

## The Argument from Divine Hiddenness

Daniel Howard-Snyder  
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### I

Do we rightly expect a perfectly loving God to bring it about that, right now, we reasonably believe that He exists? It seems so. For love at its best desires the well-being of the beloved, not from a distance, but up close, explicitly participating in her life in a personal fashion, allowing her to draw from that relationship what she may need to flourish. But why suppose that we would be significantly better off were God to engage in an explicit, personal relationship with us? Well, first, there would be broadly moral benefits. We would be able to draw on the resources of that relationship to overcome seemingly everpresent flaws in our character. And we would be more likely to emulate the self-giving love with which we were loved. So loved, we would be more likely to flourish as human beings. Secondly, there would be experiential benefits. We would be, for example, more likely to experience peace and joy stemming from the strong conviction that we were properly related to our Maker, security in suffering knowing that, ultimately, all shall be well, and there would be the sheer pleasure of God's loving presence. As a consequence of these moral and experiential benefits, our relationships with others would likely improve. Thirdly, to be personally related to God is intrinsically valuable, indeed, according to the Christian tradition, the greatest intrinsic good. In these ways our well-being would be enhanced if God were to relate personally to us. Moreover, the best love does not seek a personal relationship *only* for the sake of the beloved. As Robert Adams rightly notes, "It is an abuse of the word 'love' to say that one *loves* a person, or any other object, if one does not care, except instrumentally, about one's relation to that object."<sup>1</sup> Thus, God would want a personal relationship with us not only for the benefit we would receive from it but for its own sake as well. So, if a perfectly loving God exists, He wants a personal relationship with us, or more accurately, every capable creature, those cognitively and affectively equipped to relate personally with Him.

But why suppose that He would want to develop such a relationship with capable persons *now* rather than merely later? Because, says J.L. Schellenberg, "A personal relationship with a loving God could...only enhance my well-being at any time at which I exist"; moreover, a personal relationship with God "would not detract from...my deepest well-being and the well-being of others."<sup>2</sup> So it seems that God would want to relate personally to us at each moment we were capable of such a relationship.

We must be careful what we infer from this. First, we must distinguish *a* desire from *an all-things-considered* desire. While God might have a desire to relate personally with us now, it does not follow that He has an all-things-considered desire to relate personally with us now. Since we have no reason to believe that God's desire to relate personally to us now would override any other consideration *He* would be aware of, we wrongly infer that He would do whatever He could to enter into an explicit, reciprocal relationship with us now.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Pure Love,' in *The Virtue of Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 188.

<sup>2</sup> *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993) 26.

Secondly, the best sort of love respects the choices of its object. Thus, God, who is perfect in love, would prefer not to coerce us to return His love. Moreover, were God to override our wills in this regard, our love of Him would be a sham, and He would know it. So God would prefer us to reciprocate His love on our own. But in that case, He must allow us to reject Him, and if we did, He may quite understandably withdraw from us given that He respects our choice and that He wants us to return His love on our own. If we reject God, it is our fault that we fail to relate personally with Him. The point here can be generalized. If we culpably shut ourselves off from God in *any* way, we cannot rightly expect Him to act on His desire to relate personally to us.

With these two points in mind, we seem to be led to the following proposition:

1. If a perfectly loving God exists, then for any human S at any time t, if S is capable of a personal relationship with God at t, S is at t in a position to relate personally to Him (i.e., can at t do so just by choosing), unless S is culpably in a contrary position at t or unless God has overriding reason to permit S to be inculpably in a contrary position at t.

We can go further here. What if we did not believe that God exists? Then we would not be in a position to relate personally to Him. For we cannot choose to enter into a relationship with God and hence cannot be in a position to relate personally with Him unless we believe that He exists. Moreover, since belief is involuntary, we must have grounds to believe that God exists and those grounds must render belief reasonable. For, as Michael Dummett puts it, "God is just and cannot wish or require anyone to believe that which there is no reason to believe."<sup>3</sup> We might add that since God is loving, and wishes to relate personally with us, He would provide grounds that rendered theistic belief reasonable, since if He did not, we might learn of it and therefore inculpably fail to believe God exists, and so fail to meet a precondition for our choosing to enter into a relationship with Him. It appears, then, that

1'. If a perfectly loving God exists, then for any human S at any time t, if S is capable of a personal relationship with God at t, S believes at t that God exists on the basis of reasonable grounds, unless S culpably fails to have theistic belief at t or unless God has overriding reasons to permit her to fail to have theistic belief at t.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> 'The Impact of Scriptural Studies on the Content of Catholic Belief,' in Eleonore Stump and Thomas P. Flint, eds., *Hermes and Athena: Biblical Exegesis and Philosophical Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993) 9. Dummett makes this point in a context completely different from ours.

<sup>4</sup> I have two worries about 1'. First, in a certain frame of mind, one might read 1' in such a way that it implies that God must have a reason to permit S--as opposed to anyone else--inculpably to lack theistic belief *at t*--rather than at some other time. Or to put it slightly differently, one might be tempted to read "God must have overriding reason to permit her [S] to fail to have theistic belief at t" in such a way that it would *not* be enough were God to have a perfectly *general* reason to permit inculpable nonbelief, a reason that picks out neither S nor t specifically. My worry is that the proponent of 1' might yield to the temptation just described. If I had the space, I would explain why this temptation should be resisted. However, I only have space to refer the tempted to Peter van Inwagen's essays, 'The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God,' especially 50-65, 'The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence,' 77, note 11, 'The Magnitude, Duration and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy,' 103-104. Page references are to these works as they are collected in van Inwagen's *God, Knowledge and Mystery: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995). See also his 'Reflections on the Chapters by Draper, Russell and Gale,' in Daniel Howard-Snyder, ed., *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996) 234-35.

