that I want to reconsider Schellenberg’s argument from divine hiddenness and challenge the amount of evidential support for the argument from divine hiddenness. I will now reconsider each premise in this context and then provide a defense that the agnostic may find appealing in which to challenge the argument from divine hiddenness.

### **Weakening premise (3): Inculpable Nonbelief Occurs**

Now that I have cast the argument from divine hiddenness in the context of purposively available authoritative evidence and the need to consider the volitional core of humans, I will continue the argument from chapter 2 that Schellenberg’s third premise, inculpable nonbelief occurs, does not provide as much evidential support for the argument as originally thought. I want to build on my previous argument from chapter 2 by incorporating Moser’s concepts of cognitive idolatry and attunement to show that much of what Schellenberg has considered reasonable nonbelief, is actually culpable nonbelief. Moser argues that it is idolatry, specifically *cognitive idolatry*, that gets in the way of evidence for God and that a person must be properly attuned, or have *volitional attunement* to God’s reality. When these concepts are combined with my claim that culpability is not limited to only voluntary epistemic failures, it reduces the amount of inculpable nonbelief that is left as a challenge to the existence of God by showing that the most clear cases of inculpable nonbelief are limited to very few.

### **Cognitive Idolatry**

Moser describes idolatry as the following:

Idolatry is, at bottom, our not letting the true, perfectly authoritative and loving God be Lord in our lives. It is commitment to something other than the true God in a way that devalues the true God, particularly God’s rightful preeminence and authority. It is inherently a rejection, in attitude or in deed, of God’s supreme authority and a quest for self-definition, self-importance, and self-fulfillment *on our own terms*. Idolatry flouts the serious challenge we would have from the true God to be free of self-indulgent fear, self-exaltation, self-authority, and selfishness in general. (2008, 101)



Cognitive idolatry is a particular kind of idolatry:

Cognitive idolatry typically aims to protect one's lifestyle from serious challenge by the God who would authoritatively and lovingly call, judge, and seek to reconcile humans. In disallowing the primacy of volitional knowledge of God as authoritative Lord, such idolatry favors *at most* theoretical knowledge of God as an undemanding object of human knowledge. Cognitive idolatry exploits epistemological standards, if implicitly, to refuse to let God be supremely authoritative in a person's life, initially in the cognitive area of life. A cosmic authority problem regarding a perfectly authoritative and loving God lies behind much cognitive idolatry and, for that matter, idolatry in general. (2008, 102)

A simple working definition of idolatry is: "reliance on an inadequate substitute for God" (Moser 2008, 84). Moser claims that our ability to 'receive' authoritative evidence for God depends on our prior state and intentions in seeking God, and that idolatry gets in the way. It is our selfishness that can potentially obstruct our receiving of purposively available evidence (95). *Cognitive* idolatry is when we place our own *human* standards and requirements for adequately knowing God's reality. Moser has in mind cognitive standards such as "empiricist, deductivist, rationalist, or some hybrid, that doesn't let God be authoritative Lord over our knowing God's reality" (102). These idolatrous standards allow for individuals to insulate themselves from the challenge that authoritatively purposeful evidence would pose and instead settle for theoretical knowledge that does not challenge the agent in changing and submitting to God's authority. Moser writes:

We harmfully jump the gun, philosophically speaking, when we pursue the question of God's existence as if God is morally indefinite and thus not intentionally elusive toward any human pursuit of a morally indefinite creator. Indeed, our jumping the gun in this manner may involve a kind of *cognitive idolatry* whereby we use cognitive standards that displace God's cognitive and moral supremacy, including God's authority over the actual manner of divine self-manifestation and corresponding evidence for humans. Such idolatry inevitably would be harmful to inquirers by distancing them from needed suitable knowledge and evidence of the true God. Once again, we need to consider allowing God to be God, and thus authoritative and morally challenging, even in the cognitive domain. (2010, 28)

One such form of cognitive idolatry is what Moser calls, "*the idolatry of volitionally neutral support,*" which is when demands are made for conclusive evidence for God's existence without any concern over the intention of our will in relation to God's will. My example would be an agnostic who

has no intention of seeking a relationship with God, even if God were to exist, who nevertheless requires evidence of God to come in the form of clear signs and miracles in order to prove God's existence – or in Schellenberg's case, the demand for evidence in the form of general background awareness. According to Moser, this is idolatrous because we place ourselves as neutral judge over the evidence without requiring the possibility of being open to evidence that is purposively available evidence (2008, 103). Or consider a scenario which Moser takes to be a similar kind of idolatry: someone willing to know God but not open to follow through on what that may entail. Moser cites Isaiah 58, where God is reported to complain that the Israelites, "seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God" (103). Thus cognitive idolatry can happen even among theists:

Volitionally thin theism, focusing on theoretical knowledge that God exists, can obscure the importance of volitionally knowing God as the authoritative personal Lord who calls us to a change of lordship, mindset, and moral direction. Oversimplification of God (for example, as merely sentimental, friendly, harsh, or distant) can be similarly obscuring, and can even make a self-controllable idol of "god" (where "God," of course, wouldn't be the true God). So, even devout theism can be idolatrous, if the ultimate devotion is toward something other than the true, perfectly authoritative and loving God (such as a moral *law*). (2008, 101)

Therefore, we should not only be open to evidence for God's existence but also be willing to enter into a relationship with God based on requirements of God rather than our own requirements.

Moser claims that cognitive idolatry is an ever present threat because of our propensity to be selfish and our desire to maintain our own autonomy and authority over our lives rather than to submit ourselves to the authority of God. Moser thinks the typical attitude is: "I will live my life *my way*, to get *what I want, when I want it*" (2008, 104). This is overstating the case of the typical attitude of individuals, but it is fair to say that humans are self-interested. To apply this to Schellenberg, humans may inculpably be inclined to be selfish, but should over time become more compassionate and less selfish. If individuals do not pursue such opportunities to rise above selfishness, then the attitude can become one that is culpable. It is reasonable to argue that our own selfishness can become a culpable

form of idolatry that gets in the way of our relationship with God. My desire to fulfill my own interests, wants, and needs, while not wrong within itself, could become an obstacle which gets in the way of fulfilling what God would desire me to do. If I place my own autonomy above the desire to be submissive to God's will, then it becomes possible that my self-reliance can become an idol that replaces my trusting and relying on God.

Another expression of cognitive idolatry that Moser offers falls into the following principle: "Unless God (if God exists) supplies evidence of kind *K*, God's existence is too obscure to justify reasonable acknowledgment." The problem is not with the principle but instead the specification of kind *K* if it does not take into account the character and purposes of God and thereby closes one off to the volitional challenge that such purposively available authoritative evidence would pose (2008, 121-22). This is one of the flaws of Schellenberg's argument. Schellenberg has made the claim that unless God supplies evidence of kind *K* (general awareness via religious experience) for every individual, then God's existence is too obscure for those who do not experience at least some sort of generic awareness of God. But Schellenberg has not taken into consideration the volitional component that is needed in order for an individual to recognize such general awareness as evidence for God. Schellenberg considers inculpable nonbelief to be widespread and easily instantiated, but this is a difficult claim to verify without further considerations of the volitional aspect of humans. Given the difficulty in determining *reflective* nonbelief to be inculpable (as I established in Chapter 2), makes the possibility seem all the less likely that general *unreflective* nonbelief is inculpable as well. Therefore, the possibility of cognitive idolatry is capable of casting further doubt on the widespread amount of inculpable nonbelief.

### **Attunement**

In addition to cognitive idolatry as a threat of interfering with evidence for God, Moser also argues that a person must be properly attuned to evidence for God. To introduce the idea of attunement Moser offers the following analogy. Consider the following sentence: *Toy vayashar adonai*;

*tov layisrael elohim; tov vayashar hadavar*. The level of significance that such a sentence is thought to have will vary for different people. The problem does not lie with the sentence but rather in one's "appropriate sensitivity" to ancient Hebrew. Moser calls the perspective we bring to such a sentence, or in our case the existence of God, a "psychological attitude-set" which consists of the beliefs, intentions, desires, and other attitudes a person brings (2008, 111-12). A fair interpretation of this would be a person's world view. A person's psychological attitude-set, or world view, may oppose the purposively available authoritative evidence of God. Thus, the problem is not with the purposively available authoritative evidence but instead a problem with a person being 'tuned' to the right 'frequency' (114). The next question we ought to ask is what if we are inculpably ill-attuned. However, before addressing this question, I want to further explain Moser's concept of attunement.

Consider the following scenario from Moser: People are on a sinking desert island and the only hope they have is of scanning a radio for a rescuer. The islanders are not in a position to have control over the frequency that a rescuer will use. The perishing islanders are not in a position to make demands on the frequency or how the rescuer is revealed. Instead, the islanders should tailor their expectations to the purposes of the potential rescuer. In a similar way Moser argues we should not demand the ways God should appear if it would be opposed to God's character and purposes. The question is more about the character and purposes of God rather than the mere existence of God, and Moser argues that "a perfectly loving God would communicate on a frequency available to *all* people who are open to divine rescue *on God's terms*" (2008, 114-16).

Moser uses a similar analogy, except that it takes place in a cabin out in the wilderness, which becomes the basis for his book [The Evidence for God](#). The analogy demonstrates why humans should attempt to 'attune' themselves to God:

As people lost in the wilderness canyon, we should not expect ourselves to have any control or authority over which radio frequency a potential rescuer uses. If we stubbornly insist on such authority, we may completely overlook the frequency actually occupied by a potential rescuer. We therefore should ask this simple question: *who* is

entitled to choose the potential rescuer's frequency for communication – the lost people or the potential rescuer? In addition, are we willing to be rescued, or found, on the terms of the rescuer rather than on our favored terms? Once we ask such questions, we should see that the lost people have no decisive authority of their own to demand exactly how the potential rescuer is revealed or proceeds. Their expectations of the potential rescuer, at least for practical purposes, should conform to the character and purposes of the potential rescuer, and not vice versa. (2010, 14)

How then are we to be properly attuned to the evidence for God? Moser says that a person must be willing to receive God's perfect authoritative and forgiving love (2008, 118), and therefore, knowing God's reality "becomes as much about *us*, as potential recipients, as about a perfectly loving God's contribution by way of noncoercive self-revelation" (119). It is this lack of focus on humans as potential recipients that is missing in Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness and account of unreflective nonbelief. Concepts such as cognitive idolatry and volitional attunement support the idea that much of the nonbelief and disbelief in the world is due to human flaws of selfishness and lack of openness to relationship with God. If the agnostic is an agnostic because of divine hiddenness, then such considerations should show the reasonableness of concluding that much of the nonbelief and disbelief in the world is the result of defectiveness on the part of humanity rather than the nonexistence of God.

Moser develops what he calls volitional theism, which bases evidential demands on the basis of a morally perfect God's character and purposes. Instead of evidence for the existence of God coming in the form of rational or empirical arguments, it is in the form of the experience of individuals in their wills and the subsequent transformation that comes as individuals grow in relationship with God. Moser writes:

Without depending on any argument of natural theology, volitional theism acknowledges evidence of purposive divine intervention in the world, but does not characterize (all) such evidence in terms of inferential evidence or arguments. It acknowledges, more specifically, that a perfectly loving God would seek noncoercively to transform the wills of wayward humans, and thereby to have humans themselves become personifying evidence of God's reality, in willingly receiving and reflecting God's powerful moral character for others and thus bringing God's presence near to others. (2010, 16)

This is why attunement is so important for Moser. Evidence for God is just as much about us as it is about God:

[Given volitional theism] if we become properly attuned to purposively available evidence of God's reality, including God's authoritative self-giving love, then God's reality will become, at the opportune time, adequately indicated for us by undefeated authoritative evidence. We would do well, then, to seek and to appropriate the purposively available evidence of God's reality, however morally challenging the process.

Given volitional theism, the extent to which we know God, including God's reality, depends on the extent to which we are sincerely willing to cooperate with God in a program of divine redemption of humans. As a result, it becomes obvious why we humans (whether theists, atheists, or agnostics) have difficulty in knowing God. The difficulty stems from our resisting cooperation in God's redemptive program of reconciliation. Accordingly, it is naïve, if not arrogant, for us humans to approach the question of whether God exists as if we were naturally in an appropriate moral and cognitive position to handle it aright. (2010, 263)

The critic may challenge Moser by arguing that standards of what constitutes good evidence for things are religiously neutral. If there are objective standards for evidence that are applicable to all fields, then why should Moser be able to develop an exception if those standards are generally applicable in other fields of study? I think the reply from Moser would be that it may not be as much a difference in standards of evidence as it is differences in the approach to discerning evidence. This is discussed in the beginning of The Evidence for God when Moser makes the distinction between "purpose-neutral discerning of evidence" and "telic discerning of evidence" (7). The natural sciences and talk of objects may not need to extend beyond purpose-neutral discerning, but it can be relevant to consider purposes that are indicated by the evidence, particularly in cases of interpersonal objects such as between humans and the divine. Moser writes:

In fact, our available evidence could call for our attending to purposive considerations for the sake of *accurate* comprehensive treatment of our evidence. The propriety of telic discerning therefore cannot be excluded as a matter of logical or cognitive principle. It remains as a logically and cognitively live option, and this will surprise no one who is not in the grips of a supposed monopoly by the natural sciences.(8)

If this is the case, then discerning the evidence for God is different from discerning the evidence of objects in the natural sciences. If God is a personal agent, this would imply that there is more involved in discerning the evidence for God, and provide motivation for the claim that critics of Moser may be looking too narrowly at evidence for God.

