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### COMMENTS FOR MY COLLEAGUES

When I penned the last sentence of my book *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (yes, literally penned), expressing my hope that others would apply their reason to divine hiddenness, I did not imagine that the response would be as full and diverse or as continuous as it has turned out to be. And it continues in these pages, which fill out still further the body of available options and whose publication in Poland adds yet another aspect to the diversity of response. I am delighted to see them. Since a good deal of the discussion in these pages has a direct bearing on my own work, I am not just delighted but also grateful.

Given the religious orientation of the group whose findings are presented in this issue of the *Annals*, which orientation I do not share, it would not have been untoward for me to have been left out of the discussion. But right from the start Marek Dobrzeński made clear his and the group's generous intention to include me in one way or another. I am grateful for this as well, and I hope that my brief comments below on each of the seven papers I was sent will prove to be of some benefit to their authors and to the readers of this journal.

### DUMSDAY

Travis Dumsday, through his many papers on the subject, has shown how *various* attempts to solve the hiddenness problem can be. His discovery of new angles is featured yet again in "From Satan's Wager to Eve's Gambit to Our Leap: An Anselmian Reply to the Problem of Divine Hiddenness." The

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central idea of this essay is interestingly diachronic: perhaps the condition of blameless atheists and agnostics, as we see it today, reflects the last of *several phases* of effort on God's part to win the freely willed allegiance of unruly creatures.<sup>1</sup> This present time has the features that puzzle us, given reflection on God's love, only because creatures did not respond appropriately to earlier divine efforts, which involved revelatory events that *were* in line with what we might expect from a loving God. As part of an ongoing divine-human drama that was already well begun way back in *Homo sapiens* pre-history, God has adopted a new strategy that involves a different and more subtle and less explicitly self-revealing approach. Dumsday hopes that for some thinkers, perhaps theologically oriented thinkers at least, this idea can gain enough epistemic traction to slow or stop the hiddenness argument.<sup>2</sup>

I agree with Dumsday that those who lack theological presuppositions are unlikely to find his idea helpful, even when it is presented as only an epistemic possibility—as reflecting what might have been the case for all we know or justifiedly believe. Scientific investigation alone reveals no trace of Hebrew monotheism or of a mind prepared to receive it in early *Homo sapiens*. Quite the contrary. This is why the hiddenness argument, when framed—as usually it is—not in terms of atheism and agnosticism but in terms of nonresistant nonbelief, is able to find evidence of the troublesome phenomenon in times coming long before there ever were theists or atheists or agnostics!

For the sake of discussion, then, let me take on board the necessary theological presuppositions. The problem now is that although the notion of shifting divine strategies is initially appealing, we receive no reason to suppose that our present conditions are of the sort a God might produce after being repeatedly repulsed in the manner Dumsday details. Why these conditions instead of other ones?

Dumsday just says that perhaps God decided to proceed in this way. But we need at least a suggestion as to how our present epistemic conditions could be seen as reflecting an understandable divine strategy. What is more, it's hard to see how they could. At the previous stages, Dumsday has us imagining, creatures (whether demonic or human) were given lots of knowledge of God and yet freely sinned, distancing themselves from God.<sup>3</sup> So what sort of strategy might God pursue, if such were the case? Would God make even less

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<sup>1</sup> Travis DUMSDAY, "From Satan's Wager to Eve's Gambit to Our Leap: An Anselmian Reply to the Problem of Divine Hiddenness," *Roczniki filozoficzne* 69, no. 3 (2021): 80.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 72–77.

knowledge available? How might this be expected to help? One is inclined to think it would just make things worse, with creatures wandering even further from God. So perhaps a more expectable strategy would involve continuing to provide knowledge of God but *altering the mode of its delivery*. Much of what Dumsday describes is consistent with creatures having previously been provided with propositional knowledge about God non-experientially or with limited experiential involvement. Suppose now they are led, if not fully then at least more fully, into a special kind of experiential acquaintance with God—allowed to gain a sense of the radiant goodness, the rich beauty, that an unsurpassably great divinity would necessarily embody. How could this not aid the project of winning a positive response?

One might think that it would compromise creaturely free will. But that sort of move has not fared well in the last 25 years of discussion, at least where the cognitive condition referred to by the hiddenness argument has been sensitively and accurately portrayed. (For example, we should not speak of this as involving absolute certainty and indubitability, as Dumsday himself does once or twice.) And if creatures really are as hard to reach as Dumsday's story would have us imagine, their free will, one thinks, should withstand a considerable infusion of religious knowledge-by-acquaintance! In any case, the force and content of experiential evidence could be made to vary, in response to the needs of free will, in ways that are difficult to replicate at the purely propositional level.