My second worry is this: in 1', what is the content of the belief that *God* exists supposed to be? Obviously enough, the most charitable answer will leave 1' more plausible than competing answers. Here are two suggestions. First, we might look for a list of divine properties that are necessary and sufficient for the belief that God exists. If we go in this direction, we certainly don't want a list that is so exhaustive or sophisticated that 1' looks implausible

So, properly qualified, we rightly expect to reasonably believe that God exists.

In light of 1', we can understand why theists and nontheists alike have felt justified in expecting more from God in the way of making Himself manifest. For it is not obvious why many who earnestly seek Him frequently fail to find Him. And it is not obvious why those who understandably come to doubt His existence frequently fail to find the assurance that He could so easily give. Moreover, William Rowe observes that much of the suffering occasioned by horrific evil is due to the fact that it does not seem to serve any good purpose.<sup>5</sup> Even if we have no reason to think we could grasp God's purposes in permitting horrific evil,<sup>6</sup> were He to lovingly reassure us, this aspect of our suffering would be greatly diminished. More generally, Anthony O'Hear remarks that a "striking and surprisingly little stressed aspect of the whole problem of" God's dealings with His creatures "is the way [he] fails to manifest himself in the world."<sup>7</sup> On the face of it, then, given 1', we can understand why we expect more from God on this score, if He exists.

## II

If 1' is true, we might argue as follows:

2. Some people capable of relating to God personally inculpably fail to have theistic belief.
3. There is no reason for God to permit them to fail inculpably to have theistic belief.
4. So, there is no perfectly loving God.

Call this *The Argument from Divine Hiddenness*.<sup>8</sup>

Note that, although the argument is deductively valid, one might simply offer reasons that render 2 and 3, and hence 4, quite likely or reasonable to believe. Hence, the argument can be viewed not as purporting that inculpable nonbelief is incompatible with theism, but rather as showing that inculpable nonbelief renders theism unlikely or atheistic belief reasonable.

What should we make of the Argument from Divine Hiddenness? We might well question the argument for premise 1'.<sup>9</sup> Let us suppose, however, that premise 1' is true. Do we have good

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on that account alone. Alternatively, we might go for a functional description: the content of S's belief that God exists is that list of properties sufficient to get S interested in a personal relationship with Him. If we go this route, then, since the list of properties may well vary from person to person (even bizarrely), the content of the belief that God exists will likewise vary (even bizarrely). I'm not sure what to say about the matter. I'll proceed on the assumption that it can be ironed out. Note that if it cannot, it is unclear how the Argument from Divine Hiddenness can get started.

<sup>5</sup> 'William Alston on the Problem of Evil,' in Thomas Senor, ed., *The Rationality of Belief and the Plurality of Faith* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., many of the essays in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*.

<sup>7</sup> *Experience, Explanation and Faith* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984) 238.

<sup>8</sup> Much of section I relies on J.L. Schellenberg's excellent work noted above. I have, however, veered from his version of the argument at points that I think are worth veering from. See my review of his book in *Mind*, 104 (1995). What I have to say in the sequel applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to his particular version of the argument.

<sup>9</sup> For example, we might object to the move from 1 to 1' in the following fashion: "Even if we have no direct voluntary control over belief, we still have indirect voluntary control; therefore, we would be rightly held culpable for not believing that God exists even if we did not have reasonable grounds for believing." By way of reply, note that the premise is false since even if we can do things that will drastically increase the likelihood of our believing a proposition, it does not follow that we have control over our believing it. At best, we can put ourselves in a better position to believe it, but after we've done that, it is not up to us what happens. We may or we may not believe the proposition, depending in typical case on what we have to go on. As for the inference, even if we have indirect

reason to believe premise 2? As an antidote to hasty assent, it is useful to consider the variety of ways in which theistic nonbelief can be *culpable*. But even if many nonbelievers or even most nonbelievers fail to believe culpably, it seems reasonable to believe that it is likely that some or perhaps even a great many people capable of relating to God personally fail to believe He exists through no fault of their own. How could we be reasonably sure of this? Because some people seem to have investigated the matter in an inculpable fashion, and yet remain agnostic. How do we know this? Well, we may have been privy to their investigation, or they may tell us of it, and we may judge that it is exemplary. But how can we be reasonably sure that they are not self-deceived in their assessment of their search or culpable in some hidden way? Such questions are difficult to answer, but we are not completely in the dark. We might consider whether they tend to be honest and seekers of the truth, even when it reflects badly on them. We might consider whether they are determined to resolve the question of God's existence one way or the other, and continue to search for an answer in a variety of ways. If so, then it is significantly more likely that they would not neglect their investigative duties. Indeed, we might consider whether they *prefer* to believe that God exists more than not. For if those who prefer to believe fail to believe, they are less likely to have deceived themselves into nonbelief. Another relevant point is that experts are divided over whether God exists; the matter is highly controversial. If a proposition is controversial, it is more likely that some people who have inculpably investigated the matter will be uncertain about it. Of course, each of us will have to consider whether we have met or reliably heard of inculpable nonbelievers. But it certainly is not implausible; indeed, it would not be surprising at all if some people are inculpable nonbelievers.<sup>10</sup> At any rate, let us grant that premise 2, as it stands, is true.