### **Culpability of nonbelief**

I have argued that Moser's concepts of cognitive idolatry and volitional attunement show the defectiveness of humans which prevents belief in God. However, this is not enough to challenge Schellenberg's argument. The final step is to show how humans are *culpable* for this defectiveness. The main challenge to Moser's concepts of cognitive idolatry and attunement is that even if these concepts are assumed, it remains to be shown how humans are culpable for naturally being selfish or ill-attuned to God. If we have a tendency to be selfish, or to put our own concerns before God's concerns or other people's concerns, then how is this something we are culpable for if we naturally find ourselves in such a situation? If someone is ill-attuned to the evidence for God as a result of something which is out of his control, then how is the nonbelief exhibited culpable? Consider an individual who is born into a secular society in which little concern is shown for topics such as the existence of God or of relationship with God. How can that person be culpable for nonbelief which results as a natural and reasonable outcome of his environment?

The answer to this challenge is a culmination of what I have previously argued in Chapter 2. I argued that a person can be culpable for negligent nonbelief and involuntary actions and beliefs. Looking to the Model Penal Code, negligence can be culpable despite lack of awareness. This supports having a broader understanding of culpability than what Schellenberg allows. If we are negligent in considering the possibility of God, we are culpable even if we do not recognize epistemic failures leading up to belief. Nonbelief can be culpable based on Adams' principles for a theory of responsibility since nonbelief is a state of mind, directed towards an intentional object, and arises from within us.

Furthermore, the experience of the world is rich enough to permit someone to recognize the importance of considering spiritual matters or the existence of God as important topics. Although an individual may not be epistemically culpable for having nonbelief, he may be morally culpable for omissions which have resulted in his current state of nonbelief. This is in contradiction to Schellenberg's claim that someone is only culpable for voluntary failures. On Schellenberg's conception of culpability, a person that exhibits cognitive idolatry or is ill-attuned is not culpable if they made no voluntary failures which placed them into such a situation. While an individual may not be culpable for being in such a disposition, a person can foster characteristics within themselves that will encourage less selfishness and better volitional attunement to God or more volitional openness to a higher power. If an individual does not develop these characteristics which he has had the opportunity to develop and improve over time, then an individual is responsible, and therefore, culpable for those omissions of character development which have led to the individual's current state of selfishness or ill-attunement.

This can be the case even in situations where the defectiveness is due to corporate failures such as an individual being born into a secular culture with little to no regard for God. The individual still has opportunities to develop characteristics such as selflessness and openness to a higher power, and can therefore be culpable if those characteristics are lacking. Just as an individual can be held culpable for negligent action or negligent nonbelief, in ways similar to the Model Penal Code's concept of culpability, an individual can be culpable if there is negligence in the possibility of character development. This approach is also consistent with Adams' principles for a theory of responsibility for involuntary actions or beliefs: (1) the nonbelief in question is a state of mind or psychological state, (2) directed towards an object, (3) arises within us, and (4) does not require conscious recognition. All that is needed is rich enough data that permits potential recognition of such faults or flaws. In the same way that someone who was raised in the segregated South could still be held culpable for racism, someone raised in an environment unfavorable to theism can still be held accountable, and thus, culpable for a lack of belief



of God. In the same way that there is enough evidence to recognize the flaw of being prejudice and treating humans unequally because of skin color, there is enough evidence to recognize the good of being loving, unselfish, and open to the concept of a higher power such as God. The critic may respond that the individual in question may have no idea that such development is possible. I would respond that perhaps the nonbelief in question is then inculpable. The claim I am making is that these considerations should broaden the understanding of culpability, and thus, reduce the evidential force of Schellenberg's premise. This is not the same as claiming that no inculpable nonbelief occurs.

To help illustrate the possibility of subtle culpability I offer the following analogy of taking care of your physical health. I am open to being physically healthy and capable of being healthy. However, in order to be healthy, I must put forth certain efforts such as eating right and exercising. Even though I am open to being healthy and capable of being healthy, it does not entail that I am healthy. For example, in the process of writing this dissertation I have gained 15 pounds. This is the result of a variety of factors. First, I do not exercise as much as I used to. Of course, there is nothing wrong with skipping a day of exercise, but skipping one day can easily become skipping two, or three, and so on. I also get caught up in doing other things (like working during the day, working on my dissertation in the evenings, and taking care of daily chores and other things that need to be done). After work I may feel tired and not want to exert the energy to exercise. Second, I end up eating more and begin to indulge in more sweets that counteract the efforts of any exercise that I actually do perform. Over time, I form habits that result in a less healthy state of being (i.e. being 15 pounds heavier). At this point there is nothing that has occurred that is detrimental to my health, however, it is a less desirable state and if I continue in this pattern, I will one day find myself in a situation in which my health has become dangerously unhealthy. Along this spectrum of states of health there is not a time at which I voluntarily choose to have bad health, but little omissions along the way, such as not exercising or not controlling my sweet tooth, over time, result in an unhealthy state for which I am responsible and culpable. Let's

change the scenario a bit and say that I am born into an obese family and am all the more likely to be unhealthy. Even in such an unfortunate case, at some point I must take responsibility of my own health if I want to improve my health.

I offer this analogy as a parallel to how culpability can be subtly instantiated in nonbelief over time. Even if I am open to the possibility of God and capable of having a relationship, this does not entail that I actually believe that God exists or have a relationship with God. I do not actively shut out spiritual concerns but I also do not actively pursue the investigation or nurturing of such possibilities. I do not seriously consider the existence of God because I get caught up in doing other things and the distractions of everyday life. I am caught up in temporal things rather than thinking about, to again borrow religious terminology, eternal matters. I end up forming habits that result in my not paying serious attention to the possibility of relationship with God because I am just too busy doing other things. But it is this habit, or lifestyle, of not seriously pursuing the possibility of God's existence that becomes culpable because of my actions and omissions over time, even though I do not explicitly set out to not show concern for the possibility of God's existence. This is why I claim that much of the unreflective nonbelief that Schellenberg considers to be inculpable could very likely be culpable.

Therefore, I conclude that Moser's concepts of cognitive idolatry and volitional attunement, combined with the possibility of culpable self-deception, involuntary culpability, and the noetic effects of sin, show that much of the nonbelief that Schellenberg has considered to be inculpable nonbelief is actually likely to be culpable. Furthermore, Schellenberg attempted to develop relatively strict standards to show the possibility of reflective doubt to be inculpable and the success of his attempt was called into question in Chapter 2. If it is difficult to show *reflective* doubt to be inculpable, then showing *unreflective* nonbelief to be inculpable is even more difficult. All these considerations weaken the strength of Schellenberg's premise that inculpable nonbelief occurs, and therefore, weakens the evidential force that such a premise carries against the possibility of the existence of God. However, I

am not completely denying the premise because the possibility of inculpable nonbelief cannot be ruled out completely. I find cases such as the isolated nontheist to be the most challenging kind of nonbelief for a response to the argument from divine hiddenness to explain and show as culpable. But such forms of nonbelief will be much less common than the kinds of other nonbelief that are instantiated in the world.

**Weakening Premise (2): If God exists, inculpable nonbelief will not occur**

The next step in developing a defense to the argument from divine hiddenness is to challenge the strength of Schellenberg's second premise that if God exists, inculpable nonbelief will not occur. Even though Schellenberg has said that his argument is an evidential argument, his claim is conceptual in that inculpable nonbelief will never occur if God is perfectly loving. In the preface to the paperback edition of Schellenberg's, Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason, Schellenberg writes:

A further misunderstanding that readers should beware of involves conflating what my argument claims – that if God exists, reasonable nonbelief does not occur – with “If God exists, reasonable nonbelievers receive evidence sufficient for belief.” What the former claim says is that if God exists, there is *never* a time when someone inculpably fails to believe (belief is made available as soon as there is a capacity for relationship with God). In other words, if there is a God, *there are no reasonable nonbelievers about who may be treated in the imagined fashion*. So it is no use showing that God would not interrupt the lives of reasonable nonbelievers with evidence; what we need is a way of understanding how God could have permitted them to become reasonable nonbelievers in the first place. (ix)

Schellenberg continues:

Such points as I have made about relationship with God ought to be assessed in light of another: that given the infinite richness and depth of any God there may be, relationship with God would be capable of an indefinite degree of development, with always more to discover and overcome for one who participated in it. Critics often argue as though there are goods God would desire for us that must somehow be fitted in *prior* to such a relationship, but if we look at things from only a slightly nonconventional slant, we will see how such goods must in a multitude of forms arise as the relationship progresses. What cause could there be, then for anyone ever to be prevented from so much as *beginning* the relationship? (ix-x)

However, the claim that inculpable nonbelief will never occur is widely rejected in the literature because of the many possible reasons why God may allow inculpable nonbelief for a time. Moser writes, “Some

people,” Schellenberg included, “assume that God would have a magic cognitive bullet in divine self-revelation whereby God *guarantees* that the divinely offered evidence of God’s existence will actually be willingly received by humans” (2010, 33). I argue that Schellenberg’s demand for evidence is similar to what Moser calls “the idolatry of volitionally neutral support” (2008, 103). Schellenberg focuses too narrowly on God as the source of evidence without considering humans as the recipients of such evidence and the intention of recipients’ will in relation to God’s will. I reject Schellenberg’s second premise, and will now combine Moser’s distinction of propositional and filial knowledge, along with what Moser calls “the transformational gift,” with my previous arguments to show why the premise should be rejected.

### **Propositional versus Filial Knowledge**

It is important to include in the discussion of divine hiddenness Moser’s distinction between *propositional* knowledge and *reconciling, filial* knowledge of God. This distinction is foundational to Moser’s understanding of evidence for God. Here is what Moser has in mind:

Filial knowledge of God wouldn’t be theoretical knowledge of a mere “first cause,” “ultimate power,” “ground of being,” or “best explanation.” It would instead be *morally challenging* firsthand knowledge of a personal and authoritative divine Father who expects and commands faithful love and fellowship by way of our appropriating redemption as reconciliation to God. [...] Filial knowledge of God would be *reconciling* personal knowledge whereby we enter, if imperfectly, into a (volitional) *child-parent* relationship involving volitional fellowship with God as our perfectly loving Father. Such knowledge would be personally and morally transforming, not impersonally abstract or morally impotent. (2008, 96)

Thus, just as we come to know other fellow humans by relating to that person through “*personal volitional interaction*,” we also come to know “God’s reality firsthand through personal volitional interaction” (2008, 97).

While filial knowledge of God’s existence will require propositional knowledge of God’s existence, filial knowledge is more than mere propositional knowledge because it involves one being “reconciled to God (at least to some degree) through volitional submission to God as Lord,” based on

“conclusive purposively available authoritative evidence.” This is, in other terms, the same distinction I have been making between belief *that* God exists, and belief *in* God. The idea of filial knowledge is also in line with a biblical view of knowledge regarding God. This can be found in the Hebrew verb *yada*, “to know,” which is used to show a kind of encounter, experience or sharing in an intimate way. Marvin Wilson writes, “In the Western world knowledge has often been limited in definition, confined to abstract concepts or theoretical principles. But in Hebrew thought to ‘know’ something was to experience it, rather than merely to intellectualize it” (287). As Moser correctly notes, filial knowledge is different than mere propositional knowledge because it is transformative in “*who we are* and in *how we exist and act*, not just in what we believe” (2008, 126). Furthermore, Moser suggests, filial knowledge is not transferable from one person to another in the sense of one person providing it for another. Other individuals could assist in some of the “preconditions” for knowing God’s existence, but it ultimately would have to come firsthand from God and sought individually (127).

The critic can ask at this point why God doesn’t just show humans his existence through miraculous signs and wonders since that would seem to be sufficient self-revelation rather than through less obvious forms, like general background awareness. Moser argues that miraculous signs are open to other interpretations so that they do not result in “*inescapable proofs for all inquirers*,” and therefore, would not result in trust in God for all people (2008, 128). This is similar to what I argued in Chapter 3 that miracles and wonders still allow for human free will since belief *in* God cannot be coerced. Nevertheless, even though miraculous signs and wonders would not be ruled out as a form of revelation, Moser’s response to the critic would appear to be that a constant fireworks show from God would trivialize the character and purposes of God. Similar to van Inwagen, Moser argues that God’s purposes will keep as a focus the redemptive aim of leading people noncoercively to loving God and others. For Moser, it is not about continual miraculous signs and wonders, or even the assessment of

historical and scientific probabilities, but rather a first-hand “*personal acquaintance with God*” (2008, 133).

