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## Undermining the Axiological Solution to Divine Hiddenness

### Abstract:

Kirk Lougheed (2018) argues that a possible solution to the problem of divine hiddenness is that God might hide in order to increase the axiological value of the world. In a world where God exists, the goods associated with theism necessarily obtain. But Lougheed also claims that in such a world it's possible to *experience* the goods of atheism, even if they don't actually obtain. This is what makes a world with a hidden God more valuable than a world where God is unhidden (where it's impossible to experience atheistic goods), and also more valuable than an atheistic world with no God (and hence no theistic goods). We show that Lougheed never considers the comparison between a world where God hides and an atheistic world. We argue that it's possible for a person to experience theistic goods in a world where God does not exist, a possibility Lougheed never considers. If this is right it undermines his axiological solution to divine hiddenness. We conclude by showing how our discussion of the axiology of theism connects to the existential question of whether God exists; that is, we show that the axiological question is (partly) dependent on the existential question.

### I. Introduction

The axiology of theism is a small but growing literature which examines the axiological question of what value impact, if any, does (or would) God's existence have on the world. This is distinct from the more common questions of whether God exists, or whether it's rational to believe that God exists. There are two main answers to the axiological question. *Pro-theism* is the view that God's existence would, on balance, increase the value of the world. *Anti-theism*, on the other hand, is the view that God's existence decreases the value of the world. *Personal* judgements about the axiological question represent the value impact of God's (non-) existence for persons. *Impersonal* judgments about the axiological question are about the value impact of God's (non-) existence without reference to the value impact on persons. The answers can be further sub-divided to account for narrow and broad judgments. Narrow judgments represent just *one* feature of theism or atheism, while broad judgments concern the axiological consequences of theism or atheism *overall*. Klaas J. Kraay notes that other answers to the axiological question include neutralism (God's existence doesn't add or detract from the value of the world), quietism (the axiological question is in principle unanswerable), and agnosticism (we currently don't have the answer to axiological question) (Kraay 2018, 8). Pro-theism and anti-theism are by far the most widely discussed positions in the literature and they will be our focus in this project.

Some recent work in the axiology of theism makes connections to the existential question of whether God exists. For instance, Myron A. Penner and Benjamin H. Arbour argue that if someone endorses the problem of evil in defense of atheism, then she is rationally required to endorse pro-theism. This is because if she endorses the problem of evil then she is committed to the claim that certain world bad-making properties (e.g. gratuitous evil) cannot exist in a world with God (2018, 192-202). Likewise, Richard B. Davis and W. Paul Franks argue that Alvin Plantinga's response

to the logical problem of evil where he offers God's *possible* reasons for evil is incompatible with his recent pro-theistic theodicy where he offers God's *actual* reasons for evil (2018, 203-223). Finally, Michael Tooley (2018) and John L. Schellenberg (2018) both argue, albeit each for different reasons, that anti-theism entails atheism.

We will discuss Kirk Lougheed's recent attempt to connect the axiology of theism to the divine hiddenness argument for atheism (2017). He argues that a potential solution to divine hiddenness is that God might hide in order to increase the value of the world. Since God exists in such a world, Lougheed suggests that the goods associated with theism obtain in that world. Lougheed also claims that in such a world, the experience of atheistic goods obtain.<sup>1</sup> The experience of a good isn't as valuable as the actual obtaining of a good, but it still adds value to the world. This makes a world with a hidden God more valuable than a world where God doesn't hide because in such a world the atheistic goods cannot be experienced. Likewise, it's better than an atheistic world since, according to Lougheed, theistic goods don't obtain in that world. After outlining Lougheed's argument in greater detail, we argue that his solution either fails or is incomplete. We argue that the theistic goods Lougheed mentions, including an afterlife, divine intervention, and cosmic justice, can indeed be experienced in an atheistic world. This means an atheistic world may not be less valuable than a world where God hides. We conclude by discussing ways for Lougheed to avoid our objection.

## II. The Axiological Solution to Divine Hiddenness

John L. Schellenberg (1993, 2015) is the foremost defender of hiddenness argument against theism. According to Schellenberg, if God exists then God desires a personal and loving relationship with each of God's created creatures. This relationship is such a great good that God wouldn't deny it to a person who genuinely desires it. But Schellenberg argues that there are (probably) instances of non-culpable, non-resistant, non-belief. So, God (probably) doesn't exist.