### III

We are left with premise 3, the claim that there is no reason for God to permit those we have identified as inculpable nonbelievers to fail to have theistic belief. Is this true?

To answer that question, let's briefly consider what it would take for something to count as such a reason. Schellenberg asserts that a reason for God to permit inculpable nonbelief must involve "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 [inculpable] nonbelief, for the sake of which God would be willing to sacrifice the good of belief and all it entails".<sup>11</sup> But this seems false. If permitting inculpable nonbelief is *no worse than any other means* for some significantly greater good to obtain, the good can still figure in a reason to permit inculpable nonbelief even if permitting inculpable nonbelief is *not logically necessary* for that good to obtain. We cannot, therefore, reject a candidate reason because it involves a good that does not logically necessitate permitting inculpable nonbelief. Without argument, I stipulate that God would have a *prima facie* reason to permit inculpable theistic nonbelief if there is a good *G*

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voluntary control over our believings, it follows that we would *culpably* fail to believe that God exists whilst lacking reasonable grounds *only if* there is nothing epistemically defective about believing whilst lacking reasonable grounds. But certainly there *is* something epistemically defective about that. If I'm right on this point, perhaps we can affirm the move from 1 to 1' without even raising the issue of doxastic control. For surely, provided that one does not culpably fail in some other relevant respect, one does not culpably fail to believe that God exists unless one has reasonable grounds to believe He does.

<sup>10</sup> See Schellenberg, 65-69.

<sup>11</sup> Schellenberg, 84-85.

such that permitting inculpable nonbelief is no worse than any other way for *G* to be instantiated, and none of God's perfections would be shown defective were He to sacrifice the good of theistic belief (and all it entails) for the sake of *G*.<sup>12</sup>

Now, for reasons I haven't the space to get into here, I tend to think that, given our unaided natural cognitive powers alone, we do not reasonably believe of any good that permitting inculpable nonbelief is no worse than any other way for that good to be instantiated. If I'm right about this, then, given our unaided natural cognitive powers alone, we *don't* reasonably believe of any candidate reason that it *is* a reason for God to permit inculpable nonbelief. (Note: This concession favors the proponent of the Argument from Divine Hiddenness.) Having said that, let me hasten to add that we often can tell whether permitting inculpable nonbelief is no worse than any other way *we know of* for some particular good to be instantiated, or at least we cannot see how permitting inculpable nonbelief is any worse than any other way *we know of* for that good to be instantiated. Suppose that with respect to some good *G* (i) we cannot see how permitting someone to lack theistic belief is any worse than any other way we know of for *G* to be instantiated and (ii) we know of no other considerations that would militate against God's perfections were He to permit inculpable nonbelief for the sake of *G*. In that case, let us say that, *for all it is reasonable for us to believe*, *G* is a *prima facie* reason for God to permit inculpable nonbelief. Now, suppose that we discover a good which is such that, for all it is reasonable for us to believe, it is a *prima facie* reason for God to permit inculpable nonbelief. In that case, it would not be fitting for us to believe that there is no reason for God to permit inculpable nonbelief (i.e., premise 2). So, then, can we think of a good of the relevant sort?

#### IV

Let us begin by considering the ways inculpable nonbelievers might be disposed to respond to God upon coming to believe that He exists. There are basically three responses: rejection, complete indifference, and reciprocation. Interesting variations on these will prove to be important later. For now, however, I want to make three preliminary observations about them. First, a general point. We ordinarily think that for one to be disposed to do something is for one to be very likely to do it under certain circumstances. Of course, the probabilities here vary, and so we can think of a person as being more or less likely to do something in the designated circumstances, and hence we can think of their disposition to do it as stronger or weaker. A maximally strong disposition would leave a person powerless to choose otherwise in the designated circumstances whereas in the more ordinary case a disposition to do something does not render a person powerless to choose otherwise. With this distinction in mind, we can draw a line between a disposition to respond to God in a certain way that leaves one powerless to choose otherwise and a disposition to respond in that way that leaves one able to choose otherwise. Second, instead of focusing on why God might permit inculpable nonbelief in someone disposed to respond to Him in one of these ways, let us focus on why God might want to refrain from entering into a personal relationship with someone who is disposed to respond to Him in one of these ways. For if we can think of a *prima facie* reason for God to refrain from entering into a personal relationship with someone, then we will have found a *prima facie* reason for God to refrain from meeting those conditions necessary for such a relationship to commence.

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<sup>12</sup> We need to think of goods fairly broadly here. The avoidance of bad states of affairs and the following of deontological prescriptions can count as types of goods.

Finally, we need to remember that we are looking for a *prima facie* reason for God to permit inculpable nonbelief *for a time*--not forever, or just any length of time, but, say, a significant portion of a human life, perhaps even the whole of it. (And let us not forget that, according to classical Christian theism, humans survive their physical deaths and that, from the point of view of eternity, a human lifetime is relatively short.) So then, our question is this: for each of the possible responses to God, why might He refrain, for a time, from entering into a personal relationship with an inculpable nonbeliever who is disposed to respond in that way upon coming to theistic belief?<sup>13</sup>