In Chapter 3, I rejected free-will defenses as an answer to the challenge posed by Schellenberg because God could be less hidden in the world than he is without jeopardizing human free will. In a similar way, Moser also rejects defenses of God’s hiddenness that rely on freedom or proper-motivation responses (that God is hidden otherwise we would respond in improper motives). Moser offers the same flaw that I claimed in the third chapter, that is, that a free-will theodicy or a soul-making theodicy is not fully satisfying since God could accomplish the same goods of free will or soul-making while being just a little less hidden. Moser thinks the free-will response and proper-motivation response are lacking because they involve an unappealing disjunction: “either God would be hidden or human freedom in responding to God would be lost,” or, respectively, “either God would be hidden or humans would be (more) likely to respond to God out of improper motives” (2008, 109-10). Moser thinks these responses owe us a better case for endorsing such a disjunction.

Instead of a free-will, soul-making, or proper-motivation response, Moser argues that a sound approach to the problem of hiddenness is, what Moser calls, the *Divine Purposes Reply*:

God would restrain divine manifestations, at least for a time, to at least some humans in order to enhance satisfaction of God’s own diverse perfectly authoritative and loving purposes regarding humans. The Divine Purposes Reply allows that the amount and kind of God’s self-revelation can vary among people, even *if* there is a common minimal self-revelation purposively available on God’s terms to all people. The variation in divine self-manifestation would result from God’s purposes, or intentions, regarding recipients of divine revelation. If these purposes are perfectly morally righteous and loving, then God can be perfectly morally righteous and loving in giving varied self-revelation, even elusive varied self-revelation, to humans. The myth of a cognitively promiscuous, bland, uniform, predictable, or convenient God regarding divine self-manifestation should thus die easily. (2008, 110-11)

The advantage of such a reply is that God can hide for various purposes, just as there may be various purposes in God’s allowing evil, depending on God’s purposes and desires, instead of our own, and therefore, it is not a one-size-fits-all answer. The challenge of such a response is that we may be left

with very little in knowing the details, reasons, or purposes in divine hiding. This does little to 'solve' the problem of divine hiddenness given the limited human perspective in relation to God. But given the goal of relationship that humans are to have with God based on purposively available authoritative evidence means that "we shouldn't be surprised at all that we lack our own means to remove, or even to explain fully, divine hiding." Moser continues: "In general, one's having conclusive evidence or knowledge of the reality of a person doesn't require one's having a comprehensive explanation of the intentions of that person," and likewise in the case of God. Therefore, unexplained hiddenness does not constitute "a decisive defeater to all evidence of divine reality" (2008, 124).

This kind of response may be appealing to a theist, but what about the agnostic considering the argument from divine hiddenness who does not have any such evidence or experience of God? The agnostic has no experience of God on which she can rely in order to get her through the times of divine hiding in the same way that a theist may struggle with doubt while still in the context of a relationship with God. Schellenberg's criticism is relevant here as Schellenberg argues we could endure hiddenness if we are already in some sort of relationship with God, but the agnostic is precisely *not* in such a situation, and therefore, would be more inclined to deny the existence of God rather than suppose that the evidence is merely lacking. I believe Moser's response to Schellenberg would be that such agnostics are experiencing hiddenness because they are not availing themselves of the evidence that is available since they are not volitionally open or receptive to the evidence for God, and this could be due to their own cognitive idolatry. If it is a case of inculpable nonbelief, a response is more challenging to come by, but the agnostic can continue to be volitionally open to the possibility in hopes of eventually coming to believe in God, if God does indeed exist.

### **The Transformative Gift**

To tie the concepts of Moser together, it is important to explain how Moser thinks evidence for God is revealed to humans. For Moser:

As perfectly loving, God would aim to have all people freely come, in volitional cooperation with God, to be morally perfect as God is morally perfect. Given this aim, God would have no reason to offer spectator evidence of divine reality to humans. In contrast, authoritative evidence that includes a divine call to human transformation would serve God's redemptive purpose for humans. (2010, 211)

This divine call is going to come through, what Moser calls, "the transformative gift," which he defines as follows:

One's being 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. (200)

With this definition in place, the argument "for the reality of an authoritative perfectly loving God" is as follows:

1. Necessarily, if a human person is offered, and unselfishly receives, the transformative gift, then this is the result of the authoritative leading and sustaining power of a divine X of thoroughgoing forgiveness, fellowship in perfect love, worthiness of worship, and triumphant hope (namely, God).
2. I have been offered, and have willingly unselfishly received, the transformative gift.
3. Therefore, God exists. (200)

When our personal will is challenged by our acquaintance with God, leading us from selfishness to unselfish love in fellowship with God, it is a change in our motivational center. And as we are acquainted with perfect unselfish love, we are offered the transformative gift. Even if this awareness is only through "vague glimmers of the gift," this is enough to allow us to respond positively, negatively or indifferently to such an offer (2008, 135-36). As such, "the transformative gift in question can be offered to a person but rejected or ignored by that person. Accordingly, this gift's being offered does not guarantee its being received for what it is intended to be: namely, a redemptive gift that seeks to trump human selfishness with divine love for the sake of human transformation by God" (2010, 201). The divine call would be something like the following: "The transformative relationship in question



would include an initiating and sustaining divine call via human conscience: specifically, a divine call away from human selfishness and pride, including self-righteousness, and toward human cooperation in (receiving and manifesting) divine perfect love and its morally righteous requirements” (36).

Moser offers three obstructions, or roadblocks, that can potentially get in the way of the transformative gift. One impediment is looking in the wrong place for evidence of God: “For example, seemingly endless disputes about probabilities involving apparent design in biology or cosmology or about the need for an inaugural cause behind any parade of contingent causes and effects illustrate the point abundantly and decisively” (2010, 202). And so, if we are caught up in various evidential arguments for the existence of God, we may overlook the evidence which is available through our own conscience which challenges us to become less selfish and more loving. A second obstacle is unreflectively thinking of unselfish love as “just another *natural* human capacity”:

Accordingly, they [those who consider it a natural human capacity] uncritically think that humans have the power of perfect unselfish love on their own, without a morally superior power beyond themselves. The rough idea, then, is that many humans are naturally loving toward other people, and that therefore we have no basis here for introducing a God worthy of worship. This is presumptuous at best, and also implausible on any careful reflection that attends to actual human tendencies. (2010, 203)

A third roadblock is thinking that evidence and knowledge of God are available without “an authoritative challenge to participate in the kind of perfect unselfish love characteristic of God.” Moser continues, “We humans naturally prefer to keep God’s authoritative perfectly loving reality at arm’s length, in order to block this reality from challenging our own selfish plans” (2010, 204).

With Moser’s argument for the existence of God, and the common obstacles established, let’s challenge his argument to find any potential weaknesses. The argument is logically valid, and we can for the sake of argument grant the first premise. The challenge is for Moser to show why the second premise should be accepted. Moser argues for the cognitive well-groundedness and trustworthiness of the second premise as part of a best-available explanation of an individual’s experience and evidence

(2010, 205). The second premise is “irreducibly first-person, self-implicating, and self-involving,” which is in line with his development of purposively available authoritative evidence. Second, he reminds us that “we shouldn’t confuse the firsthand evidence in question with an argument of any kind” (2008, 138). Furthermore, Moser considers the transformative gift to be *diachronic*, that is, happening over time, as a person receives the gift “more deeply” (139). Moser doesn’t consider the argument a conceptually necessary truth, but nevertheless, suggests the steps of the argument are true and its inference valid (140).

What about the possibility of defeaters of evidence for God such as the problem of unexplained evils or inculpable nonbelief? Moser thinks the matter is more complicated in that “one’s *having conclusive (undefeated) purposively available evidence of God’s reality*, as suggested, isn’t the same as one’s *having a comprehensive explanation of God’s ways and purposes*” (2008, 141). Although we may not be in the dark about God’s purposes and intentions, “finding *God* [...] isn’t necessarily finding a *theodicy*.” Furthermore, God’s hiding doesn’t entail divine hiding from all people at all times. Moser writes, “So, there is no clear defensible way to generalize on actual cases of divine hiding to encompass *all* people with regard to evidence of divine reality. A generalized argument for atheism or agnosticism, then, doesn’t emerge from divine hiding” (2008, 142).

Important to Moser’s argument is a pneumatic epistemology – that evidence for God is nonpropositional experiential evidence through God’s Spirit revealing itself in human conscience (2008, 193). But many will criticize Moser on this point since, as Schellenberg suggests, “not everyone experiences conscience *as* the call of God, sensing that God is convicting them of wrongdoing or engaging them in a volitional wrestling match” (2011, 230). Moser will need to develop his argument that such a divine call is available to all through conscience. Moser will say that such a call is available should someone dispose themselves to it, and that the call may start out as a ‘small glimmer.’ As already mentioned, since Moser considers it to also be diachronic, the transformative gift via conscience

can happen over time and develop more deeply. But again, some will question, as does Schellenberg, “why should we accept that conscience comes bearing this gift for all who are willing.” Schellenberg goes on to suggest that there are good empirical grounds that there are those who have a demanding conscience and who exhibit dispositions like unselfish love, and yet do not believe in a personal God (2011, 231). Someone can value unselfish love, and thus, be volitionally transformed to some extent (although not in the same way as suggested by Moser) without considering it to be God’s call.

I think Moser would respond that someone is indeed receiving ‘glimmers’ of the transformative gift but is being impeded by considering unselfish love to be a natural human capacity. However, given the *diachronic* nature of the transformative gift these ‘glimmers’ may cause someone to develop over time and lead an individual to theism. Moser would probably continue to express that the argument for God from the transformative gift is expressed first-person and it can provide the best explanation for an individual’s experience regardless of other people’s experiences, and therefore, the argument for God’s existence is available to a person who does interpret it as experiencing God through conscience. For this reason, the skeptic may feel as if Moser is being uncharitable to skeptical challenges since Moser can retreat to the position that his argument is based on first-hand nonpropositional experience of God. Thus, Moser’s argument for God from a pneumatic epistemology will remain unconvincing to many except for those from Christian backgrounds who will be inclined to already accept some of the assumptions Moser is making.

To further extend the criticism of the transformative gift, we are still left with many unanswered questions as to what the experience of receiving the transformative gift is like. Bruce Russell asks if it is like hearing an inner voice telling an individual of their selfish and prideful ways, or is it rather like forming the immediate belief that God is disapproving of something, or is it like feeling the presence of God in some way (2009). Thomas Senor asks some of the same clarification questions regarding what the experience of someone receiving the transformative gift is like. Senor asks for more clarification of

what this experience would be like since we are left without “a robust, phenomenological characterization and philosophical exploration of the mode of evidence we receive and how it is that we are able to receive it.” Particularly, since Moser argues that we can have direct, firsthand experience of God by acquaintance, Senor goes on to ask, “What it is to be acquainted with perfect, unselfish love” (2011)?

Moser somewhat clarifies the kind of experience he has in mind by saying that he is not advocating a mystical, fideist type of religious experience: “Religious experiences of a mystical, spectacular, fantastic, or numinous kind are [...] not only unnecessary but also dangerous for experientially well-founded theistic belief.” Instead the evidence is of an “evident authoritative divine love expressed via human conscience, including an evident invitation to repentance and volitional fellowship with God” (2008, 8). Moser writes:

Human reception of the divine transformative gift can come in varying levels or degrees, owing to varying depths of being led into noncoercive volitional cooperation or fellowship with God. At any level, however, one’s undergoing the required transformation that brings a new default motivational center will entail one’s becoming personifying evidence of divine reality, wherein one willingly receives and reflects God’s moral character of unselfish love and thus God’s distinctive kind of moral agency for others. (2010, 209)

But if this is the main form the evidence takes, then it may not produce the effect that Moser claims. First, as already mentioned, this does not imply that people will necessarily experience conscience as a call from God. If someone does express remorse over something and does want to change ways, it does not imply that it would result in a repentance and fellowship with God. Someone would need to know what they are turning towards when deciding to repent of something, and it is not clear how this experience would also entail them identifying the experience as coming from God. Such a ‘glimmer’ of an experience, nor, as Senor notes, a recognition of a volitional change, would justify premise two, given the sizable conjunction of the transformative gift (2011).

Another problem is that if the transformative gift does not provide an inescapable proof for all inquirers, then it is inconsistent for Moser to reject the need for spectator evidence in the form of miracles, since miracles do not provide "*inescapable proofs for all inquirers*" (2008, 128). If this is a reason to reject spectator evidence, then it can be a reason to reject the sufficiency of a divine call, even a glimmer of a divine call, via conscience. It is possible that the divine call may not be received or perceived by an individual as authoritative evidence. This is why my distinction between spectator and authoritative is a better account since it can accommodate this problem by classifying evidence based on how it is received by individuals. The transformative gift can be authoritative when it is received as authoritative by the individual, but it is not necessarily received in that way.

Now to tie Moser's account back to Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness, Moser's account of the transformative gift can still, despite its flaws, be used to challenge Schellenberg's second premise and concept of divine love. Even though the concept of the transformative gift needs further development, I do want to use Moser's idea of a diachronic, transformative, interpersonal process to show how Schellenberg's second premise can be challenged. I now offer an analogy to show why God may allow inculpable nonbelief in the process of bringing someone into relationship with God. The analogy is one in which there is good news for a person, but it must be slowly revealed in order to bring about the right response to the good news that is being offered and to serve the purpose of the good news giver. The scenario involves a large inheritance and increased responsibility tied to the good news of the inheritance.