The upshot is that, even given theological preconceptions, the present stage does not appear to fit very well into the drama of divine-human interaction that Dumsday's innovative idea gets us thinking about. It needs to fit smoothly and naturally. So there is more work to be done.

#### JORDAN

I like Jeff Jordan's notion of "entanglement," which is central to his essay on "The Argument from Divine Hiddenness and Christian Love." This is the idea that love for another person will have us joining our own interests to theirs.<sup>4</sup> Of course I would point out that when speaking of such entanglements a personal relationship is generally presupposed: it provides a rather familiar *context* for such activity. But my main point just now is that it helps to con-

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<sup>4</sup> Jeff JORDAN, "Argument from Divine Hiddenness and Christian Love," *Roczniki filozoficzne* 69, no. 3 (2021): 90.

sider how Jordan would view his own notion of entanglement when we evaluate his claim that by speaking of God always being open to relationship, I and other advocates of the hiddenness argument have in some controversial manner been making God's love "unvarying." If I said to Jordan that *he* controversially requires God's love to be unvarying by insisting that it always involves entanglement of interests, he'd be right to respond that he's not talking about how divine love may or may not behave but rather about the very idea of divine love, or, perhaps better, about what divine love *is*. If entanglement is necessarily part of divine love, then it's not surprising that one should be thinking of it as always there! Well, the same goes for my thinking about divine love and openness to personal relationship.

Contrary to what Jordan suggests, I haven't endorsed the content of his Maximality model of loving behaviour. But I do think it can be defended against his criticisms. Some of what I think about these matters is indicated in a recent reply to Jordan in the *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, to which he refers in a note. So I can be brief. But here are two points.

1. Jordan recognizes that you can't ask God to do the logically impossible and that no model of God's behaviour should require this. So when he argues that God can't identify with everyone's interests all the time since these are often incompatible, one expects him to conclude that therefore God's love can be maximal without including an identification with everyone's interests all the time. Instead he says this: "Since different people have different interests, there is an in-principle obstacle to maximally loving all people."<sup>5</sup> This looks to me like an error. Instead we should say that there is an in-principle obstacle *to caring equally about everyone's interests* (at least where caring about interests is defined as including an attempt to help realize them). And then we should conclude that a definition of maximal love sensitive to what's logically possible will lack this condition.

2. I don't think Jordan's "fungibility" point works against the idea that God's love might be maximal by evincing maximal concern for everyone's *best* interests. (Notice that if a concern with best interests seems too thin here, we may now add that a concern with other interests that *aren't* incompatible with anyone else's can be added to the mix.) Jordan says: "No one could identify only with those interests of Jones common to all others and yet love Jones as an individual."<sup>6</sup> This seems false. Take Jordan's example of being healthy, which is in everyone's best interest. If he is right, then if God's interests were

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

entangled with my being healthy and also with Jeff being healthy and that's all, then God would be treating us or our good interchangeably. But this doesn't follow. Here we need to distinguish types and tokens. My health is the same *type* of thing as Jeff's, but we are two token individuals, and my health and his are even two token goods. Since he and I have travelled distinct and very different paths to our present condition, what's required for good health in these two cases should be expected to be different and similarly for any corresponding concern. Suppose that Jeff has taken pretty decent care of himself while I have let myself go, living it up for forty years, and am presently teetering at the edge of a medical crisis. In that case, God clearly wouldn't respond to my health needs in exactly the same way God responds to Jeff's, as interchangeability demands. This is just one example, but it's evident already that God's entanglement of the divine interests with my best interests and with Jeff's would require plenty of sensitivity to Jeff's particularities and to mine, contrary to what Jordan says when making his fungibility claim.

#### DOBRZENIECKI AND KING

For what it's worth, I regard theology as a perfectly respectable intellectual tradition. But the theology of hiddenness, in the very nature of the case, will start off by assuming that God exists and that there is some perfectly good reason for God to be hidden. So one might be inclined to think that there will not be much overlap with my own concerns in "The Theology of Hiddenness: J. L. Schellenberg, Divine Hiddenness, and the Role of Theology," the provocative essay from Marek Dobrzeniecki and Derek King.

Occasionally, though, theologians will suggest that their ideas about the situation could be made available even to a philosopher who doesn't accept the assumption just mentioned. Dobrzeniecki and King seem, most of the time, to be of this opinion. In some of the contexts they take us through I agree and in others I do not. And in some of the former I think that the suggestions made by Dobrzeniecki and King are not worth as much as they would be if they included a response to explicit, sometimes, detailed replies to what they have to say that are already available in the philosophical literature. Here I will concentrate on one of the *other* examples of the former, which concerns the doctrine of the Incarnation—after making a more general comment about theologians bearing gifts for philosophers.