Let us begin by considering the inculpable nonbeliever who is disposed to reject God upon coming to believe that He exists. In line with my first point above, we might think of someone who is constituted in such a way that she is powerless to do anything but reject God upon coming to believe, or, alternatively, we might think of her as very strongly inclined to reject God under those conditions. Either way, however, we are to think of her as being so disposed through no fault of her own. At first glance, this option seems a bit farfetched. How could an inculpable nonbeliever be disposed to reject God upon coming to believe that He exists? To the extent that we should think someone is an *inculpable* nonbeliever, shouldn't we think they would *not* reject God upon coming to believe that He exists? While it is a controversial matter, I think we can see in some portion of psychological space the sort of inculpable nonbeliever in question. For example, suppose that due to social influences over which I never had any control, I now prefer to run my life on my own, and suppose that this preference is more deeply rooted in me than any other. Then, upon coming to believe that God exists, and seeing that to reciprocate that love is closely related to obeying Him unreservedly, I will (at least) very likely reject Him. Alternatively, suppose that, through no fault of my own, I now find myself severely embittered by an abusively strict religious upbringing or the suffering of those most dear to me. Such bitterness could become so obsessive and self-destructive that upon meeting God face-to-face, so to speak, I would spit on Him if I could. And, perhaps, there are other inculpably acquired defects that would at least strongly dispose one to reject God upon coming to believe that He exists.

Could God, who loves even such people as these, have a reason to refrain from entering into a personal relationship with them, at least for a time? It seems so. What benefit would there be for me if God brought it about that I believed that He existed when I am such that, face-to-face, it is at least very likely that I *would* reject Him? Indeed, if He brought it about that I believed, I would probably only confirm myself in my defective disposition by actually rejecting Him. This would not be good, to say the least; it would be especially bad since I was so ill-disposed through no fault of my own. (Remember, we are thinking of *inculpable* nonbelievers.) In that case, God's failure to supply reasonable grounds for me to believe that He exists would be an act of mercy, a gracious response to one in such an unfortunate state.

Do we know of a better way for God to bring about the good in question--that the ill-disposed inculpable nonbeliever does not confirm himself in that state by actually rejecting God, thereby making it less likely that he becomes better disposed in the future? Or, do we know of any other considerations that would militate against God's perfections were He to permit inculpable

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<sup>13</sup> Pascal, Butler, Kierkegaard, Hick and Swinburne (among others) have answered this question in ways importantly different from the way in which I wish to answer it. My answer, however, is most like Hick's.

nonbelief for the sake of the good in question? I believe we do not.<sup>14</sup> If I am right, then for all it is reasonable for us to believe, the good in question constitutes a *prima facie* reason for God to permit inculpable nonbelief, for a time, in those who are ill-disposed toward Him.

What about *indifferent* inculpable nonbelievers? Here we are to imagine someone who is either strongly inclined to (or powerless to do anything but) respond indifferently upon coming to believe that God exists. They would not be hostile, or even skeptical. It is just that, in virtue of causes over which they never had a choice, they are so constituted that they do not care whether there is a God. It just does not matter to them. So far as I can see, what I said above about ill-disposed inculpable nonbelievers applies to indifferent inculpable nonbelievers.

But what about *well-disposed* inculpable nonbelievers, those who are strongly inclined to reciprocate God's love upon coming to theistic belief, or who are unable to do otherwise? Here we might usefully separate four cases along two dimensions: the strength of the disposition, and the responsibility one has for being in that state.

	responsible	not responsible
very likely to reciprocate, but can choose otherwise	1	2
powerless to do anything but reciprocate	3	4

Type-1 inculpable nonbelievers are very likely to reciprocate God's love upon coming to theistic belief, they are responsible for being so well-disposed, and they have it within their power to refrain from reciprocating God's love upon coming to theistic belief. Type-2 inculpable nonbelievers are very likely to reciprocate God's love upon coming to theistic belief and they have it within their power to reject God's love but they had no say in becoming so well-disposed. Type-3 inculpable nonbelievers are powerless to do anything but reciprocate God's love upon coming to theistic belief although they are responsible for being in that state. Type-4 inculpable nonbelievers are powerless to do anything but reciprocate God's love upon coming to theistic belief and they had no say about the matter.

Let us begin with the type-4 inculpable nonbeliever. We might imagine a bright young teenager who through (surprisingly) effective parental and social training is so strongly inclined to love God upon coming to believe that He exists that she could not do otherwise, but who, for one reason or another, does not yet believe. Now, given that God wants to relate personally with her and that she will reciprocate His love upon coming to believe that He exists, it seems initially

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<sup>14</sup> One might object: "Of course we do. God could bring about the good in question by simply preventing anyone from ever becoming so twisted and ruined." There are well-known direct answers to this objection. I shall not give them. Rather, I shall simply rule the objection a foul, since it is not in accordance with the rules of the present discussion. The reason why it fails to accord with the rules is that it conceives of the Argument from Divine Hiddenness in a way that its proponents do not intend it, namely, as hanging on the argument from evil. Proponents of the Argument from Divine Hiddenness wish to develop and defend their argument independently of other worries about the human condition.

odd to suggest that He might refrain from bringing it about that she believes. But even here I think we can see a *prima facie* reason for God to postpone entering into a personal relationship with her, and hence for refraining from bringing it about that she believes that He exists, since she is *not* responsible for being fixed in her loving stance toward God. She never had a say about whether she would be the sort of person who, upon coming to believe that God exists, would reciprocate His love. This is crucial. For, all else being equal, a state of affairs in which one reciprocates God's love but never ever had a say in the matter is far worse than a state of affairs in which one reciprocates His love and did have a say about it. In that case, God might well prefer her to *confirm* her stance toward Him, on her own, *prior* to entering into a personal relationship with her. By allowing her to do this, repeatedly, in the face of contrary desires and competing allegiances, God allows her to own that stance, to make it genuinely hers, even though she acquired it involuntarily.