Lougheed explains that goods which obtain on atheism include things like privacy, independence, and autonomy. He further argues that such goods can be *experienced* in a theistic world where God hides. Lougheed often focuses on the good of privacy, and more specifically, the good of mental privacy. In a world where God hides an individual could enjoy the *experience* of a high degree of mental privacy, even though she really has no such privacy because God exists.<sup>2</sup> Lougheed also assumes that theistic goods such as cosmic justice, an afterlife, and divine intervention obtain in a world where God hides. He explains the relevant axiological comparisons with the following chart:

| Possible World  | Ontology           | Phenomenology                                    | Value                                       |
|-----------------|--------------------|--|---|
| Atheistic World | God does not exist | Not Unhidden<br>God or<br>Possibly Hidden<br>God | Atheistic goods<br>and<br>No Theistic goods |

<sup>1</sup> It's worth noting that this doesn't include impersonal goods, since they may not have to be experienced.

<sup>2</sup> One possible downside to this is that it makes God a deceiver. However, it isn't clear to us that this type of deception really lowers the value of the world (e.g. deceiving the Nazis about the location of Jews isn't a bad-making feature of the world). There is more to say here, but we won't discuss this issue further; for the rest of this project we're going to assume that this type of deception doesn't entail a value drop.

|                 |  |   |  |
|-----------------|--|---|--|
| God is hidden   | God exists and is hidden from humans     | Not Unhidden God<br>or<br>Possibly No God | Experience of Atheistic goods and Theistic goods |
| God is unhidden | God exists and is not hidden from humans | Not atheism<br>or<br>Not Hidden God       | Theistic goods and No Atheistic goods            |

Lougheed is careful to explain that the mere experience of a good is not as valuable as the good actually obtaining. Famous objections to hedonism show that this is the case. For instance, we wouldn't choose to experience a wonderful life if it turns out that such a life was an entirely fabricated trick against us that the rest of world is in on (Nagel 1970). Even if this is so, contends Lougheed, a world where God hides is the only one where one set of goods obtains, along with the experience of another set of goods, and therefore, such a world is to be preferred.<sup>3</sup>

In the conclusion of his paper, Lougheed explores what he takes to be the strongest objection to his argument. This is the worry that worlds where God is unhidden are going to be significantly better than worlds where God is hidden. This is because many theistic goods only obtain (at least completely) in a world where God doesn't hide. Lougheed acknowledges there is a value drop, and suggests that more work exploring this world comparison remains to be done. However, Lougheed overlooks the value comparison between a world where God hides and a atheistic worlds. He never considers the possibility that a person can experience theistic goods in a world where God does not exist. If this is right, then it's another world where a set of goods obtains along with the experience of a set of goods. In the next section we argue that it's possible to experience theistic goods in an atheistic world, thereby undermining Lougheed's axiological solution to divine hiddenness.

### III. Why the Axiological Solution Fails

One way to criticize Lougheed's argument is based on his usage of the term 'experience'. For his argument to succeed Lougheed needs it to be the case that the value drop between the experience of a good and the obtaining of a good is insignificant: they need to be near equivalent with respect to their value impact on the world. But it's not clear Lougheed fully appreciates the force of the experience objections to utilitarianism leveled by Thomas Nagel and Robert Nozick, even though he acknowledges them. Imagine someone secretly installs hidden cameras in Sally's bathroom and live-streams her bathing on the internet. According to Lougheed, Sally is able to *experience* as much of the good as privacy as she did before the cameras were installed (as long as she never becomes aware of them), even though the good of privacy no longer obtains. But if 'experience' is a success term like 'perception', then Lougheed's use of term is wrong, if not absurd. Sally doesn't *experience* as much privacy as she did before the cameras were installed. Rather, she has the *apparent* experience of privacy. But her experience is misguided at best, or outright misleading at worst, and, therefore, Lougheed's solution to the problem of divine hiddenness is in jeopardy: if there is no (real, not merely apparent) experience of atheistic goods in hidden theistic world,