It can be tempting for theologians to think that nonbelieving philosophers are going to one-sidedly emphasize human-centered considerations and also that their conception of God will lack theological sophistication. Though more sensitive and accurate information about nonbelievers is also conveyed by the Dobrzeniecki/King essay, both thoughts appear in it. The authors explicitly say that when discussing hiddenness I “consider the value of the world from the perspective of human interests” and it’s an apparent implication of one of their comments that the hiddenness argument presupposes a “generic ... large person in the sky” picture of God.<sup>7</sup> (Oddly, they also say that my main target is the “Judeo-Christian” God.)

My reply is that by seeing perfect divine love as entailing an openness to personal relationship with all creatures capable of such relationship, the hiddenness argument purports to *deepen* our understanding of the concept of God and focuses our attention on what love naturally seeks, not on what we self-interestedly might want. One might even say that the hiddenness arguer is looking out for *God’s* interests! This is important: only someone willing to accept as a possible conclusion that God does not exist could ascribe to God impressive attributes inconsistent with God having actualized our world.

The Dobrzeniecki/King discussion of the theology of the Incarnation is interesting. Its relevance to philosophy rests in their idea that the ontological distance between creator and creatures is so great that the possibility of personal relationship between them demands some special attempt on the part of the former to produce “common ground”—and this is what the Incarnation is supposed to afford. Are we to conclude that something like the Incarnation was *necessary* for personal relationship? This appears to be the Dobrzeniecki/King suggestion.<sup>8</sup> But then one wonders why the possibility of benefitting from the Incarnation, as Christians regard it, was not made more widely accessible. Either God wants everyone capable to be always able to enter into personal relationship with God, or not. If we think it’s the former and also accept the “common ground” argument, then we’ll conclude that the relationship-related spiritual benefits of the Incarnation would be made available always, and to everyone if to anyone, and thus find ourselves in *opposition* to Christian theology rather than learning from it. If, on the other hand, we think it’s the latter, then we can accept the Christian notion of the Incarnation. But then also we’re left still needing an answer to the hiddenness argument—a reason to

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<sup>7</sup> Marek DOBRZENIECKI and Derek KING, “The Theology of Hiddenness: J. L. Schellenberg, Divine Hiddenness, and the Role of Theology,” *Roczniki filozoficzne* 69, no. 3 (2021): 118.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

think that, of the two possibilities mentioned, it indeed is the latter rather than the former that is realized.

In any case, it seems that the assumption of the Incarnation's necessity in this connection (or of the necessity for something like it to obtain) is false. As has been argued and discussed repeatedly over the past 25 years, a God, no matter how ontologically distant from created beings, would be able to communicate with them *experientially*—finding them where they are and communicating with them there, with the source of the communication made evident. The authors mention Pascal, and Pascal is especially poignant on this point about God's ability to make known to us through our experience both our own sad deficiencies and the wonders of divine love. We might even imagine something like an Incarnation occurring against the background of truly universal theistic experience, at least where the latter is sensitively portrayed.

So a question I have for Dobrzeniecki and King is this one: What makes the Christian view of Incarnation preferable philosophically, or even (in a broad sense) theologically, to such a two-part picture of how the creator might stoop to communicate with us? The unfinished work here is, it seems to me, much the same as the unfinished work I mentioned above in reply to Dumsday. Let me also point out why the Dobrzeniecki/King "ecclesiological" response (whose basic point is found also in Jordan's piece) and "harmatological" response don't finish it. The idea that God might leave some people in a condition of nonresistant nonbelief so that others (perhaps those belonging to the Christian Church) could have the responsibility of helping them out of it, and the idea that perhaps no one really is nonresistant—these are ideas for which detailed rebuttals have for some time been available in the philosophical literature. Dialectically, the recurrence of the former should therefore be accompanied by arguments to the effect that the latter are inadequate.