My present point about confirmation has wider applicability. I shall argue that it--or, more accurately, something quite close to it--applies to our other cases. Consider type-1 inculpable nonbelievers, those who would be very likely to reciprocate God's love upon believing that He exists and who had a significant say about being in that state. In this connection, we might imagine a woman who has cultivated, over many years, her attraction to the stories and propositions of some particular faith, say, the Christian faith, and now finds herself affirming uniquely Christian values, wanting to believe that the Christian God exists, going out of her way to be open to evidence for and experience of Him but, due to what she sees as telling evidence against theism or the attractiveness of a naturalistic worldview, remains agnostic.<sup>15</sup> Alternatively, we might imagine a man who, through repeated wise and good choices has made himself into one who would very likely love God upon believing, even though he does not conceive of himself in those terms but rather as one who loves the Good as such.

It may appear ludicrous to suggest that God could want people such as these to confirm their disposition toward Him. Two worries lurk here. First, if an inculpable nonbeliever is responsible for being well-disposed, then she *does not need* to confirm herself in that disposition. She has already done that. Second, even if there is some sense in which she may need to confirm her disposition toward God, there is no value in her doing so *independently* of theistic belief. In the case of the type-4 inculpable nonbeliever, we can see the value of confirming that stance: if she does not, then, upon believing, she will love God but her love will be something about which she never ever had a choice. But the inculpable nonbeliever we are now considering has already had a choice, and she has made choices that have resulted in her being well-disposed toward God. Moreover, her disposition to love God is not so strong that she would be unable to refrain from reciprocating God's love were she to come to believe. Therefore, in her case, confirmation independent of theistic belief may well seem pointless. By responding to these worries, I shall try to display how God's desire for inculpable nonbelievers to confirm their disposition to love Him might nevertheless be (for all we reasonably believe) a *prima facie* reason for Him to postpone a personal relationship with them, even though they were responsible for being so well-disposed and even though it would remain in their power to refrain from loving Him.

I shall treat the first worry first. There are two dimensions along which one might confirm one's disposition to love God, even if one is largely responsible for being so well-disposed.

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Audi describes such a person in 'The Dimensions of Faith and the Demands of Reason,' in Eleonore Stump, ed., *Reasoned Faith* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).



First, though we may be responsible for being disposed to love another, the love to which we are disposed may be deficient in a variety of ways. Suppose that I have nurtured the love I now have for my wife, that I have brought it about by choice in the face of competing desires and allegiances to what it is today. That love may, nevertheless, fail to be what it should. Even if I have had a significant say in what it has become, it may still be a tender reed, too easily moved by winds it ought easily to resist. It may not have a fittingly deep grip on me. Alternatively, its influence may be restricted to some small quarter of my psyche, never penetrating those attitudes, emotions and dispositions that constitute the springs of much of my waking behavior. Or it may not be as passionate or longsuffering as it should be.

In a similar fashion, the love to which the inculpable nonbeliever is well-disposed may not be fitting for its object. Even if I am responsible for being disposed to love God, the love to which I am disposed may nevertheless be more fittingly centered in my character so that, upon believing, it exerts a more stable influence, permeates and shapes more of my attitudes, emotions, decisions and behavior, and is more passionate, enduring and trusting.

Second, even if one is disposed to love another and is responsible for being so disposed, that disposition may be founded on the wrong sorts of motivations, and it may never have been a matter of choice that those motivations were operative. This is an especially live possibility in the case of being disposed to love God.<sup>16</sup> For if there is a God, there is a being who possesses great wisdom, power and knowledge. And were we to come to believe that a being like this exists, we quite understandably might be strongly attracted to Him since in being on His side, so to speak, we would be on the side of unparalleled power and thereby increase the scope of our own power. If this is the only end that inclines us toward Him, or if it significantly shapes our present disposition to love Him, then we are well-disposed toward Him for the wrong reason.

Perhaps this second sort of phenomenon can be seen more clearly if we reflect on the following analogy. Suppose I am attracted to a woman. She is intelligent, kind-hearted, witty, athletic, sexy and just plain fun to hang out with. I begin to court her. She responds favorably; eventually we marry. Now suppose that over time or through therapy, I learn that my affection for her and my desire to be her mate have been, for the most part, motivated by an unconscious desire to benefit from her connections to people who can advance my interests. Suppose this desire is not the result of choices I have made. Even so, I should be disappointed with myself for I am not as I ought to be. I am defective. And I should want my motivations for loving her to be changed. Were she to discover this embarrassing truth, she also would be disappointed and hurt. For even though she would acknowledge that my love for her is a good thing--she does not want me to be ill-disposed toward her or indifferent!--she rightly prefers that my love spring from a purer source.