<sup>3</sup> In his words: "In light of this it...appears that Hidden Theistic World is the most rational world to prefer. One gets the complete set of goods of one ontology (theism) and the experience of another set of goods from another ontology (atheism). Neither Atheistic World nor Unhidden Theistic World can offer both." (2017: 7)

then the value of such worlds is not increased and divine hiddenness is without justification. It's not clear Loughheed does enough to address this concern.<sup>4</sup>

While this issue poses a serious threat to Loughheed's thesis, we will not pursue it here. Rather, we're going to assume with Loughheed that the experience of a good is (almost) equivalent to the obtaining of a good, and argue that this threatens to undermine his argument. That is, we will argue that even if we allow Loughheed this assumption that there are still serious problems with his argument. In particular, we will argue that the goods that he thinks are exclusive to theistic worlds are not, in fact, exclusive: the theistic goods that he mentions—the good of an afterlife, of divine intervention, and of cosmic justice—are not exclusive to theistic worlds, and this, we claim, threatens to undue his thesis. In the remainder of this section, we will outline how these theistic goods (and more) can obtain in an atheistic world and hence are not exclusive to theistic worlds.

### 1. *Afterlife*

Initially, it might appear that the good of an afterlife only obtains in a theistic world. However, if we assume with Loughheed that the experience of a good adds (significant) value to a world, then it appears that, via experience, the good of an afterlife can obtain in an atheistic world. To see why, let us consider near death experiences (NDEs). Here are a couple of short cases from Raymond Moody's classic *Life After Life* (1975):

- (a) *When I saw them pick up my body and take it out from under the steering wheel, it was just like a swoosh and I felt like I was drawn through a limited area, a kind of funnel...* (Moody 1975: 83)
- (b) *The last thing the light said to me, before I came back to my body, back to life, was—well, what it boiled down to was that he would be back.* (Moody 1975: 96)

In these cases, there is clearly an *experience* of an afterlife; the subjects that had these experiences no doubt felt as though they were in the afterlife.<sup>5</sup> Since NDEs are possible in an atheistic world, it follows that the good of an afterlife can be experienced in such a world, and hence the good of an afterlife is not exclusive to a theistic world. One might worry that NDEs are not experiences of an *afterlife*, since the subjects are not dead—they are, after all, called *near* death experiences. This objection, however, is innocuous since the subject of the NDE takes themselves to have died, and thus their experience is that of an afterlife; it appears to them that their bodies are no longer living.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the good of an afterlife can indeed obtain (through experience) in an atheistic world.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> We're grateful to an anonymous referee for bringing the force of this objection to our attention. The counterexample comes directly from them.

<sup>5</sup> We emphasize that we are not assuming that NDEs entail, or even are evidence for, an afterlife. Rather, we are only assuming that the testimony of the subjects is not fabricated—we are assuming that the subjects really had the experiences they say they had. For some looks at the plausibility, or evidential force, of NDEs, see e.g. Carol Zaleski (1987) and Kenneth Ring (1980).

<sup>6</sup> In other words: the experience seems to the subject as having occurred after their death, and thus their experience is of events that happen *after* the *life* of their body.

<sup>7</sup> Guy Kahane (2018) has recently observed that it's possible to get the actual good of an afterlife on atheism. However, as a critique of Loughheed, our project need only show that the *experience* of theistic goods is possible on atheism. Hence, we won't affirm the more controversial position that the actual theistic goods can obtain.

But perhaps this is too quick. The afterlife on (many forms of) theism is *everlasting* or infinite, and hence its corollary experiences are everlasting. But, NDEs are clearly not everlasting, and hence it might be objected that an NDE does not amount to the experience of an afterlife, and thus the good of an afterlife cannot obtain in atheistic world.

While this objection is serious, we think that there are (at least) two reasons for thinking that it does not undermine our claim. First, it seems to confuse the *experience* of a good with the *duration* of an experience of a good. That is, one can have a temporal experience that is phenomenologically identical to another experience that is never ending, everlasting. To make this clearer, consider two runners, R1 and R2. Suppose that R1 runs at pace P for 1 mile. Call her phenomenology while running at P ‘Q’. Suppose that R2 is on an everlasting run also at pace P, and hence also has Q. If this is the case, then it appears that R1 and R2 have the same experience, namely Q, and this is so despite their runs having different durations. And hence the fact that two experiences have different durations does not (necessarily) preclude their having the same phenomenology. But if that is the case, then the fact that the afterlife in a theistic world is everlasting does not preclude the experience of the afterlife obtaining in an atheistic world. In other words, while the experience of an afterlife is everlasting in theistic worlds, the experience is not *necessarily* everlasting, in which case it can obtain in a non-everlasting manner in atheistic worlds.