There is a man, let's call him Bill, with immense wealth and a large company (something like the wealth of Bill Gates). Bill has only one grandson, let's call him Stan, who happens to be 18 years old, and Bill wants to leave all his wealth and his company to Stan. Let's say that Stan does not know who his grandfather is because his mother and father had a falling out with Bill, and Stan's parents have just died, leaving him with no knowledge of his grandfather. Bill has a dilemma: if he connects with Stan and

informs him of the wealth that he wants to bestow upon him, Bill is concerned that Stan will be overwhelmed by the news, not be prepared to handle the possibility, or may only have a relationship with Bill motivated by the inheritance to follow. On the other hand, Bill wants to begin a relationship with Stan as soon as possible because he loves his grandson and wants to build a relationship. Bill decides that the best course of action will be to try to prepare Stan for a relationship with him and for the inheritance to follow.

In the beginning Bill will do things for Stan indirectly in order to try and bring about the characteristics that he feels are important for Stan to have in managing the company and future amount of wealth. Bill wants to develop characteristics such as responsibility and compassion. To do this Bill finds as many ways as he can to foster the development of important characteristics without being explicit in his relationship to Stan. For example, Bill gives an endowment to the college where Stan is pursuing his degree in business so that Stan can have resources to get the best business education possible. Bill also asks the dean of the college to mentor Stan so as to bring these characteristics out even more. When Stan graduates, Bill has a recruiter talk to Stan about joining Bill's company to work. Stan begins to work in Bill's company, and Bill ensures that Stan's supervisor provides him with projects that have increasing responsibility. Bill also makes sure that there are opportunities for Stan to develop characteristics, like compassion, through the philanthropy outreaches of the company. In the process of working in Bill's company, Stan learns a little about the CEO of the company, Bill. As Stan excels in his projects, Bill invites him for a meeting and tells Stan that he has been impressed with his work and sees a lot of potential. Bill offers to be Stan's mentor, and Stan accepts. Bill is thrilled to now have a relationship with Stan even though the relationship is not to the depth that Bill would like. Over time, Bill continues to mentor Stan, and Stan responds by wanting to learn and do more. Stan wants to know more about Bill and even does some research on Bill to try to understand him better and to mimic his

success. Because of Stan's interest, and Bill's desire to connect with Stan, their relationship deepens over time.

Finally the day comes when Bill thinks Stan is ready to know the true nature of their relationship and the inheritance that he wants to leave to Stan. Bill reveals to Stan that he is his grandfather. He also reveals that he wants to leave his company and wealth behind to Stan. Stan is overjoyed and once he calms down he asks why Bill waited so long to reveal the nature of their relationship. Bill begins to tell Stan how he wanted a relationship all along, but he wanted to make sure that Stan would be able to handle the responsibility that would come with taking over the company and the great amount of wealth. Bill also wanted Stan to be compassionate so that he uses the inheritance to continue doing good things. Bill goes on to tell Stan how he did things, without Stan's knowledge, to promote opportunities for Stan to develop, such as the college endowment, working through the dean, recruiter, and supervisors, until Stan was ready to begin his relationship with Bill. Throughout the entire process Bill wanted to have a relationship with Stan, but because of the nature of the good news, Stan had to go through a transformative process, which was encouraged with opportunities by Bill, so that Stan would be able to accept the good news and the responsibility, and enjoy the relationship that was in store for him with his grandfather.

While this is only an analogy, it shows the potential of Moser's argument for the transformative gift. In this analogy of an interpersonal relationship, it is as much about Stan as it is about Bill in the resulting relationship. The question of whether or not Stan begins a relationship with Bill depends on how Stan responds to the opportunities provided by Bill. For example, if Stan did not take advantage of the resources from the endowment while in college, or did not follow the advice given to him by his mentors, or did not do a good job at work and was instead lazy and unproductive, then Stan would not have been able to have a relationship with Bill or had the characteristics necessary to handle the inheritance of the company and wealth. If Stan had rejected all of Bill's indirect advances, then even

though Stan was inculpable in not having a relationship with Bill in the beginning, at some point Stan would have been considered to be responsible, and thus culpable, for not having a relationship with Bill since he would have not taken advantage of the opportunities to develop himself into the kind of person that Bill wanted him to be. But in this analogy, Stan did do all the right things and was volitionally open to the opportunities with which he was presented. Even though Stan did not have a relationship with his grandfather in the beginning, Bill had a reason for not revealing himself and his relationship to Stan, despite the fact that Stan had done nothing wrong.

In a similar way, we can accept the possibility that God may allow inculpable nonbelief, at least for a time, to bring about the ultimate goal of a relationship, or belief *in* God. God may have purposes in being elusive in order to bring about, over time, a transformation in us as humans, in preparation for a relationship with God and with others. Although Moser needs to develop his argument for God via the transformative gift further, it is enough for our purposes in challenging Schellenberg's second premise, to show that it is likely possible that there are reasons *motivated by divine love* to allow inculpable nonbelief to occur. Moser does not specifically address inculpable nonbelief, partly because Moser seems to think that all nonbelief is culpable given his defectiveness theory, but Moser can still be applied to Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness by showing (1) why many forms of nonbelief may be culpable, and (2) that in the context of interpersonal relationships, we should be open to a variety of ways in which a perfectly loving God would choose to reveal himself, and a variety of reasons as to why a perfectly loving God may be elusive.

### **A Defense**

A response to Schellenberg that merely blames the agnostic for nonbelief will obviously not be satisfying to Schellenberg or the agnostic. Therefore, to close out this dissertation, I will now develop a defense which incorporates some of Moser's concepts while at the same time being more likely for an agnostic to entertain as possible. The core of a defense against the argument from divine hiddenness



should incorporate the claim that God wants to have fellowship with humanity without claiming that God revealing himself may result in a lack of free will since, as I showed in Chapter 3, a free-will explanation is insufficient as an explanation. The central claim is that God would want each of us to be the type of person who wants to have fellowship with God, or more specifically, God wants us to be the type of person that wants to spend an eternity in fellowship with God. Therefore, God does not want just any relationship but instead one that is based on love, trust, and faith. This should be the context of trying to provide a defense to the argument from divine hiddenness. This allows for the possibility that instead of God's threatening individuals, he would be wooing in the context of an offer through filial knowledge of God, rather than mere propositional knowledge of God. God's hiddenness or revelation is related to the goal of preparing humanity for eternity with God and providing an offer for humanity to accept. While belief *that* God exists is necessary, God would value belief *in* God more since it results in faith and relationship.

Another component that should be included in a defense is the corporate nature of collective human evidence, methods of reasoning, and testimony – much like Moroney's model of the noetic effects of sin includes the effects of communities and not just individual factors. This theme can be found in the following quote from Moser:

We should expect God to care about how we handle evidence of God's existence. In particular, God's aim is for humans to become, in the image of God's moral character, more loving in handling this elusive and humanly uncontrollable evidence. In other words, humans are, themselves, to become personifying evidence of God in willing receiving and reflecting God's moral character for others. Indeed, as we increasingly become personifying evidence of God, our evidence of God becomes more salient, if only because we ourselves are more salient evidence of God. In our inquiry about God, then, we are put under challenge by God to become the evidence of God we claim to seek. (2010, 264)

Thus, the onus is not on God alone to reveal himself to every individual so as to make his existence obvious. Instead, there is a corporate component in which those who believe *in* God would somehow be part of sharing the evidence they have for believing *that* God exists, and their subsequent

belief *in* God. Moser's concept of personifying evidence is relevant here as a way to encourage the volitional attunement of others. In this way, it can be argued that God has revealed himself to such an extent that humanity collectively has enough evidence for his existence so that any inculpable nonbelief may in part be due to a shortcoming of those who believe *in* God. Perhaps the private evidence of individuals can collectively become a part of public evidence for the existence of God which can be shared with inculpable nonbelievers.

Such a defense is better equipped to handle the case of reflective inculpable nonbelief, exemplified by an honest agnostic, because the honest agnostic should use whatever indirect voluntary control she may have to accept the proposition that God exists in order to begin a relationship with God motivated out of faith. This would not violate the rationality of the honest agnostic since part of being an inculpable nonbeliever would include being open to the possibility that God exists. Thus, God's goal of bringing us to be the types of persons who want to spend eternity with him may be better accomplished by allowing this kind of inculpable nonbelief to occur in the honest agnostic. One way this goal could be better accomplished is that it may result in the honest agnostic having a stronger relationship with God in the end, rather than providing explicit evidence at the beginning, since it would imply more willingness to want to have fellowship with God and to trust in God. Again, Moser's concept of a diachronic process is relevant.

There is still, however, the challenge of unreflective nonbelief, exemplified by the isolated nontheist. It is tempting to begin using ideas similar to implicit belief to reduce the challenge of unreflective nonbelief. For example, the isolated nontheist could be open to becoming a less selfish and more loving individual, and associate this change with the closest divine concept. While there may not be a clear concept of God, the concept of divinity in general could lead the isolated nontheist towards an implicit belief in God by pursuing characteristics of divine love. Applicable here is Moser's consideration of the possibility that an individual, while not responding *de dicto* to God, may be

responding to God *de re*: “One could yield volitionally to God’s unselfish love and thereby to God *de re*, without any corresponding acknowledgment *de dicto* and thus without one’s knowing (or believing) that one is yielding to God or even knowing (or believing) that God exists” (2010, 251). However, the parameters I set in the beginning of the dissertation were that I would be considering belief in terms of explicit belief. In terms of explicit belief, I do not know what to say about the isolated nontheist. But just because I, or anyone else, cannot think of a reason or explanation for unreflective inculpable nonbelief does not necessarily imply that there is not a reason. This is to confuse “absence of evidence” with “evidence of absence,” and it is the distinction between these two that motivated my consideration of skeptical theism.

However, there is a way to address the difficult cases of inculpable nonbelief without having to appeal to skeptical theism. This will illustrate, in another way, the consistency of the occurrence of inculpable nonbelief and the existence of a perfectly loving God. Schellenberg’s general claim against all the defenses and theodicies offered is that God could be less hidden while still allowing goods like free will or soul-making. I want to challenge Schellenberg’s claim that God could, and should, be less hidden if he does exist. Instead the hiddenness of God in the actual world is appropriate. This stems from van Inwagen’s claim that it is impossible for God to determine a limit of hiddenness that is not in some way arbitrary. And given the reduced evidential force of Schellenberg’s third premise regarding inculpable nonbelief, and the reasons for rejecting his conceptual claim from divine love which is his second premise, it is reasonable to conclude that God’s amount of hiddenness is in the right amount generally and thus appropriate in the actual world.

More specifically the claim I am challenging is: if a perfectly loving God exists, then *gratuitous* hiddenness will not occur. Gratuitous hiddenness means that since it does not serve some greater purposes and could have been avoided, there is no reason why a perfectly loving God would allow such instances to occur. Van Inwagen uses the concept of vagueness to show that the principle behind the

claim, or its equivalent in the argument from evil, is mistaken. Van Inwagen offers the following scenario: Suppose that a judge sentences someone to 10 years in prison for a crime that person has committed so as to deter future crime. It is reasonable to say that 9 years and 364 days would be just as effective of a sentence to deter crime. Any additional day spent in prison beyond what is needed seems to be gratuitous, and therefore, the judge should only sentence the criminal to 9 years and 364 days. However, 9 years and 363 days would be just as effective as 9 years and 364 days in deterring crime, and therefore, the judge should only sentence the criminal for 9 years and 363 days. You can see where this is going. No matter where the line is drawn for the punishment, it can always be argued that  $n-1$  would be just as effective (2006, 100-02). The question then becomes: Where do we draw the line for punishment so as to deter future crime? The answer is that the judge had to draw an arbitrary line *somewhere* in order to deter future crime.

Applying this to the argument from divine hiddenness, the theist has another option in which to challenge Schellenberg's claim and to explain cases of gratuitous inculpable nonbelief. Instead of trying to respond to Schellenberg's claim that God could always be a little less hidden, the theist can accept that there will be instances of hiddenness which are not necessary or for some greater good. Not only is the theist able to challenge the premise that if a perfectly loving God exists, inculpable nonbelief will not occur, but also the more specific, and possibly more challenging claim, that if a perfectly loving God exists, no *gratuitous* hiddenness will occur. The theist can offer the possibility of van Inwagen's claim that there is no non-arbitrary line to be drawn (2006, 105-06), and argue that since inculpable nonbelief is necessary to bring about some good, God must draw the line somewhere as to the amount of hiddenness in order to accomplish his ultimate goal regarding humanity. No matter where that line is drawn, there is the possibility to claim that some less amount of hiddenness would have been just as effective. Van Inwagen claims that if a theist can tell a story as to why, in general, God allows a certain kind of evil (which in this case is inculpable nonbelief), then:

Even if no good came of the instance of suffering cited in the argument, the occurrence of that event does not tell against the existence of an omnipotent, morally perfect being; for it may be that the omnipotent, morally perfect Creator of the world was morally required to draw a morally arbitrary line through the set of threatened evils, and that the instance of suffering that the argument cites fell on the “actuality” side of the particular line he chose. (2006, 124-25)

This may not be a comforting answer but he thinks it is reasonable nonetheless. If inculpable nonbelief serves a purpose, even though God could prevent some cases of inculpable nonbelief by being less hidden and still have his purpose, whatever it may be, served, it still doesn't count against God because in principle there is no minimum amount of inculpable nonbelief that will serve that purpose.