#### MORDARSKI<sup>9</sup>

Drawing on the Catholic tradition, Ryszard Mordarski in "Benevolence or Mercy? The Problem with the First Premise of the Hiddenness Argument" seeks to develop an understanding of God's love that will be more appropriate to its profound subject than the "infantile" and "trivialized" picture he finds

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<sup>9</sup> When near the beginning of his essay Mordarski mentions my 2015 book *The Hiddenness Argument*, he does not say that he recently translated the book into Polish. So let me say it, and let me also thank him for the generosity of this act. (I expect most readers will wish to add their "Amen"!)

in popular culture today. He fears that my own understanding of divine love—that on which the hiddenness argument is based—is too influenced by this popular picture and also by “liberal-democratic” currents of thought in contemporary culture to commend itself to readers who become aware of the alternative he presents.<sup>10</sup>

In developing that alternative, Mordarski gives us a fascinating tour through certain classical discussions of love. My main problem is not that I disagree with much or any of this but that I do not see how a sensitive construal of what I have had to say about love and personal relationship could lead to the conclusion that it is *incompatible* with the perspective Mordarski favours. The infantile picture of love to which he is rightly opposed may entail an emphasis on openness to personal relationship—this is probably the source of the confusion—but the emphasis on openness to personal relationship does not entail the infantile picture of love. It is far too general to do that. Put otherwise: the idea of openness to personal relationship can be filled out in a large disjunction of ways, and the picture with which Mordarski “entangles” my view is just one disjunct.

So some corrections are in order. I will first identify a couple of characteristic Mordarski’s statements about my view of divine love and show how they go wrong.

“He will always come to us, even when we ourselves fall into a culpable situation and turn away from Him.”<sup>11</sup> This is perhaps the most clear misstatement since—precisely to forestall this sort of misinterpretation—I have explained how in my sense being “open” to relationship just means not being closed, with no special action on God’s part required, and also how we ourselves would be permitted to close the door to relationship through resistant behaviour for which we are culpable. The latter indeed has got to be one of the most familiar themes from my work on hiddenness.

Mordarski similarly speaks of “the relation of expectation proposed by Schellenberg, which is summed up in the requirement for God: if you love me, you must establish a relationship with me.”<sup>12</sup> The troubling confusion here is between the philosopher who examines the concept of divine love and says that it follows from an analysis of it that God will be open to relationship with creatures and a human being seeking to be known to God and imposing his

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<sup>10</sup> Ryszard MORDARSKI, “Benevolence or Mercy? The Problem with the First Premise of the Hiddenness Argument,” *Roczniki filozoficzne* 69, no. 3 (2021): 136–37.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.



own subjective needs onto God. I assume that the difference between these two and its relevance will be clear.

Now to Mordarski's proposed alternative. On his view some human work is required before the depths of God's love can be experienced. "The call to contemplation is a call to choose such an option of life in which man [sic] seeks God and tries to integrate his will with God's will. It is therefore a call to all rational creatures, and the promise for fulfilling this call is precisely to experience what deep and sincere love is."<sup>13</sup> Here I would point out that the developmental work Mordarski rightly values, and which he apparently imagines must come before a relationship with God commences, can just as easily be pictured as belonging to the early stages of a relationship with God. It seems to be tempting for some to think of what I've been talking about, when talking about a relationship with God, as the fullness of communion all at once—as it were the beatific vision immediately deposited in our consciousness! But this is a misinterpretation. I have always spoken of such a relationship precisely in *developmental* terms, and perhaps most pertinently, have said that whether it is shallow or deep depends on the response of the human term of the relation. Such a relationship is indeed two-sided, and I would have thought my work shows how comfortable I am with the notion that development in a relationship with a transcendent divine could—at least initially—be difficult and demanding.

Mordarski further says that "the horizontal model of love based on benevolence should be replaced or complemented by a vertical model based on good, which includes forgiveness and reconciliation coming from God." He also speaks of a "theism of mercy" as opposed to just benevolence.<sup>14</sup> "Merciful love," he says, "is an act of the highest subtlety and a delicacy that requires an active human response and does not exclude the hiddenness of God from those human beings who are not prepared to fruitfully accept this act."<sup>15</sup> Mordarski appears here to be saying that the benefits of the relationship for us should not be "automatic" but dependent on how we behave and above all dependent on how God chooses to operate within the relationship. I could not agree more. Here my comments in the previous paragraph are again relevant. And here I am also put in mind of what I have frequently said about a sort of dark night of the soul—a second-order hiddenness *within* a relationship that is therefore compatible with the absence of the first-order hiddenness that the hiddenness argument tells us *would* be absent.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 131

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 137.

Finally: “We cannot expect God to distribute His love for people automatically and against their will. This does not mean that God’s love does not work on people, but that it is an act so exceptional that it requires special preparation from humans so that they can fully accept it. Perhaps this is also the reason for the hiddenness of God, who protects His creation from violent and direct encounters with Himself.”<sup>16</sup> The first two sentences here convey thoughts to which I have already responded. The third, though, contains something that may seem new: the idea that if God were open to relationship with all, then creatures would be endangered because of the unavoidable force with which they would be struck by spiritual contact with God.