But suppose one rejects our above attempt to reconcile the finite nature of NDEs with the everlasting experience of the afterlife in theistic worlds. This brings us to our second reason for doubting that the above objection succeeds. The reason is that there are possible atheistic worlds in which an everlasting afterlife actually obtains. For example, T.J. Mawson (2018) observes that one way of discerning the axiology of theism is to compare an atheistic world and a theistic world that are as similar as possible in every respect save for God’s existence.<sup>8</sup> Thus, imagine that an atheistic world contains a simulacrum of everything in the theistic world. This means everything in the atheistic world is as similar as possible to the theistic world, without actually being that theistic world. This includes a simulacrum of God (i.e. a being as similar to God as possible without actually being God). While Mawson only discusses an afterlife with respect to theism, it’s clear that his view entails that an everlasting afterlife is possible on atheism. Not only that, it entails that an atheistic afterlife is possible that is as similar to a theistic afterlife as possible (without actually being identical with it).<sup>9</sup> Now, if Mawson is correct—and we think he is—then the experience of an (everlasting) afterlife is obviously possible in atheistic worlds: since, in such a world, the afterlife is actual, the experiences that accompany the afterlife would also be actual. But if an everlasting afterlife possibly obtains in atheistic worlds then so does the experience of the afterlife, and hence the good of the afterlife is not exclusive to theistic worlds (it can either actually obtain or obtain via experience), and the above objection does not succeed.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Mawson isn’t naïve about potential problems with attempting to make this is comparison (e.g. counterpossibles are only trivially true) but set this worry to the side. Likewise, ignore concerns about the identity of the indiscernibles.

<sup>9</sup> Mawson ultimately favours a form of (weak) pro-theism because he believes that we should prefer a world where God exists to world with a simulacrum of God who is necessarily at least slightly less than God, etc. But evaluating his conclusion isn’t important for our project here. The point we’re gleaning here is that theistic goods are possible in similar atheistic worlds.

<sup>10</sup> The objection discussed in this section is owed to a referee.

## 2. *Divine Intervention*

It also appears that the good of divine intervention can be experienced in an atheistic world. For example, consider the following two cases:

(c) *We were on holiday in Tenerife in 1981. I was rushed to the hospital with salmonella...Because we were desperate to get home, we left the hospital after two weeks and sat waiting at the airport for a flight home. It was the height of the holiday season. There [were] no flights. We prayed. All of a sudden a lady dressed in bright blue appeared with blonde hair tied up on top. She smiled at me and said 'You're in trouble aren't you?' and handed me four tickets for the family. My husband George was amazed. We looked up to thank her, but she had disappeared. We believed she was an angel... (Heathcote-James 2001: 86-87).*

(d) *Sally is religious and contracts a serious disease. She is circling the drain, and doctors give her a week to live. However, her health takes an unexpected turn, and her disease is suddenly cured. The doctors have no explanation of what happened, and Sally attributes her sudden recovery to God; she thinks that God has miraculously healed her.<sup>11</sup>*

What should be clear is that the subjects in the above cases *experienced* (even if falsely) divine intervention; they had an experience of (what they took to be) non-natural beings interacting with them, helping them, and performing miracles. This experience is no doubt possible in an atheistic world, and therefore it follows that it is possible for the theistic good of divine intervention to be experienced in an atheistic world.<sup>12</sup>

## 3. *Cosmic Justice*

We also believe that cosmic justice can be experienced in an atheistic world. Cosmic justice obtains just in case every person receives what she is due. For example, suppose that a person P robs another person R. In that case, P has wronged R, and the situation is unjust. The only way to attain justice for R is for her to be compensated and (perhaps) for P to be punished. So, supposing that P is caught, returns the money, repents, and is imprisoned for a sufficient amount of time, then justice has been obtained for R.<sup>13</sup> Now, for *cosmic* justice to obtain, this must happen on a large scale: *all* must be made right for *all* persons that have ever been wronged. What is key here is that after P is sentenced (etc.), R is *experiencing* justice; once things have been made right for P, she experiences justice. Furthermore, those who become aware of P's repentance and subsequent sentencing (etc.) too experience justice. Finally, P herself experiences justice after being sentenced and, indeed, while sitting in her jail cell: she has received her due and is aware of it.