To show the reasonableness of the vagueness principle, van Inwagen considers the question of what is the minimum amount of horrors (or in our case inculpable nonbelief) consistent with God's plan, to be like asking, “What is the minimum number of raindrops that could have fallen on France in the twentieth century that is consistent with France's having been a fertile country in the twentieth century?” France still would have been a fertile country if God would have prevented any one of the raindrops, or any two, or any thousand, or any million raindrops. “But, of course,” van Inwagen continues, “if God had allowed *none* of the raindrops that in fact fell from the clouds over France in the twentieth century to reach the earth, France would have been a desert” (106). Van Inwagen thinks that there isn't anyone who will claim that there is some  $n$  such that if God had prevented  $n$  or fewer raindrops to fall on France, France could not have been fertile. Therefore, whenever a defense or theodicy is challenged by claiming that God could be a little less hidden, we can say God's hiddenness is still appropriate even if there is some hiddenness which does not contribute to God's plan. But if someone is inclined to say there is a minimum number of raindrops that must have fallen on France consistent with France having been a fertile country in the twentieth century, or that there is some minimum amount of inculpable nonbelief that God would allow, then the theist can claim that since God is good, the amount of inculpable nonbelief – past, present, and future – is just the minimum amount

that God allows (107). However, van Inwagen thinks the better answer is that: “He [God] had to draw an arbitrary line, and he drew it. And that’s all there is to be said” (108).

Taking these points into account, a defense from a Christian theist perspective could go something like this: God has the ultimate goal of wanting humans to be the type of creatures that want to spend an eternity in fellowship with God. For this to be the case, God will provide evidence for his existence and communicate this desire via an offer of eternal fellowship with him. There will be a variety of requirements in order to make this possible; one such requirement is that humans will need to be focused on God rather than themselves and will need to be reconciled to God. This is similar to, in Moser’s terminology, that cognitive idolatry must be removed and an individual must be volitionally open to God. Belief *that* God exists will be necessary, and therefore, God will provide evidence for his existence which promotes filial knowledge in different ways and in different times. God is more importantly concerned with belief *in* him because it is the foundation of a relationship, and therefore, God will provide opportunities for the relationship to occur in different ways and in different times. These different ways of God’s communicating an offer of fellowship may come via direct communication, the use of prophets, revelation in the form of scripture, and religious experience. The Christian view will also include the ultimate revelation of God through Jesus Christ. These forms of revelation and evidence are sufficient for humanity collectively because humans play a part in the continued expression of the existence of God and divine offer via human testimony and preservation of revelation in Scripture.

Because there is no non-arbitrary amount of hiddenness, there will be cases of nonbelief that do not serve some greater good, are the result of corporate effects of nonbelief, or are due to the shortcoming of the corporate responsibility of humanity to communicate the divine offer available to humans. However, cases of reflective inculpable nonbelief can result in belief via the openness of the honest agnostic to the possibility of God and the volitional desire to be open to the possibility of eternal

fellowship with God. Cases of unreflective inculpable nonbelief such as an isolated nontheist can result in belief by eventual interaction with other parts of humanity who may be able to share the possibility of the divine offer. There still will be cases of isolated nontheists but these will not be as common given the ever growing communication among all of humanity. Furthermore, those who believe *in* God should continue to try and communicate the divine offer which was previously communicated to them.

This is merely a defense and therefore a possibility, regardless of being likely or not, for the existence of God despite Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness. I have attempted to keep theistic assumptions to a minimum beyond what Schellenberg has already granted. These assumptions are reasonable enough for someone to consider who is an agnostic *because* of the argument from divine hiddenness. These basic assumptions are that if God exists, (1) God will want fellowship with humans; (2) God will communicate this possibility to humanity in a variety of ways; (3) human testimony will play a role in continuing to communicate the possibility of the divine offer; (4) there is not a non-arbitrary amount of hiddenness in the world that is possible; and (5) there may be requirements for humans to have a relationship with God. The agnostic need not conclude that we must be able to explain divine hiddenness, or remove the challenge it presents. As Moser writes, "finding God [...] isn't necessarily finding a *theodicy*" (2008, 142). But the agnostic should at least find such a scenario possible, which as a result shows that Schellenberg's second premise – if a perfectly loving God exists, inculpable nonbelief will not occur – can be rejected.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I have shown that the *prima facie* evidential force of Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness can be significantly reduced in a variety of ways. Schellenberg is mistaken in assuming that culpability is only based on voluntary epistemic failures. This broadens the amount of nonbelief which is culpable in some form, and therefore the evidential force of Schellenberg's premise that inculpable nonbelief occurs is reduced. Schellenberg is also mistaken in not allowing any other

concepts of divine love which include possible reasons God could be motivated from love to allow inculpable nonbelief at least for a time. A perfectly loving God may be more concerned with belief *in* God rather than just belief *that* God exists, and therefore, promoting belief *in* God may require times of a lack of belief *that* God exists. Therefore, the premise that if a perfectly loving God exists, inculpable nonbelief does not occur is rejected as well as the overall argument from divine hiddenness.

The theist can also appeal to skeptical theism to show that we are simply not in a position to know the all-things-considered judgments about what God would or would not do regarding inculpable nonbelief. However, if the theist appeals to skeptical theism this limits the ability to develop other defenses to the argument from divine hiddenness since the skeptical theist is not in a position to make all-things-considered judgments about what God would or would not do. The skeptical theist may find a way around this difficulty by basing all-things-considered judgments, used to develop other defenses as a response to the argument from divine hiddenness, in divine revelation. But in doing so the skeptical theist must accept the possibility of divine lies even though it is still rational to accept such divine revelation. This will also introduce the challenge of what is to be considered genuine divine revelation.

Beyond this, I have shown that the context of Schellenberg's argument is mistaken. Schellenberg has focused too exclusively on the responsibility of God to provide evidence for humanity, and as a result has neglected the responsibility of humans to be volitionally open to relationship with God. Schellenberg has mistakenly focused on the standards of evidence for belief while ignoring a holistic (intellectual, emotional, and volitional) consideration of the believer. Schellenberg will say that this is already incorporated in the definition of a reflective nonbeliever. However, his concept of a reflective nonbeliever only includes the openness to belief that God exists, and not the more important kind of openness to relationship and openness to the requirements that such a relationship may entail (such as avoiding selfishness and becoming selfless). Schellenberg's definition of an unreflective



nonbeliever does not include any kind of considerations for volitional openness to God, and therefore, his considerations of unreflective nonbelief are incomplete.

Culpable nonbelief is more common because of culpable self-deception, the noetic effects of sin, and Moser's concepts of cognitive idolatry and volitional attunement. This is all the more relevant since Schellenberg is arguing that only general background awareness for God's existence is needed. The lower the threshold of evidence that Schellenberg requires, the more likely it is that it can be culpably ignored. My arguments from culpable self-deception, the culpable noetic effects of sin, and Moser's concepts of cognitive idolatry and volitional attunement show the likelihood of widespread nonbelief. In all of this I am not claiming that inculpable nonbelief never occurs. There is evidence for God which may go inculpably unnoticed by individuals, but over time humans should develop the characteristics and volitional attunement which would result in openness to the concept of God. Evidence for God is not necessarily blatant and clearly evident to every individual but it may at least be, as Moser puts it, small glimmers to which individuals can respond positively, negatively or indifferently. Individuals can develop characteristics of love and volitional openness which will result in being receptive to evidence for God and relationship with God. For individuals who choose to ignore these small glimmers, self-deception, the noetic effects of sin, and cognitive idolatry can set in and over time the individual will be in a position of culpable nonbelief because they could have volitionally molded themselves into individuals that would have been receptive to evidence for God. It is these considerations which cast the argument from divine hiddenness in a different context and allow the agnostic (*because of the argument from divine hiddenness*) to accept the reasonableness of my defense to the argument from divine hiddenness instead of necessarily being epistemically led to atheism.

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## **Appendix: God in Judeo-Christian Scripture**

### **The Development of Divine Hiddenness in the Old Testament**

In Richard Elliott Friedman's book, The Hidden Face of God, Friedman surveys the development of the hiddenness of God found in the Old Testament. In this appendix I would like to lay out the development of divine hiddenness in the Old Testament as found in Friedman's work and to show that themes of divine hiddenness are actually a central part of Jewish and Christian religious tradition. If this is indeed the case, then expectations of divine hiddenness found in Jewish-Christian scripture may inform potential defenses to the argument from divine hiddenness as presented by Schellenberg or, at the least, motivate further questioning of Schellenberg's argument.

A central verse that Friedman uses to spring board into his discussion, and a verse to which he often returns, is Deuteronomy 32:20 where some of God's last words to Moses are, "I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end shall be." This is in stark contrast to how the Scriptures begin in Genesis in which God is depicted as being intimately involved with humans. God breathes life into Adam, forms Eve, plants the garden, and forms the animals, and they even hear God walking in the Garden and have conversation with him. We should note that regardless of how one takes the Genesis story – as myth, allegory, or literal – God is shown to be clearly present at the beginning of humanity.

Moving forward in Genesis to the story of the flood, God still speaks to Noah but there is not the same level of intimacy. As Friedman shows, God's activities are observable on the cosmic and personal levels as God causes waters from above and below to fill the land and even closes the ark (Gen. 7:16). After the flood, God enters into a covenant with humankind to never again flood the earth (9:8-17). In the following story of the tower of Babel, God is depicted as personally going down to see the city and tower (11:5). This shows how God was actively involved with early humanity in a way that was visible, audible and evident to all. However, as humankind grows there is never another encounter in which God is manifested to all mankind. God instead makes a second covenant with one man, Abraham, in which ultimately every human family will be blessed (12:3; 18:18; 28:14). Although God speaks to

Abraham, there is also a new expression in which God is said to “appear” to Abraham: “The word for ‘appear’ is a Hebrew passive (Niphal) form of the root *r’h*; literally: the deity ‘was seen.’ In the account of the covenant in Genesis 15:17 the divine appearance is via fire, and as Friedman writes, it is unclear from the text “whether this fire is an expression, a symbol, or a herald of God’s presence – or even the actual form that the theophany itself takes.” In other uses of the expression (12:7 and 17:1) the “divine appearance is left unspecified” (9).

Moving forward in our survey of the development of divine hiddenness there is an account of many great miracles in the book of Exodus and the life of Moses, which are referred to as “signs” and taken to be evidences of God’s involvement in the world. The signs result in the freedom of the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. God is credited with causing various plagues on the Egyptian nation that affect the people, land, and livestock and these are done so, “By this you shall know that I am the Lord” (Exod. 7:17). The Red Sea is parted for the Israelites to pass through and then falls in on, and drowns, the pursuing army of the Egyptians. These signs were witnessed by whole nations and others heard about the events as well: “the peoples have heard, they tremble” (Exod. 15:14-15, also 18:11). Friedman writes: “This is a world full of upheavals of nature, of immediate proofs of divine presence. It is not a world of belief in God but of *knowledge* of God. Indeed there is no word for the verb ‘to believe’ in biblical Hebrew. The word that is frequently translated as ‘to believe’ means, in the original, something more like ‘to trust’; that is, it means that one can rely on this God to do what He has said He will do [taking Exod. 14:31 as an example]” (14).

The Israelites are in the wilderness for 40 years and have continuous miraculous evidence of God through daily reminders such as a cloud by day and a fire by night leading them in the wilderness (Exod. 13:21-22). They are also sustained on manna that appeared every morning and quail for food (Exod. 16:3-35). There are also several accounts where water is provided, even from a rock for the nation to drink (Exod. 15:23-25; 17:1-7; Num. 20:2-13). There is also another kind of experience which is



repeated among the nation of Israel and is described as the “glory of the Lord.” As Friedman notes, we are never told exactly what the “glory” is, but it is visible to the people and it is generally not seen directly but often veiled within a cloud (Exod. 16:7, 10; 24:16, 17; 40:34, 35; Lev. 9:6, 23; Num. 14:10; 16:19): “Whatever it is, the glory involves something that emanates from the deity and is associated with cases of immediate intervention in specific human situations” (15).

Besides the miraculous signs that the nation of Israel saw and experienced there is “what is presumably the ultimate experience of God by a large mass of people in the entire Bible,” that is, the revelation at Mount Sinai. God descends on the mountain in fire which the people see (Exod. 19:11, 18, 20) and the people hear God as he speaks to Moses (Exod. 19:19; 20: 1, 22). The people are in fact terrified from this encounter: “All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. Then they said to Moses, ‘Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die’” (Exod. 20:18, 19).