Here we may see again the misconception that a relationship with God, on my view, means or implies all of God made available all at once. Relatedly, there seems to be little sensitivity to what God can do from *God’s* side to determine which aspects of the divine nature creatures come in contact with and to moderate the force with which they are revealed. But I now want to expose an even more fundamental problem, which I have encountered time and again: the notion that a relationship with God, to which the hiddenness argument says God would be open, *must be experientially mediated at all*. The experiential option is an important one; I have appealed to it more than once already—always, of course, on the assumption that experience of God could be infinitely variable and modulated to meet the needs of creatures. But it is important now to emphasize: there is nothing in the idea of divine openness to personal relationship with creatures or indeed in the idea of such relationship itself that *necessitates* the inclusion of any reference to theistic religious experience. To make the point most sharply: even Saint Teresa of Calcutta, who famously went for a long period without any experiential confirmation of God’s existence, could have then been in a personal relationship with God conforming to my definition of the latter so long as God indeed exists and through that period she believed in God and performed religious actions in expression of her belief, with God responding in various ways, even if in ways not immediately or clearly discernible by her. As can be discerned from this example, what the hiddenness argument says God would make possible for all capable creatures in respect of relationship is modest indeed—and, in particular, does not conform to the picture presented by Mordarski’s paper.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>17</sup> Many “proof texts” might be cited in support of my contentions and corrections here. Clear examples appear in my 2015 book *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy’s New Challenge to Belief in God* (Oxford: OUP), chaps. 4 and 8, see esp. pp. 40–41, 106, and 109–11.

## BUTAKOV

In his very clear and skillfully developed essay “Divine Openness for Physical Relationship,” Pavel Butakov introduces two new notions, the notion of a “physical relationship” between God and creatures and the notion of God’s “favorite kind of relationship,” arguing that a physical relationship is likely to be God’s favorite rather than the conscious kind of relationship I have emphasized.<sup>18</sup> There is some overlap with Mordarski, also in criticizable material, for Butakov suggests that theistic religious experience is on my view the way belief in God *has* to come (right from the beginning I have stressed that there are alternatives, such as an “in-built” belief in God). He also supposes that just by recognizing the existence of God, say, through religious experience, one would, on my view, enter into conscious relationship with God, when in fact I have insisted on a clear distinction between *being in a position* to enter into relationship with God and *actually doing so*. But here we can set these matters aside, since larger issues beckon which do not involve them. (But do notice that because of these errors, what Butakov says to link my view to restricted freedom in relationship with God is deprived of force.)

So let’s consider the idea of God’s “favorite” kind of relationship. At first Butakov seems to be getting at something more specific than what I’ve been talking about. To explain his idea Butakov uses the analogy that there are “different kinds of human loving relationships, such as a loving relationship of a bride with the groom, of a king with his subjects, or of a mother with her baby.”<sup>19</sup> Notice that all of these—at least where the capacity for conscious relationship exists—*presuppose* a conscious connection. In this context I would reply to Butakov’s question about God’s favorite kind of relationship by saying (as just suggested in my response to Mordarski) that we should not expect God to *have* a favorite, since the style of interaction would be tailored to the needs of creatures.

But then it becomes clear that Butakov is thinking of a conscious relationship as one among several possible kinds, to which he opposes the notion of a “physical” kind of relationship, which he says might be God’s favorite instead. Because some of the “larger” issues are even larger, I will assume here that there are no missteps in Butakov’s development of this notion. One larger issue is about the odd omission of a kind of relationship that *combines* what

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<sup>18</sup> Pavel BUTAKOV, “Divine Openness for Physical Relationship,” *Roczniki filozoficzne* 69, no. 3 (2021): 141–61

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

Butakov values from the physical realm with the consciousness constraint. Call the kind of relationship that emerges from reflection on this possibility a “multimodal” relationship. Then I can ask two questions. First, isn’t a multimodal kind of relationship—a conscious relationship that includes plenty of physical features—even more likely to be God’s favorite, for those capable of it, than an exclusively physical kind? And, second, isn’t it precisely the multimodal kind of relationship that I have implicitly been advocating in my work, at least for physical worlds like ours?

We should notice here that Butakov somewhat implausibly portrays the conscious sort of relationship as all “in the head” when instead it can include any number of dimensions, so long as the conscious side of things isn’t excluded.<sup>20</sup> Observe also that Butakov needs to push, as the alternative, a view that isn’t *at all* in the head—that’s exclusively physical. This doesn’t always come out clearly. (Take his example of Holy Communion, which Christians would generally regard as multimodal rather than purely physical.) And he needs to push this as God’s favorite even where a capacity for more exists.