What would experiencing justice on the cosmic scale be like? Presumably, it would amount to something like a feeling that all has been made right in the world—a feeling that everyone has

<sup>11</sup> This is a fictional example.

<sup>12</sup> Kahane also shows that this good can actually obtain on atheism (2018, 95-133).

<sup>13</sup> We do not pretend that these are the necessary and sufficient conditions for justice to obtain in this case.

received, or is in the process of receiving, her due.<sup>14</sup> One way to think about this is to consider the case of P and R above. In that case, all has been made right for both P and R. Now, to notice that this has occurred is to notice that justice has obtained. This ‘noticing’ is the phenomenal quality we are referring to as the experience of justice. For cosmic justice to be experienced by a person is merely for them to ‘notice’ (even if falsely) that everyone has received, or is in the process of receiving, her due. This experience can no doubt obtain in an atheistic world. For example, when meditating, one might come to have an experience (even if false) that all has been made right in the world—that all persons have received their due. Or, during a particularly euphoric NDE, one might have an experience of cosmic justice—it might seem to her all persons have received, or are in the process of receiving, their due.

Furthermore, there are possible atheistic worlds in which cosmic justice actually obtains: there are possible atheistic worlds in which everyone actually receives their due (e.g. a world in which only a few humans exist who always do what is right and who lives not tainted by moral or natural evil), and therefore there are possible atheistic worlds in which one has the feeling, experience, that everyone has received their due. To make this clearer, consider another example. Recall Mawson’s strategy of imagining an atheistic world and a theistic world that are as similar as possible without being identical to one another. In the atheistic world there a simulacrum of *everything* in the theistic world. This includes a being that is as similar to God as possible without actually being God. In this atheistic world it’s plausible to think that justice is experienced and also obtains in a way quite similar to theistic worlds. For instance, a being who is only slightly less than all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good will be able to ensure justice in much the same God ensures it. At the very least, it’s logically possible that this happens in an atheistic world. Thus, in such a world, cosmic justice, and the experience of it, actually obtains. And hence the experience of cosmic justice—and cosmic justice itself—possibly obtains in an atheistic world; it is not exclusive to theistic worlds.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4. *Relationship with God*

Finally, let us consider the good of having a relationship with God. In an atheistic world, God does not exist, so it should be clear that this good cannot actually obtain in such a world. However, it should be equally clear that the experience of such a relationship can obtain in an atheistic world. One need only visit her local church, mosque, or synagogue to see that there are many people who experience being in a relationship with God; there is abundant evidence that many persons have the experience that they have a relationship with God.<sup>16</sup>

To this clearer, consider Andrew Cullison’s (2010) response to the problem of divine hiddenness. He asks us to consider a person, Sally, who suffers from severe social anxiety. Any interaction

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<sup>14</sup> We have added the qualification “is in the process of receiving her due” on account of the traditional Christian view of hell, in which a person suffers an everlasting punishment (perhaps via separation from God) for her sins. Obviously, since the punishment is never ending, she has not received her due in full—if she had, then it would have ceased. Thus, the fact that she is in the (direct) process of receiving her due (which is never ending) is sufficient for cosmic justice to obtain, and hence the feeling that all are in the (direct) process of receiving their due is sufficient for the experience of cosmic justice to obtain.

<sup>15</sup> Again, Kahane demonstrates that this theistic good can obtain on atheism (2018, 95-133).