Perhaps the same goes with God and the inculpable nonbeliever in question. If the love with which I am disposed to love God would largely stem from a desire to increase my own power, then although I may choose to love Him upon coming to theistic belief, my love would not be properly motivated. I would love Him for the wrong reason. It is preferable that this motivation play only a very minor role, if any at all, in forming and sustaining my love of God. What should stand front and center is a love of the Good, and hence an attraction to God's moral beauty. For it

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<sup>16</sup> What follows in this and the next two paragraphs is inspired by Eleonore Stump, who credits St. Thomas Aquinas. See her 'Faith and Goodness,' in G. Vesey, ed., *The Philosophy in Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

is intrinsically better that my love of God should spring from an attraction to His goodness rather than from a desire to increase my own power. And it is instrumentally better too. For if I am primarily attracted to God's goodness I will be more inclined to recoil from my own sinfulness and I will be more apt to want to be holy, whereas if I am attracted to Him by a desire to increase my own power I will encourage what is in me a source of much sin. It would be far better if the love to which I am disposed were to flow from an attraction to His goodness. Of course, were I to become aware of such base motivations in myself, I could set about to change them.<sup>17</sup>

Now to the second worry. Is there some value in the inculpable nonbeliever shaping the love to which she is disposed *independently of belief that God exists*? I think so; at least there could be. Suppose the inculpable nonbeliever in question is deficient in one or all of the ways I described. If God brings it about that she believes, then, given her disposition, she will very likely love God, but her love will not be as it should be. It should have a more central place in her character, or be more passionate or considered, or flow from a purer source. Perhaps, then, God prefers to postpone entering into a personal relationship with her in the hope that she will learn of her defects and change, perhaps influencing her in subtle but respectful ways so that the love to which she is disposed to love Him will be more fitting than it is otherwise likely to be.

To see the point of the suggestion here, recall my earlier illustration. Suppose the woman I love learned of the defective source of that love before I began to court her instead of after we were married. Nevertheless, suppose, she loves me, and longs for intimacy and companionship with me. Should we think any less of her if she initially turned back my advances and ignored my overtures, at least for a time? Should we think any less of her if she held out for a more preferable state of affairs, namely one in which my love springs from a more admirable source? I think not. Or suppose she knew in advance that it was very likely that I would be so obsessed with doing philosophy that, after the initial thrill was gone, I would virtually leave her in abject loneliness. Should we think that she was irrational or that her love for me was defective, even *slightly* defective, if she failed to reciprocate my love for her in any explicit fashion? Again, I think not.<sup>18</sup>

For similar reasons, God might refrain from entering into a personal relationship with the sort of inculpable nonbeliever in question. Even if I have made myself such that I would very likely love God if I believed, I am so disposed by impure motives and God rightly prefers a more

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<sup>17</sup> There are other possibilities here. For example, if the love with which I am disposed to love God would stem from a deep-seated fear of divine reprisal, then, upon coming to believe that He exists, I will love Him; but it would be far better if my love were not motivated by fear but by an attraction to God's goodness. This is not to say that one ought not to fear divine reprisal; rather, it is to say that it would be far better if one's love of God were not motivated by such fear. Consider an analogy. Even though parents prefer that their young children do not love them out of fear, they may well want them to fear being grounded. Reflection on what Christ called "the first and greatest commandment" may well reveal other respects in which one's love of God may be more appropriate for its object. See Matthew 22:34-40.

<sup>18</sup> One might urge that, in these cases, her love would be defective *if* she knew that I had a strong second-order desire to improve the source of my love for her or to improve the love to which I was disposed. Naturally, if I had such a desire, I would have to be aware of these defects in myself and I would have to *acknowledge* them as such. I grant that it is much more plausible to think her love would be defective in this case were she to fail to reciprocate explicitly my love for her. And I am willing to say the same for God. If I am disposed to love God upon coming to believe that He exists, but I am so disposed for the wrong reason or the love to which I am disposed is unfitting, then, if I acknowledge these defects and strongly desire to be rid of them, a perfectly loving God would not have the sort of reason for remaining hidden that I have been sketching here. Of course, it is quite difficult to tell whether there are any such people. See Objection 4 and my reply to it below for more on this point.

admirable source of my love for Him. Alternatively, I am disposed to love Him with a love that is unfitting in some way, and God rightly prefers to be loved by me with a more fitting love. In either case, given my defects, God would not get what He preferred if I came to theistic belief.

I do not have the space here to show how the reasons for God to permit type-1 inculpable nonbelief applies to type-2 and -3 inculpable nonbelief. Without argument, I will assume they do.

Do we know of any better ways for God to bring about the goods I have laid out? Alternatively, do we know of any other considerations that would militate against God's perfections were He to permit inculpable nonbelief in those well-disposed toward Him for the sake of the goods I have mentioned? I know of none. If I am right, then for all it is reasonable for us to believe, the goods I have mentioned constitute *prima facie* reason for God to permit inculpable nonbelief, for a time, in inculpable nonbelievers who are well-disposed toward Him.

It seems that we can think of *prima facie* reasons for God to permit inculpable nonbelief in those who are ill-disposed toward Him, those who are completely indifferent, and those who are well-disposed toward Him. But what about the inculpable nonbeliever who possesses an array of conflicting attitudes and emotions, pulling him this way and that, who is about as likely to love God as to reject Him upon coming to believe He exists? Well, either God is sure about how such a person would respond or He is not. Suppose He is sure. Then either He is sure he would reject Him, or He is sure he would be indifferent, or He is sure he would reciprocate His love. Depending on which, the reasons I have already mentioned might well apply. On the other hand, suppose that God is not sure how the conflicted inculpable nonbeliever would respond were he to believe God exists. Then there is a grave risk in his coming to theistic belief. For if he comes to believe that God exists and then spurns His love, he is well on his way to reinforcing an extremely harmful disposition. In that case, the better part of wisdom may well be to let him form and/or confirm in himself a deeply entrenched disposition to love God.

So far as I can see, nothing we reasonably believe rules out there being *prima facie* reason for God to permit inculpable nonbelief. While this does not suffice for us to believe that premise 3 of the Argument from Divine Hiddenness is false, it should suffice to make us suspicious about whether it is true. We would do well, therefore, to refrain from believing it.