Precisely here, however, Butakov will think his view gains purchase, since the physical kind of relationship, unlike the one I emphasize, is available to *absolutely everyone* no matter what their capacities, even—for example—to those suffering from autism. But then why not say that God would be open to a physical relationship with those who are capable of nothing more than this (if such there be) and open to a multimodal relationship with those who are capable of *that*? Here observe how Butakov has introduced a notion only theology can unequivocally accept: that a world created by God will include personal beings who lack the capacity for a multimodal relationship with God. Leaving *God* some freedom, a philosopher, as a philosopher, should consider that God might not create our world or any world much like it. And perhaps worlds created by God that include personal creatures would include only personal creatures with a capacity for the multimodal kind of relationship with God. Perhaps, indeed, this would be God’s favorite kind of world.

#### GUILLON

All of the essays I am discussing deserve a fuller response than I can offer here. This sense is especially strong when it comes to “You Would Not Seek Me if You Had Not Found Me”—Another Pascalian Response to the Problem

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 148.

of Divine Hiddenness,” the long, densely argued, and imaginative piece contributed by Jean-Baptiste Guillon, which builds quite an edifice upon the Pascalian remark in its title. However, it may still be of some use to offer a few remarks on four central features of Guillon’s essay. The points I’ll make are critical points. However, as in the other cases, I would not wish it to be inferred that in my view little or nothing of value can be gleaned from the work under discussion. Quite the contrary.

(1) The first feature I want to address is Guillon’s assumption that what is central according to the hiddenness argument is a “significant” personal relationship with God. By this, we are told, is meant a personal relationship that reaches “a certain level,” even if not a “maximal” level—in particular a level where one believes, when related to God, that God exists.<sup>21</sup> (Clearly what we have here is identical to or very close to what Butakov means by a “conscious” relationship.) I am mystified by the attribution to me of this way of speaking, since I have never used the term “significant” in this connection, and what I have had in mind is not a matter of degree: either a relationship with God is explicit, that is to say conscious, or it is not. Now *once one is in* such an explicit/conscious relationship, distinctions can be made: for example, such a relationship could be shallow or deep, as I have already noted above. But we should not treat the relationship’s being conscious as itself a certain level reached, as Guillon does. Rather, that condition provides the *context* for all such distinctions.

I suppose use of the term “significant” might have done no harm. But in Guillon’s essay, given his assumption about the significance of “significant,” things are otherwise. This assumption is hard at work justifying all kinds of claims that falter in its absence. In particular, by wrongly applying the notion of “degrees” here we come rather easily to the notion that *some* relevant relationship between God and creatures can exist even where the latter do not believe in the existence of the former.

(2) Guillon seeks to convince us that the idea of a loving God is “a historical product of the Judeo-Christian religion” and, what is more, that those who seek for God have no other secure basis for the claim that God is loving. “It is not a datum of natural theology or philosophical theology, but rather of revealed theology.”<sup>22</sup> Right from the beginning, however, and especially in my 2015 book *The Hiddenness Argument*, which has a chapter on this issue, I have

<sup>21</sup> Jean-Baptiste GUILLON, “‘You Would Not Seek Me If You Had Not Found Me’—Another Pascalian Response to the Problem of Divine Hiddenness,” *Roczniki filozoficzne* 69, no. 3 (2021): 167.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

maintained that the idea that a perfect personal being must be loving is something even secular philosophical reasoning can deliver. And I've argued that cultural evolution is making the connection between the best love and openness to relationship ever harder to deny. Guillon's apparent unfamiliarity with such arguments makes for a lacuna in his essay.

(3) At a central stage of his reasoning Guillon starts writing as though he is free to assume that God actually exists and is in touch with the seeker. For example:

If I believe that a personal relationship between God and myself would have intrinsic value in and of itself, and if I also believe that God is perfectly good and cognizant of everything that has value, I must also believe that God considers a personal relationship with me as having intrinsic value in and of itself, and therefore that God *desires* such a relationship with me for its own sake. Consequently, I cannot truly love God without believing that God also truly loves me.<sup>23</sup>

Another example:

From a psychological point of view, it is plausible to suppose that a human person can be attracted by God *precisely because* she feels that God loves her. According to this psychological hypothesis, one way God can introduce into a soul a desire for him, or a love for him, is by giving her the belief or conviction that he loves her. But if God is the author and cause in her of this belief (that he loves her)—which he has introduced in her in order to cause her to love him—then this belief is itself a testimony or is evidence that God has initiated a personal contact with that soul.<sup>24</sup>

Now if at this point Guillon is doing theology and does not hope to be making points that a philosopher unwilling to make theological assumptions can use, then well and good. But he does appear to have something like the latter hope. This can be seen just from the fact that the *seeker* he is trying to help is unable to make theological assumptions. But in that case we must feed a hypothetical element into what he says at a number of points: *If God exists, then* God desires such a relationship for its own sake; *if God exists, then* your desire and distress indicate that God is making contact with you, etc. etc. And we must correspondingly restrict ourselves to what can be done with such hypothetical propositions.