<sup>16</sup> For a concrete example, see Teresa of Avila (2010).

with other humans causes her to experience severe panic. Suppose Sally is chatting on a computer and believes she is communicating with an AI bot. She shares personal information with the bot likewise shares and responds to her. There is a sense in which Sally is developing a relationship with the bot, even though she doesn't believe the bot is real. However, suppose the bot is actually a real person. It turns out that a genuine relationship is being formed between Sally and another person, and also that this was made easier because Sally thought her interlocutor wasn't real. Cullison posits that God might hide because it's easier for certain individuals to form relationships with God if they disbelieve that God exists (2010). In the atheistic world we're considering the scenario would be reversed: Sally believes that a real person is on the other end even though it's actually just an AI bot. It's true that Sally isn't actually forming a relationship with a person in such a case, but she is having the *experience* of a relationship. Likewise, it's possible for someone to have the *experience* of a relationship with God even it turns out that God does not exist.

Thus, if our world is an atheistic world, then this theistic good has obtained via experience.<sup>17</sup> And, if our world is not an atheistic world, it is no doubt possible that there is an atheistic world in which such experiences occur. And hence, the good of having a relationship with God can obtain via experience in an atheistic world.

In this section, we have seen that the goods of an afterlife, divine intervention, cosmic justice, and of having a relationship with God can all obtain via experience in an atheistic world. The significance of this is that it renders Lougheed's solution to the problem of divine hiddenness a failure: a world where God hides is not more valuable than atheistic world.

#### IV. Objections

##### 1. *Lougheed's solution succeeds for hiddenness but fails to establish pro-theism*

Perhaps the most straightforward way for Lougheed to respond is by conceding that he has not shown that a world where God hides is the most valuable world, but insist that this does not undermine his solution to divine hiddenness. He could argue that even if anti-theism is correct, that God would still nonetheless actualize a world where God hides in order to create the most valuable possible world compatible with his existence;<sup>18</sup> if Lougheed is right and the experience of goods adds value to the world, then God would still have good reason to actualize a world where he is hidden. And hence divine hiddenness is explained: God allows such hiddenness to increase the value of our world.

This reply strikes us as being the most plausible route to take. After all, why should he maintain that his solution to divine hiddenness must also establish pro-theism? Of course, this does come at the cost of rendering his solution to divine hiddenness less significant: if his solution established pro-theism, it would have significance outside of the debate around hiddenness. Though, what it

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<sup>17</sup> From the fact that it could happen we infer it has happened. This because in our world there are *many* people who report having such experience. We take this to be uncontroversial.

<sup>18</sup> There might be worlds which are incompatible with God's existence (and hence impossible for God to create) which are more valuable than worlds with God. This is what Kahane (2018) appears to think, but this does not undermine this possible reply for Lougheed. For so long as the experience of atheistic goods would increase the value of a theistic world, God has reason to ensure such goods obtain.



does show (when conjoined with our arguments in the previous section) is that no good is exclusive to theistic or atheistic worlds.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the focus in the debate on the axiology of theism ought to focus not on goods that are exclusive to theism or atheism, but on (the, admittedly, more difficult project of evaluating) the value of particular goods.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. *Obtaining of theistic goods is more valuable than obtaining of atheistic goods*

One way for Lougheed to avoid our objection is to argue that the obtaining of theistic goods is more valuable than the obtaining of atheistic goods. If this is right, then the world where God hides (where the theistic goods obtain and the atheistic goods are experienced) is more valuable than the atheistic world (where the atheistic goods obtain and the theistic goods are experienced). This strategy might seem appealing because Lougheed need not deny our main arguments showing that theistic goods can be experienced in an atheistic world. In other words, Lougheed could admit we're right that such goods obtain in an atheistic world, but deny that such a world is more valuable than a world where God hides, or that significant value is gained in such a world.

What Lougheed needs is a principled reason for giving more value to hidden theistic world than atheistic world. Here are two possible reasons: (i) God's existence swamps all other values; (ii) real theistic goods are more valuable than experienced theistic goods. If Lougheed goes with the former, then his argument reduces to—or, at least, stands or falls with—the case for pro-theism. But this would render his solution far more controversial and far less unique. And hence we do not regard this as an attractive option for him. If he goes with the latter, then he must argue for the controversial thesis that while the experience of atheistic goods is not significantly less valuable than their actually obtaining, the experience of theistic goods are significantly less valuable than their actually obtaining. Perhaps this can be done, but as things stand, it does not appear very plausible to us.