Followed by this experience of the masses there is a smaller group, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the elders of the Israelites, who have another vision of God: “and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God, and they ate and drank” (Exod. 24:11, 12). Later there is another experience, this time only for Moses, in which God passes by Moses (Exod. 34:5-8) in response to Moses asking for God to show him His glory, to which God responds: “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live! [...] Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand there on the rock; and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen.” (Exod. 33:20-23). Friedman writes:

It is arguably the culminating moment of human history since Adam and Eve in this narrative, and it is as mysterious as anything in the Bible. [...] The sight that he is

privileged to behold is not described, just as the vision of the seventy-four and the voice that the thousands hear are not described. These things are understood to belong solely to those who experienced them, and they are not to be repeated in any subsequent generation. (16)

It is after these encounters, Friedman argues, that the presence of God in the Bible starts to diminish. Miracles will continue to occur but no one will encounter God in such a way as experienced by the nation and the seventy-four. After the account in Exodus 20, in which the people tell Moses that they do not wish God to speak with them, but Moses instead, God “never again speaks directly to an entire community Himself.” Hence prophecy, “mediated communication between the deity and human communities,” is born (17). Likewise, no personal experience will happen again to a human in the way that God interacted with Moses. This is expressed in Numbers 12 in the account where Aaron and his wife Miriam oppose Moses because of his choice of a wife saying: “Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?” God, having something to say about it, “comes down” in a pillar of cloud at the tent of meeting and reprimands them by saying:

Hear now my Words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household; With him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings, and he beholds the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses? (Num. 12:6-8)

This being said, all prophecy to follow is understood to be in terms of dreams and visions, or else not described, but inferior to the interaction that God had with Moses. Although visions and dreams of the Old Testament are indeed impressive, this is still a distancing of God from mankind. Thus the period of time when the Israelites are in the wilderness has, as Friedman describes it, a “curious quality,” that is, “it is a period of incubation, nurturing, and unusual closeness to the divine, and at the same time a period of developing divine hiddenness and mystery” (18).

Friedman continues on that God is still involved in human affairs, just not in the same direct ways as previously described. Here are some of the ways that both revelation and hiddenness can be found in the narrative so far: (1) the column of cloud and fire conveys God’s presence, but at the same

time “masks” the divine; (2) Moses, because of his interactions with God, is among the people but now wears a veil over his face because “the skin on his face shone and the people were afraid to come near him” (Exod.34:29, 30); (3) God has inscribed the tablets of stone with the ten commandments (Exod. 34:1) and they are kept among the people but they are still separated from the people through various layers of the Tabernacle (courtyard, Tabernacle, “the Holy” outer room, the “Holy of Holies” inner room, and inside the “ark” box); (4) the Tabernacle is itself a series of layers (framework of wooden trellises, covered by linen, covered by wool, and covered by red leather); (5) the people are allowed only in the courtyard, only priests are allowed in the Tabernacle, and only the high priest in the “Holy of Holies.” Returning back to Exodus 32:20 (“I shall hide my face from them. I shall see what their end will be.”), Friedman suggests that the hiddenness of God becomes more explicit. Add on top of this the death of the one man who has seen the deity, Moses, and you have another sense of hiddenness developing. Thus Friedman concludes, from the first five books of the Bible, the narrative “has flowed from an era of creation, cosmic crisis, and extraordinary divine intervention in human affairs to a time in which the deity has begun to be hidden – and to a promise of increasing hiddenness in the future” (19).

As the narrative continues, signs of divine presence continue to diminish. Granted there are still a number of miracles and signs that happen: the splitting of the Jordan for the Israelites to cross and in which God “exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; so that they revered him, just as they had revered Moses all the days of his life” (Exod. 4:14); the walls of Jericho fall (Joshua 6); and the sun stands still for the Israelites to defeat their opposition (Josh. 10). But there is no longer the pillar of cloud or fire, the glory of God no longer appears, and the manna stops once the Israelites have food in Canaan (Josh. 5:12). In the following book, Judges, there are still some signs and appearances of angels, but Gideon perhaps best expresses the sentiment that signs and miracles were evidence of God’s presence when Gideon says (to an angel), “If the Lord is with us [...] where are all His miracles which our fathers told us

about” (Exod. 6:13). As Friedman points out, “Gideon in fact gets his miracle (*fire* comes from a rock; 6:21), but miracles are fewer and farther between after this” (20).

There are several miracles that surround the story of Samson and some at the beginning of first Samuel but “the diminishing apparent presence of God continues and even accelerates from this point.” First Samuel 3:21 is the last time that God is said to be “revealed” to a person (Samuel) and first Kings (3:5; 9:2; 11:9) is the last time that God is said to have “appeared” to a person (Solomon). So far God is said to have appeared to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Exod. 6:3), Moses, Joshua (Deut. 31:15), Aaron (Lev. 16:2), Israel (Lev. 9:4; Num. 14:14), Samuel (I Sam. 3:21), David (2 Chr. 3:1), and Solomon. And with five thousand years left to the story of the Hebrew Bible this is the last time that the deity has been said to appear to a human (20). Likewise, the last appearance of the cloud and glory takes place at the dedication of the Temple (I Kings 8:10-11; 2 Chr. 5:14; 7:1-3). This is notable, Friedman says, because “the glory, the supernatural sign of divine presence which has hitherto been associated with divine communications to humans, is now replaced by a natural, man-made structure which is associated with human communications to the divine.” Not that God can be contained in a building but Solomon asks God to “cause your name to dwell” in the Temple so that the Israelites can direct their prayers towards the Temple for God to hear (I Kings 8). The Temple thus becomes the channel to God. In first Kings 13 King Jeroboam builds an alternative altar at Beth-El for worship which is denounced by a prophet, Jeroboam’s arm withers, and the Beth-El altar is cracked. “The Temple’s status thus is initially confirmed by divine word, glory, and miracle. And after that, as these divine signs recede, the Temple itself gradually will become the only visible channel to God” (21).

The last “public” miracle (as Friedman refers to it in the sense that it is experienced by all the Israelites, or at least a large portion) occurs in I Kings 18 when Elijah is on Mt. Carmel and faces off with the prophets of Baal in front of the king and “all of Israel” (18:19, 20). (This is taking place about 100 years after the dedication of the Temple and now King Ahab and Jezebel have sanctioned the worship of

the god Baal.) It is agreed upon that the true God will answer by fire. The prophets of Baal call on Baal but to no avail. The account ends with Elijah calling on God who sends fire to consume the entire offering that is made for the test. After this display the people fall on their faces saying, "The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God" (18:39). The end of public miracles in the Hebrew Bible is one that once again involves fire, and "is presented as a resounding visible demonstration of the presence of God" (22).

Followed by this story is, as Friedman calls it, "one of the most remarkable juxtapositions in the Bible," (22) the story of Elijah at Mount Horeb (I Kings 19). Elijah is on the run from Jezebel and he goes to Mount Horeb (another name for Mount Sinai), the same place where Moses had his encounter with God. But now the encounter with God is very different than with Moses' encounter. Elijah is at the mountain and "the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'" (I Kings 19:9). Elijah, discouraged and feeling alone, expresses his frustrations to God to which God tells Elijah to "stand on the mountain before the Lord" and "the Lord was passing by!" There is a "great and strong wind," followed by an earthquake, followed by a fire, but God was not in any of these (I Kings 19:11-12). As Friedman notes, each of these "has been associated with divine activity in other biblical episodes" (Gen. 1:2; 2:7; Num. 16:28-34), but after each of these is mentioned the text says, "but the Lord was not in it." In verse 13 it says that after the fire there was "a sound of a gentle blowing." Friedman thinks it is best translated as "a sound of thin hush," meaning, the sound of silence (23). Thus the juxtaposition is between the previous encounter of Moses on Mount Sinai and now Elijah, in which he hears wind, feels the earthquake, and sees the fire, but God is not in them and instead he hears nothing: "The scene of the last great public miraculous confirmation of the divine presence at Mount Carmel has been followed by the scene of the divine refusal to appear at Mount Horeb/Sinai" (23). While Friedman is not the first to notice the significance of the event, he does stress, given the context of divine hiddenness we are considering, that "it is just one dramatic stage in a series of stages, spanning the entire Hebrew Bible, through which God step-by-step removes the visible

markers of His presence.” And “this is the last time in the Hebrew Bible’s narrative that the text says ‘And Yahweh said’ anything to anyone” as well as the last *appearance* of an angel (2 Kings 1:3, 15) (24).

As Elijah’s story continues, as well as the story of Elisha, there is a transition from public miracles to personal miracles. These however come to an end with the last one being in the story of Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:8-11). Friedman sums up the development of divine hiddenness as follows:

With over two hundred years still left to the story, there are no more fires from the sky, no more miracles, public or personal, no more angels, seen or unseen, no more cloud and glory, no more “and Yahweh said to X.” The only remaining visible channel to God is the Temple, housing the ark in Jerusalem, and it is destroyed by the Babylonians, in fire, at the end of the books of Kings and Chronicles (2 Kings 25:9; 2 Chron. 36:19). It is interesting and ironic that the last reference to fire should be the burning of the last visible marker of the presence of the deity on earth. The text, further, expresses the destruction of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah with the words: “Yahweh turned them out from before His face” (2 Kings 17:23; 23:27). The prediction in the deity’s last words to Moses has come true. (25-26)

Granted, right after this conclusion, Friedman mentions that there are a few miracles found in the book of Daniel and that the whole book is something of an enigma. He suggests that perhaps these small personal miracles are an indication that “God’s presence extends beyond the borders of their land and pervades the entire world” as the Israelites are in exile. But the remaining books which tell the history of the nation of Israel “have a decidedly different feeling to them” (26). Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of the return of the Israelites from Babylonian captivity and the books contain “no miracles, no angels, no divine appearances. [...] The Temple is rebuilt, but this second Temple contains no Tabernacle, no ark, no tablets [...]. No glory or cloud appears on its dedication day” (27). In the book of Esther God is not even mentioned. The closest that we get is when Mordecai, trying to encourage Esther to confront the king, tells Esther: “If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?” (Esth. 4:14). Compare this to Joseph’s response in Genesis 40:19-20 (“Do not be afraid, for am I in God’s place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.”),

and you can see how Mordecai's "Who knows?" has an "ambiguity and uncertainty" that is "a far cry from the world of the earlier biblical narratives (Friedman 27).

To again quote Friedman at length, we can conclude:

The initial biblical depiction of a world in which the deity is intimately involved has gradually transformed into a picture of a reality not so different from the one we know [...]. In the latter books of the story, no snakes talk, no seas split, no one wrestles with the creator, - not literally, anyway. The presence of God that is apparent, that is a matter of knowledge, at the beginning, has become, at the end, a hidden thing, a matter of belief, or of hope. The text never says that deity ceases to exist, to care, or to affect the world. It only conveys that these things are no longer *publicly visible* at the end of the story in the way that they are at the beginning. One might still conceive of the deity as being present and involved in undetected ways. One might speak of the natural wonders of nature as conveying, for some people, the divine presence. But regarding the *apparent, manifest* presence of God, as conveyed in the particular terms and descriptions of the earlier biblical episodes: that ceases by this point in the story. (28)

Friedman thinks, given that the books were written by many different authors over many different centuries, the theme of the hiddenness of God, or the "diminishing apparent presence of God" is "consistent enough to be striking, impressive, and ultimately mysterious." However, this is only half the story (29). We now turn to the theme of the developing of human responsibility.

### **The Development of Human Responsibility in the Old Testament**

The other important theme that Friedman thinks corresponds with the development of divine hiddenness is the development of human responsibility: "The story begins in Genesis with God in complete control of the creation, but by the end humans have arrived at a stage at which, in all apparent ways, they have responsibility for the fate of their world" (30). In Genesis, God communicates mainly via commands: be fruitful and multiple, what to eat and not eat. By the time we get to Noah's generation there are still commands but man's responsibility seems to have grown. Noah has to set out to build the ark to God's specifications. Friedman offers as a symbolic formula: "the deity makes Adam's and Eve's clothes, but Noah has to build his own ark" (31). Continue further in the story to Abraham and we see another development in human responsibility: the commands to Noah were more factual (the specifications of how to build the ark) while the commands to Abraham "emphasize the personal

burdens that these acts imply” (32). Friedman uses Genesis 12:1 to illustrate what he means: instead of God saying, “Go on a journey,” God tells Abraham, “Go from your *land*, from your *birthplace*, and from your *father’s house* to the land that I show you.” Or similarly Genesis 22:2: instead of “Take Isaac,” God tells Abraham, “Take your *son*, your *only one*, whom you *love*, *Isaac!*” As the story of Abraham continues we learn more about him and he becomes more identifiable and relatable to us than say Adam or Noah. Not only that, but we see an expansion of human behavior towards God. When God tells Abraham that He is going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham questions the decision and even bargains with God to attempt to prevent the destruction of the cities. When God tells Noah about the flood and the impending destruction of all creatures, Noah doesn’t argue or questions the decision, or at least no account is recorded in the text. In the case of Abraham he asks God: “Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? [...] Far be it from You to do such a thing [...] Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly” (Gen. 18:23-25)? While Abraham’s negotiations with God are clothed in humility, Abraham is still challenging the divine decision. Friedman argues that this is all part of a development in a “stronger stance of humans relative to deity” that is only going to continue through the rest of the story (34).