## V

On several occasions friends have objected to my arguments. Responding to them will elucidate and, I hope, strengthen my case.

*Objection 1.* "I find your arguments completely convincing. Indeed, they are so good I'm afraid they prove too much. You've solved the problem of theistic *nonbelief*, but now you have the problem of theistic *belief*! For if your argument works, God should prevent theistic belief since nonbelief has such overwhelming benefits. But, as you know, theists exist. Thus we have a new argument: there are believers, so there is no God."

*Reply.* The objection misconstrues both what I aimed at and what (I claim) I succeeded in doing. I neither tried to give nor succeeded at giving *incontrovertible* reasons for God to permit theistic nonbelief. At best, I only gave *prima facie* reasons. Those reasons are compatible with there being some general policy or some reasons specific to particular persons that would rightly lead God to bring some or perhaps many nonbelievers to theistic belief.

*Objection 2.* "Theistic belief does not render one immune to contrary desires and competing allegiances. The wiles of the devil, as St. Paul would put it, are no less enticing to believers than

to nonbelievers. And self-deception as well as reasonable doubt are live possibilities for believers as well as nonbelievers. Thus, your type-1 inculpable nonbeliever, the one who is responsible for being favorably disposed toward God, would have a choice to confirm that disposition *even if* he believed that God exists. It isn't right for God to sacrifice the good of theistic belief (and all that it entails) for the sake of a good that could just as well be instantiated if one believed that God exists. So, according to the conditions you laid down, you have not shown that allowing one to confirm on one's own one's disposition to love God is a *prima facie* reason for God to permit inculpable nonbelief in those who are responsible for being favorably disposed toward God."

*Reply.* The objection misrepresents my position regarding type-1 inculpable nonbelievers. We need to distinguish clearly confirming a disposition to love God, on the one hand, and shaping the nature of the love to which one is disposed, on the other. I said that the opportunity for confirmation may well be a *prima facie* reason for God to permit inculpable nonbelief in one who is powerless to do anything but reciprocate God's love upon coming to theistic belief and who is *not* responsible for being so disposed (type 4 in my taxonomy). I did *not* say that the opportunity for confirmation may well be a *prima facie* reason for God to permit inculpable nonbelief in one who *is* responsible for being well-disposed toward Him (type 1 in my taxonomy). Rather, I argued that, with respect to her there is a very great good that would not be realized if God brought it about that she believed--namely, the good of His being loved more fittingly by her than He is otherwise likely to be, or, alternatively expressed, the good of her loving Him more fittingly than she is otherwise likely to love Him. If the love of God to which the inculpable nonbeliever in question is disposed is defective in the ways I have sketched, then it is *false* that God would be loved more fittingly than He is otherwise likely to be loved were she to believe that He exists.

*Objection 3.* "But in that case, you portray God as demanding that the inculpable nonbelievers in question be disposed to love Him perfectly before He brings it about that they believe He exists. While such a demand might well come from a perfectionist with a high opinion of himself, it could not possibly come from one perfect in love. Hence, your reason is not a *prima facie* reason for God to permit inculpable nonbelief after all."

*Reply.* One can be disposed to love God more fittingly than one is otherwise likely to be disposed without being disposed to love God perfectly. I only argued that, before God makes Himself known to inculpable nonbelievers who are responsible for being well-disposed toward Him, He might rightly desire (I never said "demand") that the love to which they are disposed be more fitting than it is otherwise likely to be. This does not imply that He desires that the love to which they are disposed be perfect before He manifests Himself to them.

*Objection 4.* "I, the proponent of the Argument from Divine Hiddenness, agree with all that you have thus far said. But far from refuting my case, you have shown exactly how I need to reconstruct it so as to get past your objection. As it stands, premise 2 of the argument says that some people capable of relating to God personally inculpably lack theistic belief and premise 3 says that there is no reason for God to permit that. You have shown me that premise 2 should have said that some people capable of relating to God personally *and who are responsible for being disposed to love Him and whose love is sufficiently fitting* inculpably lack theistic belief, and premise 3 should have said that there is no reason for God to permit inculpable nonbelief in someone like *that*."

*Reply.* While this new version of the argument certainly gets past my objections, it comes at a steep price. While we might have good reason to think that someone is neither ill-disposed nor indifferent toward God, it is much more difficult to determine whether one has had a significant say in being well-disposed toward Him. But suppose we can tell that. Nevertheless, we would not have reason to believe the new premise 2 unless we had reason to believe that such a person had no need to improve the love of God to which she was disposed. Here, I submit, we are clearly out of our league. Even if there were such people, we don't have what it takes to tell whether there are any. This is one of the key differences between the Argument from Divine Hiddenness and the best versions of argument from evil. While, in the words of Ivan Karamazov, it is "unanswerably clear" that innocent children suffer horribly, it is unanswerably *unclear* whether the love to which any well-disposed inculpable nonbeliever is disposed is sufficiently fitting for its object.

*Objection 5.* "Central to your argument is the claim that God would prefer those capable of personal relationships with Him to have had a choice about reciprocating His love. This you infer on the grounds that, all else being equal, a state of affairs in which one loves God but never ever had a choice about the matter is far worse than a state of affairs in which one loves God and had a choice it. But why should I believe that? It isn't just obvious."

*Reply.* I have no argument from more obvious premises to dispel such doubt. However, for my own part, reflection on pairs of cases from both third- and first-person perspectives seems to reveal that it is true.