## V. **Connections to the Existential Question**

Much of our paper focuses on the connection between the axiological question about God and divine hiddenness argument against the existence of God which answers the existential question. We believe that our discussion highlights further unexpected connections between these questions, well beyond our focus on divine hiddenness. It turns out that if our above discussion is correct, then the correct answer to the axiological question partly depends on the correct answer to the existential question. Consider the following:

1. If a world with a hidden God is more valuable than a world with no God, then the case for pro-theism is strengthened (all-else-being equal between the worlds).
2. If the goods of an afterlife, divine intervention, cosmic justice, and a relationship with God are not exclusive to theism (or if no goods are exclusive to theism), then the case for anti-theism is strengthened.

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<sup>19</sup> This, of course, assumes that all theistic goods can be experienced in an atheistic world (which we argued above) and that all atheistic goods can be experienced in (certain) theistic worlds.

<sup>20</sup> Or, it must be shown that the experience of goods is of no (or little) value.

Thus,

3. If God exists then the case for pro-theism is strengthened.
4. If God does not exist then the case for anti-theism is strengthened.

Thus,

5. The answer to axiological question is (partly) dependent on the answer to the existential question.

(1) is just a restatement of Lougheed’s original argument. The antecedent is true if Lougheed is right that the where God doesn’t hide is the only world where one set of goods obtains along with the experience of a set of goods. The consequent follows if the antecedent is true because God’s existence in the more valuable world supports pro-theism. Thus, (1) supports pro-theism. (2) follows from section III, in which we argued that certain goods thought to be exclusive to theism are not so; we showed that more goods can obtain in atheistic worlds than usually thought, and thus atheistic worlds are (or can be) more valuable than usually thought. Thus, the case for anti-theism is strengthened. In other words, it was thought that atheistic worlds only contain atheistic goods and hence such worlds are less valuable than theistic worlds in which, in addition to theistic goods, atheistic goods also obtain through experience. However, we have shown that atheistic worlds also contain theistic goods, and are therefore more valuable than usually thought. The following chart helps illustrate our point:

| Possible World Ontology | Phenomenology   | Value   |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Hidden God              | Not unhidden God<br>Possibly atheistic<br>Possibly hidden God | Theistic goods<br>Experience of atheistic goods |
| Atheistic World         | Not unhidden God<br>Possibly atheistic<br>Possibly hidden God | Atheistic goods<br>Experience of theistic goods |

Therefore, we will assume that premises (1) and (2) are true. Moving on, (3) follows from the truth of (1), while (4) follows from the truth of (2), and this entails (5), which is that the answer to the axiological question (partly) depends on the answer to the existential question. Therefore, to correctly answer the axiological question, at least if we’re answering it by relying on evaluating the theistic and atheistic goods mentioned here, we need to know the answer to the existential question of whether God exists.<sup>21</sup> In other words, we have shown that the axiological question brushes up against perennial philosophical questions about the existence and nature of God.

## VI. Conclusion

In proposing the axiological solution to divine hiddenness Lougheed (2017) never considers the value comparison between a world where God hides and an atheistic world. We argued that

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<sup>21</sup> We also need to know whether or not God is hidden.

Lougheed wrongly assumes that theistic goods can't be experienced in an atheistic world. Indeed, we demonstrated that theistic goods such as an afterlife, divine intervention, cosmic justice, and a relationship with God can all be *experienced* in an atheistic world. Perhaps Lougheed might concede that while his response to hiddenness succeeds, our arguments shows he fails to establish pro-theism. Likewise, without a principled reason on offer to show that the obtaining of theistic goods is more valuable than the obtaining of atheistic goods, it is arbitrary to favour a world where God hides over an atheistic world. Lougheed could argue directly against Section III by attempting to show that the theistic goods we mention can't be experienced in an atheistic world. But we're doubtful this strategy will succeed as the style of the arguments we use directly parallel his arguments showing atheistic goods can obtain in a world where God hides. Finally, it turns out the correct answer to the axiological question is (partly) dependent on the answer to the existential question. If God exists and is hidden then the case of pro-theism is strengthened. But if God does not exist then the case of anti-theism is strengthened. Thus, attempting to answer the axiological question brings us right back to the perennial philosophical questions about the existence and nature of God.

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