Friedman cites the following examples to show the development of this shift in “divine-human balance.” First, Lot is told to flee the city to the mountain to escape the destruction of the city. Lot protests that he won’t have enough time and asks to flee to a neighboring town instead. Not only does God allow it but also says, “Hurry, escape there, for I cannot do anything until you arrive there” (Gen. 19:22). In the story of the search for a wife for Isaac the servant who is to find Isaac’s future wife asks for a sign from God, and also specifies what it should be: “now may it be that the girl to whom I say, ‘Please let down your jar so that I may drink,’ and who answers, ‘Drink, and I will water your camels also’ may she be the one whom You have appointed for Your servant Isaac; and by this I will know that You have shown lovingkindness to my master” (Gen. 24:14). Friedman writes that at minimum: “(1) a



human being has asked for a personal act of God, (2) the human has himself named the form that he wants this act to take, and (3) the act has immediately taken place, albeit with a slight change of wording” (36).

Returning to Abraham, he received a message from God that he and Sarah will have a son even though they are in their old age. To this Abraham laughs that such a thing could happen. Not only does he question the communication from God but he, like Lot, offers an alternative. Abraham, having Ishmael with Hagar asks God to make him the heir (Gen. 17:18) to which God refuses. However, continue to the next generation in Genesis 27 where Isaac is now to pass the blessing on to one of his children, Esau or Jacob. Deception ensues and Jacob ends up receiving the blessing instead of Esau, and God honors it. Friedman writes: “What has happened here is that the succession has been determined through the dynamic of intra-family relations, including conflicting parental preferences, sibling rivalry, and human manipulation that is morally questionable at best, and *the creator of the universe has accepted the outcome*” (37). Fast forward some years to Jacob and the account of his wrestling with deity in Genesis 32:25-33 and we have a further development in the fact that Jacob wrestles, prevails, and demands a blessing (38).

Friedman next mentions Joseph because of his unique ability to interpret dreams and foresee the future which again is a unique empowering of a human (Gen. 40-41). After Joseph is the impressive figure of Moses. In Exodus 7:1 we see the authority and power that God bestows on Moses: “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘See, I make you as God to Pharaoh.’” Joseph was able to interpret dreams, but now Moses is able to do many great things (41). Returning to the idea of prophecy we have a further shift in divine-human balance because any intermediary will affect the message in some way during its conveyance because of that person’s personality and communication. Friedman’s point is this: “Prophecy, by its very nature, means increased human involvement in a realm that has been God’s alone prior to this. Human mediation has become an essential part of divine communication” (43). In

Moses we see the fruition of the statement that “the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend” (Exod. 33:11). Moses on several occasions argues with God and persuades God to change a course of action (Exod. 14:12-20). Further, he speaks to God in a way not yet read about. In Numbers 11:11-15, in complaining to God, Moses says, “If You are going to deal thus with me, please kill me at once.” And in the challenging story of Numbers 20:1-13 Moses even alters a miracle: God told Moses to speak to the rock to bring forth water but instead Moses strikes the rock. Water still comes forth but God is displeased with Moses and he is not allowed to enter Canaan. Though this story may incite other questions, Friedman’s point is that: “a human’s direction of a miracle has reached a new height. And it will go higher” (46).

These new heights of human responsibility and direction can be seen in the account of Joshua 10 where it is written that the sun and the moon stay in the sky at Joshua’s request so that the Israelites can defeat their enemy. To this Friedman says, Joshua is not just altering a miracle, but is picking his own miracle (46) and to which God answers: “There was no day like that before it or after it, when the Lord listened to the voice of a man” (Josh. 10:14). Further accounts of unique control of power from the divine is found in the account of Samson where the line between God’s control and Samson’s control is blurred. Nevertheless, such a situation confirms what Friedman is driving at: “From Abraham, who performed no miracles, to Joseph, who had a single power of dream interpretation, to Moses, who enacted a host of miracles and once altered a miracle, to Joshua, who called for a miracle himself, now to Samson, who has miraculous powers invested in him at his beck and call, the divine human balance is evolving” (48-49).

Switching topics just a bit but still within the same theme of human responsibility, is the role that human monarchy plays in the shift of divine-human balance. Human monarchy, although permissible, was seen as a step away from God. When the Israelites try to make Gideon king in Judges 8:22-23 he responds: “I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over

you.” In I Samuel 8:4-7 the people again demand a king. Samuel does not want to anoint a king but God tells him: “Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them.” To reiterate this point Samuel says at the start of the selection ceremony, “You have today rejected your God” (I Sam. 10:19). Even though a monarchy is a rejection of God, God still allows it. Later, God even makes a covenant with King David in 2 Samuel 7:8-17 (“Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever”). This is despite the fact that many of the kings to come will not serve God but will instead do evil. Friedman writes: “The force of this Davidic covenant is remarkable and barely possible to overstate. The deity here has not only ceded to humans the right to have their own human rulers, but He has conveyed to one family of rulers even the power to violate His own law without losing the throne” (51).

Continuing on through the story of the kings and the prophets, “the power of the kings comes into conflict with the power of the prophets” (Friedman 51). An example of the power of the prophets – and the conflict – can be seen in the stories associated with Elijah and Elisha. In first Kings 17:1 Elijah tells King Ahab, “As the Lord, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.” And as Friedman points out, the ‘*my*’ is referring to Elijah himself and not to God. In fact the miracles that Elijah and Elisha perform “bring personal control of miracle[s] to a point that dwarfs anything that Samson ever did” (52). Friedman uses several examples from the life of Elijah and Elisha, but the one most relevant to his intended point is a succession of three stories: two of them are similar in that they both involve the respective prophet bringing someone back to life (Elijah in I Kings 17:17-24 and Elisha in 2 Kings 4:18-37), and the third involves a person coming back to life after the dead body touched the bones of Elisha (2 Kings 13:20-21). Friedman writes: “No matter what we might imagine the divine contribution to these events to be, the fact remains that, in the progression of the three resuscitations, the narrative increasingly places the human participants in

the center of the action. And this progression just amplifies the already extraordinary fact of how far the divine-human balance has come when two humans play a role, *any* role, in the giving of life” (55).

Friedman highlights a turning point in the shift from the divine to the human in the story of the healing of Hezekiah. In I Kings 20:1-11 King Hezekiah is dying and is told to put his house in order by the prophet Isaiah. But Hezekiah cries out to God and Isaiah returns to let Hezekiah know that God will extend his life by 15 years and even allows Hezekiah the choice of what the miracle will be to confirm this. What is fascinating to Friedman is that the conflicting powers now come to a culmination in which “the prophet who deals with miraculous power offers the political leader the choice of how the miracle should operate” (56). What is also interesting is that in 2 Kings 18:4 Hezekiah is the one who destroyed the Nehushtan – this was the bronze snake that Moses had made in the wilderness so that anyone who was bitten by a snake would be healed by looking at it (Num. 21:4-9): “Here the political figure destroys the visible remnant of the miraculous power of Moses, the father of all the prophets. And this is the king who plays the pivotal role on the story of the final transition from miraculous to political power in the earth.” Friedman argues that while some may think this is a move backwards in the divine-human balance because men are no longer doing miracles, instead it should be seen that “by eliminating the miraculous from the story altogether, the biblical narrative has completed the jump into the human realm.” And so in the disappearance of God and of miracles we see a focus of attention on the interactions and dealings of men in the political realm (57). It is helpful to conclude this train of thought with the following from Friedman:

From Adam to Ezra, and from Eve to Esther, we have observed a process in which humans have gradually come to acquire responsibility for their world. Though there is no suggestion that they are supposed to give up prayer and faith, the text unequivocally concentrates more on what they must do for themselves. The face of God has become hidden. The miracles of God have passed ever more into human direction and then have ceased. For better or worse, a shift in the divine-human balance has taken place, and humans are left in control of their destiny.

Granted, he notes, this is only the diminishing of “*apparent control*” and of “*visible divine presence*” (58); one could still argue that God is operating in the background.

### **Continued Themes in the Prophets and Poets**

The rest of the Old Testament is made up primarily of poetry, which is in contrast to most of the narrative that comes before it. The difference in these modes is that “one work gives a narrator’s account of what happened, and the other gives an individual’s account of his own experiences in that era” (61). However, even in this different mode these themes are reinforced: “In the prophetic books there are no more grand public miracles and few personal miracles. In all fifteen books, there are only two classic miracle stories” (63). Those two being the story of Jonah and the fish, and the shadow moving backwards as already mentioned in association with Hezekiah (Isa. 38:7-8). The prophets use symbolic acts – such as Hosea’s marriage to a prostitute (Hos. 1:2-3) – and as mediators of God’s word, tend to be more focused on them as individuals. As Friedman writes, all fifteen of the prophetic books “are all about the word of God in the mouths of men; and that means fifteen more expressions of a phenomenon that is developed in the Bible’s historical narrative. [...] They picture them as profoundly in touch with the divine presence, and they picture the rest of humankind as profoundly out of touch with it” (67-68).

Also noteworthy is the fact that the phrase of hiding the face is found over thirty times in the Hebrew Bible (69) which was already mentioned as occurring in some of God’s last words to Moses (“And I will hide My face from them” – Deut. 31:17). Friedman does add that “the hiding of the face” can have various meanings and have taken place in different historical situations, and so not every reference will directly apply (72). However, these references lend credibility to the development of divine hiddenness found in the Old Testament. The prophets at various times cry out for God to show Himself. Friedman references many of these instances (69-75) but I will highlight just a few. Take Isaiah for instance:

Where is He who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of His flock?  
 Where is He who put His Holy Spirit in the midst of them,  
 Who caused His glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses,  
 Who divided the waters before them to make for Himself an everlasting name? (Isa. 63:11-12)

Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down,  
 That the mountains might quake at Your presence –  
 As fire kindles the brushwood, as fire causes water to boil –  
 To make Your name known to Your adversaries,  
 That the nations may tremble at Your presence!  
 When You did awesome things which we did not expect,  
 You came down, the mountains quaked at Your presence. (Isa. 64:1-3)

This is obviously a very different plea, in a very different time that is displaced from a time when God answered with powerful signs and miracles to the nations. Notice the verse which shortly follows:

There is no one who calls on Your name,  
 Who arouses himself to take hold of You;  
 For You have hidden Your face from us  
 And have delivered us into the power of our iniquities. (Isa. 64:7)

However, there are also the following verses to be found in Isaiah that are hopeful in a reconciliation to God – that the divine hiddenness is not to be permanent:

“For a brief moment I forsook you,  
 But with great compassion I will gather you.  
 In an outburst of anger I hid My face from you for a moment,  
 But with everlasting lovingkindness I will have compassion on you,”  
 Says the Lord your Redeemer. (Isa. 54:7-8)

And a few verses later:

Seek the Lord while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near.  
 Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts;  
 And let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him,  
 And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. (Isa. 55:6-7)

One more instance I would like to highlight that Friedman discusses is Psalm 22. David begins with “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” (vs. 1) Friedman thinks that while “forsaken” and “abandoned” are accurate translations, the best conveyance of the Hebrew reading is simply the verb “to leave” (74). David refers back to times when God answered the cries of humans (vs. 4-5) and this is

in contrast to, "O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer" (vs. 2). But David calls the descendents of the Israelites to praise God because God has answered those in the past: "For He has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; Nor has He hidden His face from him; But when he cried to Him for help, He heard" (vs.24). This passage encourages the audience to have faith that God's presence will again be apparent in the future: "the psalm declares that the deity was present, listening, and answering in the past, and it suggests that the deity will be so again in the future, but for the present God is hiding His face." Thus, as Friedman sees it, the prophets and the poets reinforce the theme of the development of divine hiddenness and "depict the emotional responses of individual human beings to divine hiddenness. [...]: boldness to flaunt the law, piety to hold on to the law, wonder, confusion, anger, faith, uncertainty, terror" (75). Furthermore, he continues, the disappearance of divinity is worse than divine punishment: "Frequently the psalms in which references to the hiding of the face occur set this thought in parallel with references to the deity's not seeing, not hearing, and [...] forgetting. It is one thing to cry out to one's God and hear the divine voice saying, 'You've been bad.' It is another to cry out and hear nothing but the sound of thin hush" (76).

### **Hiddenness and Humanity**

Friedman claims that the development of these themes is not widely discussed or known. While many may know that God is not mentioned in Esther, or that Genesis and Exodus contain the more "dramatic" miracles: "No one known to me [Friedman] has observed this whole intricate development through the course of the books of the Hebrew Bible." Granted many of the events discussed have been talked about and studied but not necessarily placed together to show the overall developments taking place: "a progression in which God departs and humans are called upon to grow up" (78). Samuel Balentine, similarly wrote:

The phrase "hide the face" is but one element from a large stock of language which gives expression to the motif of the hiddenness of God in the Old Testament. In terms of frequency alone this language suggests the importance of this theme and should

guarantee it a prominent place in Old Testament studies. Yet surprisingly little notice has been taken of this aspect of Israelite religion. (115)

To recap here are eight major steps which contribute to the “development of the diminishing apparent presence of God in the narrative”:

1. Moses sees God at Sinai.
2. Moses, the one who has seen God, wears a veil.
3. God tells Moses, “I shall hide my face from them.”
4. The last time God is said to be “revealed” to a human: the prophet Samuel.
5. The last time God is said to have “appeared” to a human: King Solomon.
6. The last public miracle: divine fire for Elijah at Mount Carmel; followed by God’s refusal to appear to Elijah at Horeb/Sinai.
7. The last personal miracle: the shadow reverses before Isaiah and Hezekiah.
8. God is not mentioned in Esther. (Friedman 82)

Friedman highlights these to show why the development of this theme was not intentional by the various writers of the Hebrew Bible, but that is not our present purpose. Friedman also argues that the God of the Israelites is different from the pagan gods of other nations because God is understood to be outside of nature: “If one wanted to comprehend the sun god Shamash, one contemplated the sun. If one wanted to pursue the essence of the storm god Baal, one observed the storm. But the essence of Yahweh, God of Israel, was hidden. [...] Instead of being known through nature, God was known through His acts in history” (88). But what happens if God disappears? How are we to know God is there? Let us turn for the moment to the question of why God hides His face in light of Judeo-Christian scripture.