(4) Guillon has a hypothetical of his own, a version of what he calls the "Pascalian Conditional of Hiddenness": "*If* it were true that you don't have a

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 188.

significant relationship with God, *then* you wouldn't be distressed and longing for such a relationship (as I can see you are)."<sup>25</sup> A concluding summary fleshes out his point, addressed to the seeker, and also happily introduces the hypothetical element I was insisting on in my previous paragraph:

If it's the loving god, the Christian god, whose existence or non-existence you are seriously considering, then you should take into account the different ways in which this god enters into a personal relationship with us; and one such way is by instigating in us a desire for a relationship with him. Consequently, if this god exists, then your distress itself is evidence that he has already initiated an intimate relationship with your soul, by producing in you this desire through his revelation that he is a god of love.<sup>26</sup>

But, unfortunately, in his comments on the central evidential issue Guillon tells the seeker only one side of the story. If he's right, then the seeker's distress is indeed likely to occur on the hypothesis that the Christian God exists. But this is just one part of what is needed for confirming evidence. The seeker still needs to consider whether her distress is *also* likely on some hypothesis entailing that God does *not* exist, say, some purely naturalistic hypothesis. If so—and even without discussion the possibility that it *is* so must appear quite live—the force of the seeker's distress as evidence will be extinguished.

#### WOJTYSIAK

It feels appropriate to end this discussion with Jacek Wojtysiak's "How to Be a Christian Ultimist," a piece whose lovely spirit of conciliation is fired by developmental impulses (to my mind) all too rare among Christians. He proposes three lessons for me and for Christians, associated with three themes from my work: ultimism, hiddenness, and deep time.

I agree with what Wojtysiak appears to be suggesting a Christian might learn: the wisdom of gravitating toward the more apophatic parts of her tradition; of relinquishing the anthropomorphic conception of God that gives the hiddenness argument its bite; and of anticipating significant religious developments in the far future—cultivating the patience and comfort with complexity and subtlety needed to navigate all these developments successfully.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 211.

How about what I might learn? As I read him, Wojtysiak is saying that I would be wise to take on board the notion of divine action associated with particular historical events, thus giving more substance to ultimism, especially soteriologically; to qualify what I say about hiddenness to allow for a middle way between anthropomorphic communication from the divine and none at all; and, in light of deep time, to show less dismissiveness about traditional Christianity, which might see itself confirmed in ways we can only dimly imagine far in the future.<sup>27</sup>

What can I say—briefly!—about these three (interconnected) pieces of advice? First let me say that, situated as they are within an attempt to bring greater integration to three themes from my work (and given my own developmental impulses), I find them stimulating and welcome. Then I would say that as I respond I detect in myself—I think I see something quite similar in Wojtysiak, reflected in his distinctions of “strong” and “weak”—some testing of the waters, some movement back and forth between ideas more and less friendly to traditional Christianity. This seems to me just fine, quite appropriate in developmental work as one determines how far to go in this or that respect. It could be that we should allow some considerable time for such testing of the waters. And so I would say that I would wish to consider both a “strong” sense in which the notion central to Wojtysiak’s first piece of advice (on some suitable interpretation)—the notion of divine action associated with particular historical events—might be accepted, according to which its truth is *entailed* by simple ultimism, and also a “weak” sense according to which no more is meant than that its falsehood is *not* entailed—according to which, in other words, its truth is *not ruled out* by simple ultimism, and should not be regarded as ruled out by someone whose religious commitment involves simple ultimism alone.