One case we might dwell on is the story of Ruth and Naomi. Her husband and sons suddenly dead, Naomi finds herself with two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, in Moab, where she sojourned from Judah ten years earlier to avoid famine. Bitter and full of despair, she packs to return to Judah then bids Orpah and Ruth to stay in their homeland.

And they lifted up their voice, and wept: and Orpah kissed her mother in law [goodbye]; but Ruth clave to her. And Naomi said, "Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after her." And Ruth said, "Entreat me not to leave thee: for wither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me."

When Naomi saw that Ruth had set herself to go with her, she stopped urging her to follow her sister. Now suppose that Ruth was driven by an irresistible lifelong fear of loneliness to commit herself to Naomi; or suppose that, due to her native cognitive endowment, she was compelled to stay with Naomi by a practical syllogism she could not resist. Fill in the story how you'd like, but let it be the case that Ruth *never ever* had a choice about responding in selfless commitment to Naomi. Doubtless, Ruth's loving response to Naomi would, even then, be a good thing. Yet, is it not clear that had Ruth had a choice about giving herself to Naomi as she did, or had she had a choice about whether she would be the sort of person who would be able to give of herself in this way, her commitment to Naomi would have been much more admirable, much more noble, much more honorable?

Perhaps a first-person perspective on the matter will be more revealing. How do you prefer to be loved by those whom you want to love you? To be sure, that reason would dictate that they love you, or that you are so overwhelmingly desirable to them that they could not help but love you--these are heady propositions, reflecting rather well on you! But, flattery aside, would you not prefer them to have a choice about loving you, or at least to have had a choice about whether

they would be the sort of person who would love you? I certainly would, even at the great risk of not being loved by the one whom I desire to reciprocate my love. This suggests, to me at any rate, that a state of affairs in which one loves and had a choice at some time about whether one would love is much more valuable than a state of affairs in which one loves but never ever had a choice about the matter.

*Objection 6.* "You focus on individual nonbelief. But there is more to explain than the nonbelief of individuals. What about the fact that there are large social groups none of whose members have heard of the theistic God? Take, for example, the Chinese race, in the period from the beginning of their history until the Christian middle ages, during which no Chinese even heard of a theistic God. Your *prima facie* reasons for why God permits nonbelief in individuals does not explain why He would permit nonbelief in whole races for thousands of years."

*Reply.* Indeed, the *prima facie* reasons I sketched do not explain why God would permit whole races to lack theistic belief. But they do explain why God might permit each individual person in such a race to lack theistic belief. For each person within such a race will be disposed to respond to God upon believing that He exists in one of the ways I have addressed. I shall resist the temptation to infer that, therefore, God has a reason to permit an entire race of such people to lack theistic belief. It is an interesting question why God would reveal Himself clearly to the members of some races but not at all to others. Perhaps another argument from divine hiddenness could be constructed which appeals, not to individual nonbelief, but to what we might call *cultural* nonbelief. I have not tried to address that argument.<sup>19</sup>

## VII

I want to make three closing observations about my case against the Argument from Divine Hiddenness, as I have construed that argument.

First, nothing I have said implies that God would have a reason to refrain *forever* from personally relating to those capable of such a relationship. I have only argued that there is *prima facie* reason for God to permit inculpable nonbelief *for a time*. This claim is consistent with the idea that God would make Himself evident at some time or other to all those capable of a personal relationship with Him.

Second, nothing I have said rules out the possibility that nonbelievers will some day not only come to see that God exists but be *coerced* to love Him if they are not so inclined of their own accord. Of course, that state of affairs would not be nearly as good as one in which nonbelievers eventually responded in love to Him on their own. But that is consistent with the idea that God will, after a time or in the long run, settle for second best (if it is second best).

Third, I expect that the reasons I have sketched for God's permitting inculpable theistic nonbelief will not convince everyone. Let's suppose that I am wrong. Indeed, let's suppose that we can't think of *any* reason compatible with perfect love for God to permit inculpable nonbelief. Does the Argument from Divine Hiddenness fare well on these suppositions? I submit that it does not. 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

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<sup>19</sup> On this issue, see Linda Zagzebski's 'Religious Luck,' *Faith and Philosophy*, 11 (1994).

one.<sup>20</sup> It isn't too difficult to think of good reasons to be suspicious here. For example, it is arguable that it would not be surprising at all if there were goods we don't know of which, given what we have to go on in assessing the matter, are as likely as not to figure in God's reasons for permitting inculpable nonbelief. This, by itself, should give us pause. And there are other argumentative strategies as well.<sup>21</sup>

I conclude that a properly qualified expectation that God will bring it about that we reasonably believe that He exists does not warrant an argument for atheism on the basis of divine hiddenness.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> This sort of inference is frequently made in evidential arguments from evil. For a defense of the condition I lay down in the text, but in the context of discussing a certain evidential argument from evil, see my 'The Argument from Inscrutable Evil,' in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*.

<sup>21</sup> See *The Evidential Argument from Evil*.

<sup>22</sup> I have benefited from audiences at the Society of Christian Philosophers meeting at the American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division (1994), the Pacific Regional meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers (1995), and Tiffany Forum at Seattle Pacific University (1995). For release time to work on this paper during Fall term 1994, I am grateful for a Faculty Research Grant from Seattle Pacific University. For comments on earlier drafts, I am indebted to William Alston, Phil Goggans, Mark Heller, Larry Lacy, C. Stephen Layman, Wesley Morriston, Alastair Norcross, Philip Quinn, Mark Walhout, Linda Zagzebski and, especially, Frances Howard-Snyder and William Rowe.