Some explicit reasons given in the Hebrew Bible for God’s hiding are sin and to provide a test. Given Deuteronomy 31:18 (“I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil which they will do, for they will turn to other gods.”) it is clear that God can hide His face due to human sin. But, Friedman argues, we should not be quick to credit sin with all of God’s hiding. In fact, in reference to Deuteronomy 32:20 (“I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end shall be.”) Friedman suggests that this could be more than just a cynical statement but “could also mean that the deity really means to give these independence-seeking humans a chance to direct their own world, and that God will take an interest in seeing how they do” (97). For instance, Friedman thinks the case of King



Hezekiah (one of the two best kings of Judah; 2 Kings 18:5) may illustrate this when in 2 Chronicles 32:31 it explicitly says, "God left him alone only to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart."

Therefore divine hiddenness is not necessarily a form of punishment.

Friedman asks the further question: When divine hiddenness is tied to sin or "human violation of covenant in the Bible," why does the violation occur (98)? When the serpent tempts Eve in the Garden to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, its argument is "In the day you eat from it [...] you will be like God" (Gen. 3:5). This argument particularly appeals to humans because "only humans are understood to aspire to the divine." Friedman continues, "In biblical terms, the paradox of being human is to be enough like God to aspire to the divine, but not enough like God to achieve it" (99). Even Psalm 8:5 says, "You have made him [humans] a little lower than God." Interestingly, Friedman notes that "precisely when humans are closest to God that they rebel most blatantly." Consider all the examples of disobedience that occur in the wilderness when the Israelites had daily reminders of God's presence. In the later generations of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, when the presence of God is less apparent "the people are relatively obedient" (100). Returning to the occasion when the people asked Moses to be their intermediary to God, and later the people's insistence for a king being a kind of rejection of God, Friedman thinks that "the divine impinges on human independence." The presence of God is frightening and humbling. Friedman continues, "Most humans resist their parents, to some degree, at some point in their lives, craving independence, seeking direction of their own lives. How much more would they resist a *divine* parent, an *all-powerful, always present* father? A father with six hundred commandments? And so they struggle with God" (101-102).

Despite all this, God is also depicted as a loving God that always gives another chance for people to return to Him, and this theme also continues to reoccur throughout the Hebrew Bible. God is pictured as continuing to get angry, and then continuing to forgive. In Genesis 6:6 God is described as being "grieved to His heart." This is odd in a couple ways but what Friedman thinks is most striking is

that “it is a picture of a God who is disappointed and angry at the being whom He has created but still is actually pained at their condition and possibly at the idea of hurting them” (for example see Hos. 11:8-9)

(104). Friedman continues:

The Hebrew Bible pictures a God who is the most hidden of deities and yet the most personal. He tells you flat-out that you may not see Him, and He is not identifiable with the components of nature, yet He is grieved to His heart. Even if we suggest that it is all meant metaphorically, still, what a metaphor! The fact remains that the biblical narrative explains the continued existence of humankind, despite their inherent conflict with their creator, as owing – metaphorically or literally – to the deity’s feelings for them. (105-06)

Returning to the hiddenness of God, Friedman argues that it is not solely a negative concept.

The hiding of the face of God and the shift in the divine-human balance may “entail divine and human grief, but they also entail divine compassion and human maturation and independence” (114):

Humans have acquired the power to make judgments of good and bad, and the power to choose between the two. It is through this channel of knowledge of good and bad, the very channel that estranged them from paradise, that mortals may have an opportunity to return eventually to the divine-human harmony associated with Eden and the tree of life. Having disobeyed and appropriated this knowledge, they may now cultivate it, aiming to arrive at the highest form of knowledge in the Bible: wisdom. And the book of Proverbs characterizes wisdom this way: “It is a *Tree of Life!*” (3:18) (116).

One more point that Friedman makes regarding the hiddenness of God found in the Old Testament is that “the essence of God remains unknown.” Thus God remains a mystery. Humans may know about God through words and acts in history, but his essence remains a mystery: “The most that humans are allowed to know is the outward personality of Yahweh: a merciful and gracious God, long-suffering, abundant in kindness...But what Yahweh *is* is the Bible’s unspoken, pervasive mystery.” Supporting this idea Friedman uses Deuteronomy 29:29 in which some of Moses’ last words to the nation are: “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.” The focus is on what humans must do here in the world instead of the essence of God (117).

**Further religious development in the context of Divine Hiddenness**

In the centuries following the completion of the Hebrew Bible there are two further developments on which I want to focus before wrapping up this survey of scripture in regards to divine hiddenness. These two developments, which Friedman discusses, are (1) the development of rabbinic Judaism, and (2) the development of Christianity. The priesthood of Judaism was transitioned to a new group of religious figures: rabbis. This was a consequence of the destruction of the second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD which caused the role of priests to diminish: "According to the biblical law, one could offer sacrifices only at the Temple and nowhere else on earth. The destruction of the Temple therefore meant the end of sacrifices, and that in turn meant the end of the primary function of the livelihood of the priests" (119).

The term rabbi, though not in the Hebrew Bible, means "my great one" or "my master" and was thus a position of high respect and authority. Rabbis explained, interpreted, and ruled on the Torah. Friedman sees an irony here in that Judaism "was based on obedience to the law, which is to say, obedience to God, but it placed the interpretation of this law in human hands. The shift in the divine-human balance had come to the point at which the comprehension and execution of the word of God was the responsibility of human beings" (119). The other development related to this was of an oral Torah. This was the result from the fact that the written Torah was not a complete law code (Friedman gives the example of the law regarding the procedure for divorce but no laws for the procedure of getting married). Therefore, what the rabbis had learned was seen as being passed down through the ages and therefore authoritative as well (120). There is more that can be said about this development but that is not my current purpose. Instead, it is enough to say that with the disappearance of God and the development of the rabbis the Torah was now seen to be in human hands.

Another development was that of Christianity. After several centuries of divine hiddenness, the New Testament tells a narrative in which "the deity once again manifests His presence visibly in human form" (126). In the book of John this is made explicit: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word

was with God, and the Word was God. [...] And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (1:1, 14).

Friedman writes: “Whether one understands the depiction of Jesus at any point in the Gospels to be as God, son of God, messiah, expression of God, or incarnation of God, one can say minimally that the narratives picture something of the divine in human form as never before” (127), and as such this is “the most immediate expression of the divine presence on earth since Sinai” (126). In the development of the theme of divine hiddenness the acts of God were replaced by the Word of God, and now in Christianity the Word, which is a lesser experience of the divine than the acts of God, has now become “the most intense experience of the divine” (128).

Furthermore, the idea of God becoming incarnate shifts the balance back from the human to the divine – “it is through this son of man that humans are believed to be redirected to God” (129).

Friedman returns again to the topic of monarchy to clearly show how this shift back to the divine has taken place:

In the Hebrew Bible the monarchy in Israel was a key step in this shift [...] making a human king instead of having only God as king. [...] Later the deity makes a covenant of *eternal* kingship with the house of David. Now, in the New Testament, Jesus is identified in the first verse as “the son of David” (Matt. 1:1; cf. Mark 10:47f), followed by a genealogy from Abraham to David to Jesus (1:2-16; cf. Luke 3:23-38) and reference to him as king of the Jews later (Matt. 2:2; 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19). The idea of the incarnation of the divine in the form of a man, joined to the idea that this man is in the royal line of David, pulls the carpet out from under the human institution of monarchy, and it returns God to the place of sole monarch. [...] When Jesus is identified as Christ/Messiah/Anointed (Mark 8:29) he is seen in the context of the monarchy that is established in the Hebrew Bible. (129-130)

Furthermore, the Word becoming flesh, is accompanied by accounts of miracles and signs, the likes of which have not occurred since earlier on in the Hebrew Bible narrative: “Coming to this [New Testament] narrative with a consciousness of the development of the hiding of the face of God, one is struck by the great rush of miracles that one encounters in the Gospels” (129). These are not the large scale public miracles as found in the account of Egypt or the sun standing still, but are more personal while still being observed by a great many people and in great quantity. Especially considering the

narratives of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, where there are no miracles, to about five centuries later, where there are many miraculous healings, casting out of demons and spirits, causing the blind to see, the mute to speak, and returning the dead to life. Jesus also multiplies loaves and fish to feed thousands, turns water to wine, calms the wind and sea, curses a fig tree and it withers, and walks on the sea (130-31). Jesus performs these miracles as a confirmation of his identity. Friedman also notes that these miracles are similar to the miracles performed by Elijah and Elisha which Friedman took to be “performed in humans’ most advanced control of divine powers in the Hebrew Bible.” These similar acts are now being attributed to Jesus and thus, “the New Testament accounts once again reverse the shift in the divine-human balance and transport it back toward the divine” (132).

However, as Friedman has tried to trace the divine-human struggle, we now see the culmination of the struggle in the death of Jesus: “the divine and the human have been in conflict since the former created the latter, and it is utterly consistent with that background that the first time that the deity places some aspect of Himself within the power of humans they act as they do. He says, in enormous generosity, ‘Father forgive them, for they know not what they do’” (133) (see Friedman 133-135 for an interesting discussion of Jesus last words on the cross and their relation to the theme of divine hiddenness). But with the resurrection comes another aspect in which “the execution turns out to be not a human victory but an element of a divine plan, the death turns out to be a divine sacrifice, the resurrection a channel to human salvation” (135).

Comparing these two religious developments, rabbis and Christianity, we see two different responses to the hiddenness of God as found in the Hebrew Bible, which is held as sacred to both religious traditions: “For Judaism the path back is Torah. For Christianity it is salvation through Jesus Christ.” There are also similarities between Christianity and Judaism: the stories are not primarily about miracles but both “appear to be more concerned with humans’ learning how to live, both with each other [...] and in relation to their God” (137). Both are also concerned with life after death – “salvation

in Christianity, and to ‘the world to come’ in normative Judaism.” Friedman thinks this development corresponds with the prevailing of divine hiddenness: “Possibly, in concentrating more on the afterlife, both Judaism and Christianity became more concerned with a realm in which divine authority still functioned completely. It was both a recognition of the hiding of the face of God and a yearning for contact with the divine” (138).

### **Application to the Argument from Divine Hiddenness**

This concludes a survey of Judeo-Christian scripture regarding divine hiddenness which is for the purpose of having a background context which may inform our expectations of divine hiddenness. Much more could be said about divine hiddenness in Scripture and how this has impacted religious tradition, teachings, and theology but Friedman’s narrower purpose has been to show “that in the core elements of Christianity and Judaism the sense of the disappearance of God already resides, and the perspective of the disappearance of God is already relevant, fitting, and enriching” (140). What this survey does imply is that divine hiddenness can be accepted within Christianity and Judaism. Indeed, some sort of divine hiddenness can be expected within these religious traditions. There are several applications to the argument from divine hiddenness which provide a theological motivation to question Schellenberg’s argument, as well as providing suggestions for components of a defense to respond to Schellenberg’s argument.

I will leave it to the reader to decide how to apply this survey of Scripture to the argument from divine hiddenness but here I will offer my suggestions. A defense can include the possibility that divine hiding can be a result of sin. Divine hiding has also been considered as a way for humans to be tested. However, the possible reasons of divine hiding extend much further than these two claims. As I have argued throughout the dissertation there is a need to consider the corporate nature of humanity as well as the role of responsibility that humans play in the evidence for God. The focus should not be only on the responsibility God has for providing evidence for belief, but also what responsibilities humans have

in being open to evidence and the role of receiving such evidence. It is also important to recognize that even in the face of clear evidence for God there may still be individuals who struggle in having a relationship with God. This corresponds with my important distinction between belief *that* God exists and belief *in* God. A defense should also seriously consider the ways that God has been perceived to communicate evidence for his existence. From this survey, evidence for God has been provided through acts of God, the word of God (scripture), and ultimately, from the Christian tradition, through Jesus. Despite such possible forms of evidence there are limits to be recognized: God's essence will still remain a mystery, but this does not interfere with human ability to recognize God's existence. To believe in God is not to claim to fully comprehend God or to be able to completely explain divine hiddenness. Therefore, a defense to the argument from divine hiddenness should be broad and open to divine purposes (which may be beyond our understanding), all while being considered with humility.