I think I can already accept the first piece of advice in the latter, weak sense. But now we have the critical question about suitable interpretation! Given that, as Wojtysiak notes, I don’t think we can rule out there being *something like* a personal component in a (perhaps infinitely-dimensional) divine reality, I don’t think we can rule out *something like* personal divine activity directed toward ourselves. And given the inclusion of soteriological ultimacy, it would be unsurprising if this activity had relevance to the events of our lives

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<sup>27</sup> Jacek WOJTYSIAK, “How to Be a Christian Ultimist? On Three Lessons J. L. Schellenberg and the Christian Theist Can Learn from Each Other,” *Roczniki filozoficzne* 69, no. 3 (2021): 215–229.



or to the events of worldly history. (All of these points, by the way, are already present in my 2009 book *The Will to Imagine*.<sup>28</sup>)

What about the suggestion that I might qualify what I say about hiddenness to allow for a middle way between anthropomorphic communication from the divine and none at all? Again interpretation will be important. If by “the divine” we mean a reality that could be quite different from the theist’s personal God or even just supra-personal in Wojtysiak’s sense, then I don’t see that a qualification is necessary, for the hiddenness argument has always been aimed at the idea of an *exclusively personal* ultimate reality, and its conclusion is compatible with the truth of any number of other religious claims, including ones that allow for something like “communication” from the divine, perhaps understood along lines suggested in the previous paragraph.

And my attitude toward traditional Christianity—should this change in light of deep time? Here I find myself wanting to know more about how *Wojtysiak* interprets “traditional Christianity.” Is there some latitude here—at least a small disjunction of possibilities?—or does he have in mind a fairly standard-issue and orthodox Christianity? I can say this: the further we move in the direction of orthodoxy, the more we should expect the idea of God threatened by the hiddenness argument to be entailed by the views we entertain. And given the force of the hiddenness argument (and other arguments against theism), I would not look to the future to redeem this idea.

But what if traditional Christian doctrines, such as the doctrine of the Incarnation or of the Trinity, are regarded as having nailed down *parts* of some hidden larger truth (much as the personal element of traditional theism, or something like it, might be regarded as part of a larger picture of the divine)? *Wojtysiak* doesn’t explicitly mention it, but this notion I can more easily see myself getting behind. Even if, as I suspect, many Christian ideas reflect human immaturity, this could still be true of them. And so in relation to such a notion, and the associated thought that *other* parts of the bigger picture may be revealed to us in the far future, you will not find me appearing dismissive.

How should Christians today relate themselves, intellectually, to such ideas? *Wojtysiak* has a related question: Can he still be a Christian believer while moving so far toward simple ultimism?<sup>29</sup> Here one might well wish to draw on a fourth theme from my work, pointing out that belief can be replaced by non-doxastic faith. Another notion I have been thinking about recently,

<sup>28</sup> J. L. SCHELLENBERG, *The Will to Imagine. A Justification of Skeptical Religion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), see esp. 48–49.

<sup>29</sup> WOJTYSIAK, “How to Be a Christian Ultimist?” 225.

more appropriate to inquiry, is that of having or holding a *position*. The latter I define with the help of L. Jonathan Cohen's notion of acceptance—which involves taking a proposition on board and being disposed to use it as a premise when making relevant inferences.<sup>30</sup> S has (or holds) the position that p, we can say, if and only if S accepts that p *and* is disposed to mobilize and defend p in any discussion among competing views about an issue or issues to which p can be seen as a response.

There can be various inquiry-related reasons to take a position, though its seeming the view best adjusted to the *available* evidence will probably be most common. And of course one can take as a position what one does not believe, or what one does believe but does not intend to treat as belief-worthy in inquiry. This brings me to my final suggestion in response to Wojtysiak's fine essay. Whatever should be said about belief or faith, there appears to be intellectual room for a twenty-first century inquirer to have or hold the *position* that some Christian doctrine is true or conveys part of a larger hidden truth that we may learn more about as both religion and human inquiry mature.

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<sup>30</sup> Jonathan COHEN, *An Essay on Belief and Acceptance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

## COMMENTS FOR MY COLLEAGUES

## Summary

In the paper, the originator of the hiddenness argument, J. L. Schellenberg, responds to papers that challenge his reasoning. In his remarks he puts an emphasis on the concept of divine love and he explains why it is not only connected to the idea of the Christian God. He also clarifies his position on ultimism.

**Keywords:** divine hiddenness; the hiddenness argument; divine love; ultimism.

## KOMENTARZE DLA MOICH KOLEGÓW

## Streszczenie

W artykule autor argumentu z ukrycia, J. L. Schellenberg, odpowiada na teksty zawarte w niniejszym tomie, które podważają jego rozumowanie. W swoich uwagach kładzie nacisk na pojęcie miłości Bożej i wyjaśnia, dlaczego nie jest ona związana tylko z ideą chrześcijańskiego Boga. Wyjaśnia również swoje stanowisko w sprawie ultymizmu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Boże ukrycie; argument z ukrycia; Boża miłość; ultymizm.